



**RAHUL GANDHI TO
CAMPAIGN IN WB
FROM APRIL 14 | P6**



**WITH NO SIGN OF
RETURN TO CABINET,
SIDHU'S FUTURE IN
LIMBO | P8**

**DEEPIKA PADUKONE RESIGNS AS
MAMI'S CHAIRPERSON: 'UNABLE
TO GIVE THE UNDIVIDED FOCUS
IT REQUIRES' | P17**



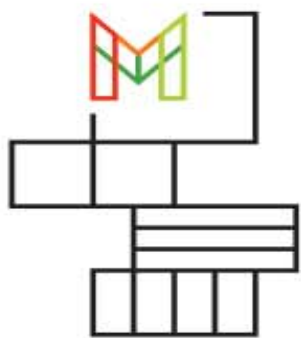
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**Y MEDIA
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INTERVIEW**

**"I PROMISE THAT PUNJAB WILL BE
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- IG KUNWAR VIJAY PRATAP SINGH

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Y MEDIA GROUP EDITOR & CEO YUDHVIR JASWAL'S EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH IG KUNWAR VIJAY PRATAP SINGH. | DETAILS ON PAGE 14

Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

COVID-19 VARIANTS SPREAD LEADS TO SURGE OF NEW CASES IN CANADA

OTTAWA, (IANS) The rapid spread of more contagious Covid-19 variants is believed to have driven a devastating third wave in Canada. "Although B.1.1.7, which is now confirmed in all provinces and two territories, continues to account for the majority of variants of concern in Canada and has likely replaced the original virus in some areas, there has been a concerning rise in P.1 cases in recent weeks," Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, said in a statement on Saturday, Xinhua news agency reported. "Early evidence suggests that the P.1 variant may reduce the effectiveness of vaccines, making it even more important to control its spread," Tam added in the statement. The number of confirmed variant cases in Canada has skyrocketed in recent weeks, rising from about 2,000 a month ago to over 30,000 as of Monday afternoon and counting, with more than 90 per cent of those being the B.1.1.7 variant first identified in Britain.

| CONTD. ON PAGE 7

- *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.*
- *US calls for pause on Johnson & Johnson Covid vaccine over blood clots.*
- *Ford Govt. Closes Elementary And Secondary Schools, Switch To Online Learning Post Spring Break.*
- *Special education workers across Ontario and education workers in Peel and Toronto hot spots are eligible to register for vaccination, call 1 833 943 3900.*
- *Canada to receive 6.4 million Covid-19 vaccine doses in April & 7 million doses in May, a total of 44 million vaccines in next 3 months & approx. 110 million vaccines to arrive before Sept. 30. India permits the use of Sputnik-V vax in emergency situations.*

"MORE CONTAGIOUS AND DANGEROUS VARIANTS ARE SPREADING AND THREATENING THE PROGRESS WE'VE MADE" - PM JUSTIN TRUDEAU



PUNJAB SAYS YES TO CENTRE, AGREES TO DIRECT CASH TRANSFER

WHY WERE FARMERS, AARHTIYAS' KEPT IN DARK, AKALI DAL ASKS PUNJAB CM



Punjab Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal on Thursday said the state government has "no choice" but to implement the Centre's mandated instruction on direct bank transfer of MSP to farmers from the current season.

| CONTD. ON PAGE 12

INDIANS HAIL BRITISH COLUMBIA GESTURE TO MARK AMBEDKAR'S BIRTHDAY ON APRIL 14 AS 'EQUALITY DAY'



MUMBAI, (IANS) The decision of British Columbia province of western Canada to celebrate the upcoming 130th birth anniversary of Architect of Indian Constitution Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on April 14 as 'Equality Day' has been hailed by his kin in Mumbai and other prominent Indians, who term it as "yet another acknowledgement of his growing global acclaim".

| CONTD. ON PAGE 10

3 INDO CANADIANS CHARGED IN RELATION TO 2019 DOUBLE MURDER

Three people have been charged in relation to a 2019 double homicide. At approximately 2:15 a.m., on Wednesday, April 3, 2019, police were called to the 2400 block of 37 Avenue N.E., for reports of a shooting.

| CONTD. ON PAGE 9

QUEEN ELIZABETH II'S CONSORT, PRINCE PHILIP PASSES AWAY

FUNERAL SERVICE TO TAKE PLACE ON SAT, APRIL 17 AT 3 PM IN ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL, WINDSOR

LONDON, (IANS) Prince Philip, the "beloved" consort and a crucial supporter and confidante of UK's Queen Elizabeth II, who did much to modernise the monarchy but was panned over his "insensitive" remarks in various countries while on state visits, passed away on Friday, the Buckingham Palace announced. He was 99.



| CONTD. ON PAGE 9

TARANVIR DHALIWAL APPOINTED AS CO-CHAIR RACIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY COMMISSION OF NDP

Taranvir Dhaliwal was appointed as Co-Chair of Racial Justice and Equity Commission of the Federal NDP during the NDP convention 2021. The Racial Justice and Equity Commission focuses on ensuring that Canada's multicultural nature and racialized and ethnic minority Canadians' perspectives are reflected in the NDP. Prior to this responsibility, Taranvir Dhaliwal works with Brampton East MPP Gurratan Singh as his Executive Assistant and board member of the Sikh Heritage Month Foundation of Ontario.



BJP OR TMC IN BENGAL- WHAT IS THE STORY BEHIND LEAKED AUDIO?

KOLKATA, (IANS) A political controversy erupted in West Bengal during the fourth phase of the elections when BJP's IT cell released an audio tape of Trinamool election strategist Prashant Kishor where he was heard saying a 'ClubHouse' chat that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is hugely popular in West Bengal and this is one of the factors that will decide which party sweeps the state.

| CONTD. ON PAGE 11



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Happy Vaisakhi & Sikh Heritage Month



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times and happiness that
you so rightly deserve.
Happy Baisakhi



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As we celebrate, let's also
remember to follow
public health advice and
stop the spread of
COVID-19 together

Happy Vaisakhi

Member of Parliament
RUBY SAHOTA
BRAMPTON NORTH

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Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX, 5 STATES ELECTION, INDIA

Rahul Gandhi to campaign in WB from April 14



NEW DELHI, (IANS) Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will begin campaigning in West Bengal from April 14 where he will address the rallies in Goalpokhar and Matigara-Naxalbari.

The former Congress president will start the campaign after four phases of polling has ended in the state where the party is contesting on 92 seats in alliance with the Left.

The party is filled up with energy after the announcement as it was struggling to find leaders to campaign in the state as state in-charge Jitin Prasada tested positive for Covid. The only big names from Delhi who had campaigned here are Salman Khurshid and Jaiveer Shergill. Apart from them, party leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

is also holding the fort in the state. Sources said that lack of positive feedback from the state is stopping the leaders from coming here. While the ruling Trinamool Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are in direct contest, the Left is trying to win back its rural support, and the Congress is trying to retain its last tally of 44, in 2016 elections. The Congress' vote share had declined to 4 per cent in the 2019 General Elections, but it still remains an important factor in some districts such as Purulia, Malda and Murshidabad. Sources also said that the Congress leaders were refraining from sharing the dias with the Left till elections in Kerala got over as Rahul Gandhi has been attacking them in Kerala.

PM MODI TO MAMATA: INCITING PEOPLE AGAINST CENTRAL FORCES WON'T SAVE YOU

KOLKATA, (IANS) Hours after the death of four people in the firing by central forces at Sitalkuch in Cooch Behar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressing condolences over the deaths said that inciting people against the central forces and creating hindrances in the poll process won't be able to save you Didi (Mamata). Modi said this while addressing a rally at Jalpaiguri in North Bengal on Saturday. "My condolences are with their family members" Modi said in Jalpaiguri adding that "This violence, inciting people against the central forces and creating hindrances in the poll process won't be able to save you Didi (Mamata). I urge the ECI to take stern action against the guilty in the Cooch Behar case," he added. Though police claimed that the central forces opened fire in self-defence, the Election Commission has adjourned the polling process in the booth and sought a report from the special police observer and CEO Ariz Aftab by Saturday evening. The final decision regarding the incident will be taken after the commission examines the report.

Referring to the cut money issue and alleged extortion by the Trinamool Congress leaders the Prime Minister said that Didi and her goons have become jittery seeing the people's support for the BJP. Seeing her rule coming to an end, "Didi has stooped to this level. But I would like to make it clear to the TMC that this won't work in Bengal," Modi said.

Marred by violence, Bengal sees 76% turnout in 4th phase of polls



KOLKATA, (IANS) Despite violence and bloodbath in the fourth phase of Assembly elections in West Bengal on Saturday, which saw five people get killed at Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar district, the state recorded a relatively low turnout of 76.16 per cent till 5 p.m. A total of five people were killed in two separate incidents in Cooch Behar district on Saturday. Four persons were killed when central forces opened fire on an unruly mob in Sitalkuchi Assembly constituency in Mathabhanga block, while in another incident in the same constituency, a first-time voter was killed. Though the police have claimed that the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel on duty opened fire in self defence that led to the death of four persons, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has sought an explanation and said that she would visit the village on Sunday. However, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has issued a note on Friday evening that may stall the Chief Minister's plan to visit Sitalkuchi. "In Cooch Behar district where voting shall be over by today, no political leader from any national, state or other party should be allowed to enter the geographical boundaries of the district for the next 72 hours with immediate effect," the ECI said. The four persons who died on Saturday have been identified as Amjad Hossain (28), Chalmu Mian (23), Jobed Ali (20) and Nameed Mia (20).


EFFECTIVE VAX AGAINST COVID

MUTATIONS CAN BE PRODUCED: AIIMS


NEW DELHI, (IANS) In the first wave of coronavirus in India last year, virus mutations were not a major issue, but the ongoing second wave, where the spike in cases is much steeper, has led to variants concern, which are more infectious and lethal. However, the vaccine technology platform for Covaxin and Covishield, can develop effective vaccines against mutations, said Y.K. Gupta, former Dean and Head of Pharmacology AIIMS, Delhi, and currently president, AIIMS - Bhopal and AIIMS-Jammu. Gupta emphasized that unless there is a lot of variation, the vaccines (Covaxin and Covishield) will remain effective, and added so far, the vaccine is effective against the existing variants and there is no evidence that it is not generating antibodies. He insisted that these vaccines will be effective against all variants as on date. At least five major variants have been reported in India, which include the UK variant, South Africa variant and Brazil variant. The double-mutant, which combines mutations from two separate virus variants, has been found in samples from Maharashtra, Delhi and Punjab. However, there is no evidence to establish it is widespread resulting in steep increase in Covid cases. Could the Indian vaccine platform adapt to the change in variants in future to produce effective vaccine? Gupta replied, "Yes, it will adapt... If there is some variant against which these vaccines are not effective, then the platform can develop vaccine effective against that variant. This is a very advantageous situation. Vaccine can be developed very fast."

*May Waheguruji
accept your good deeds,
and shower you with love
and contentment.
My best wishes to you and
your family on Baisakhi!*








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M1H	M1X	M3N	M6H	M9N
M1J	M2J	M4A	M6K	M9P
M1K	M2M	M4H	M6L	M9R
M1L	M2R	M4X	M6M	M9V
M1M	M3A	M5A	M6N	M9W
M1P	M3C	M5B	M8V	
M1R	M3H	M5N	M9A	

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Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

COVID-19 VARIANTS SPREAD LEADS TO SURGE OF NEW CASES IN CANADA

CONTD. FROM PAGE 3

The P1 variant first discovered in Brazil is also on the rise in Canada, with cases increasing mostly in the populous provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta.

Meanwhile, the B.1.351 variant first found in South Africa is also picking up steam, with more than 350 cases identified in the country. "The race between the vaccine and the variants is at a critical point," Tam said. "It is clear that we need stronger control to combat variants of concern that are driving rapid epidemic growth in many areas of the country."

Younger Canadians are being impacted harder in the third wave, Tam said, with infection rates highest among those aged 20 to 39 and a rise in the number of hospitalizations and ICU admissions in those under 60.

The fact is Canada's third wave of Covid-19 is showing no signs of slowing down as the vaccine rollout gradually ramps up, meaning Canadians need to buckle down until more of us get a shot, Canadian experts said. They added that Canada's slower vaccine rollout means our third wave could last into June.



Osler Expands Access to Vaccine in North Etobicoke with Move of Vaccine Clinic to Humber-UofGH

Vaccine appointments made on or after April 14 for the Osler-Humber College COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic will occur in the Main Lobby at the University of Guelph-Humber

William Osler Health System (Osler) is proud to announce an innovative partnership with Humber College and the University of Guelph-Humber (UofGH) to expand access to the COVID-19 vaccine for residents in Osler's North Etobicoke catchment area.

On Wednesday, April 14, Osler will transition its Etobicoke COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic, currently located at its Etobicoke General Hospital site, to the Osler-Humber College COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic at the UofGH building at Humber's North Campus. This location change will increase access to the vaccine in North Etobicoke and continue to serve the residents of the area.

"After a successful partnership with our Drive-Thru COVID-19 Testing Centre, Osler is pleased to work alongside Humber College and the University of Guelph-Humber again to create greater access to vaccinations at its campus and better meet the health needs of the North Etobicoke community," said Kiki Ferrari, Chief Operating Officer, William Osler Health System. "This community has been hard-hit by COVID-19 and through this partnership, we want to ensure as many people as possible are vaccinated."

As part of this partnership, Osler will provide oversight of the Vaccine Clinic and offer practical experience for Humber and UofGH students. As many students have not been able to receive a clinical placement due to COVID-19, the Vaccine Clinic transition will provide important on-the-job training for the next generation of clinicians who will benefit immensely from the practical, real-world experience of administering vaccines to local residents.

"Humber and the University of Guelph-Humber are pleased to be able to provide space on campus to assist our community with the important rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations," says Chris Whitaker, President and CEO, Humber College. "This initiative, in partnership with William Osler Health System, will also provide a much-needed and once-in-a-lifetime work-integrated learning experience for our students in a variety of healthcare-related programs."

All appointments booked on or after April 14 will automatically be moved over to the Main Lobby at the UofGH building at Humber's North Campus. Initially, between April 14 and 16, the clinic will maintain similar hours to the clinic at Etobicoke General Hospital, between 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. The goal is to ramp up to open seven days a week and have hours that can accommodate essential workers in the community who may work shifts. "The Osler-Humber College COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic is another great example of Ontario's rapidly increasing vaccine infrastructure. It will be critical to get more vaccines into the arms of Etobicoke residents as quickly as possible and allow us to utilize every resource including our bright and capable Humber College and UofGH students," says the Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario and Member of Provincial Parliament for Etobicoke North. "The partnership between Osler, Humber and UofGH is a great example of the Team Ontario spirit and demonstrates how our health care and post-secondary partners are coming together to stop the spread of COVID-19." Appointments at the Osler-Humber College COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic can be booked online through Osler's website or by phone at 905-494-6685, from 8 am-6 pm, seven days a week.

50 or older?				
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L4W	L5C	L5R	L6S	L6Y
L4X	L5K	L5V	L6T	L6Z
L4Z	L5L	L5W	L6V	L7A
L5A	L5M	L6P	L6W	L7C

RESIDENTS 50+ LIVING WITHIN SELECT POSTAL CODES CAN NOW BOOK A COVID-19 VACCINE APPOINTMENT AT ALL CLINICS IN PEEL (TWITTER/ REGION OF PEEL)

‘LOCKDOWN, NOT VACCINATION, BEHIND DECLINE IN UK’S COVID CASES’

LONDON, (IANS) British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Tuesday that lockdown, not the country's vaccine rollout, is the main reason for the decline of Covid-19 infections in Britain. "The numbers are down — of infections and hospitalizations and deaths. But it is very, very important for everybody to understand that the reduction in these numbers... has not been achieved by the vaccination programme," he told Sky News, Xinhua news agency reported.

"People don't, I think, appreciate that it's the lockdown that has been overwhelmingly important in delivering this improvement in the pandemic and in the figures that we're seeing," he said. The prime minister said the vaccination programme has helped, but the bulk of the work in reducing the disease has been done by the lockdown.

"So, as we unlock, the result will inevitably be that we will see more infection, sadly we will see more hospitalization and deaths, and people have just got to understand that," he said. However, Johnson said, "at the moment" he couldn't see "any reason" to change his roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions. All shops reopened from Monday along with hairdressers, beauty salons and other close-contact services. Restaurants and pubs were allowed to serve food and alcohol to customers sitting outdoors. Meanwhile, gyms, spas, zoos, theme parks, libraries and community centers can all open. On May 17, restaurants and pubs are expected to be allowed to resume indoor service and most rules on gathering outdoors are expected to be lifted.

"It is very, very important that if we're to get there in the way that we all want that people continue to be cautious and they continue to exercise restraint and just do the basic things to stop the spread of the virus," he added. "So, you know, washing your hands, giving people plenty of space, doing things in fresh out as much as you can."

NEW ZEALAND BANS ARRIVALS FROM INDIA FROM APRIL 11



WELLINGTON, (IANS) New Zealand on Thursday announced a temporary ban on arrivals from India, which has witnessed a massive surge in new Covid-19 cases, in order to curb the spread of the virus in managed quarantine facilities.

From April 11 to 28, flights from India to New Zealand will be suspended in order to reduce the number of arriving passengers from India who tests positive for Covid-19, reports Xinhua news agency. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told a press conference that anyone who had been in India in the past 14 days would be banned from entering New Zealand until April 28. The ban applies to anyone who has been in India, covering New Zealand citizens and residents, Ardern said.

The Prime Minister said that she understood that the temporary ban would affect New Zealand citizens and residents currently living in India, but she felt "a sense of responsibility and obligation to find ways to reduce risks that travellers are experiencing". The decision came as New Zealand reported 23 newly imported Covid-19 cases in managed isolation facilities on Thursday.

Among them, 17 people came from India.

On Thursday, India recorded 126,789 Covid-19 cases, the highest single-day spike following the onset of the pandemic last year. The new figure increased the overall caseload to 12,928,574, the world's third-highest after the US and Brazil. The death toll from the deadly infection stands at 1,66,892, the fourth largest in the world after the US, Brazil and Mexico.

US CALLS FOR PAUSE ON JOHNSON & JOHNSON COVID VACCINE

NEW YORK, (IANS) Federal health agencies in the US on Tuesday recommended a pause in the use of Johnson & Johnson's Covid vaccine in the country "out of an abundance of caution" after six recipients developed a rare and severe type of blood clot.

All six cases occurred among women between the age group of 18 and 48, and the symptoms occurred six to 13 days after vaccination.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have urged the states across the country to pause the use of the single-dose vaccine while they investigate cases of blood clots.

The US CDC will convene a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) on Wednesday to further review these cases and assess their potential significance while the FDA will review that analysis as it also investigates these cases.

"Until that process is complete, we are recommending a pause in the use of this vaccine out of an abundance of caution," the CDC and the FDA said in a joint statement.

"This is important, in part, to ensure that the healthcare provider community is aware of the potential for these adverse events and can plan for proper recognition and management due to the unique treatment required for this type of blood clot," it said.

As of April 12, more than 6.8 million doses of Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine have been administered in the US. In the six reported cases in the US, a type of blood clot called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis was seen in combination with low levels of blood platelets.

Treatment of this specific type of blood clot is different from the treatment that might typically be administered.

COVID SURGE IN INDIA 'WORRISOME', THREATENS GROWTH PROSPECTS: IMF



UNITED NATIONS, (IANS) The new wave of Covid-19 infections sweeping parts of India is "worrisome" and threatens the 12.5 per cent growth projection, an International Monetary Fund expert for the region said on Tuesday.

Jonathan Otry, the Deputy Director of the IMF's Asia Pacific Department, said that "the current surge in infections presents a worrisome downside risk revisions" for India which "has seen a more sizeable upward revision to 12 and a half per cent on account of continued normalisation of its economy and a more growth-friendly fiscal policy". In projections made before the current spike in Covid-19 cases and released last week, the IMF had raised its estimate of India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth by 1 per cent from the January projection to the historically high rate of 12.5 per cent -- the highest in the world for large economies -- during this fiscal year. The growth was projected to moderate to 6.9 per cent next fiscal year.

Otry said at a news conference that a faster vaccine rollout "will propel the economic recovery" around the region. For this strong international cooperation is needed to ensure adequate vaccine production and universal distribution at affordable prices, he said, praising India's programmes.

"In this respect, the efforts of China and India have been commendable. And we hope, both countries continue to make supplies available to other countries, while ensuring adequate supplies at home," he said.

While the Covid-19 pandemic may adversely impact efforts in some areas to combat climate change, he said that India has pledged to meet the Paris Climate Agreement goals and is even likely to exceed its commitments.

Otry also said that the recovery from the pandemic will be uneven across the Asia Pacific region.

China's economy is projected to grow by 8.4 per cent this year, the second highest globally. Japan, in contrast will have a growth rate of only 3.3 per cent.

The rest of South Asia excluding India is also recovering despite the recent spike in infections because of higher than expected exports and remittances, he said.

The IMF's growth projection for the South Asia region is 11 per cent. Bangladesh is projected to grow by 5 per cent, Nepal 2.9 per cent, and Sri Lanka 4 per cent.

Pakistan, which is listed by the IMF in the Middle East and Central Asia region, is projected to have a growth rate of 1.5 per cent.

The two smallest South Asian countries are outliers in the growth projection for the region.

The Maldives, with a population of only 531,000 and a GDP on just \$5.6 billion, outperforms most countries with a growth projection of 18.9 per cent.

Bhutan's economy is, however, projected to continue shrinking, registering a negative growth rate of 1.9 per cent. (Bhutan's population is 763,000 and GDP \$2.5 billion.) Among steps to be taken to ensure a strong recovery, Otry called for actions against "zombie" companies and support for "dynamic entrants".

He said "corporate debt vulnerabilities, especially among small and medium enterprises, need to be addressed".

"Balance sheet repair" should be facilitated to "enable zombie firms to exit, and allow dynamic entrants to thrive", he said.

"Insolvency frameworks need to be strengthened to allow non-viable firms to exit, while assuring adequate credit flow to productive firms, and facilitating fresh equity capital to help companies overcome debt overhangs and grow job opportunities," he added.

Otry emphasised the role of trade in the recovery.

"Easing of trade and technology tensions and facilitation of digital trade would also provide a welcome fillip to growth," he said.

"To fulfil Asia's potential for trade-led growth, restrictions that impede trade need to be reduced. These include tariffs and non-tariff barriers, such as quotas, subsidies, local content rules, and licensing requirements, where progress has stalled since the 1990s," he added.

Trinamool banking on Muslim voters, women to return to power

KOLKATA, (IANS) Though the BJP has made a convincing dent into the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribe votes and the Muslim that constitute 30 per cent of the electorate, the population stands divided between Trinamool congress and The Indian Secular Front (ISF) floated by Muslim cleric Abbas Siddiqui. Yet, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is trying to bank on the women and minority votes to sail through the election this year. Considering this poll mathematics there are some seats across the state which can be considered to be safe for the ruling Trinamool Congress.

There are around 35 million women voters in Bengal that constitute nearly 49 per cent of the electorate population who will play a significant role in this election. In absolute terms among the 73,294,980 electors the number of male electors is 37,366,306 and the number of female electors is 35,927,084.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee, who has been in power for the last 10 years, is aware of the power of women voters. There are many seats in urban Bengal particularly in Kolkata, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly, where women voters are considerably high compared to the other districts of the state.

According to poll analysts, since the Trinamool chief has taken several steps to enhance women's empowerment like Kanyashree the Trinamool congress is likely to do better in these areas than the other portions of the state. According to several surveys conducted in the state, of the 126 seats spread across these five districts, the Trinamool Congress is sure to get 48 to 50 seats. "Though Trinamool did far better in the 2016 election particularly in South and North 24 parganas but as a considerable size of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population present in the bordering areas of these two districts have moved away from Trinamool Congress camp and showed their confidence in the saffron brigade there will be a dip in the number of seats in these two districts," a senior Trinamool Congress leader who didn't want to be named told IANS.

"Though the party might do a shade worse in South Kolkata, including in prestigious seats like Bhowanipur and Tollygunje but they will retain their vote bank in North Kolkata and the Muslim-dominated areas like Metiabruz and Garden Reach," he added. The state has much of presence of tribal population in ten districts including five in North Bengal and four districts in Janglemahal. There are 28 seats in the five districts of North Bengal including Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Alipurduar and Kalimpong where Trinamool could not perform well in the Lok Sabha election in 2019.

With no sign of return to cabinet, Sidhu's future in limbo



NEW DELHI, (IANS) Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu's return to the Punjab cabinet hangs in balance as there is no indication of this happening from Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh, despite the efforts of the Congress leadership and General Secretary in-charge Harish Rawat.

Captain Amarinder Singh and Navjot Singh Sidhu have met twice but there has been no breakthrough from both sides. Sources say Sidhu wants his old portfolio back which Amarinder isn't willing to concede.

Sidhu last met Singh on March 17. A day after the meeting, when the Punjab CM was asked about Sidhu's rehabilitation, he said: "Everyone wants him to be part of our team." He was hopeful that Sidhu, whom he had known since the latter was a kid and with whom he had a very cordial meetings even on Wednesday, would soon take a decision on joining back. Sidhu on Monday tweeted in Hindi: "Though my wishes are not fulfilled but I always try with full heart", while praising the farmers agitation continuing at Delhi borders, "The youth has redeemed Punjab's image, earned respect and transformed public perception from Uddh Punjab to Chardha Punjab! Must invest in our future, protect them, in these tough times ... Exuberance of youth and wisdom of Union leaders is a perfect combination for the "Morchha's" success." The Congress Central leadership is keen in accommodating the ex-cricketer who has been star campaigner for the party.

Since Harish Rawat is recuperating from Covid after being discharged from hospital, more time may be taken on organisational issues.

Even as Sidhu hopes the organisation will intervene, the party has started restructuring of the state unit.

Sidhu had resigned from the Punjab cabinet in July 2019 after being stripped of a key portfolio. He was in-charge of Local Bodies but was then shifted to the Power Department. The simmering tension between the two leaders had reached a boiling point when Sidhu's wife Navjot Kaur was denied a party ticket for the Lok Sabha elections in 2019, sources said. Congress state in-charge Harish Rawat had met both Amarinder Singh and Sidhu last week to hammer out a solution.

BIDEN PROPOSES TO HOLD SUMMIT WITH PUTIN



WASHINGTON, (IANS) US President Joe Biden has urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to de-escalate border tensions with Ukraine and proposed the two leader hold a summit in the coming months, the White House said.

Biden spoke by phone with Putin on Tuesday to discuss a range of issues, from arms control to cyberattacks and fresh worries over the amassing of Russian troops on the Ukraine border, a statement said, DPA news reported.

The US president suggested their meeting take place "in a third country." The last Russia-US summit was held in Helsinki in July 2018. At the time, then-president Donald Trump was embroiled in investigations over Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

In March, the Kremlin was outraged by Biden's comments about Putin during an interview. Biden had answered "I do" to the question of whether he considered Putin a "killer."

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said of the remark: "There has never been anything like it in history." He described US-Russian relations as "very bad" and accused Biden of showing no interest in improving the relationship.

The Biden administration recently imposed sanctions on Russia over the assassination attempt on jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Meanwhile, anxiety has grown over the recent build-up of Russian troops near Ukraine's borders.

During the phone call, Biden voiced "concerns over the sudden Russian military build-up in occupied Crimea and on Ukraine's borders, and called on Russia to de-escalate tensions," the White House said.

Reports of Russian military activity in and around Ukraine as well as ceasefire violations have sparked worries that the seven-year conflict between the two nations could escalate again.

Moscow annexed the Crimean peninsula after a controversial referendum in 2014. Western governments still consider Crimea to be part of Ukrainian territory.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday said that "thousands" of combat-ready Russian troops have been moved to Ukraine's border.

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INDIVIDUALS AGED 18+ IN PEEL, TORONTO ELIGIBLE FOR VACCINATION THROUGH MOBILE TEAMS AND POP-UP CLINICS

TORONTO - To slow the spread of the virus and protect communities with the highest rates of transmission, Ontario is rolling out vaccines to "hot spot" regions across the province as part of Phase Two of the COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan. Through this initiative, 114 highly impacted neighbourhoods, as identified by postal code, will be reached through mass immunization clinics, mobile teams and pop-up clinics. Details were provided today by Premier Doug Ford, Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Solicitor General Sylvia Jones at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto. "As we receive more vaccines from the Federal government, it is vital that we continue to target our vaccination efforts on those most at risk," said Premier Ford. "We must get vaccines to the people in these hot spot regions as quickly as possible in order to stop the spread of this virus and prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed. This pop-up clinic shows once again how our valued community partners have stepped up and are working with local public health in our collective battle against COVID-19. This is another great example of Team Ontario at work."

Individuals aged 18 and over in designated hot spots, as identified by postal code, are eligible for vaccination through mobile teams and pop-up clinics in targeted settings. Starting in Peel and Toronto, the province will be providing additional resources to support more mobile vaccination teams, expanding to hot spots in other public health units in the future.

Mobile teams and pop-up clinics will administer vaccines in high-risk congregate settings, residential buildings, and faith-based locations in hot spot neighbourhoods. Upcoming mobile and pop-up clinics will be promoted locally within their target communities and local public health units, and will not use the provincial booking system. This week, a pop-up clinic will begin operating at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Complex in highly impacted North Etobicoke. The government has partnered with BAPS Charities, William Osler Health System and Toronto Public Health Unit to establish and operate the clinic. It is planned to run for three weeks. Appointment bookings for this clinic will be opened through the William Osler Health System booking system to the surrounding highly impacted hot spot communities and vaccinations will begin on April 14, 2021.

Ontario is also working with public health units, business groups and large employers to explore employer-operated onsite vaccination clinics, with a focus on hot spot communities at greatest risk. These clinics will be set up, operated and funded by participating employers within hot spot areas and will vaccinate employees aged 18 and over as well as members of the local and neighbouring communities. This capacity will supplement publicly-run vaccination clinics. Employer-operated onsite clinics must have the support of local public health units and hospitals as the program needs to be consistent

with local plans. Employers interested in hosting an onsite clinic must meet the following criteria:

"The workplace must be located within an identified hot-spot community and have had a previous COVID-19 outbreak or is at risk of an outbreak.

"The onsite clinic will vaccinate employees that cannot work at home, many of whom reside in hot-spot areas.

"The employer will also vaccinate those in the local community, either at the onsite clinic or an alternative location in consultation with the local public health unit.

"The employer will take on the responsibility of setting up, operating and funding the onsite vaccination clinic as well as the community clinics being sponsored if not onsite.

In addition, to further support hot spot communities, as of Friday, April 9, 2021, the Ontario government expanded the provincial booking system to provide appointments to individuals aged 50 and over in hot spot communities at mass vaccination sites. Eligible populations, as identified by postal code, aged 50 and over can schedule an appointment through the provincial booking system, or directly through public health units that use their own booking system.

"COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted certain neighbourhoods and communities across the province," said Minister Elliott. "Partnering with communities to deliver the vaccine is critical to reducing the impact of COVID-19 quickly, and we are working to mobilize every available channel for vaccine delivery to protect individuals and stop the spread of the virus."

As of April 12, 2021, special education workers across the province and education workers in Peel and Toronto hot spots will be eligible to register for vaccination by calling the provincial vaccine booking line at 1 833 943 3900, or directly through those public health units who are using their own system. These education workers will have been notified directly by their school board of their eligibility. Vaccinations will roll out in the near future to education workers in other hot spot communities in York, Ottawa, Hamilton, Halton and Durham.

"Ontario's vaccine distribution plan continues to focus on getting vaccines to the people who are most at risk," said Solicitor General Sylvia Jones. "By targeting hot spot zones with mobile teams and pop-up clinics, along with our mass immunization clinics, hospitals and pharmacies, we're making it easier for people in highly-impacted communities to obtain the vaccine so they can protect themselves and others."

Phase Two of Ontario's vaccine rollout will also prioritize individuals with the highest-risk health conditions in April 2021. If the province receives a steady supply of the COVID-19 vaccine from the federal government, over nine million Ontarians will be offered their first vaccination between April and end of June 2021.

3 INDO CANADIANS CHARGED IN RELATION TO 2019 DOUBLE MURDER

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Upon arrival, police found two men, Jasdeep SINGH, 25, and Japneet MALHI, 22, suffering from gunshot wounds inside a vehicle. The victims later succumbed to their injuries.

We believe the victims had been targeted by two suspects who waited for them for more than an hour. When the victims appeared, the suspects drove in a vehicle past the victims, firing multiple rounds. Over the course of the investigation, we have also determined a third person was involved in carrying out these offences. "Over the last two years, we have worked to piece together an investigation in which two young people lost their lives in such a calculated manner," says Staff Sergeant Colin Chisholm of the Calgary Police Service Homicide Unit. "Three people will now be held to account due to the diligent work of many areas of the Service, throughout this investigation." Amandeep SAGGU, 30, Prabhjot BHATTI, 22, and Jaskaran SIDHU, 21, all of Calgary, have each been charged with two counts of first-degree murder and one count of reckless discharge of a firearm. They will appear in court on Thursday, April 8, 2021.



QUEEN ELIZABETH II'S CONSORT, PRINCE PHILIP PASSES AWAY

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"It is with deep sorrow that Her Majesty The Queen has announced the death of her beloved husband, His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. His Royal Highness passed away peacefully this morning at Windsor Castle," the statement said, the BBC reported. Prince Philip died weeks after he returned home to Windsor Castle, where the Royal couple was staying amid the Covid pandemic, on March 16 from a month-long stay in hospitals in London - first admitted to King Edward VII's hospital on February 16, and then he was operated for a pre-existing heart condition at St Bartholomew's. The exact reason for his initial admission to hospital was not disclosed, but Buckingham Palace said at the time it was not related to coronavirus. As the news spread, mourners gathered at both Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle and left floral tributes at the gates. All UK parties announced suspension of their election campaigns as a mark of respect. The Parliament has been called into session on April 12 to pay tributes to Prince Philip. Top leaders from around the UK, the Commonwealth and across the world, as well as royalty from around Europe mourned his passing. Emerging out of 10 Downing Street to address the waiting media, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Prince Philip had "earned the affection of generations here in the United Kingdom, across the Commonwealth, and around the world". "Like the expert carriage driver that he was, he helped to steer the royal family and the monarchy so that it remains an institution indisputably vital to the balance and happiness of our national life," he said.

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INDIANS HAIL BRITISH COLUMBIA GESTURE TO MARK AMBEDKAR'S BIRTHDAY ON APRIL 14 AS 'EQUALITY DAY'

CONTD. FROM PAGE 3

The grandsons of Ambedkar - Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi President Dr. Prakash Ambedkar and Republican Sena President Anandraj Ambedkar - say that their grandfather is already an icon for the depressed classes of society and now the world is also recognizing this in a big way.

"The decision of the British Columbia government is indeed a great honour India and even his family -- The principles of Equality, enshrined in the Indian Constitution due to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, have inspired many other countries which secured independence after the 1950s to include similar fundamentals in their own Constitutions," Dr. Prakash Ambedkar told IANS.

"The Republican Party of India (RPI-A) and myself are moved by this honour to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the British Columbia province -- I shall write a letter of thanks to the government there," an elated Union Minister of State for Social Justice Ramdas Athawale told IANS.

He recalled how Dr. B.R. Ambedkar worked hard all his life, often surviving on a small loaf of bread, studying 18 hours daily at the Lehman Social Sciences Library during his days at the Columbia University in New York (USA), and later became its most famous alumnus to be honoured with a statue (bust) there in 1995.

"The British Columbia gesture has made us all extremely proud, it shows that the world understands and appreciates Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's philosophy of Equality, the first person to propound it after Lord Gautam Buddha, for the upliftment of the oppressed sections," Anandraj Ambedkar told IANS.

The Proclamation was made on April 1 by the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of British Columbia, Janet Austin, declaring that "April 14, 2021, shall be known as 'Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Equality Day' in the Province.

Decreed in the name of Queen Elizabeth II, the Proclamation noted that British Columbia is 'a culturally diverse province comprising many peoples and communities'.

It added that the "Indigenous people, Black people and people of colour in British Columbia continue to experience systemic racism, injustices, discrimination and hate" and the province's government was committed to address all forms of racism.

Dr. Prakash Ambedkar pointed out that this was in tune with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's doctrine of "positive revolution in all oppressed human societies", while Anandraj Ambedkar said "it respects (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's) his humanitarian role as emancipator of the persecuted people world over'.

Athawale feels the latest recognition proves that "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar belongs not just to India but to the humanity and all tyrannized people everywhere on Earth", and said even Prime Minister Narendra Modi has deep respect for him.

The decision has struck a warm chord among Indians elsewhere in Canada, like a hospitality industry professional Shirish Deshpande in Mississauga in Ontario. "It has made all Indians here very proud - Dr. B. R. Ambedkar taught the world to end all kinds of discrimination and



his legacy is being followed in many parts of the world," Deshpande told IANS.

In 2015, the York University, Toronto, unveiled his bust and in 2016, Carleton University, Ottawa celebrated his 125th birth anniversary, he added.

A legendary jurist, economist, social reformer, anthropologist and political leader, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was born in Mhow (now in Madhya Pradesh) town on April 14, 1891, as the 14th child of Ramji M. Sakpal and Bhimabai R. Sakpal with family roots in Ambadawe village of Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district, and belonged to the Mahar (Dalit) caste. Facing the scourge of discrimination, untouchability from an early left a deep scar on his psyche and barely six years old, he moved to Bombay (Mumbai, now) and became the only 'untouchable' student at the famed Elphinstone High School.

By the time he was 15, he had an arranged marriage with a 9-year old girl, Ramabai, the next year (1907), he graduated from the University of Bombay in 1912, later went to Columbia University, New York and London School of Economics, acquired two PhDs, became a Barrister, was conferred with top academic honours and accolades.

On return to India, he joined the Freedom Movement, with Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and others, became a Minister of Labour in the Viceroy's Executive Council and a Member of the Constitution Drafting Committee.

Later, after the country's Independence on August 15, 1937, he became India's first Law Minister in Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet and also Chairman of the new Constitution Drafting Committee. After a glorious life dedicated to the common masses, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who had converted to Buddhism on October 14, 1956, passed away peacefully on December 6 that year and his funeral was performed at Dadar Chowpatty in Bombay the next day, attended by over 500,000 people.

‘Employment rose 303,000 (+1.6%) in March’: StatsCan

EMPLOYMENT GROWTH CONTINUES AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FALLS

Employment rose 303,000 (+1.6%) in March and was within 1.5% of its pre-COVID February 2020 level.

The unemployment rate fell 0.7 percentage points to 7.5%, the lowest level since February 2020.

Both full- (+175,000; +1.2%) and part-time (+128,000; +3.9%) employment increased.

Self-employment rose for the first time in three months, up 56,000 (+2.1%), but remained 5.4% (-156,000) below its pre-COVID February 2020 level.

Total hours worked rose 2.0% in March, driven by gains in several industries, including educational services, retail trade and construction.

There were 1.5 million Canadians unemployed, up 371,000 (+32.4%) compared with February 2020.

Compared with February 2020, there were 296,000 (-1.5%) fewer people employed in March 2021, and 247,000 (+30.4%) more people worked less than half of their usual hours.

The labour underutilization rate fell 1.9 percentage points to 14.7%, the lowest level since February 2020.

Employment up in industries most affected by easing of public health restrictions

Employment in retail trade rose by 95,000 (+4.5%) in March, fully recouping the remainder of the losses sustained in January.

Employment in information, culture and recreation increased (+62,000; +9.4%) for the first time since September.

There were 21,000 (+2.4%) more people working in accommodation and food services.

Following little change in February, employment in the goods-producing sector rose 43,000 (+1.1%) in March, with construction contributing most of the gain (+26,000; +1.8%).

Employment increases in most provinces

Employment increased in seven provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia.

Employment was unchanged in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan.

Young women continue to face challenges despite growth in youth employment

Employment among youth aged 15 to 24 rose by 115,000 (+5.0%) in March, with gains entirely in part-time work.

Compared with February 2020, employment was down 122,000 (-9.5%) among young women, compared with 39,000 (-3.0%) among young men.

Building on an increase of 134,000 (+1.1%) in February, employment among people aged 25 to 54 rose a further 87,000 (+0.7%) in March. Employment among people aged 55 and older rose by 101,000 (+2.5%) but their employment rate was 0.8 percentage points lower than in February 2020.



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BJP OR TMC IN BENGAL- WHAT IS THE STORY BEHIND LEAKED AUDIO?



CONTD. FROM PAGE 3

BJP's IT cell chief Amit Malviya claimed that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's election strategist Prashant Kishor had accepted the BJP's victory. Malviya shared the audio of Prashant Kishor's discussion on the ClubHouse platform on social media. In this, Kishor is chatting with some journalists.

In a public chat on ClubHouse, Mamata Banerjee's election strategist concedes that even in TMC's internal surveys, BJP is winning. The vote is for Modi, polarisation is a reality, the SCs (27 per cent of WB's population), Matuas are all voting for the BJP, Amit Malviya-National in-charge of BJP's Information & Technology department wrote in his tweet.

In the audio, Kishor is saying that on a public chat at the clubHouse, Prashant Kishor admitted that BJP is winning in TMC's internal survey too. People are voting for Modi and polarization has taken place. SC and Matua, 27 per cent of Bengal's population all voted for the BJP.

Another candid admission by Kishor is that -- all that the Left, Congress and TMC ecosystem have done in the last 20 years is Muslim appeasement. Implication? It has resulted in resentment on the ground. The speakers had not realised that the chat was public, Malviya wrote. That moment when Mamata Banerjee's strategist realised that the ClubHouse room was open and his admissions were being heard by the public at large and not just a handful of Lutyens journalist. Deafening silence followed, Malviya added.

Prashant Kishor was immediate to react. "I am happy that the people of BJP are taking my clubHouse chat more seriously than the state-

ments of their leaders. I appeal to them to release the entire conversation except for some part of the chat. In the part that has been released, the question was being answered about how BJP is getting 40 per cent votes and how it has been thinking that the BJP is winning. He also said through social media that the BJP will not be able to cross the 100 mark in Bengal elections" Kishore tweeted.

Trinamool Congress has come out in open defence of its political strategist Prashant Kishor, popularly known as PK, after a controversy erupted when the IT cell of the BJP released an audio tape where PK could be reportedly heard saying in a 'Clubhouse' chat that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is hugely popular in West Bengal, which is one of the three factors that will decide which party sweeps the state in the ongoing Assembly elections.

Trinamool Rajya Sabha member Derek O'Brien said, "They (the BJP) have only published a portion of the audio tape. Let them release the full tape. BJP will get less than 100 seats in the elections. If they release the full audio recording, we will hold a press conference."

"I have heard the full recording. In a portion it is said that the BJP is getting 38 to 39 per cent votes, but that is said against a question as to how the Trinamool is getting 45 to 46 per cent votes. Let them take out the full recording, why they are so scared," O'Brien added.

Senior Trinamool leader Dola Sen also urged the BJP to release the full audio recording.

"Of the eight-phase polling in the state, the elections for four phases have been completed. The BJP has understood that Trinamool is coming to power for a third time. Now it is trying to create sensation, else they won't get any workers," the Trinamool leader said.

TORONTO REGIONAL REAL ESTATE BOARD
SAYS HOME SALES RISE BY 97% IN MARCH

For the third straight month of 2021, record home sales continued in March across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) with buyers taking advantage of favourable borrowing costs and continued improvement in many sectors of the economy.

GTA REALTORS® reported 15,652 sales in March 2021 – close to double that of March 2020. While sales were strong, it is important to remember that for the second half of March 2021, we are comparing against the initial impact of COVID-19 in the second half of March 2020 when sales activity dropped off dramatically. With this in mind, it is important to consider annual sales growth for the pre-COVID period (March 1 to 14, 2020) and the COVID period (March 15 to 31, 2020):

- There were 6,504 sales reported during the first 14 days of March 2021 – up 41 per cent compared to the pre-COVID period in March 2020.
- There were 9,148 sales reported between March 15 and March 31, 2021, an increase of 174 per cent compared to the COVID period of March 2020. This is a stark reminder of the initial impact COVID-19 had on the housing market and overall economy a year ago. "Confidence in economic recovery coupled with low borrowing costs supported a record pace of home sales last month. While the robust market activity is indicative of widespread consumer optimism, it is also shedding light on the sustained lack of inventory in the GTA housing market, with implications for affordability," said TRREB President Lisa Patel.

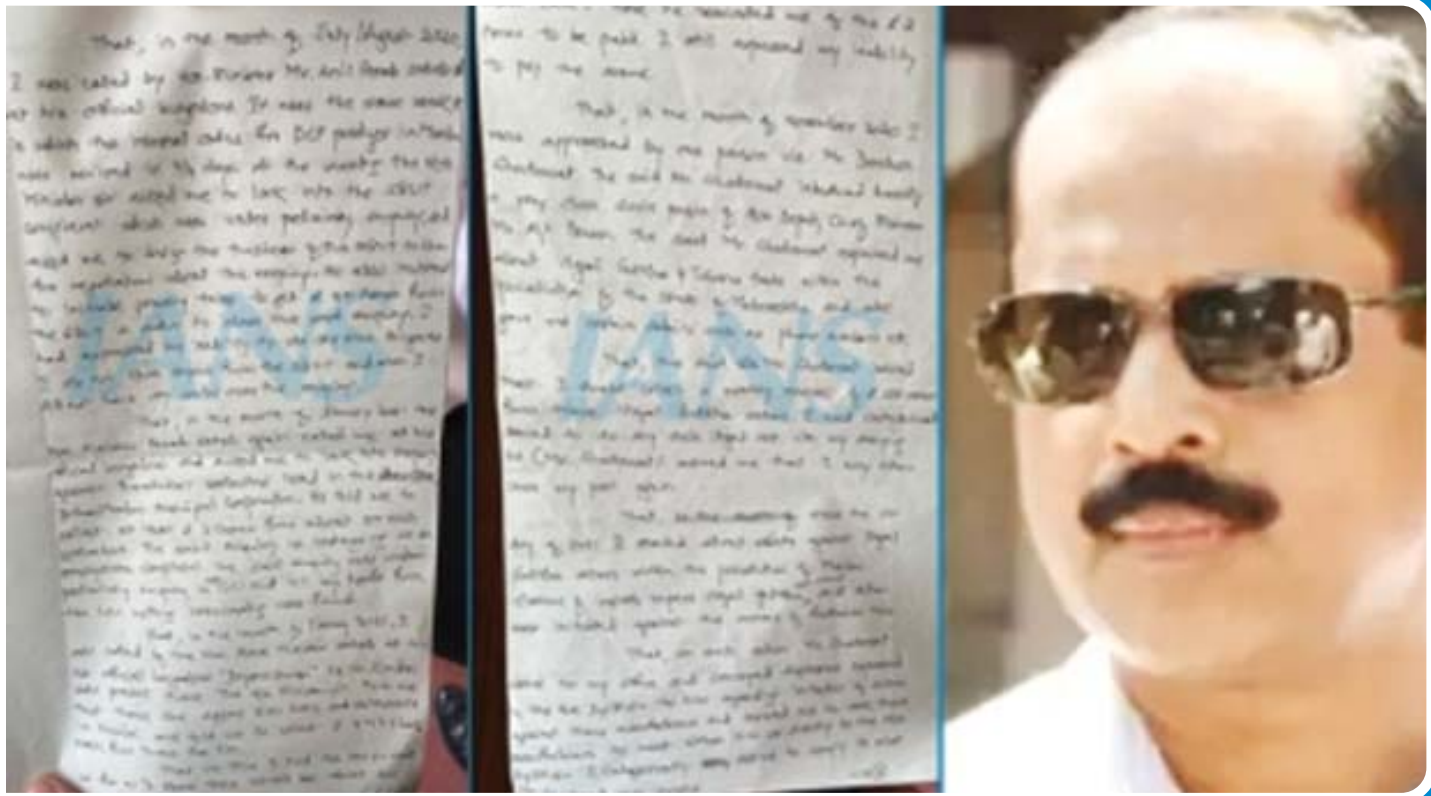
For March 2021 as a whole, new listings were up 57 per cent year-over-year to 22,709. While representing a strong year-over-year increase, the annual growth rate for new listings was well below that of sales.

"With sales growth outstripping listings growth by a large margin, including in the condo market segment, competition between buyers in some market segments and the potential for double-digit price growth could continue without a meaningful increase in the supply of homes available for sale. This will become more apparent as population growth resumes over the next year," stressed TRREB Chief Market Analyst Jason Mercer. The MLS® Home Price Index Composite Benchmark for March 2021 was up by 16.5 per cent compared to March 2020. The average selling price at \$1,097,565 was up by 21.6 per cent over the same period.

Following the recent trend, low-rise home sales in regions surrounding the City of Toronto drove price growth.

"The current state of the market has reinvigorated discussions about potential demand-side policy interventions. Policies focusing on demand, such as a capital gains tax on primary residences, can have a short-term impact, but can also be fraught with unintended consequences like further stifling the supply of listings. The federal minister responsible for the housing portfolio has said his government will not entertain such a policy option, which is the right decision. We have been saying for too long now that policymakers must focus on the long-term goal of increasing housing supply in order to accommodate current and future demand," said TRREB CEO John DiMichele.

VAZE OPENS PANDORA’S BOX FOR MVA, SAYS DESHMUKH ASKED HIM TO EXTORT MONEY FROM BARS



BANGLADESH HAS REGISTERED 7,087 FRESH COVID-19 CASES, TAKING THE TALLY TO 6,37,364, IN THE LAST 24 HOURS UNTIL SUNDAY WHICH IS THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF INFECTIONS SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC, THE UNITED NEWS OF BANGLADESH REPORTED. (AP PHOTO)

MUMBAI, (IANS) Arrested Mumbai Police crime branch officer Sachin Vaze has opened up a Pandora’s Box for the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in Maharashtra, accusing former Home Minister Anil Deshmukh, Transport Minister Anil Parab and others of pressuring him to extort money from the contractors of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and illegal tobacco factories and bars in the city. In a handwritten letter dated April 3, a copy of which has been viewed by IANS, Vaze has claimed that NCP chief Sharad Pawar was against his reinstatement into Mumbai Police in 2020 and wanted it to be revoked. However, senior officials of the NIA remained tightlipped on the authenticity of Vaze’s letter. In the letter, Vaze said that Deshmukh had told him that if he paid Rs 2 crore to him, “he would convince Pawar to allow him back into the force”.

“I had expressed my inability to pay such an amount. On this, the home minister asked me to pay it in a later course,” Vaze wrote. Vaze further claimed that Deshmukh had called him to the Sahyadri Guest House in October 2020 and asked him to collect Rs 3-3.5 lakh each from 1,650 bars and restaurants in Mumbai. “I refused by saying that it was not within the scope of my capability,” Vaze claimed in his letter, adding that as far he knew, there were only 200 bars in Mumbai and not 1,650, as anticipated by Deshmukh. Vaze also alleged that soon after he came out of the meeting with

Deshmukh, his PA Kundan had advised him that he must comply with the instructions of the minister if he wished to keep his job and post intact. Vaze also said that Deshmukh made the same demand again in January 2021, when the two met at the former minister’s official bungalow. Vaze in his letter also claimed that Maharashtra Transport Minister and Shiv Sena leader Anil Parab had asked him to extort money for him. “In July-August 2020, I was called by Minister Anil Parab at his official bungalow... At the meeting, Parab asked me to look into the complaint under preliminary inquiry and bring the trustees of the SBUT to him for negotiations about the inquiry. He also insisted to initiate primary talks to get Rs 50 crore from SBUT in order to close the said enquiry. I had expressed my inability to do any such thing as I do not know anybody from SBUT and also I did not have any control over the inquiry,” Vaze told NIA in his letter. Vaze further claimed that Parab called him again in January 2021 and asked him to look into an inquiry against some contractors listed in the BMC and collect Rs 2 crore each from them. “He told me to collect at least Rs 2 crore each from 50 such contractors. An inquiry was on in this matter based on an anonymous complaint. The Crime Intelligence Unit inquiry against the contractors

had not yielded any result,” Vaze claimed in his letter. Vaze, who was arrested on March 13 in connection with the explosive-laden SUV found outside Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani’s residence on February 25, said that he had informed the then Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh about the extortion demands made by Deshmukh and Parab. “...I met the Police Commissioner (Param Bir Singh) and expressed my apprehension about this... I told him that I would be embroiled in a false controversy in the near future. The Commissioner encouraged me and categorically instructed me not to involve myself in any such illegal collection of money from anyone and for anyone,” Vaze wrote. Vaze is currently being investigated by the NIA in connection with the mysterious death of Mumbai-based businessman Mansukh Hiren, whose body was found from a Thane creek on March 5. A Mumbai Court on Wednesday extended the remand of Vaze till April 9. After the cases related to the explosive-laden SUV and the death of Hiren exploded in Maharashtra, Singh was shunted out from the top cop’s post and made the Commandant General of Home Guards. After being shunted out as Mumbai Police Commissioner, Singh dropped a ‘letter bomb’ on March 20, accusing Deshmukh of asking Vaze and other Mumbai police personnel to extort Rs 100 crore ‘monthly’ from bars, hotels and restaurants in the city. Earlier in the day, Singh had appeared before the NIA in connection with the case. The Bombay High Court on Monday ordered a CBI preliminary enquiry against Deshmukh. The court also asked the CBI to complete the probe within 15 days, following which the CBI registered a PE on Tuesday night. Two teams of the agency have already arrived here from Delhi.

PUNJAB SAYS YES TO CENTRE, AGREES TO DIRECT CASH TRANSFER

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

Badal, after a lengthy discussion with Union Food Minister Piyush Goyal on this issue, said the Centre rejected the state government’s demand to give more time to implement direct bank transfer (DBT) of minimum support price (MSP) to farmers. “The Government of India (GoI) had asked us to implement the DBT for farmers. We had sought more time because in Punjab there is a traditional arthiyas system.But the GoI dismissed our demand. We tried a lot but they did not listen,” Badal told reporters after 2.30 hours of meeting. With the Centre rejecting Punjab’s demand for continuation of payment through ‘arthiyas’ and exemption from the direct benefit transfer (DBT) system, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Friday asked Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to tell why he had kept the farmers and the ‘arthiyas’ in the dark. The party also demanded that the more than 50 per cent hike in fertilizer prices announced by the Central government be rolled back immediately and asked the Chief Minister why he was not opposing this measure aimed at punishing farmers for protesting against the three agricultural laws forcefully. Addressing a press conference here, senior party leaders Prem Singh Chandumajra, Jathedar Tota Singh and Sikander Singh Maluka said the Chief Minister had made a big show of opposing the DBT scheme and had during a recent meeting with ‘arthiyas’ or commission agents announced that all payments for food grain procurement would be routed through them only. “However the Punjab ministerial team led by Finance Minister Manpreet Badal abjectly surrendered before the Centre in its meeting with Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday. It is also a fact that the Congress government had committed in writing to implement the scheme from the forthcoming Rabi season,” they said. Despite this the government resorted to a drama to befool the people in the same manner as the Congress party befooled and deceived all sections of society with false promises in the 2017 assembly elections, they added. Asserting that implementation of the new DBT scheme would increase social strife, Chandumajra said ‘relations between farmers and ‘arthiyas’ would be poisoned and it would cause immense problems for those who leased out land. The SAD leaders also announced that its top leadership would fan out in the ‘mandis’ on Saturday, the first of the wheat procurement, to ensure it was initiated in earnest as well as to secure the rights of farmers. Chandumajra said there were reports that farmers were not being allowed to download their produce in the ‘mandis’ and even jute bags had not reached the mandis. They said the SAD would also ‘gherao’ wheat trucks being brought into the state from Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and demanded the Chief Minister take action against Congress ministers and legislators indulging in this corrupt activity. The Akali leaders also castigated the Chief Minister for not standing up to the principle of federalism and allowing the Centre to infringe on the rights of the state.

Amarinder compromised interests of Punjab: Sukhbir Badal

CHANDIGARH, (IANS) Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Saturday said Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh should resign for compromising the interests of the state by being hand in glove with the BJP-led Centre in punishing the farmers protesting against the three agricultural laws. The SAD president, who was addressing the media here, said the Punjab and Haryana High Court order quashing the Special Investigating Team (SIT) formed by the Congress government in the Kotkapura police firing case had made it clear that the Chief Minister was not interested in finding the guilty but was using the case to implicate the Badal family. He said it was now clear that the SIT was formed to indulge in political vendetta. “What we have been maintaining since day one that the entire investigation is being done with malicious intent has been proved. Amarinder took an oath to take action against those responsible for sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib but has played with the sentiments of the people by indulging in a political investigation and has wasted four years in this process.” Stating that the Chief Minister had sold off the interests of the state to the BJP, Badal said “forget fighting for the rights of the state, Amarinder does not even raise the issues affecting the people of the state with the central government.” He said the Chief Minister had time and again agreed with all the anti-farmer steps taken by the Centre.

Indian Youth Congress (IYC) protests against alleged corruption in Rafale deal

NEW DELHI, (IANS) Indian Youth Congress (IYC) activists on Wednesday staged a protest here over the reports of alleged corruption in the Rafale defence deal. During the protest, that was led by IYC national president Srinivas BV, IYC activists carried placards of Rafale fighter jets and raised slogans against the government. The protest by the IYC activists came in the wake of the revelations made by a French news portal alleging that one million euros were paid to a middleman. Speaking to the media, Srinivas said, “In the country’s largest defence deal worth more than Rs 60,000 crore, the presence of commissions, middlemen and money transactions have once again opened the layers of the Rafale deal.” He said that these allegations have been levelled by a French news portal. The IYC leader said that former Congress President Rahul Gandhi’s statement on the Rafale defence deal has finally proved to be true. Srinivas also said that in every defence procurement deal in our country, it is mandatory to have an ‘integrity clause’. “The presence of middlemen, bribery or exchange of commissions are prohibited,” he said. The IYC leader also demanded that there should be a fair investigation into the allegations of bribery in the Rafale deal.

CLEAR RS 937 CR PROJECTS RELATING TO GURU TEGH BAHADUR: PUNJAB CM ASKS PM



CHANDIGARH, (IANS) Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Thursday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to clear the state governments proposal for launching various projects worth Rs 937 crore, including the development of Anandpur Sahib as a Smart City, to pay tributes to Guru Tegh Bahadur, whose 400th Prakash Purab is being celebrated this year.

Participating virtually in the high-level national committee meeting convened by the Prime Minister to finalize the plans to celebrate the 400th Prakash Purab, the Chief Minister said, “We are all fortunate to celebrate this great event in our lifetimes and I urge Modi Ji to ensure that this historic event is commemorated not only at the national level but also at the global level.”

He said Guru Tegh Bahadur, also known as Hind Di Chadar, stands as a shining symbol of the country’s great pluralistic tradition and secularism, and his supreme sacrifice forms an important part of India’s history.

The Chief Minister said that he was “blessed” as during his present tenure, he got the opportunity to be part of the grand celebrations of the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh as well as the 550th Prakash Purab of Guru Nanak Dev.

“Even during my last tenure, I was fortunate to be part of the celebrations to mark the 400th anniversary of Guru Granth Sahib Ji,” he said.

Briefing the Prime Minister on the memorandum sent to the Centre in this regard, Amarinder Singh said his government plans to duly recognize the towns and villages associated with the life of Guru Tegh Bahadur in the state by upgrading their infrastructure.

Besides the city of Amritsar, Anandpur Sahib and Baba Bakala are significant in this regard, he said. In addition, he said that there are 78 villages in the state which were graced by the Guru.

Amarinder Singh said the proposal sent by the state government includes projects for the development of infrastructure in and around Anandpur Sahib, Amritsar and Baba Bakala; rejuvenation of village ponds and traditional water bodies for water conservation in 78 villages that were visited by the Guru; and setting up Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur School of Textile Technology and Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Institute of Handicrafts at the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, and Sathiala, Baba Bakala, respectively.

The Chief Minister further requested the Prime Minister that the Union government should release a special commemorative stamp on this occasion. He suggested that the commemorative events should be held across the country, as well as at all Indian missions abroad, in order to carry forward the powerful message of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s life.

Amarinder Singh informed the Prime Minister that the details of the main programme on May 1 are being finalized, keeping in mind the Covid situation in the country, particularly in Punjab.

The Chief Minister also thanked Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for making elaborate plans for celebrating this historic event across the country. “I’m grateful to you for giving such prominence to this event, as normally it is left to the state or communities to manage such celebrations,” he said, while also appreciating Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar’s assurance of organizing befitting celebrations in his state too.

Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath tests positive for COVID-19

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has tested positive for COVID-19. He informed about the same on Wednesday (April 14) on his official Twitter handle. He is already in self-isolation since Tuesday. “After initial symptoms, I got myself tested. My report is positive. I am in self-isolation and following doctors advice. I am doing all the works virtually,” Adityanath tweeted from his official Twitter handle.

Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday went into self-isolation after several officers in the Chief Minister’s Office tested positive for COVID-19. The Chief Minister said as a precautionary measure, he is isolating himself. Some officials, including his Officer on Special Duty (OSD) Abhishek Kaushik, tested positive for COVID-19. The chief minister, however, had not identified the officials who were tested for the infection. The number of new coronavirus cases in India hit a record daily high with 21,84,372 infections pushing the total tally of cases to 1,38,73,825, while the active cases surpassed the 13-lakh mark, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Wednesday. The death toll increased to 1,72,085 with 1,027 new fatalities, the highest since October 18, 2020 the data updated at 8 am showed.



Maharashtra to undergo 'Lockdown style' curfew April 14-30

MUMBAI, (IANS) On anticipated lines, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday announced 'lockdown' style restrictions starting 8 p.m. on April 14, till April 30, to break the chain of the coronavirus which has gripped the state. However, Mumbai suburban trains and city buses will continue to run, but commutes will be permitted for those in the designated 'essential services', he said. “From tomorrow 8 pm, Section 144 will be imposed across Maharashtra.. From 7 a.m.-8 p.m. only essential services shall remain open. This is imperative to break the chain of the virus. Saving lives is our topmost priority,” Thackeray said in an address to the state late this evening.

Even as Thackeray spoke, the state’s daily Covid tally touched a whopping 60,212 new infections, taking the tally above the 35 lakh mark to 35,19,208, besides 281 deaths taking the toll to 58,526 - the highest in the country.

Referring to the shortages experienced by the state, Thackeray said he would request Prime Minister Narendra Modi to direct the Indian Air Force to transport oxygen from other states as road transportation could lead to delays. Presently, the state produces around 1,200 tonnes of oxygen of which nearly 950-1000 tonnes is utilised daily, but as the cases continue to spike, the demand has increased, besides the need for more Remdevisir medicine and other Covid-treatment related requirements.

RDIF sets target of 50m doses a month for Sputnik in India

NEW DELHI/MOSCOW, (IANS) More than 50 million doses of Sputnik V vaccine will be produced in India in a month over the summer in partnership with five Indian companies, Kirill Dmitriev, the CEO of Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), said on Tuesday.

Over 850 million doses of Sputnik V are going to be produced in India annually, which will be sufficient to vaccinate more than 425 million people around the world.



India is the leading production hub for Sputnik V. RDIF has reached agreements with the leading pharmaceutical companies in the country, including Gland Pharma, Hetero Biopharma, Panacea Biotec, Stelis Biopharma and Virchow Biotech, aimed at producing more than 850 million doses per year. Dmitriev said in a media briefing that a big milestone has been reached with India giving approval for the Sputnik V vaccine on April 12. India is the most populated country to register the Russian vaccine. Total population of 60 countries where Sputnik V is approved for use is three billion people or about 40 per cent of the global population. The vaccine has been registered in India under the emergency use authorisation procedure based on the results of clinical trials in Russia as well as positive data of additional Phase III local clinical trials in India conducted in partnership with Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories.


Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav tests COVID positive

Samajwadi Party Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav has tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday (April 14). He took to his Twitter handle and confirmed about testing positive and asked anyone who had come in contact with him over the past few days to get themselves tested. He is isolating himself at home and has started medication.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday also isolated himself after some officers at his office tested positive for Covid-19. Taking to microblogging site Twitter, Yogi Adityanath tweeted, “Some officials of my office have tested positive. As a precautionary measure, I have isolated myself and carrying on my work virtually”.

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Y Media Exclusive- 'I promise Punjab will the most progressive state in India:' IG Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh

POOJA LUTHRA

In an exclusive interview with Y Media's Group Editor and CEO, Yudhvir Jaswal, Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh, an IG rank officer in Punjab Police, opens up about his resignation, heading the Special Investigation Teams (SITs) probing the Kotakpura and Behbal Kalan firing cases and his vision for Punjab.

In 2015, two persons were killed, and many others were injured after the police under the previous SAD-BJP government resorted to unprovoked firing on hundreds of people protesting the alleged desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib in Bargari village in Faridkot district.

After that, IPS officer Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh was appointed as the head of Special Investigation Teams (SITs) to investigate the firing incident.

In an exclusive interview with Y Media, IG Vijay Pratap said, "We faced various barriers during the investigation that started in January 2019, there were many interferences, but we completed our investigation in March 2021."

"Nine challans or charge sheets were submitted, and the case was called on trial in court," said Singh.

During the investigation, he and his team even summoned orders for high-profile individuals, including Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar, former chief minister of Punjab Parkash Singh Badal and the President of the Shiromani Akali Dal, Sukhbir Singh Badal.

IG Vijay Pratap Singh said the summons relate to the investigation of cases originating from the various sacrilege incidents in the year 2015. He even questioned former Director General of Punjab Police Sumedh Singh Saini and suspended IG Paramraj Umranangal. Both were accused in the first information report (FIR) in the Behbal Kalan case registered at the Bajakhana police station.

During the exclusive interview, he did not name the people involved in the charge sheets during the investigation, as per the rules in India's Constitution.

However, he said, "each and every sentence of my report and charge-sheet is evidence in itself, and no one can challenge its integrity."

The Punjab and Haryana High Court quashed the SIT probe into the Kotkapur firing case and directed the state to constitute a new SIT without IG Vijay Pratap Singh.

The directions were passed by the bench of Justice Rajbir Sherawat, hearing a plea filed by Gurdeep Singh, the former police officer at Kotkapura, and another official who had approached the court seeking directions to remove the IPS officer from the investigation team.

Vijay Pratap voluntarily submitted his application seeking retirement from service from April 15, 2021.

He further added he would continue to serve the society in the best



COURTESY: FACEBOOK

possible manner, but not in the IPS.

However, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh refused to accept the resignation letter of Vijay Pratap Singh seeking premature retirement from service.

The Chief Minister of Punjab stated he was a highly competent and efficient officer whose services were needed in the border state, especially when Punjab is faced with various internal and external security threats.

During the interview with the Group Editor Yudhvir Jaswal asked him about the resignation decision, IG Vijay Pratap said, "no one can question my integrity, professional competency and dedication. I strive to be ahead of officers in India."

"But I will not let the national interest be compromised as it can destroy the system."

"No two separate responsibilities should clash with each other," he said.

He added he has been working hard for the past 22 years to help less fortunate society get their due justice and not be exploited by the privileged class.

"I did my part, no regret. I request everybody not to glamourize or politicize the issue," he further said.

His vision is to make Punjab a more progressive state, whether he is in service or not.

He believes change can be induced in society without being involved in the service.

Group Editor Yudhvir Jaswal even asked him whether he is ready to start new political innings.

However, he did not reveal his further plans or commit to joining active politics.

IG Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh "claimed and promised Punjab to make the most progressive in India."

Inspector-General of Police at Punjab Government, Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh, is a police officer of the 1998 batch of the premier Indian Police service (IPS), serving for the past 22 years. His life revolves around following the "oath of allegiance to the Constitution of India" that he took during the ceremony. He even studied LLB at Panjab University, Chandigarh, while serving his nation and knows all the articles in the Indian Constitution by heart.

He was among the face of a five-member Special Investigation Team constituted by Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh to probe police firing incidents on protestors at Kotakapura and Behbal Kalan in 2015 during the SAD-BJP government. Besides being an SIT member, Kunwar Vijay Pratap was also holding the charge of IGP Crime and an additional charge of the organized crime control unit (OCCU). The Punjab government also posted him as IG Counter Intelligence (Amritsar).

He is a highly competent and efficient officer and has done an excellent job of expeditiously investigating the Kotkapura case. He has led many investigation incidents in Punjab and is a recipient of many awards. He has written six books.

All adults in US to be eligible for COVID-19 vaccination by April 19: Joe Biden

All American adults will be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine by April 19, US President Joe Biden announced.

Biden moved up the COVID-19 vaccine eligibility target for all American adults to April 19, which was earlier set as May 1. However, he warned that with new virus variants spreading "we're still in a life-and-death race" with the coronavirus.

No COVID-19 vaccine is authorized yet for children under 16, although testing is underway. Most U.S. states had already said they would open vaccines to all adults by that new target date.

The US President said that 150 million doses have been administered within his first 75 days in office, in line with a stated goal of 200 million shots by his 100th day in office. He urged Americans to continue to practice pandemic safety measures, saying the country is not "at the finish line yet" and may experience more "disease and misery" before July 4. More than 80% of teachers and school staff had received at least one vaccination shot, Biden said but noted that variants of the coronavirus are spreading and generating a rise in cases.

"We aren't at the finish line. We still have a lot of work to do. We're still in a life-or-death race," Biden said.

A few weeks ago, Biden called on states, tribes and territories to make all American adults eligible for vaccination no later than May 1.

The country has witnessed a resurgence in 27 states, including cases from new and emerging Covid-19 variants. The US is still the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 30,845,915 and 556,509, respectively, according to Johns Hopkins University.

FEARING DEATH, MORE YOUNG PEOPLE IN CHINA PUSHED TO WRITE WILLS

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world as we know it. And with the second wave of coronavirus hitting various countries hard, people are living in uncertainty more than ever. A new report released by the China Will Registration Center says that fearing death more young Chinese people are preparing wills than ever before. Citing the China Registration Center report, South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported that the pandemic has forced more young people to think about death and their assets. From 2019 to 2020, the number of will writers born after 1990 has grown 60 per cent, faster than in previous years, the report says. Since August 2020, an increasing number of overseas Chinese people are consulting the centre in order to arrange their assets at home. The centre saw inquiries triple in a year. Chinese news agency Xinhua reported that an 18-year-old student known as Xiaohong (a pseudonym) went to the Centre's Shanghai branch to prepare a will that deals with 20,000 yuan (USD 3,000) in assets.

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CRITICISM OF ARMED FORCES PUNISHABLE BY LAW IN PAK NOW



ISLAMABAD, (IANS) Pakistans National Assembly Standing Committee on Interior has approved a bill that would punish those who intentionally criticize the countrys armed forces.

The committee has approved the Bill to amend the Pakistan Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, sanctioning punishment to those who ridicule armed forces through intended criticism.

As per the details of the Bill, “anyone who shall be guilty of said offence could face up to two years imprisonment or fine that may extend to Rs 500,000 or both”.

The Bill titled Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2020, which was introduced by the ruling party’s Amjid Ali Khan, was approved by the committee despite opposition from the political camps.

The Bill proposes an amendment to Section 500 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), which currently states “whosoever defames another shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or both”.

The amendment proposes “punishment for international ridiculing of the armed forces etc. Whosoever intentionally ridicules, brings into disrepute or defames the armed forces of Pakistan or a member thereof, shall be guilty of an offence punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or fine which may extend to five hundred thousand rupees or both”.

Opposition lawmakers from Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) opposed the proposed amend-

ment, stating that there was no need to introduce the Bill, as it is already covered under Article 19 of the Constitution.

Other than the opposition party’s concerns, the home department of the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KP) provincial government, which is led by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), also opposed the Bill, stating that its declaration would create conflict among the existing constitutional and stationary provision, adding that its misuse could not be overruled. The KP government also maintained that the Bill would create differences and discrimination between other law enforcement agencies and public offices. However, the Interior Ministry maintains that the amendment is being proposed because of the increasing criticism against the armed forces in the country.

“The incidents of defaming the armed forces have increased in the country and some disruptive elements, for the furtherance of their political objectives, engage in this undesirable practice, which is very defamatory and demoralizing for the armed forces of Pakistan. The Interior Ministry endorses the proposed legislation keeping in view the current situation in the country,” read the ministry’s explanation. It should be mentioned here that the opposition party’s alliance to topple the government has been giving statements against the interventions of the country’s military establishment in political matters, calling for a complete end to what they call ‘deliberate interventions’ to select political leaders, manipulate voting processes and damage the democratic system of the country.

IRAN BLAMES ISRAEL FOR ATTACK ON NUKE FACILITY

TEHRAN, (IANS) Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday described the cyberattack on the Natanz nuclear facility as an act of terrorism and blamed Israel for it. The plant in central Iran produces, among other things, new centrifuges for uranium enrichment, dpa news agency reported. "The Zionists want to sabotage Iran's nuclear achievements and the nuclear negotiations (in Vienna) with these terrorist operations," Zarif told Parliament on Monday. Neither, however, will happen, he said. "Our revenge is that we will continue successfully in both areas," Zarif added. Israel has so far not commented on the allegations. "The activities of the Israeli army in the Middle East are not hidden from the enemies," Israeli Chief of General Staff Aviv Kochavi said on Sunday. "They are watching us, seeing our capabilities, and carefully considering their moves." Israel considers Iran's nuclear programme a serious threat because Tehran has missiles with a range of up to 2,000 km that could hit anywhere in the Jewish state. If the missiles were equipped with nuclear warheads, Israel's existence would be seriously threatened. Tehran insists it has no nuclear warheads and will only use the missiles for a retaliatory strike.

'Lockdown, not vaccination, behind decline in UK's Covid cases'

LONDON, (IANS) British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Tuesday that lockdown, not the country's vaccine rollout, is the main reason for the decline of Covid-19 infections in Britain. "The numbers are down -- of infections and hospitalizations and deaths. But it is very, very important for everybody to understand that the reduction in these numbers... has not been achieved by the vaccination programme," he told Sky News, Xinhua news agency reported.

"People don't, I think, appreciate that it's the lockdown that has been overwhelmingly important in delivering this improvement in the pandemic and in the figures that we're seeing," he said.

The prime minister said the vaccination programme has helped, but the bulk of the work in reducing the disease has been done by the lockdown.



"So, as we unlock, the result will inevitably be that we will see more infection, sadly we will see more hospitalization and deaths, and people have just got to understand that," he said. However, Johnson said "at the moment" he couldn't see "any reason" to change his roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions. All shops reopened from Monday along with hairdressers, beauty salons and other close-contact services. Restaurants and pubs were allowed to serve food and alcohol to customers sitting outdoors. Meanwhile, gyms, spas, zoos, theme parks, libraries and community centers can all open.




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WISHING YOU
ALL A VERY
HAPPY
VAISAKHI

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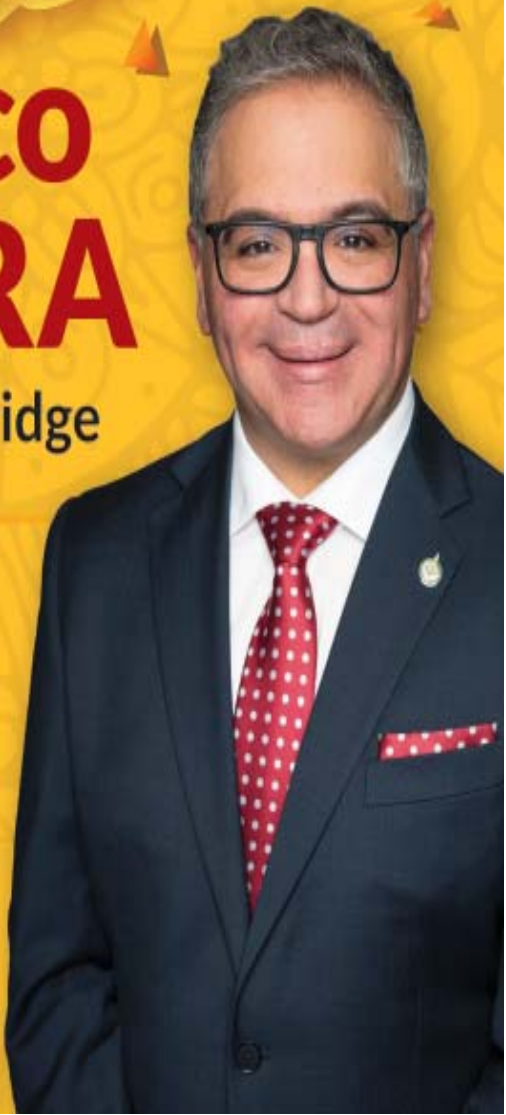


Wishing you
a healthy, safe and
Happy Vaisakhi!

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Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine plan is helping to stop the spread and save lives. Thousands of people across the province are getting vaccinated every day.

As vaccinations continue, we need to stay the course to protect those we love. Wear a mask. Wash your hands. Keep your distance.

Find out when, where and how to get vaccinated at ontario.ca/covidvaccineplan or call 1-888-999-6488 for assistance in more than 300 languages.