



ON NATIONAL DAY OF OBSERVANCE (MARCH 11), CANADA MOURNS LOSS OF LIVES DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC. (ANITA ANAND/ TWITTER)

# Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

## US, JAPAN, AUSTRALIA PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO PRODUCE 1 BILLION COVID VACCINES IN INDIA

- 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.
- National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends AstraZeneca vaccine to aged 65 & above.
- Every Canadian to receive inoculation by September
- Ontario aims to have all eligible Ontarians receive 1st Covid-19 vaccine shot by June 20.
- Ontario government expects to inoculate up to nine million people between April 2021 and July 2021.
- Ontario launches provincial booking system & customer service desk to support Covid-19 vaccination appointment bookings.
- Ontarians aged 80+ can now book vaccination appointments online at <http://ontario.ca/bookvaccine> or call the provincial vaccine information line at 1-888-999-6488 for support.
- President Biden says every American adult will be able to get covid-19 vaccine by May.
- President Biden sees freedom from Covid by Independence-day July 4.
- 3.8 million vaccines delivered to different Canada's provinces.
- Canada to receive 1 million Pfizer vaccine doses per week between March 22 and May 10
- 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
- In March, Ontario expects to receive 1,454,310 doses of Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine and 483,700 doses of Moderna vaccine.
- Over 325 pharmacy sites, including Shoppers Drug Mart, Rexall & independent pharmacies started offering AstraZeneca vaccine to eligible Ontarians aged 60-64 in Toronto, Windsor-Essex, and Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington from March 12.
- Primary care professionals began to offer AstraZeneca vaccine in physician offices at Hamilton, Toronto, Guelph, Peterborough, Simcoe-Muskoka, & Peel from March 13.
- AstraZeneca CoviShield vaccine available at designated pharmacies without OHIP health card in Canada.
- Ontario Hospital Association tweets 'we're now in wave 3'. Variants consist 42% of Ontario's Covid-19 cases, says Covid-19 Science Advisory Table.
- 6000 cases per day possible by April in Ont. modelling predicts.
- Ontario to record nearly 8,000 cases per day by April in 'worst-case' scenario & 5,800 cases everyday in 'medium' scenario.
- 'Our behaviour over the next few months is critical in determining the quality of our summer,' say modellers.
- Toronto to open 3 covid-19 immunization clinics beginning March 17 for residents born in 1941 or earlier
- Novavax vaccine shows 96% efficacy against Covid-19, 86% against U.K. variant: study.
- Canada to receive 52 million Novavax vaccine doses; option to purchase 24 million more

## 'QUAD HAS COME OF AGE', SAYS PM MODI AT SUMMIT HERALDING BROADER AGENDA

**NEW YORK, (IANS)** "The Quad has come of age," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared on Friday at the start of the summit of the leaders of the four nations to take the group to a next level of enhanced cooperation. "We will work together closer than ever before for advancing our shared values and promoting our secure, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific," he said.



## ASIAN WOMEN AMONG 8 KILLED IN SEPARATE SPA SHOOTINGS IN ATLANTA

**ATLANTA, (IANS)** At least eight people, many of them women of Asian descent, were killed and one injured in shootings at three spas in the Atlanta area, police said. One suspect has been taken into custody in connection with the series of shootings on Tuesday. Cherokee County Sheriff's said that Robert Aaron Long (21) was arrested at about 8:30 p.m. (local time) following a chase that led officers into Crisp County — about three hours away from where the first shootings at a massage parlour, WSB TV reported.

## EMPLOYMENT INCREASED BY 259,000 (+1.4%) IN FEBRUARY: STATSCAN

**Employment rebounds**  
Employment increased by 259,000 (+1.4%) in February, after falling by 266,000 over the previous two months. Both part-time (+171,000; +5.4%) and full-time (+88,000; +0.6%) work increased.

## BRAMPTON MAPLE-TIRANGA RALLY: 2 CHARGED FOR ASSAULT

Peel Regional Police supports the right to peaceful and lawful assembly. However, there will be no tolerance for violence or criminality, and all reported incidents will be investigated and those involved may be charged. Investigators from the Criminal Investigation Bureau have arrested a man in relation to an alleged assault during a rally in the City of Brampton.

## BANK OF CANADA TO HOLD CURRENT LEVEL OF POLICY RATE AT 0.25% UNTIL INFLATION OBJECTIVE IS SUSTAINABLY ACHIEVED, CONTINUES QUANTITATIVE EASING

The Bank of Canada today held its target for the overnight rate at the effective lower bound of ¼ percent, with the Bank Rate at ½ percent and the deposit rate at ¼ percent. The Bank is maintaining its extraordinary forward guidance, reinforced and supplemented by its quantitative easing (QE) program, which continues at its current pace of at least \$4 billion per week.



## WHO IS BEHIND CRIME TO SCARE TOP-BUSINESS HOUSE IN INDIA?

**MUMBAI/DELHI, (IANS)** Interrogation of Mumbai Police "encounter specialist" Sachin Vaze in the Ambani security scare case points towards a deep-rooted conspiracy involving a few "powerful" persons. Assistant Police Inspector (API) Sachin Vaze, seen close to the top leadership of Shiv Sena, has been in touch with "powerful" persons during the period he hatched a conspiracy to plant a gelatin sticks-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's house in Mumbai, sources in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) said.



## IS INDIAN GOVT PLANNING TO SELL STAKE IN 4 AIRPORTS?

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The Central government aims to sell its residual stake in four airports as part of the Rs 2.5 lakh crore asset monetisation pipeline. The sale of Airport Authority of India's remaining stake in the four airports of Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad, as well as identification of 13 more airports for privatisation, has been planned for the next fiscal. The Ministry of Civil Aviation will take approvals for divestment of equity stake of the AAI in the joint ventures running Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad airports.

## Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX, 5 STATE ELECTIONS, INDIA



TAMIL NADU POLLS: BJP FIELDS KHUSHBU SUNDAR

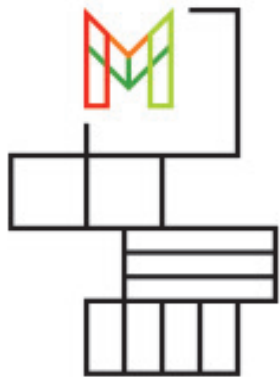


MAMATA, ON WHEELCHAIR, LEADS 5-KM LONG ROADSHOW IN KOLKATA



DEMAND GROWING FOR PRIYANKA TO CAMPAIGN IN POLL-BOUND STATES

DETAILS ON PAGE 5



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**NEW YORK, (IANS)** The leaders at the Quad summit made a commitment on Friday to harness India's manufacturing prowess for a massive vaccine diplomacy project to deliver 1 billion doses to the Indo-Pacific region and beyond as the four-nation group eyes broader agenda, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan has said.

Calling the Quad and "emergent institution", he said on Friday: "These four leaders made a massive joint commitment with India, manufacturing US technology, Japanese and American financing and Australian logistics capability. The Quad committed to delivering up to 1 billion doses to ASEAN. The Indo-Pacific and beyond by the end of 2022."

India's vaccine development and manufacturing capabilities put it in the driver's seat in the project that is of imminent importance to the Quad.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted: "United in our fight against COVID-19, we launched a landmark Quad partnership to ensure accessibility of safe COVID-19 vaccines. India's formidable vaccine production capacity will be expanded with support from Japan, US & Australia to assist countries in the Indo-Pacific region."

"Today's summit shows that Quad has come of age -- Modi said at the beginning of the summit with Prime Ministers Scott Morrison of Australia and Yoshihide Suga of Japan, and US President Joe Biden as the group reaches for a new role embracing development and cooperation beyond the four nations as a force for the global good."

"It will now remain an important pillar of stability in the region," Modi said.

Vice President Kamala Harris also participated in the summit that was held virtually with Biden presiding from the White House.

Sullivan said that the leaders agreed to meet in person before the end of the year.

Biden is trying to give the Quad that is formally known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue an impetus to expand in other areas with a new model of cooperation.

Sullivan said at his briefing in Washington that the challenge posed by China figured in the talks and "they made clear that none of them has any illusions about China, but today was not fundamentally about China."

However, Sullivan said: "The Quad is not a military alliance; it's not a new NATO despite some of the propaganda that's out there. What it is is an oppor-

tunity for these four democracies to work, and also with other countries on fundamental issues of economics, technology, climate and security."

"Each of the leaders independently in the course of the meeting referred to this event as historic because it's cemented, a group of strong democracies that will work together going forward to secure a free and open Indo-Pacific," Sullivan said.

The leaders discussed key regional issues including freedom of navigation and "freedom from coercion" in the South and East China Seas, the North Korea nuclear issue, and the Myanmar coup, he said.

A joint statement issued at the end of the summit said that the four countries will establish a vaccine working groups on vaccine and technology.

The critical- and emerging-technology working group will work to facilitate cooperation on international standards and innovative technologies of the future, while the climate working group will seek to strengthen climate actions globally on mitigation, adaptation, resilience, technology, capacity-building, and climate finance, the statement said.

The statement also said, they will try "to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas".

It said, "We reaffirm our commitment to the complete denuclearization of North Korea in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions, and also confirm the necessity of immediate resolution of the issue of Japanese abductees. As long-standing supporters of Myanmar and its people, we emphasise the urgent need to restore democracy and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Sumona Guha, the National Security Council's senior director for South Asia, also participated in the summit.

As the summit began, Biden said, "The United States is committed to working with you, our partners, and all of our allies in the region to achieve stability. This is a group particularly important because it is dedicated to the practical solutions and concrete results."

"The Quad is going to be a vital arena for cooperation," he said.

Sullivan did not give further details of the vaccine plan. But some media reports said that the US would help India manufacture the one-dose vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson that does not require ultra-cold refrigeration like other US vaccinations.

## ONTARIO LAUNCHED PROVINCIAL BOOKING SYSTEM FOR COVID-19 VACCINES

INDIVIDUALS 80 YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER WILL BE ABLE TO SCHEDULE APPOINTMENTS ONLINE OR BY PHONE

TORONTO - The Ontario government has launched a provincial booking system and customer service desk to support COVID-19 vaccination appointment bookings. The portal was live on Monday, March 15 at 8:00 a.m. and accepted appointment bookings at mass immunization clinics, starting with individuals aged 80 and older.

"We are making steady progress in the execution of our vaccine distribution plan, and the launching of the online booking system is another major milestone," said Premier Doug Ford. "In this phase of our plan we are still offering vaccines to our most vulnerable, so I encourage everyone aged 80 and older to use the portal to book an appointment. For everyone else, please be patient, as we get more supply, the vaccine will be offered to more people."

Beginning tomorrow, individuals who will be turning 80 or older in 2021 (born in 1941 or earlier) and wish to make an appointment - or an individual trusted to make an appointment on their behalf - can visit [Ontario.ca/bookvaccine](https://ontario.ca/bookvaccine). On this page, they will be guided to make an appointment through the provincial booking system, or their local public health unit if there is a local public health unit booking system or call centre in place. When booking an appointment, individuals will be asked for information from their green Ontario health card, birth date, postal code and email address and/or phone number. At the time of booking, eligible individuals will schedule their first and second vaccination appointments.

Individuals who still have a red and white health card, or who require assistance with booking, can call the Provincial Vaccine Information Line number at 1-888-999-6488 beginning on Monday, March 15.

"The provincial booking system will be critical in supporting the next phase of Ontario's vaccine rollout as more vaccines become available," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "We know everyone is eager to receive the vaccine, and as we continue to build capacity, we are making it easier and more convenient for individuals to book and receive the vaccine as quickly as possible."

At this time, vaccination appointments are only available for individuals turning 80 or older in 2021 as part of Phase One of Ontario's vaccine distribution plan. Starting in April, the online booking tool and call centre will extend to additional age-based groups that are part of Phase Two.

The province is expecting a high volume of traffic to its online booking system. We know everyone is eager to receive the vaccine, but we are asking those not yet eligible to avoid accessing the booking system or calling the service desk to allow those that are eligible the opportunity to book an appointment.

"With the launch of the new provincial booking portal and support number we are reaching yet another milestone in our plan to vaccinate Ontarians as fast as we can and as soon as we receive the vaccines," said Solicitor General Sylvia Jones. "Our task force continues to work to bolster and adjust our vaccine rollout plan as shipments to Ontario continue to fluctuate. The portal and customer support number will prove instrumental through Phase 2 as we open mass vaccination sites and inoculate more Ontarians."

Phase One of Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine rollout is nearing completion, and the Ontario government is preparing to move into Phase Two of its COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan next month, with a focus on vaccinating populations based on age and risk.

"The introduction of these booking systems puts in place the final piece in the province's infrastructure to rollout its vaccination program," said General (Ret'd) Rick Hillier "There is now a fulsome range of options for the people of Ontario to book an appointment and receive their vaccine, but please only use them if and when it is your turn."

**QUICK FACTS**

" For individuals turning 80 or older in 2021 who do not have internet access, please call the Provincial Vaccine Information Line at 1-888-999-6488, open Monday to Sunday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

" Eligible individuals can visit the provincial booking system to find out how they can schedule their vaccine appointments, or check the website of their local public health unit.

" To book an appointment, individuals will need to have a green photo health (OHIP) card as both numbers on the front and back of the card are required. Expired cards will be accepted. The provincial booking system will direct individuals without a health card to their public health unit for identity validation, and will provide contact information.

" To support the administration of the vaccine, 255 vaccination sites across the province are planned for March, including 153 mass immunization clinics.

" A pilot for pharmacy vaccine administration began on March 12 in select regions, including Toronto, Windsor and the Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington region. To book an appointment, eligible Ontarians aged 60-64 can visit [ontario.ca/pharmacycovidvaccine](https://ontario.ca/pharmacycovidvaccine) to find a participating pharmacy.

" Vaccinations in primary care settings and community locations, such as physician offices, began in Hamilton, Toronto, Guelph, Peterborough, Simcoe-Muskoka, and Peel as of Saturday, March 13, 2021. Primary care providers will not be taking appointments by request, but will be contacting eligible Ontarians aged 60-64 directly to book an appointment starting March 10, 2021. They will only be offering the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine at this time.

" To date, over 1.1 million vaccine doses have been administered across the province, including over 127,000 doses administered to long-term care home residents. Over 285,000 Ontarians are fully immunized, including over 60,000 long-term care home residents. Ontario is leading the country in the total number of vaccines administered and has fully immunized more individuals than all provinces and territories combined.

" For the month of March, Ontario is expecting to receive 870,480 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and 483,700 doses of the Moderna vaccine. Ontario has also received 194,500 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine the week of March 8.

## NOVAVAX VACCINE SHOWS 96% EFFICACY AGAINST COVID-19, 86% AGAINST U.K. VARIANT: STUDY

CANADA TO RECEIVE 52 MILLION NOVAVAX VACCINE DOSES; OPTION TO PURCHASE 24 MILLION MORE

\* 100% protection against severe disease

\* The final analysis in the U.K. trial confirms 96% efficacy against the original strain of COVID-19

\* Efficacy against variants confirmed in the U.K. and South Africa

GAITHERSBURG - Novavax, Inc. (Nasdaq: NVAX), a biotechnology company developing next-generation vaccines for serious infectious diseases, today announced final efficacy of 96.4% against mild, moderate and severe disease caused by the original COVID-19 strain in a pivotal Phase 3 trial in the United Kingdom (U.K.) of NVX-CoV2373, the company's vaccine candidate. The company also announced the complete analysis of its Phase 2b trial taking place in South Africa, with an efficacy of 55.4% among the HIV- negative trial participants in a region where the vast majority of strains are B.1.351 escape variants. Across both trials, NVX-CoV2373 demonstrated 100% protection against severe disease, including all hospitalization and death. Both studies achieved their statistical success criteria. Today's final analyses build on the successful interim results announced in January 2021, adding substantially more COVID-19 cases and statistical power. "We are very encouraged by the data showing that NVX-CoV2373 not only provided complete protection against the most severe forms of the disease but also dramatically reduced mild and moderate disease across both trials. Importantly, both studies confirmed efficacy against the variant strains," said Stanley C. Erck, President and Chief Executive Officer, Novavax. "Today marks one year since the WHO officially declared the COVID-19 pandemic, and with this data in hand, we are even more motivated to advance our vaccine as a potential weapon in the fight to end the suffering caused by COVID-19."

## MORE EUROPEAN NATIONS SUSPEND ASTRAZENECA VACCINE USE



**COPENHAGEN, (IANS)** More European countries, fully or partially, have suspended the use of the Covid-19 vaccine developed by British company AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford following reports of several suspected deaths from clotting after inoculation.

The Danish Health Authority on Thursday announced in a statement that the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine has been suspended in Denmark for 14 days due to fears of serious adverse reactions, adding that the move was based on "concerns raised by the drug authorities" and "a precautionary principle", Xinhua news agency reported.

The suspension came after several reports of blood clots following vaccinations and the death of a 60-year-old woman who received a shot and then died after developing a blood clot, according to the Danish news agency Ritzau. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) in a statement released on Thursday described the Danish Health Authority's decision as a "precautionary measure" but stressed there was "currently no indication that vaccination has caused these conditions".

Austria, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia and non-European Union (EU) countries Norway and Iceland have also banned the use of the vaccine as a precaution after similar reports of blood clots, which European drug regulators are still investigating.

Following Denmark, Norway and Iceland, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov on Friday also ordered the suspension "until an accurate and clearly confirmed diagnosis comes in writing from the EMA".

According to the country's Health Ministry, Bulgaria had booked more than 4.5 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

## 'NO INDICATION OXFORD VAX LINKED TO BLOOD CLOTS': REGULATOR



There is no indication that the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine is linked to an increased risk of blood clots, the EU's medicines regulator has said.

It said the number of cases in vaccinated people was no higher than in the general population. The statement came after a number of countries, including Denmark and Norway, suspended the use of the jab, the BBC reported on Thursday. The suspension followed reports that a small number of people had developed clots after receiving the vaccine.

There were also reports that a 50-year-old man had died in Italy after developing deep vein thrombosis (DVT) following a dose of the jab.

"There is currently no indication that vaccination has caused these conditions, which are not listed as side effects with this vaccine," the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said on Thursday.

"The vaccine's benefits continue to outweigh its risks and the vaccine can continue to be administered while the investigation of cases of thromboembolic events is ongoing," it added.

It said there had been 30 cases of "thromboembolic events" among the five million Europeans who have received the jab.

AstraZeneca said the drug's safety had been studied extensively in clinical trials. "Regulators have clear and stringent efficacy and safety standards for the approval of any new medicine," a spokesperson said.

## PAKISTAN TO RECEIVE 4.5 CRORE DOSES OF 'MADE-IN-INDIA' COVID-19 VACCINE



Even though Pakistan does not miss any opportunity to plot nefarious acts against India, New Delhi is still willing to help it deal with coronavirus. Pakistan will fight the virus with the help of Indian vaccine, which will be made available to him through the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (Gavi). Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, facing a difficult economic situation, has decided not to buy COVID-19 Vaccine, so the 4.5 crore doses of the Made in India vaccine is no less than a boon for him. The country will receive 45 million doses of Indian manufactured COVID-19 vaccine during March. Pakistan's National Health Service Secretary Aamir Ashraf Khawaja told that Pakistan will get the dose of vaccine made in India from this month. Khawaja said that the vaccine is being given to front line workers and senior citizens in Pakistan right now. Notably, Pakistan is currently using the vaccine from China, but it cannot fight the war with COVID-19 on the basis of the Chinese vaccine alone. It is being said that the country is relying mostly on free doses being provided by the Gavi to inoculate the citizens against the coronavirus as the Chinese-made vaccine CanSino would cost USD 13 or around Pakistani Rs 2,000 per person.

## NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON IMMUNIZATION (NACI) RECOMMENDS ASTRAZENECA VACCINE TO AGED 65 & ABOVE

\* NACI has expanded its recommendation for the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine to people over the age of 18, now including those 65 years of age and over.

\* NACI has considered three recent real-world effectiveness studies to inform this change in recommendation.

\* There is now real-world evidence from the United Kingdom who has been administering the AstraZeneca vaccine to people 65 years of age and older. This evidence demonstrates the high safety and effectiveness of the AstraZeneca vaccine in older adults, particularly against severe COVID-19 disease and hospitalization.

\* In light of the new evidence that emerged NACI met to review this new real-world data from three studies, two of which are large population-level studies, demonstrating high safety and effectiveness of AstraZeneca vaccine in older adults, in particular against severe disease (such as hospitalization), including in adults over the age of 80 years old with significant medical comorbidities.

\* While all available vaccines in Canada are safe and effective, NACI still recommends that in the context of limited vaccine supply, initial doses of mRNA vaccines should be prioritized for those at highest risk of severe illness and death and highest risk of exposure to COVID-19.



\* NACI will continue to closely monitor data from ongoing clinical trials and evidence from real-world use of the AstraZeneca vaccine and will revise their recommendation as needed.

## ON NATIONAL DAY OF OBSERVANCE (MARCH 11), CANADA MOURNS LOSS OF LIVES DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, issued the following statement to reflect on the year that has passed since the World Health Organization declared COVID 19 a pandemic:

"One year after the World Health Organization officially declared COVID 19 a pandemic, more than 22,000 Canadian families have lost a loved one, many people have lost their jobs and businesses, health care and front line workers have faced great risk and challenge, and all Canadians have made sacrifices to keep others safe and healthy.

"On the National Day of Observance for COVID-19, we honour every individual who lost their lives to this disease, and we stand with the people they loved as they continue to cope with this unimaginable loss. Together we also recognize all who have been impacted by the pandemic, and we reaffirm our commitment to work as Team Canada to beat this virus.

"Canada was swift to act at the beginning of this pandemic. While Canadians followed public health measures to flatten the curve and protect our front-line health care workers and systems, we quickly took action to help save lives and support individuals, families, and businesses through the crisis. With a broad range of measures, including the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, we helped Canadians put food on the table and employers keep their workers on the payroll. We also worked tirelessly to ensure essential workers had access to the supplies they needed to stay safe and healthy, and we have worked with Indigenous communities to provide the support they needed in these challenging times. Together, alongside all orders of government, Indigenous peoples, community organizations, and private sector partners, we quickly worked to use every tool available to protect and support Canadians during this crisis.

"We also joined forces with our international partners to strengthen global health systems, coordinate response efforts, support vulnerable countries, and help researchers develop tests and vaccines. Canada will continue to work with our partners through the G7, the

G20, and other international organizations to contribute to coordinated and science-based response and recovery, and to support vulnerable countries - because we can't beat COVID-19 unless we beat it everywhere.

"As we look back on the challenges of this past year and reflect on how far we have come, we must also keep one eye on the road ahead. The largest immunization campaign in our country's history is well underway, and we are on track to have a vaccine available for every Canadian who wants one, by September. But the pandemic isn't over, and until all Canadians have access to a safe and effective vaccine, we all need to continue to follow public health advice. That means working from home if you can, keeping two metres apart from others, wearing a mask, and downloading the COVID Alert app.

"Today, we acknowledge the heavy toll that the global pandemic has taken and continues to take, both here at home and abroad. To date, more than 2.6 million people have died globally from COVID-19, including 22,000 Canadians. They are more than just numbers. They were our mothers, fathers, grandparents, and loved ones. They were our neighbours, friends, and colleagues. We honour their memory and renew our commitment to do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to keep people safe and supported through this crisis.

"We also take this opportunity to thank our front-line workers who have been working tirelessly every single day to keep us safe and healthy. We owe these everyday heroes an immense debt of gratitude, and we will continue to offer the support they need.

"Since the first case of the virus was diagnosed in Canada in January 2020, close to 850,000 Canadians have recovered from this terrible disease, but many in communities across the country continue to suffer its effects. We will continue to work together to set Canada - and the world - on the path to recovery and to build back better for everyone. The past year has been difficult, but better days are ahead. We will come out of this pandemic a more resilient country in a stronger global community."

## BIDEN PLANS TO ORDER 100 MN MORE J&J COVID VACCINE DOSES

**WASHINGTON, (IANS)** US President Joe Biden has said that his administration will order another 100 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine. The planned purchase would bring the country's total vaccine order to 800 million doses.

"On Saturday, we hit a record of 2.9 million vaccinations in one day in America," Biden said on Wednesday, Xinhua news agency reported. Biden said last week the United States would have enough Covid-19 vaccine doses for every adult American by the end of May, which would dramatically accelerate his timeline previously set for the end of July.

There are three Covid-19 vaccines currently authorized for emergency use in the US.

The US Food and Drug Administration authorized the one developed by American drugmaker Pfizer in partnership with German company BioNTech, and another by American drugmaker Moderna, in December last year.

Johnson & Johnson's Covid-19 vaccine was approved for emergency use on February 27. It is the first single-dose vaccine authorized in the US. Over 127 million vaccine doses have been distributed across the US as of Wednesday, and more than 95 million doses have been administered, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## MAJOR LOCKDOWN IMPOSED IN 7 PAK CITIES



**LAHORE, (IANS)** Amid the ongoing third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Pakistan, a major lockdown will be imposed in seven cities in Punjab province starting from Monday onwards.

The lockdown, which comes after a gap of one year, will remain in force for two weeks in the cities of Lahore, Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Multan, Gujranwala and Gujrat, Dawn news reported on Sunday. According to a statement issued on Saturday by the Punjab provincial government, the major lockdown will restrict the movement of the people; there will be a complete ban on gatherings of all kinds for social, religious or other purposes at any place, public or private; marriage and banquet halls, community centres and marquees will remain closed; and also a complete ban on indoor and outdoor dining while only takeaway and home delivery will be allowed. The statement also said that there will be a complete ban on all kinds of sports, cultural and other activities and events throughout the province. Also on Saturday, the Punjab government enforced a smart lockdown in 36 more localities of three cities, including Lahore.

## BIDEN SEES FREEDOM FROM COVID BY INDEPENDENCE-DAY, JULY 4



**NEW YORK, (IANS)** US President Joe Biden has visions of freedom from Covid-19 by Independence Day, July 4, as the pace of vaccinations was accelerating and the infection rates decelerating.

"After this long hard year, that will make this Independence Day something truly special, where we not only mark our independence as a nation, but we begin to mark our independence from this virus," he said on Friday in an address to the nation commemorating the anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. As of Friday, Covid-19 has claimed 530,712 lives in the US and infected 29,214,421 others. To be free of Covid-19 by Independence Day, he announced a four-point programme with making all adults eligible for vaccines by May 1 as its linchpin. Currently, states have different criteria for who could get the vaccine based on age, vulnerability and work exposure to the virus. The other elements of the programme are creating an easy way for people to register to get vaccinated, inoculating teachers and school staff, and issuing uniform guidance on what those who are vaccinated can do. But he warned that the July 4 deadline is only a goal and before then "a lot can happen, conditions can change".

## WHO ADDS JANSSEN (J&J) VACCINE TO LIST OF SAFE AND EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY TOOLS AGAINST COVID-19



The World Health Organization (WHO) today listed the COVID-19 vaccine Ad26.COV2.S, developed by Janssen (Johnson & Johnson), for emergency use in all countries and for COVAX roll-out. The decision comes on the back of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) authorization, which was announced yesterday.

"Every new, safe and effective tool against COVID-19 is another step closer to controlling the pandemic," said WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "But the hope offered by these tools will not materialize unless they are made available to all people in all countries. I urge governments and companies to live up to their commitments and to use all solutions at their disposal to ramp up production so that these tools become truly global public goods, available and affordable to all, and a shared solution to the global crisis."

The vaccine from Janssen is the first to be listed by WHO as a single dose regimen, which should facilitate vaccination logistics in all countries. The ample data from large clinical trials shared by the company also shows that the vaccine is effective in older populations.

To expedite the listing of the vaccine, WHO and a team of assessors from all regions adopted what is called an 'abbreviated assessment' based on outcomes of the EMA review, and evaluation of quality, safety and efficacy data focused on low- and middle-income country needs. The WHO assessment also considered suitability requirements such as cold chain storage and risk management plans to be implemented in countries.

While the vaccine needs to be stored at -20 degrees, which may prove challenging in some environments, it can be kept for three months at 2-8°C and it has a long shelf life of two years.

WHO will convene its Strategic Advisory Group on Immunization Experts next week to formulate recommendations on the use of the vaccine. In the meantime, WHO continues to work with countries and COVAX partners to prepare for roll-out and safety monitoring. The COVAX Facility has booked 500 million doses of the vaccine.

# Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX, 5 STATE ELECTIONS, INDIA

MAMATA, ON WHEELCHAIR, LEADS 5-KM LONG ROADSHOW IN KOLKATA



**KOLKATA, (IANS)** A day after being discharged from the state-run SSKM Hospital, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday took part in a roadshow here, along with her nephew and MP Abhishek Banerjee. The ruling Trinamool Congress organised the 5-km-long event from Mayo Road to observe the 'Nandigram Day'. Banerjee, on a wheelchair but in the forefront of the rally along with hundreds of people and other Trinamool leaders, said that nothing would stop her from protecting the democratic rights of the people of Bengal. "We will continue to fight boldly. I'm still in a lot of pain, but I feel the pain of my people even more," she said. Banerjee said that in this fight to protect the revered land, she will continue to move around Bengal on this wheelchair. "If I go for bed rest, who will reach out to people... We have suffered a lot and will suffer more but we will never bow down to cowardice," she said, adding that her goal remained strong despite being hurt and unwell. "Outsiders will not be able to come to power in Bengal. We will win the poll battle with a fractured leg and will come back to Nabanno once again," said Abhishek Banerjee, urging people not to cast votes for the Left-Congress-ISF grand alliance in Bengal. Mamata Banerjee had sustained leg injuries during a poll campaign in East Midnapore's Nandigram on Wednesday evening. She got admitted to the state-run SSKM Hospital that night itself as she was rushed back to Kolkata via green channel. She was discharged from the hospital on Friday evening. As per her campaign schedule, the West Bengal CM is slated to visit three districts - Purulia, Bankura and Jhargram from Monday. Sources said that she will travel to all these districts by helicopter but remain seated on a wheelchair as her leg injuries are not totally cured.

TAMIL NADU POLLS: BJP FIELDS KHUSHBU SUNDAR



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The BJP on Sunday released a list of 17 candidates for the April 6 Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, including names of actor-turned-politician Khushbu Sundar from Thousand Lights and its state unit chief L. Murugan from Dharampur (SC) seats. BJP General Secretary Arun Singh said: "The Central Election Committee of the BJP met under the chairmanship of party chief J.P. Nadda, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and other members present, and decided 17 names for the ensuing Tamil Nadu Assembly elections." Union Minister for State for Home and poll in-charge for Tamil Nadu, Kishan Reddy said that as per the alliance agreement, the AIADMK is contesting 178 of the state's 234 seats, the PMK is contesting 23 and the BJP is contesting 20. "G.K. Vasan's Tamil Maanila Congress will be contesting on six seats and other smaller parties are contesting on remaining seven seats," he said. Among other members, BJP MahilaMorcha President Vanathi Srinivasan has been fielded from Coimbatore South, former IPS officer K. Annamalai from Aravakurichi and former MLA and party national Secretary H. Raja from Karaikudi. Apart from Sundar, and Srinivasan, the BJP list comprises one more woman - Dr. C.K. Saraswathi from Modakkurichi. Other candidates are Vinoj P. Selvam (Harbour), S. Thanigaivel (Tiruvannamalai), Kalivarathan (Tirukkoyilur), D. Periyasamy (Tittakudi (SC)), Poondi S. Venkatesan (Thiruvaiyaru), Dr. P. Saravanan (Madurai North), G. Pandurangan (Virudhunagar), D. Kuppuram (Ramanathapuram), NainarNagendran (Tirunelveli), M.R. Gandhi (Nagercoil), and P. Ramesh (Colachel). A senior party leader said that candidates for remaining three seats will be announced soon. Reddy also said that in two years since the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the political situation has completely changed in the state. "There is wave in favour of the NDA under leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. DMK is symbol of corruption, rowdiness and dynasty politics and with this election the third general is their family making debut in electoral politics," he said.

## DEMAND GROWING FOR PRIYANKA TO CAMPAIGN IN POLL-BOUND STATES

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** After Rahul Gandhi, the demand for Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to campaign in the poll-bound states of Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry is growing. Party sources said that each state unit wants Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi to campaign in the poll-bound states. This is the first time after her debut in active politics in 2019 that she will be actively participating in the Congress campaigns. She has already campaigned in Assam for two days, where she met tea garden workers and visited the famous Kamakhya temple, besides addressing public meetings, appealing the people to vote for the Congress. She even assured the people in the northeastern state that the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act will not be implemented in the state if Congress is voted to power. The Congress has released the list of its star campaigners for West Bengal and Assam, which includes party chief Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former party President Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, among others. Congress leaders said that the list has been prepared after receiving feedback from the district and state leaders. Party sources said that while Rahul Gandhi will be focusing more on the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, his sister will focus on West Bengal and Assam. A meeting of Congress leaders to chalk out the strategy for the poll-bound states has unanimously decided that Priyanka Gandhi will be pushed into hectic campaigning and her schedules and dates have been finalised in accordance with the state units. Though Sonia Gandhi may not address rallies, she may issue video statements for the poll-bound states, while former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh may address pressers in each poll-bound states to highlight the plight of the economy. The Congress has adopted a different strategy for each poll-bound state, with unemployment, farmers' plight and fuel price hike being the common issues that will be raked up by the party leaders. However, the star campaigners' list doesn't feature leaders like Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal and Manish Tewari. On this, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera said, "More lists will be released and leaders will be accommodated according to the demand of the states." The other star campaigners in the list include Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, his former deputy Sachin Pilot, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, Mukul Wasnik, Salman Khurshid, Navjot Singh Sidhu, Mohammed Azharuddin and JaiveerShergill.



## BANK OF CANADA TO HOLD CURRENT LEVEL OF POLICY RATE AT 0.25% UNTIL INFLATION OBJECTIVE IS SUSTAINABLY ACHIEVED, CONTINUES QUANTITATIVE EASING

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

The global economy is recovering from the economic effects of COVID-19, albeit with ongoing unevenness across regions and sectors. The US economic recovery appears to be gaining momentum as virus infections decline and fiscal support boost incomes and consumption. New fiscal stimulus will increase US consumption and output growth further. Global yield curves have steepened, largely reflecting the improved US growth outlook, but global financial conditions remain highly accommodative. Oil and other commodity prices have risen. The Canadian dollar has been relatively stable against the US dollar but has appreciated against most other currencies. In Canada, the economy is proving to be more resilient than anticipated to the second wave of the virus and the associated containment measures. Although activity in hard-to-distance sectors continues to be held back, recent data point to continued recovery in the rest of the economy. GDP grew 9.6% in the final quarter of 2020, led by strong inventory accumulation. GDP growth in the first quarter of 2021 is now expected to be positive, rather than the contraction forecast in January. Consumers and businesses are adapting to containment measures, and housing market activity has been much stronger than expected. Improving foreign demand and higher commodity prices have also brightened the prospects for exports and business investment. Despite the stronger near-term outlook, there is still considerable economic slack and a great deal of uncertainty about the evolution of the virus and the path of economic growth. The labour market is a long way from recovery, with employment still well below pre-

COVID levels. Low-wage workers, young people and women have borne the brunt of the job losses. The spread of more transmissible variants of the virus poses the largest downside risk to activity, as localized outbreaks and restrictions could restrain growth and add choppiness to the recovery. CPI inflation is near the bottom of the 1-3 percent target band but is likely to move temporarily to around the top of the band in the next few months. The expected rise in CPI inflation reflects base-year effects from deep price declines in some goods and services at the outset of the crisis a year ago, combined with higher gasoline prices pushed up by the recent run-up in oil prices. CPI inflation is then expected to moderate as base-year effects dissipate and excess capacity continues to exert downward pressure. Measures of core inflation currently range from 1.3 to 2 percent. While economic prospects have improved, the Governing Council judges that the recovery continues to require extraordinary monetary policy support. We remain committed to holding the policy interest rate at the effective lower bound until economic slack is absorbed so that the 2 percent inflation target is sustainably achieved. In the Bank's January projection, this does not happen until 2023. To reinforce this commitment and keep interest rates low across the yield curve, the Bank will continue its QE program until the recovery is well underway. As the Governing Council continues to gain confidence in the strength of the recovery, the pace of net purchases of Government of Canada bonds will be adjusted as required. We will continue to provide the appropriate degree of monetary policy stimulus to support the recovery and achieve the inflation objective.

## IS INDIAN GOVT PLANNING TO SELL STAKE IN 4 AIRPORTS?

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For the 13 AAI airports identified for privatisation, the possibility of bundling of profitable and non-profitable airports will be looked at to make more attractive packages. In the first round of airports' privatisation under the Narendra Modi government, the Adani Group bagged contracts for six airports - Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Mangaluru, Thiruvananthapuram, and Guwahati - last year. Adani Enterprises in January had signed the concession agreement with the Airports Authority of India (AAI) for operating and developing the Jaipur, Guwahati and Thiruvananthapuram airports. In a regulatory filing, the company said that the concession period is 50 years from the commercial operation date. "Adani Jaipur International Airport Ltd, Adani Guwahati International Airport and Adani Thiruvananthapuram International Airport, wholly-owned subsidiaries of the company have signed the concession agreement on January 19, 2021 with Airports Authority of India for the operations, management and development of Jaipur, Guwahati and Thiruvananthapuram airports respectively," it said.

## BRAMPTON MAPLE-TIRANGA RALLY: 2 CHARGED FOR ASSAULT

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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. The victim exited her vehicle, there was an altercation, and she was assaulted. She did not sustain any injuries. On March 5, 2021, Jaskaran Singh a 27-year-old man from Toronto was charged with Assault. He is scheduled to appear at the Ontario Court of Justice in Brampton on a future date. On March 11, 2021, Jodhveer Dhalwal a 30-year-old man from Caledon was charged for Assault Cause Bodily Harm. He is scheduled to attend the Ontario Court of Justice in Brampton on a future date. 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. This has been and will continue to be our service's approach to support our community's well-being and safety.

## Ravneet Bittu assigned Lok Sabha duty in Adhir's absence

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Due to the upcoming Assembly elections in five states/UT, Congress floor leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and deputy leader Gaurav Gogoi will not be participating in the House proceedings for the ongoing Budget session of the Parliament. Accordingly, their work has been assigned to Ravneet Singh Bittu, Congress MP from Ludhiana and the grandson of former Punjab Chief Minister late Beant Singh. A note from Chowdhury said, "In the absence of the Leader of Congress in the Lok Sabha, his parliamentary duties and responsibilities are handed over to the chief whip Kodikunnil Suresh. But since Suresh will be away for election-related responsibilities in Kerala, the duties will be performed by party whip Ravneet Singh Bittu." The Congress said this is an interim arrangement for the second leg of the Budget session. Chowdhury and Gogoi are occupied with election-related duties in West Bengal and Assam, respectively.





HUGE BILLBOARDS IN CANADA MENTIONING 'THANK YOU INDIA, THANK YOU PM MODI' AFTER CANADA RECEIVES 500,000 COVISHIELD VACCINES.

# AMU LECTURE: GANDHI WAS FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM, SAYS RAJMOHAN

**ALIGARH (UTTAR PRADESH), IANS)** Rajmohan Gandhi, the grandson of the 'Father of the Nation' Mahatma Gandhi, delivered an online lecture on "Does the Arc of History bend towards Justice? Some Reflections", organised by the Sir Syed Academy, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) under the varsity's centenary celebrations lecture series. "National independence is not enough alone as Mahatma Gandhi saw it as a means of empowering the individual Indian citizen to express dissent fearlessly. He was against coercion in religious matters and in June 1947, two months before freedom, Gandhi said if someone comes to me and forces me not to utter Ram's name, I will utter Ram 'naam' even at the point of the sword. I will defend my faith and conviction with my life", said Rajmohan Gandhi, Research Professor, University of Illinois. The programme was presided by Tariq Mansoor, Vice-Chancellor, AMU. Rajmohan Gandhi, a historian and political philosopher, referred to the distant and past socio-political upheavals in different regions of the world and said, "Mahatma Gandhi's fight for India's freedom must be remembered along with his fight for the freedom of the individual Indian to think, to speak, and to believe." "In August 1942, Gandhi's famous 'Quit India' call was overwhelmingly endorsed but 13 people voted against the resolution. Right after the voting and before his arrest, Gandhi spoke to the Mumbai Assembly and said, 'I congratulate the 13 dissenters who voted against the



resolution. Three years later, after Germany and Japan were defeated, Quit India Movement's imprisoned warriors were released from the prison. Meanwhile, in February 1946 in Mumbai over-enthusiastic patriots insisted the people shout 'Jai Hind'. Gandhi ji promptly objected to it by saying 'as much as a single person is compelled to shout 'Jai Hind' or any popular slogan, a nail is driven into the coffin of Swaraj'." Delineating the struggles for justice in the American Civil War, Rajmohan Gandhi said one of the fighters for justice and human dignity was Theodore Parker, who died in 1860 just one year before the start of the Civil War. He said, "Parker rejected conventional Christianity and preached about God and the human conscience. In Parker's time slavery was legal in the United States. He and some others demanded its abolition. In the late 1840s, Parker also denounced America's war with Mexico." In one of his speeches, Parker said, "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight, I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice." According to Gandhi, Parker in his own way was saying "Khudakeghar me der hai andhermah" (in God's home there is delay but no denial). "Repeating the remark more than a century later, Martin Luther King Junior often spoke of the arc of the moral universe bending even if slowly towards justice", said Rajmohan Gandhi.

Presenting examples of Nigeria as a case study, Rajmohan Gandhi said, "Nigeria is to Africa what India is to south Asia. With over 210 million living on its soil, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country. More than 100 ethnicities exist there. Since 1960 after independence from British rule, oil rich Nigeria has practiced a political compromise."

The country's presidency has alternated for much of the time between the Muslim inhabitants of the north and the largely Christian inhabitants of the south. Sadly, Nigeria has also alternated with depressing regularity between elected rule and army rule. A constant Nigerian cry is usually raised soon after a change from one to the other: misrule and that the state is not respecting its citizens and there is corruption. They have deep longing for lasting improvement. "Wo Subah Kabaayegi" (when the morning will dawn) is a very Nigerian question, too, he said.

Presenting the case of Lebanon, Rajmohan Gandhi said, "Recently Lebanon seemed to have enjoyed economic success. Lebanon has the ethnic linguistic diversity of India and Nigeria. Like India, Lebanon has practiced electoral democracy. Like Nigeria, Lebanon accommodates competing communities in its governance." "The system of power sharing in Lebanon at the top has sadly been accompanied by bitter and repeated civil war. Moreover, Lebanon has large number of Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Regarded for long as a free democracy, in 2013 Lebanon was designated partly free by Freedom House Institute that has been measuring democracy in different nations," he added. Rajmohan Gandhi said in August last year with the Lebanese people longing for change to arrive, what arrived was an immense explosion at Beirut port destroying scores of buildings, devastating the economy and claiming the lives of hundreds. Quoting another example, Rajmohan Gandhi said, "Sorrow of Afghanistan is perhaps even greater than that of Nigeria or Lebanon. Without a pause for more than 41 years explosives from the Soviet Union, from the United States, from fellow Afghans have been blasting there; and every night men, women and children dream of a 'Rahatki subah'. With or without words they cry in pain and yet despite endless disappointments, they also cry with a droplet of hope which is mixed into their anguish."

Talking about the life and struggles of Frontier Gandhi, also known as Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Rajmohan Gandhi said, "I was 10 when I saw this towering figure for the first time. In 1945, Frontier Gandhi and his elder brother were staying for a couple of days in our home in New Delhi. My father Devdas, Gandhi ji's youngest son, had known Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan from 1930 when they were in prison together in the town of Gujrat, north of Lahore." Gandhi said, "When I last met Frontier Gandhi in 1987 when he visited India for the final time in Mumbai's Raj Bhavan, he told me that patience was prescribed again and again in the Holy Quran, and patience and non-violence were very close to each other."

## ASIAN WOMEN AMONG 8 KILLED IN SEPARATE SPA SHOOTINGS IN ATLANTA

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Two of the shootings were at spas across the street from each other in northeast Atlanta and the other happened about 30 miles away in Cherokee County to the northwest of the city.

"Video footage from our Video Integration Centre places the Cherokee County suspect's vehicle in the area, around the time of our Piedmont Road shootings," the Atlanta police said in a statement.

"That, along with video evidence viewed by investigators, suggests it is extremely likely our suspect is the same as Cherokee County's, who is in custody. Because of this, an investigator from Atlanta police is in Cherokee County and we are working closely with them to confirm with certainty our cases are related."

Officials in each jurisdiction said there were no immediate indications of motive and said it is unclear whether the shootings were related. FBI spokesman Kevin Rowson added that the agency has been assisting Atlanta and Cherokee County authorities in the probe.

## EMPLOYMENT INCREASED BY 259,000 (+1.4%) IN FEBRUARY: STATSCAN

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Among those working part-time (less than 30 hours per week) in February, almost one-quarter (23.8%) wanted a full-time job, up from less than one-fifth (18.5%) 12 months earlier.

The number of self-employed workers was unchanged for the second consecutive month and was down 7.4% (-213,000) compared with 12 months earlier.

Gains included an increase of 226,000 (+1.9%) among private-sector employees. Among workers who worked at least half their usual hours in February, the number working at locations other than home increased by 600,000 as schools and other workplaces reopened in several provinces.

Compared with 12 months earlier, there were 599,000 (-3.1%) fewer people employed, and 406,000 (+50.0%) more people working less than half of their usual hours.

In February, total hours worked increased by 1.4%, driven mostly by gains in wholesale and retail trade.

**Unemployment rate falls to the lowest level since March 2020**

The unemployment rate fell 1.2 percentage points to 8.2% in February, the lowest rate since March 2020.

The number of long-term unemployed—people who had been looking for work or been on temporary layoff for 27 weeks or more—fell by 49,000 (-9.7%) from a record high of 512,000 in January.

The labour underutilization rate fell 1.8 percentage points to 16.6%—the lowest level since February 2020.

**Employment rebounds in industries most affected by January losses**

The number of people working in retail trade increased by 122,000 (+6.1%) in February as restrictions on non-essential stores were lifted in many regions.

Employment in the accommodation and food services industry rose by 65,000 (+7.8%), driven primarily by Ontario and Alberta. After falling steadily from September 2020 to January 2021, the number of people working in the information, culture, and recreation industry was little changed in February.

February employment increases were concentrated in jobs paying \$17.50 per hour or less, reflecting monthly growth in industries with a high proportion of low-paying jobs.

**Employment rebounds in Quebec and Ontario**

Employment increased in both Quebec (+113,000; +2.7%) and Ontario (+100,000; +1.4%), coinciding with the easing of public health restrictions in most areas of both provinces.

Employment also increased in British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba, while it declined in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Youth employment recovers losses from recent months**

Employment among youth aged 15 to 24 rose by 100,000 (+4.5%) in February, with increases in both full-time (+36,000; +2.9%) and part-time (+64,000; +6.5%) work.

Year-over-year employment losses among young women (-181,000; -14.1%) were nearly double those seen among young men (-96,000; -7.3%).

The unemployment rate for youth fell 2.6 percentage points to 17.1% in February, higher than the same month a year earlier (10.4%).

Employment rose by 134,000 (+1.1%) among people aged 25 to 54 in February, restoring much of the job losses that occurred in January, particularly among women working part-time.

The unemployment rate for core-aged women fell 1.3 percentage points in February to 6.5%, returning to the low observed in December. The unemployment rate for core-aged men fell 0.6 percentage points to 6.9%, the lowest rate since March 2020.

Employment among people aged 55 and older rose by 25,000 (+0.6%) in February, following four months with little growth.

## WHO IS BEHIND CRIME TO SCARE TOP-BUSINESS HOUSE IN INDIA?

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While NIA officials remained tight-lipped over revealing Vaze's "powerful" connection, BJP spokesperson and legislator Ram Kadam said that the controversial cop is patronised by Shiv Sena leadership and he cannot execute the crime to scare the top business house of the country without the tacit backing of the ruling party.

"NIA is questioning him (Vaze) on the conspiracy part. The truth will be out in days to come," Kadam told IANS adding, "despite Sachin Vaze's arrest, the Maharashtra government has not yet suspended the tainted police officer. The ruling party and Vaze obviously seem hand-in-glove".

The 49-year-old encounter specialist has not been arrested for the first time. In 2004, he was booked in a controversial custodial murder case in Mumbai. He later resigned from the police department in 2007 and joined the Shiv Sena.

"As his resignation was not accepted, his services were not terminated. When Shiv Sena returned to power in Mumbai, Sachin Vaze was reinstated in police service in June 2020. Obviously Vazewas seen as the most powerful officer in the Shiv Sena led Maha Vikas Aghadi government," revealed a former police officer who served with Vaze earlier in the Mumbai Crime Branch.

Once perceived as the hero of the Mumbai Crime Branch, Vaze eliminated more than 63 dreaded criminals including gangsters related to Dawood Ibrahim' notorious D-company. During the mid-1990s, Vaze joined Andheri Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU) led by encounter specialist Pradeep Sharma. Another leading encounter specialist Daya Nayak was also part of Pradeep Sharma's team. The trio, who fought with underworld gangs on the streets of Mumbai, inspired many filmmakers like Ram Gopal Verma to script Bollywood hits like "Ab TakChappan" and "Company".

However several controversial encounters including the mysterious death of Khwaja Yunus, named in a bomb blast case, saw the encounter specialists being placed on suspension. Vaze also had a fall from grace, when on orders of the court in 2004, a case of murder was registered against him in matter related to death of an accused in police custody.

During the present Maha Vikas Aghadi rule, Vaze was handling most of the sensitive cases. As the head of the CIU of Mumbai Crime Branch, he investigated the high profile TRP scam case and arrested 15 accused linked with broadcast and TV rating agencies. Vaze was also part of a police team which arrested Republic TV owner Arnab Goswami in a suicide case. Busting an inter state car scam, Vaze also arrested famous car designer DilipChhabria.

# Ontario's 2021 Budget Coming March 24

THE GOVERNMENT WILL OUTLINE THE NEXT PHASE OF ONTARIO'S COVID-19 ACTION PLAN.

## ONTARIO TO RELEASE 2021 BUDGET ON MARCH 24

**TORONTO** — The Ontario government will continue to focus on protecting people's health and jobs through the COVID-19 pandemic when Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board, releases the 2021 Ontario Budget on March 24. The Budget will support the province's comprehensive vaccine distribution plan, along with providing additional resources for the health care sector and initiatives to protect the economic well-being of families, workers and employers.

"Our focus has got to be protecting health and jobs today," said Minister Bethlenfalvy. "Even though the light at the end of the tunnel shines brighter with each person that is vaccinated, we are going to take nothing for granted. This caution is necessary to save lives. And it's also necessary for our economic and fiscal recovery because as I often say, without healthy people, you can't have a healthy economy. So, we'll defeat the virus by working together. And when we do, our collective efforts will turn to unleash the growth that we are going to count on for a strong recovery."

Since the 2020 Budget, Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover, Ontario has invested an additional \$2.6 billion to protect and support people's health and economic well-being, which includes: Launching Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine strategy and administering nearly one million vaccines as of March 10, 2021

Making more than \$1 billion in payments to small businesses that were required to close or significantly restrict services under the Provincewide Shutdown through the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, with grants starting from \$10,000 up to \$20,000

Investing over \$115 million to train up to 8,200 new personal support workers (PSWs) for high-demand jobs in Ontario's health and long-term care sectors by fall 2021

Increasing investments by \$869 million for the hospital sector for supplies and equipment to address the surge in COVID-19 cases, including testing, swabs, saliva tubes and test kits, bringing the total

increase in funding to hospitals since 2019-20 to \$3.4 billion

Expanding eligibility for the Main Street Relief Grant to include small businesses with 2-19 employees, including those in the arts, entertainment and recreation sectors, to help offset the costs of purchasing personal protective equipment with up to \$1,000 in financial support

Expanding Ontario's Support for Learners program to include students aged 13 through to Grade 12

Providing \$398 million in additional support to respond to the impact of COVID-19 in the long-term care sector, which includes continued prevention and containment measures and more funding to support the implementation of testing guidelines.

Governments across Canada and around the world have faced unprecedented uncertainty due to COVID-19. To ensure Ontario can respond quickly to changing circumstances, the government's budget plan built-in historic levels of flexible, time-limited funding and extraordinary contingencies of \$13.3 billion in 2020-21. The 2020-21 Third Quarter Finances showed that these funds were fully allocated in the third quarter.

**QUICK FACTS**

The Ministry of Finance spoke directly with 745 people and organizations and received more than 850 ideas submitted as part of the 2021 Budget Consultations.

To support the government's commitment to transparency and accountability, the 2021 Budget will include a multi-year fiscal plan.

Through Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover, Ontario outlined \$45 billion in support over three years to respond to the serious health and economic impacts of COVID-19. The 2020-21 Third Quarter Finances report shows that the government is projecting to spend \$25 billion more than last year. The Fiscal Sustainability, Transparency and Accountability Act, 2019 (FSTAA) sets out the requirement for the Ontario Minister of Finance to release a budget on or before March 31 for the following fiscal year, beginning April 1.

## CANADIAN HOUSING MARKETS SET RECORDS AGAIN IN FEBRUARY

Statistics released today by the Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA) show national home sales set another all-time record in February 2021.

Summary:

- \* National home sales rose 6.6% on a month-over-month (m-o-m) basis in February.
- \* Actual (not seasonally adjusted) activity was up 39.2% year-over-year (y-o-y).
- \* The number of newly listed properties rebounded by 15.7% from January to February.
- \* The MLS® Home Price Index (HPI) jumped 3.3% m-o-m and was up 17.3% y-o-y.
- \* The actual (not seasonally adjusted) national average sale price posted a 25% y-o-y gain in February.

Home sales recorded over Canadian MLS® Systems climbed 6.6% between January and February 2021 to set another new all-time

record.

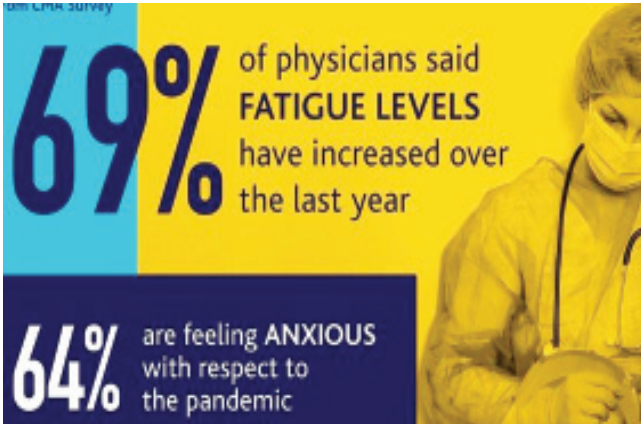
Seasonally adjusted activity was running at an annualized pace of 783,636 units in February. CREA's revised forecast for 2021 is in the neighbourhood of 700,000 home sales.

The month-over-month increase in national sales activity from January to February was led by the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and a number of other Ontario markets, along with Calgary and a number of markets in B.C.

"At this point everyone knows how far the current monthly sales numbers are from historical norms, and that they have been setting record after record for eight months now, so this should not be a surprise like the weak numbers posted last spring were," stated Costa Pouloupoulos, Chair of CREA.

The number of newly listed homes rebounded by 15.7% in February, recovering all the ground lost to the drop recorded in January.

## ONE YEAR INTO THE PANDEMIC: HIGH LEVELS OF ANXIETY AND INCREASED FATIGUE AMONG PHYSICIAN: CMA SURVEY



On the eve of the one-year declaration of the COVID-19 global pandemic, a new survey by the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) shows high levels of anxiety and fatigue among physicians.

The survey explored the impact of the ongoing pandemic on the health of physicians, noting respondents' fatigue has increased by 69% over the last year, with 64% experiencing anxiety around the pandemic.

"Like all health care professionals, physicians are feeling the stress of the last 365 days. And while they're suffering, very few are seeking help. Suffering in silence is so detrimental; we have more work to do to break down the barriers preventing physicians and other health care workers from seeking support when they need it," says Dr. Ann Collins, CMA president.

**CANADA'S POOR VACCINE ROLLOUT AMONG THE TOP CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**

When asked on what is contributing negatively to their mental health, respondents indicated that long time with social restrictions (64%), continued uncertainty about the future (63%) and concerns about vaccine rollout (62%).

Overall, 81% of respondents consider an efficient vaccine distribution strategy to be a key priority in responding to the pandemic with over half giving the current rollout poor marks. Physicians surveyed point to key challenges in vaccine rollout, including vaccine supply (93%), clear direction on priority groups that should be prioritized for vaccination (52%), and engagement of physicians in vaccine rollout and delivery (39%).

"The vaccine rollout is the light at the end of the tunnel for Canadians, including doctors, whose mental health has been battered by this pandemic," adds Dr. Collins. "Despite the heroic efforts and guidance from our public health colleagues and health workers, we're off to a rocky start with the rollout — not getting this right is not an option."

The survey also explored governments' handling of the pandemic. Over half of respondents rated provincial and territorial governments poorly in managing the vaccine rollout and 61% rated the federal government's vaccine supply strategy as poor or very poor.

The survey was completed by 1,648 practising physicians between Feb. 18 and 22, 2021.

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# Batla House: BJP seeks apology from opposition after court gives death penalty to Ariz Khan



A DELHI COURT ON MONDAY AWARDED DEATH PENALTY TO ARIZ KHAN FOR THE MURDER OF DECORATED DELHI POLICE INSPECTOR MOHAN CHAND SHARMA IN CONNECTION WITH THE SENSATIONAL CASE, SAYING THE OFFENCE FELL UNDER THE "RAREST OF THE RARE CATEGORY" WARRANTING THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE.

Asserting that the court verdict in the 2008 Batla House encounter case has thoroughly exposed "terrorist sympathizers" and "doubters lobby", the BJP on Monday sought an apology from opposition leaders Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee and Arvind Kejriwal for raising questions on the Delhi Police's integrity in the matter. A Delhi court on Monday awarded death penalty to Ariz Khan for the murder of decorated Delhi Police Inspector Mohan Chand Sharma in connection with the sensational case, saying the offence fell under the "rarest of the rare category" warranting the maximum sentence. "The Delhi court's verdict today in the Batla House encounter case thoroughly exposes the terrorist sympathisers and doubters lobby in the country. Now Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee and Arvind Kejriwal who raised questions on the integrity of our police forces must apologise to the nation," BJP leader and Union minister Prakash Javadekar said. Several opposition leaders had raised questions over the encounter as a huge row erupted with some groups alleging that it was a staged gunfight. After the encounter on September 19, 2008, protest rallies were organised against it by teachers and students of Jamia Millia Islamia University. A day after Khan's conviction on March 8, BJP leader and Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad had said at a press conference, "There was a conscious, deliberate and consistent attempt to cast serious doubt on the authenticity of the Batla House encounter to weaken the morale of Delhi Police and give clear

support to terrorists and their design. Why? For pure vote bank politics." Inspector Sharma of the police's special cell was killed during the encounter between the police and alleged terrorists in Jamia Nagar in south Delhi following serial bomb blasts in the national capital in which 39 people died and 159 were injured. Two terrorists were killed while two others fled. Khan had fled from the spot and was declared proclaimed offender He was arrested on February 14, 2018, and faced the trial.

## BJP MEET: RAJNATH URGES DIALOGUE BETWEEN FARMERS, GOVT

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday urged dialogue between the protesting farmers and the Centre while addressing a meeting of BJP office-bearers, during which he also invoked the border clashes with China and the construction of the Ram temple. Making an appeal to farmers upset over the new agri-marketing laws, the senior BJP leader said any problem can be resolved through talks. "The BJP resolve is to double the farmers' income, and in no case the MSP will end," he said, referring to the apprehension among farmers camping at Delhi's borders for months now. "We are all from farmers' families and we are ready for amendments and solutions, whatever is needed in the interest of agriculture," Singh said at the inaugural meeting of the Uttar Pradesh BJP executive committee.

# AAP govt followed 10 principles of Lord Rama for last 6 years: Kejriwal

**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which has been ruling in Delhi for the last six years said the party has led the government in the concept of Ram Rajya. AAP national head and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal made this statement while addressing the post budget session of Delhi Assembly on Wednesday. While addressing the Assembly for over 35 minutes, Kejriwal highlighted the developments, beneficial schemes for people implemented and he connected all achievements under his government with Ram Rajya. The Chief Minister said, "All of us worship Lord Rama. I worship Lord Hanuman who was a devotee of Lord Rama. Hence I am a devotee of both Lord Rama and Hanuman. During Lord Rama's rule, it is believed that people did not have to face tough challenges to access basic needs of life. This cannot be paralleled by us humans. However, even if we draw inspiration from this model of Ram Rajya, we would be successful in life. Hence, we have been constantly striving to establish this model of Ram Rajya in Delhi for the past 6 years." Kejriwal tried to justify his claim by adding that his government has been working on 10 principles inspired by the principles of Ram Rajya, including food, electricity, water, education, health, employment, houses, respect for women and the elderly.

He said, "No one should go to sleep hungry - whether there is a pandemic or not. For this, the government adopted numerous measures and formulated various policies. During the pandemic, 1 crore people were provided with dry ration, 10 lakh people were given access to cooked meals twice a day. Now, the doorstep delivery of ration seeks to further this view." He told the Assembly that under AAP's rule the city has witnessed revolutionary changes. The government schools are producing 98% results and are being equipped with marvellous buildings and swimming pools due to which the students of these schools are now at par with those studying in private schools. Kejriwal also attacked both the BJP and the Congress accusing both of keeping the education system of the country in a dismal state deliberately for over 70 years. "I take full responsibility in stating that both these parties (Congress and BJP) have conspired to keep the education system of our country in a dismal state. They deliberately kept the people of our country, poor and the students, illiterate as they believed that if these children remain illiterate, they would not be able to gain access to jobs." The Chief Minister concluded his speech stating that the last one year was tough. However, with support from the Central government the Delhi government managed to control the situation.

## NATIONWIDE STRIKE TO PROTEST AGAINST PROPOSED PRIVATISATION OF TWO STATE-OWNED LENDERS IMPACTS SERVICES OF PSU BANKS

Banking operations, including cheque clearance, got affected across the country on Monday as bankers under the aegis of the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) have gone on a nationwide strike to protest against the proposed privatisation of two state-owned lenders. UFBU, an umbrella body of nine unions, had given a strike call for March 15 and 16, and claimed that about 10 lakh bank employees and officers of the banks will participate in the strike. Members of UFBU include All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA), All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC), National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE), All India Bank Officers' Association (AIBOA) and Bank Employees Confederation of India (BEFI). The other members are the Indian National Bank Employees Federation (INBEF), Indian National Bank Officers Congress (INBOC), National Organisation of Bank Workers (NOBW) and National Organisation of Bank Officers (NOBO). However, branches of private sector lenders like ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank are open as they are not part of the strike. In the Union Budget presented last month, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the privatisation of two public sector banks (PSBs) as part of the government's disinvestment plan. The government has already privatised IDBI Bank by selling its majority stake in the lender to LIC in 2019, and has merged 14 public sector banks in the last four years. According to All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) general secretary CH Venkatachalam, services at branch level, cheque clearance and government transactions have been affected. Besides, money markets and stock markets are also going to face problems as payments would be impacted, he said. In Bengal, banking operations were severely hit as officers and



employees of public sector lenders went on a strike to protest against the proposed privatisation of two state-owned banks. "We have got a tremendous response. Our strike call has also been supported by the National Confederation of Officers Association, farmers, CITU and AITUC," All India Bank Officers Confederation (AIBOC) joint general secretary Sanjoy Das said. "There are around 6,000 branches of public, private and foreign banks in West Bengal. Most of the bank branches in the state are closed due to the strike. ATMs are not functioning except those located at hospitals, railway stations and airports," he added. Banking services in Maharashtra were also severely hit as around 40,000 bank employees and officers joined the strike. UFBU's Maharashtra convenor Devidas Tuljapurkar in a statement said that about 40,000 bank employees and officers working in about 10,000 bank branches across the state have joined the nationwide strike.

## FIGHT AGAINST FARM LAWS IS BATTLE FOR SELF-RESPECT: NARESH TIKAIT



**DEHRADUN, (IANS)** Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Naresh Tikait on Sunday asserted that the fight against the three farm laws is now a battle for farmers' self-respect and the protesters will only leave the capital's borders with their honour intact. Addressing a Mahapanchayat at Doiwala here, Tikait reiterated the demand for withdrawal of the farm laws and appealed to the people to "punish" the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the elections for enacting "anti-farmer laws". "We had supported the government first, voted for it and even appealed people to vote for it but the government acted against us only. Communalism was spread and the way the government portrayed it, we could only see that the other community was at fault," he said. On the current agitation, he said: "We never thought that the protest will continue for so long. Earlier, the government used to agree to the demands in 5-10 days but it didn't happen this time." "We should call for another 'Bharat Bandh' where women and children should come out of the houses and block the roads," he said. Highlighting the negatives of the farm laws, he said that now people have started boycotting the BJP. While Tikait received a warm welcome at several spots on his way to Doiwala, some miscreants tried to create ruckus at Badhrabad toll plaza. Farmers who were present there to welcome Tikait said that the miscreants were not with them and they were trying to malign Tikait's image. The BKU on February 28 had announced a series of Mahapanchayats, with an aim to intensify their agitation against the contentious farm laws, to be held in March. The Mahapanchayat in Doiwala was a part of this series.

## RAWAT TRYING TO BRIDGE GULF BETWEEN SIDHU AND AMARINDER



**NEW DELHI, (IANS)** Congress state in-charge for Punjab, Harish Rawat, is trying to bridge the gulf between Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and Navjot Singh Sidhu, a former minister in the Punjab Cabinet. In the last two days, Rawat has met both Amarinder Singh and Singh Sidhu to find a solution that is acceptable to all, sources said. While Sidhu has said that he had a cordial meeting with Rawat, sources said that there is still no breakthrough as the cricketer-turned-politician is keen to become the Punjab Congress President or get back his earlier portfolio of local urban body. But Amarinder Singh is not in favour of both the demands and wants to give only the energy portfolio to the former cricketer. On March 9, Sidhu had tweeted, "The system was never broken, it was built this way... a selected few pockets the states exchequer, overriding the welfare of the people of Punjab. The power and tax money of the people must return to the people in the form of development!" Rawat met Sidhu a day after a meeting with Amarinder Singh, and sources said the Congress general secretary shared various options with Sidhu according to his status. A proposal for a meeting between the three has been made by Rawat and the meeting is expected to take place soon as the Budget session of the Punjab Assembly has ended. The Congress leadership is also keen to adjust Sidhu in the state government. Sidhu had resigned as a Cabinet minister in July 2019 after differences with Chief Minister Amarinder Singh over portfolio allocation. Sidhu was in-charge of local bodies but was then shifted to the power department. However, the simmering tension between the two leaders reached a boiling point when Sidhu's wife Navjot Kaur was denied a party ticket for the Lok Sabha elections in 2019, sources said.

## India only G-20 country implementing Paris accord commitments: Javadekar



India is the only country in the G-20 forum implementing the Paris accord commitments on renewable energy and afforestation, the government informed Rajya Sabha on Monday. Replying to supplementary queries during the Question Hour, Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar said there has been a net increase of 15,000 square kilometres of tree cover in the last six years. He said the pace is likely to increase as the central government has distributed Rs 48,000 crore to states last year with the direction that 80 per cent of the money be spent on afforestation. "India is the only G-20 country which is implementing the Paris commitments given through our nationally determined contributions, be it renewable energy, be it reducing (emission) intensity as well as creating more forest area. On all three commitments, we are much ahead than any other country," he told the House.

# ‘QUAD HAS COME OF AGE’, SAYS PM MODI AT SUMMIT HERALDING BROADER AGENDA



CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

“Today’s summit shows that Quad has come of age. It will now remain an important pillar of stability in the region.” He said that the Quad working together as a “force for the global good” is an extension of the Indian creed of ‘Vasudaiva Kutumbakam’ or that the world is one family. “We are united by our democratic values and our commitment to a free and open and inclusive Indo-Pacific,” he said in a reference to the regional threat from China. Modi is participating in the summit along with Prime Ministers Scott Morrison of Australia and Yoshihide Suga of Japan, and US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. “The Quad is going to be a vital arena for cooperation,” said Biden, who was presiding from the White House over the meeting held virtually with the other leaders appearing on video screens. Of the new impetus for the Quad’s cooperation, he said: “We’re establishing a new mechanism to enhance our cooperation to raise our mutual interests.” Biden announced the formation of a new joint partnership that is going to boost Covid-19 vaccine production for the global benefit and will help the entire Pacific too. “This is a group is particularly important because it’s dedicated

to the practical solutions, and concrete results,” he said. He added: “We’re renewing our commitment to ensure that our region is governed by international law, committed to upholding universal values and free from coercion.” Biden was flanked by Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Sumona Guha, the National Security Council’s senior director for South Asia, were also participating. A free and open Indo-Pacific is essential, Biden said. “The United States is committed to working with you, our partners, and all of our allies in the region to achieve stability. This is a group particularly important because it is dedicated to the practical solutions and concrete results.” As Biden said in his opening remarks this was the first multilateral summit he is participating in, showing the urgency with which he views the situation in the Indo-Pacific where an aggressive China is emerging as a challenge to both the soft and hard power of the US and its partners. The push is now for the Quad to become a new model of multilateral cooperation that melds security interests with development. It plans to start by harnessing India’s vaccine development and manufacturing capacity to project the new outlook.

## ON DAY 50, BIDEN GETS \$1.9T RELIEF PACKAGE AMID SIGNS OF RECOVERY



**NEW YORK, (IANS)** On the 50th day US President Joe Biden has been in office, Congress gave him two victories: the \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief package that was fought for and the confirmation of a key member of his cabinet, Attorney General Merrick Garland. Biden is also buoyed by signs of recovery after more than a year of the deadly ravage of the Covid-19 pandemic. The biggest financial aid package since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the bill passed by the House of Representatives against total Republican opposition on Wednesday seeks to pull the nation from the depths of the coronavirus pandemic by infusing money into the economy at large and into the pockets of individuals. Calling the bill a “consequential and transformative legislation”, Speaker Nancy Pelosi said, “This is a momentous day in the history of our country.” Twenty Republicans joined the Democrats in the Senate to confirm Garland as the nation’s top law enforcement official. Despite the title of the attorney general, the position is more similar to that of the home minister as the official will control agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Drug Enforcement Agency and the enforcement of laws. The Senate also confirmed Michael Regan to a cabinet post as the administrator of the Environment Protection Agency. He is the first African American to head the agency. The nation sees signs for optimism with 370,000 jobs coming back last month, the stock markets hitting record highs, nearly 19 per cent of the population receiving at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and students returning to schools. The seven-day new COVID-19 infection rate has also come down from 254,000 two months ago to 65,000. The RealClear Politics average of polls has Biden with 53.7 per cent job approval. The immediate visible impact of the American Rescue Plan, as the aid package is called, will be direct payments of \$1,400 to about 85 per cent of the people. It will also lower some health insurance premiums, extend unemployment payments, give housing and utility assistance and provide monetary help to many families with children. The Plan will provide small businesses, restaurants and entertainment venues with loans and grants, help schools, bailout states and cities, assist public transportation and fund infrastructure projects.



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