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U.S. IS TRYING TO 'ENCIRCLE' CHINA: FOREIGN MINISTER

 **If the U.S. does not hit the brake but continues to speed down the wrong path, no amount of guardrails can prevent derailing and there will surely be conflict and confrontation**

QIN GANG
China's Foreign Minister



America's Indo-Pacific Strategy seeks to target China through creation of 'exclusive blocs', provokes confrontation and tries to create an Asia-Pacific version of NATO, says Qin Gang

China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang on Tuesday accused the United States of attempting "to encircle China" through its Indo-Pacific strategy, taking aim at what he called "exclusive blocs" led by the U.S.

"The U.S. 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' seeks to gang up to form exclusive blocs, stir up confrontation, and undermine regional integration," said Mr. Qin, speaking at the Foreign Ministry's annual press conference on the sidelines of the National People's Congress or Parliament session in Beijing.

"The 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' claims to safeguard regional security, but in fact it provokes confrontation and seeks to create an Asia-Pacific version of NATO," he said, adding that "the real purpose of its Indo-Pacific strategy is to encircle China". Chinese officials have previously referred to the India, U.S., Australia, Japan Quad grouping as well as the AUKUS (Australia-U.K.-U.S.) defence pact as being key elements of this strategy.

Mr. Qin's remarks followed sharp and rare direct criticism of the U.S. from Chinese President Xi Jinping, who on Monday, addressing a delegation on the sidelines of the NPC, said: "Western countries, led by the U.S., have implemented all-round containment and suppression of China, which has brought

unprecedented severe challenges to the country's development".

Mr. Xi has emphasised self-reliance in key critical industries, a theme of the NPC session. The session is also expected to pass a number of laws overhauling the party-state machinery to bring greater party control and oversight over government bodies, continuing the trend of centralisation under Mr. Xi. Announced on Tuesday, among the draft measures to be approved by the NPC, was the creation of a new National Financial Regulatory Commission, a super regulatory body to manage China's \$60 trillion banking assets.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Foreign Minister, in Tuesday's press conference — his first since taking over in December — spoke in detail on the worsening state of China-U.S. relations and reminded Washington of Beijing's "red line" on Taiwan.

In his more than two hour briefing, Mr. Qin did not comment on relations with India, taking questions only from Chinese journalists as well as reporters from Egypt, Russia, the U.S., Pakistan, Japan, Singapore and France.

Mr. Qin, who served as China's envoy in Washington prior to his appointment, attacked the Biden administration's China policy, saying it "claims it seeks to out-compete China but does not seek conflict, yet in reality, its so-called competition means to contain and suppress China in all respects".

"If the U.S. does not hit the brake but continues to speed down the wrong path, no amount of guardrails can prevent derailing and there will surely be conflict and confrontation," he said, adding that the recent U.S. shooting down of a Chinese balloon — described by the U.S. as a "spy balloon" and by China as a civilian meteorological airship — was "revealing" of the U.S. "regarding China as a primary rival" and of "U.S. domestic politics and hysterical neo-McCarthyism".

On Taiwan

On Taiwan, he said it was "the first red line that must not be crossed in China-U.S. relations" and Beijing would take "utmost efforts to pursue peaceful reunification" while "reserving the option to take all necessary measures". Drawing a comparison with the Ukraine crisis, he said Asia should not see "a Ukraine-style crisis" and be used as a "chessboard for geopolitical contest".

"Chinese people have every right to ask why the U.S. talks of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity on Ukraine, but disrespecting China's sovereignty and territorial integrity on Taiwan, and why the U.S. asks China to not provide arms to Russia while keeps selling arms to Taiwan," he said.

Mr. Qin hailed the China-Russia relationship as a model of "strategic trust and good neighbourliness", adding, pointedly, that "major countries should figure out what they want with each other — building exclusive political blocs or fostering partnerships that are open."

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SHALIZA DHAMI IS FIRST WOMAN TO BE APPOINTED TO AN IAF COMMAND POST



Woman in command: Group Captain Shaliza Dhami will take over command of a frontline IAF combat unit in the Western sector. PTI

In the first command appointment for a woman officer in the Indian Air Force, Group Captain Shaliza Dhami has been selected to take over the command of a frontline combat unit in the Western sector, the IAF said on Tuesday.

"Having been commended by the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief on two occasions, the officer is presently posted in the Operations branch of a frontline Command Headquarters," the IAF said.

Group Captain Dhami was commissioned in 2003 as a helicopter pilot and has over 2,800 hours of flying experience. She is a qualified flying instructor, and has served as Flight Commander of a helicopter unit in the Western sector. Congratulating the officer, Air Vice-Marshal Manmohan Bahadur (retd.), former Additional Director-General of the think tank Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS), said on Twitter, "Her younger brother was with us in CAPS, now an Assistant Professor in Imphal."

The armed forces have opened up command appointments for women officers following a Supreme Court verdict.

CHINA HAS SENT ASSURANCES BACKING IMF PACKAGE, RANIL TELLS PARLIAMENT



Sri Lanka has received China's much-awaited financing assurances, President Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament on Tuesday, expressing hope that it would unlock the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) promised \$2.9 billion package by the end of the month.

China's pending assurances had proved a bottleneck in Sri Lanka's ongoing attempt to urgently secure the Fund's support to recover from last year's

financial meltdown. After receiving the assurance from the Exim Bank of China on Monday night, the President and the Governor of Sri Lanka's Central Bank signed the letter of agreement and forwarded it to the IMF. "Now our duties are done. I hope that before the end of this month, by the fourth week, the IMF will do its duty. After that, we get the first round of money from the World Bank and ADB [Asian Development Bank]," Mr. Wickremesinghe said, terming the likely IMF agreement one of "special importance".

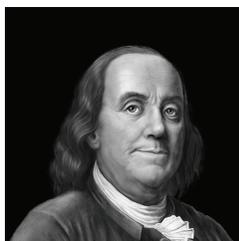
Later on Tuesday, the IMF acknowledged China's assurances in supporting Sri Lanka's debt restructure process. Krishna Srinivasan, Director of Asia and Pacific Department, IMF, said in a statement: "Sri Lanka has now received financing assurances from all major bilateral creditors. This paves the way for consideration by the IMF's Board on March 20 the approval of the Staff Level Agreement reached on September 1, 2022 for financing under an Extended Fund Facility." Approval by the Board would also "catalyse financing from other creditors", and "help Sri Lanka emerge from its current crisis and set it on a trajectory of strong and inclusive growth," he said.

Recovery process

While the IMF is yet to officially confirm receipt of China's assurances, the development is significant for those in Sri Lanka who have pinned their hopes on the IMF to kickstart Sri Lanka's economic recovery process. The Fund had made its support contingent on adequate financing assurances from Sri Lanka's top bilateral creditors. While India and Japan, through the Paris Club group of creditors, had sent their assurances earlier this year, China took longer to come on board.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Ali Sabry recently told The Hindu that China's offer until now was not compatible with the IMF's requirements, and that Colombo was trying to "narrow the gap". Following President Wickremesinghe's announcement, Mr. Sabry thanked China in a tweet, for "paving the way" for IMF support, and termed the move a "milestone" in Sri Lanka's path to economic recovery.

Mr. Wickremesinghe invited the political Opposition to join his government's efforts to "stabilise the country's economy".



*I didn't fail the test,
I just found Hundred ways to do it wrong.*

- BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

APPLYING ACTIVE NON-ALIGNMENT FOR UKRAINE PEACE

Jorge Heine is a research professor at the Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University, and a former Ambassador to India. His recent book is 'Latin American foreign policies in the New World Order: the Active Non-Alignment option'

At the recently-held Munich security conference, a major concern of the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was the reluctance of the Global South to align itself with the G-7 on the war in Ukraine. Although the vast majority of countries across the world condemn the Russian invasion and would like the war to come to an end (as shown in the United Nations vote on the subject in February 2023), very few countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America support the political and economic sanctions on Russia imposed by the G-7. The cri de coeur that seems to emerge from these North Atlantic meetings and their inability to rally the rest of the world to wage global war against Russia is: why are not developing nations more like us? Why do they not share our concern with the future of a rules-based international order, now, for the first time, in tatters, because of Russian actions?

The right side of history and ANA

The answer to these questions is very simple. The developing world, and especially Africa, Asia and the Middle East/West Asia, has been the site of many wars, including those of the proxy kind, in the course of the past 70 years. None of them was elevated to the category of a unique war that demanded a global involvement to bring it to an end. Suddenly, a war erupts in Europe, and this means that all bets are off, and all countries should chip in to support Ukraine. Yet, as India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has put it, "Europe has to grow out of its mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's."

Unable to come to terms with the fact that developing nations are unwilling to wage economic war against Russia (let alone provide Ukraine with weapons and ammunition, as the United States and Germany recently tried to induce Latin American countries to do), northern leaders are quite at a loss as to what to do. A recent call by Ukraine's President to African leaders to meet with him over a teleconference turned out to be a fiasco: only four out of 55 showed up. The Foreign Minister of Ukraine has gone so far as to call on the Latin American and Caribbean nations "to leave behind their so-called neutrality and put themselves on the right side of history".

Yet, at this particular juncture, what is the right side of history?

As the international system undergoes major shifts and we find ourselves on the verge of a second Cold War, this time between the U.S. and China, the last thing developing nations need to do is to take sides, allowing themselves to become "the plaything of others" to use Jawaharlal Nehru's famous phrase. It is in this context that the concept of Active Non-Alignment (ANA) has come to the fore.

ANA originated in 1919 and was developed in 2020 in response to the U.S.-China struggle for primacy, in which Latin America was caught in the middle. It was a bit of a manifesto calling for Latin American countries not to give in to pressures from either Washington or Beijing and to stick to their own interests. It took a page from the honourable tradition of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), but adapted it to the imperatives of the new century, impelled by the urgency of the Latin American crisis.

And the key word is "active". It is easy to do as you are told. It is much more challenging to embrace agency and come up with a fine-tuned and sophisticated diplomacy that looks at issues on a case-by-case basis. And that is what ANA is all about. As it turns out, more than a future-oriented proposal, it is an approach that is already being applied in practice. Latin American govern-

ments had no difficulty in participating one week in December 2021 in the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) ministerial forum in Mexico City, and the next one in the Democracies Summit in Washington DC, seeing no contradiction in doing so.

Neither have they dithered when it has come to rejecting entreaties to ban the Chinese telecom company, Huawei, from their 5G telecom development. So much so that ANA has been referred to as "the region's most significant foreign policy development since the end of the Cold War". In its year-end balance of 2022, Foreign Policy Magazine called it "the year of Non-Alignment". India's difficult balancing act

Moreover, reactions in the Global South to the war in Ukraine show that ANA is not limited to Latin America. ANA arose in the context of the U.S.-China spat, and the conflict with Russia has its own features, but shares others, including a certain dynamic of "the West vs. the Rest". India plays a key role in it, having taken a clear stand of non-alignment on the war, despite its closer ties with the U.S. in recent years, and its membership in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("the Quad"). As host and chair of this year's G-20, India is managing the difficult balancing act of keeping this important informal group of developed and developing nations, that was instrumental in handling the 2008-09 financial crisis, on a steady course, despite the tensions this entails, as became evident in the G-20 Finance Ministers meeting held in Bengaluru recently. Seventeen African countries abstained in the United Nations General Assembly vote to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. And South Africa, the African continent's most developed economy, took this independence from the G-7 one step further by scheduling a naval exercise with the Russian Navy and also China off the country's Indian Ocean coast that was held close to the very anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

A role for BRICS

Moving forward, there is little doubt that the BRICS group — that in many ways embodies the New South that has emerged in the new century — has the potential to play a critical role in furthering some sort of a mediated solution to the Ukraine conflict. Brazil, under the leadership of its President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, has indicated its interest in promoting a peaceful solution. China has come up with its own peace plan. In turn, precisely because of its pivotal position, very much holding the balance in the international balance of power, India is in a privileged position to act as a peace broker. This is what ANA is all about. Not passive neutrality, as some would have us believe, but embodying a pro-active attitude aimed at solving problems and generating the badly needed solutions our troubled world needs.

In the end, what we have on the table are two very different proposals to deal with this tragic war that has brought so much mayhem and suffering to the people of Ukraine. One of them is "to do what it takes" to bring about a Ukrainian victory and "weaken Russia permanently"; the other is to look for a mediated outcome, a peace agreement that would necessarily entail a compromise solution acceptable to both parties. As to which one will prevail will depend in part on the ability of the Global South not to let itself be drawn into this conflict, but rather aim for a mediated outcome.

This article is adapted from a paper the writer presented at a conference held at the India International Centre, "Connected Histories, Shared Present : Cross-Cultural Experiences between Latin America and the Caribbean and India".



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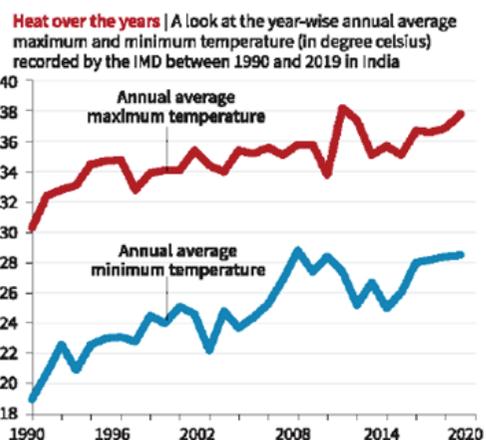
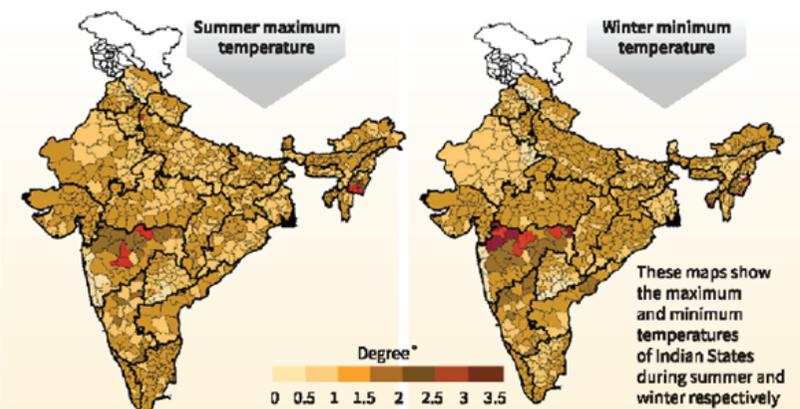
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IS HEAT IN INDIA SET TO GET WORSE?

Getting hotter by the year

The climate crisis is no longer a distant event that might happen in the future. Extreme events such as record-high temperatures and heavy rainstorms are becoming more common.



Heat over the years | A look at the year-wise annual average maximum and minimum temperature (in degree celsius) recorded by the IMD between 1990 and 2019 in India

What does the CSTEP study on India's historical climate show? Has temperature increased in summer and winter? What about the diurnal temperature range? What are some of the innovative climate action strategies that one can emulate?

EXPLAINER

The story so far:

This year the month of February was the hottest so far since 1901 in India. According to a study in *The Lancet*, published in July 2021, with two decades of data (2000-2019), more than five million people died on average each year worldwide because of extreme temperatures. The Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that extreme heat events will grow with increasing global warming and that every increment of warming matters.

How much has temperature increased?

A study by the Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP) on the historical climate in India shows that temperature in India has been steadily increasing during both summer and winter. The recorded increase in maximum and minimum temperature over 30 years (1990-2019) is up to 0.9°C and 0.5°C, respectively.

Summer temperatures have increased by 0.5°C to 0.9°C in many districts in Punjab, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and the northeast. Likewise, winter temperatures have also increased by 0.5°C to 0.9°C in 54% of India's districts, with higher levels of warming in the

northern States compared to the southern States. This increasing heat is a cause of suffering and death in extreme cases. It undermines systems such as agriculture and other climate-sensitive sectors that support the livelihoods and well-being of people.

A joint report by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre on preparing for heatwaves state that an extreme-heat event that was likely to happen only once in every 50 years without the influence of humans on climate is now likely to happen five times with human-induced climate change in the same period. If the warming is under 2°C, such events will occur 14 times; if the warming is kept under 4°C, they will occur almost 40 times.

How much hotter can it get?

Climate projections for the districts of India by the CSTEP study for a 30-year period of 2021-2050 show that the maximum temperature during summer will increase even under a 'moderate emissions' scenario. The increase is higher under higher emissions scenarios — likely to be greater than 2°C and up to 3.5°C in over 100 districts and 1.5-2°C in about 455 districts. Even winter minimum temperatures are projected to increase by 0.5°C to 3.5°C in the future. While the highest warming of 2.5°C to 3°C is projected in fewer than 1% of the districts, an increase by 1°C to 1.5°C is projected in about 485 districts.

It is clear that both summer maximum and winter minimum temperatures will increase in the future. This can affect the growth of plants, ecological systems, and even the carbon economy as the extreme variations in temperature between days and nights will affect the quality of the soil.

The diurnal temperature range (DTR) — the variation between high air temperature and low temperature during a single day — is also changing. A December 2020 study supported by the Department of Science and Technology reported an alarming decline in DTR between 1991 and 2016 over the north-west parts of the Gangetic plain, and central India agro-climatic zones. This decline signifies an asymmetric increase in the minimum temperature compared to the maximum, which in turn increases the risk of heat stress. This also leads to drought, crop failure, and higher morbidity and mortality. The joint report by IFRC and others also state that in the near future, heat waves could meet and surpass the human threshold to withstand them physiologically and socially, leading to large-scale suffering, death, and migration. From an urban perspective, the combined effects of warming and urbanisation will cause a significant increase in the number of people at risk of extreme heat.

According to a 2019 International Labour Organization report, India is expected to lose 5.8% of working-hours in 2030 due to heat stress. The loss in agriculture and construction sectors will be 9.04%, which translates to 34 million full-time jobs. The July 2021 study suggests that future death rates caused by extreme heat could be staggeringly high by the end of the century, which is comparable in magnitude to all cancers or infectious diseases.

What should be done?

More than ever, it is imperative that States step up and share responsibility with other stakeholders to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction through improved early warning systems, creation of public awareness, and formulation of heat action plans.

In addition, we also need to consider innovative strategies to combat extreme heat, such as emergency cooling centres (similar to the ones in Toronto and Paris); survival guides that are strategically displayed to survive extreme heat or heat waves (like in Athens); white roofs (Los Angeles); green rooftops (Rotterdam); self-shading tower blocks (Abu Dhabi); and green corridors (Medellin). But most of all, it is crucial we prepare district-level heat hotspot maps so that different departments of a State and/or district can design long-term measures to reduce deaths due to extreme heat.

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HOW DID THE TREATY ON THE HIGH SEAS COME THROUGH?

What is the treaty on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)? How important are the high seas to human survival and well-being?

Last week, the UN member states agreed on a historic treaty for protecting marine life in international waters that lie outside the jurisdiction of any country. The 'breakthrough' followed talks led by the UN during the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) where negotiations were underway for the past two weeks. The treaty is yet to be formally adopted as members are yet to ratify it.

What are the high seas?

Parts of the sea that are not included in the territorial waters or the internal waters of a country are known as the high seas, according to the 1958 Geneva Convention on the High Seas. No country is responsible for the management and protection of resources on the high seas.

How important are the high seas?

The high seas account for more than 60% of the world's ocean area and cover about half of the Earth's surface, which makes them a hub of marine life. They are home to around 2.7 lakh known species, many of which are yet to be discovered. The high seas are fundamental to human survival and well-being.

However, these oceans absorb heat from the atmosphere, are affected by phenomena like the El Nino, and are also undergoing acidification — all of which endanger marine flora and fauna. Several thousand marine species are at a risk of extinction by 2100 if current warming and acidification trends continue. Anthropogenic pressures on the high seas include seabed mining, noise pollution, chemical spills and fires, disposal of untreated waste (including antibiotics), overfishing, introduction of invasive species, and coastal pollution. Despite the alarming situation, the high seas remain as one

of the least-protected areas, with only about 1% of it under protection.

How long did the process take?

In 1982, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, or UNCLOS was adopted. The Convention delineated rules to govern the oceans and the use of its resources. But there was no comprehensive legal framework that covered the high seas. As climate change and global warming emerged as global concerns, a need was felt for an international legal framework to protect oceans and marine life. After years of informal discussions, the UNGA decided in 2015 to develop a legally binding instrument within the framework of UNCLOS. Subsequently, the IGC was convened to frame a legal instrument on BBNJ. There were several hold-ups due to the COVID pandemic, hampering a timely global response. Last year, the European Union launched the High Ambition Coalition on BBNJ to finalise the agreement at the earliest.

What is the treaty?

The draft agreement of the 'High Seas Treaty' recognises the need to address biodiversity loss and degradation of ecosystems of the ocean. It places "30% of the world's oceans into protected areas, puts more money into marine conservation and covers access to and use of marine genetic resources," as per the United Nations.

An important negotiating point, and source of tension during the talks, was developing countries' access to benefits reaped from the commercialisation of resources (especially genetic resources) extracted from the ocean. The treaty has agreed to setup an access- and benefit-sharing committee to frame guidelines. It was also underlined that activities concerning marine genetic resources of areas on high seas should be in the interests of all States and for the benefit of humanity. They have to be carried out exclusively for peaceful purposes.

INDIA SENDING 20,000 TONNES OF WHEAT TO AFGHANISTAN VIA CHABAHAR

India will send its next consignment of wheat as aid to Afghanistan under the Taliban regime via Chabahar, the External Affairs Ministry said on Tuesday.

The decision, announced at the first meeting of the India-Central Asia Joint Working Group (JWG) on Afghanistan in Delhi, came after the agreement with Pakistan for sending the wheat over the land route expired, and talks on extending the time have failed to proceed.

While India had sent about 40,000 tonnes of the 50,000 tonnes promised after an agreement with the previous Imran Khan government, the shipments had to be called off after floods in Pakistan, and the time allowed by Pakistan ran out.

India has used the Chabahar route in the past, prior to 2021, to send shipments of wheat to Afghanistan
"To address the current humanitarian situation, Indian side announced its

partnership with UNWFP (UN World Food Programme) for the delivery of 20,000 tonnes of wheat for Afghan people through the Chabahar Port," the Ministry said in a statement after the meeting of senior officials and envoys of India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The JWG meeting comes more than a year after the India-Central Asia summit in January 2022, where the decision to hold a special contact group on Afghanistan was announced.

At the JWG, India also agreed to offer "customised capacity building courses" for UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) officials and cooperate on initiatives to counter drug trafficking and rehabilitation efforts for Afghan drug users, especially women.

The meet comes even as other Indian and Central Asian officials are taking part in a string of meetings of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation that India is hosting this year.

HOME AND AWAY

Migrant workers must feel safe and as integral part of the community

The rumours and fake news about migrant workers in Tamil Nadu being attacked have seen the quick intervention of the authorities, assuring the workers of their safety. Many workers, most from Bihar, have been seen at railway stations waiting to leave for their home State after a video clip of violence between two groups of migrant workers was interpreted as an attack on migrant workers by locals. In any case, some of the workers were planning to be home for Holi festivities. Even before the problem could snowball, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin did well to contact his Bihar counterpart Nitish Kumar. There has been quick follow up elsewhere too. The Tamil Nadu police filed cases against those spreading rumours, which included the editor of the Dainik Bhaskar, under various sections of the Indian Penal Code. A person has been arrested in Jamui district of Bihar for sharing a misleading video clip. The Bihar police have also found some videos and news reports to be misleading and fake. Officials from Bihar and Jharkhand have visited the migrant hubs of Coimbatore and Tiruppur, and industry representatives are doing their bit to reassure the workers.

The issue has, unfortunately, paved the way for chauvinistic politics

in Tamil Nadu and Bihar. The role that migrant workers play in different fields of economic activity in Tamil Nadu, particularly real estate, is well known. According to CREDAI Tamil Nadu, the migrant community oversees 85% of the work in big projects and 70% in medium-scale projects. It also has a visible presence in manufacturing, textiles, construction, and hospitality. A Tamil Nadu Labour Department survey in 2015 estimated that the State had around 11.5 lakh migrant workers. The episode has only highlighted the need for politicians to exercise caution and restraint when commenting on issues regarding migrant workers. Under the garb of protecting the interests of local people, many leaders have often denigrated migrant workers or held them responsible for problems such as locals facing unemployment. The message, as Mr. Stalin highlighted in his conversation with Mr. Nitish Kumar, that workers "who help in the State's development are our workers", should be internalised by all political parties across the spectrum. At the same time, the government, which has been rolling out welfare measures for the community, should include the supply of pulses and edible oil at concessional rates under the Public Distribution System, supplementing what is being given under the 'One Nation One Ration Card' scheme. An exclusive wing can be formed to address the issues and problems migrants

face. The government can also institute a fresh and comprehensive study of migrant workers and help in their integration with the local community, to make them feel at home.

CHATBOT GAFFES THAT EXPOSE THE CHINKS IN THE AI ARMOUR

That OpenAI's ChatGPT has received a lot of attention is well known by now. Recently, two journalists from the United States polling company, FiveThirtyEight, asked the artificial intelligence chatbot to create an 800-word piece regarding public perception of AI chatbots. "A 2021 survey by the Pew Research Center," the chatbot wrote in the article, "found that 71% of Americans believe it is generally a good thing for society if robots and computers become more capable and sophisticated, while only 27% believe this would be a bad thing." The 2021 Pew survey that ChatGPT was citing, however, was not found by the FiveThirtyEight journalists. When questioned, Pew's media team had the same problem. With regard to the growing use of artificial intelligence in daily life, the FiveThirtyEight team, however, discovered a 2021 Pew survey that came to the opposite conclusion. Only 18% of respondents said they were more excited than concerned, 37% said they were more concerned than excited, and 45% said they were both equally concerned and excited.

The downside

Clearly, AI-powered search engines could be inaccurate and biased. They may even lie blatantly. This is particularly concerning because society as a whole appears to be almost ready to coexist with AI. Within days of its launch, Samantha Delouya of Business Insider asked ChatGPT to rewrite a piece she had written on a Jeep factory in Illinois that was idling production because the cost of producing electric vehicles was rising. A nearly pitch-perfect piece was created by ChatGPT, except that it contained fake quotes from Jeep-maker Stellantis' CEO Carlos Tavares, which sounded convincingly like what a CEO might say when faced with the difficult decision to lay off workers.

But it was all made up.

People became aware that the chatbot Microsoft introduced to its Bing search engine was disseminating a variety of false information about the Gap, Mexican nightlife, the musician, Billie Eilish, and numerous other topics. As a result of the chatbot mania, Google had to introduce "Bard". Alphabet's shares plummeted by more than \$100 billion after Bard gave an "incorrect" answer in a demonstration. In 2016, Microsoft apologised after a Twitter chatbot, Tay, began generating racist and sexist messages. Meta's BlenderBot was telling journalists it had deleted its Facebook account after learning about the company's privacy scandals. There are other examples too.

The problem with bot logic

In an interview with Time magazine, OpenAI's chief technology officer Mira Murati said the bot "may make up facts" as it writes sentences. She called

this a "core challenge". But what are the reasons for such "hallucinations"? ChatGPT generates its responses by predicting the logical next word in a sentence, she said; but what is logical to the bot may not always be accurate.

In reality, AI models are based on vast amounts of digital text that are extracted from the Internet. This content contains a significant quantity of untruthful, biased and toxic materials that may be a bit outdated and that are subsequently inherited by AI models. These technologies do not directly copy text from the Internet when they generate it. And, importantly, they do not have any human-like concept of "true" or "false". Yet, incorrect input may not be the only reason for such AI-generated untruths. "Even if they learned solely from text that was true," Cade Metz, a technology correspondent, wrote in a recent article in The New York Times, "they might still produce untruths."

A personal experience

Well, here is a snapshot of my personal experience. The most well-known "living" Bengali novelists are Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Samaresh Majumdar, Sunil Gangopadhyay, and Subodh Ghosh, said ChatGPT in response to my query. I immediately pointed out that Sunil Gangopadhyay died in 2012, whereas Subodh Ghosh passed away in 1980. ChatGPT responded, "I apologize, my training data cutoff is 2021." But when I brought up the fact that they both passed away before 2021, it immediately responded, "I apologize for that error in my previous response... Thank you for bringing this to my attention."

Hence, these chatbots are currently platforms that can resemble human writing without making any commitment to the truth. They are entertaining, for sure. However, can we conduct any real business with them? Can one, for instance, rely on a chatbot to prepare teaching materials or news articles? In a piece, in mid-February, in the MIT Technology Review, Melissa Heikkilä, senior writer, argues that the technology is not simply ready to be employed in this way at this scale. She referred to large language model chatbots as "notorious bulls***ters" because they frequently convey falsehoods as facts. "They are excellent at predicting the next word in a sentence, but they have no knowledge of what the sentence actually means," she wrote.

Will they be able to acquire such "knowledge"? Will they ever be reasonably truthful? Maybe to some extent, with further training and development. Finally, will they ever comprehend the notion of commitment or the distinction between the truth and lies, though?

CHALLENGING DOGMA

The threat from stray dogs must be framed as a public health issue

The newspaper rule of thumb is that 'dog-bites-man' stories are not newsworthy. However, with a nearly 1.5 crore stray dog population (2019 livestock census), and a dubious distinction of being the world's dog-bite-and-rabies-capital, India's 'stray dog menace' has a steady presence in the media ecosystem, to the point of being anaesthetising. Occasionally, this stupor is broken by the macabre. An infant in a Rajasthan hospital was reportedly taken away by stray dogs, while strays attacked a four-year-old, with fatal results, which was captured by CCTV cameras, in Telangana. Both incidents constitute only a fraction of the many dog attacks. Despite the acknowledgement of the crisis by States, the Centre, the judiciary, municipalities, and non-governmental organisations, the problem festers.

Dogs have a unique relationship with man's evolutionary history — one of companionship. This poses a moral dilemma of being responsible for their welfare but also confronting the vagaries of their evolution from wolves and their territorial instincts. While by no means a conundrum unique to India, much of the world has drawn the line by de-recognising the rights of stray animals: if leashed and registered, human custodians are obliged to take care of them. If not, the

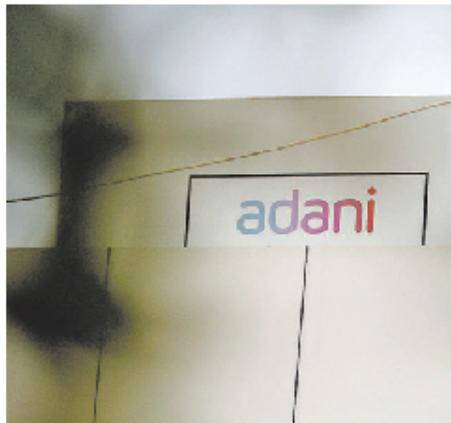
state — as a last resort — is encumbered to euthanise them, in the interest of public health. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act and the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2001 (being updated), while aimed at limiting the stray population, do nothing to improve public safety. The proposed draft rules, or the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2022, only put forth procedural changes in sterilisation and vaccination, permit only "incurably ill and mortally wounded" dogs to be euthanised, which is what existing rules permit, and make leaders of resident welfare associations responsible for feeding strays in pockets. The PCA and ABC rules acknowledge that unchecked strays must be restrained. However, they do not factor in the magnitude of the problem: that there is nearly one stray for every 100 Indians; that India lacks the infrastructure and mechanism to ensure that the most vulnerable (the poor and their children) are able to access treatment, and that expecting dog numbers to reduce on their own with sterilisation and vaccination is a pipe dream. India has committed to eliminate rabies by 2030, but without first framing the threat from stray dogs as a public health crisis, India's poorest will continue to see their right to safe public spaces culled at the altar of callous activism.

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ADANI PREPAYS ₹7,374 CRORE OF SHARE-BACKED FINANCING

Paring pledges

The Adani Group is paring the level of debt raised through pledges of promoter stakes as it seeks to bolster balance sheets



- In February, group had prepaid ₹9,200 crore worth loans to release shares pledged by promoters

- Latest prepayment of financing done ahead of maturity date of April 2025

- Group says move consistent with promoters' commitment to prepay all share backed financing before March 2023

The Adani Group on Tuesday said it had prepaid share-backed financing of ₹7,374 crore as the conglomerate tries to recover from U.S. based short seller Hindenburg Research's scathing report on its businesses. Earlier last month, amidst a rout in its stocks, the group had prepaid ₹9,200 crore worth loans to release shares pledged by the promoters.

"In continuation of promoters' commitment to reduce the overall promoter leverage backed by Adani listed company shares... we have prepaid share backed financing of ₹7,374 crore ahead of its latest maturity in April 2025," the conglomerate said in a media statement.

With the latest prepayment of loans to various banks and financial institutions, 155 million shares in Adani Ports, 31 million shares in Adani Enterprises, 36 million shares in Adani Transmission, and 11 million shares in Adani Green will be released.

The group said that the move was consistent with promoters' commitment to prepay all share backed financing before March 2023, as part of strengthening its balance sheets.

Hindenburg had accused the group of malpractices and flagged the high level of debt.

Conglomerate says move consistent with commitment to reduce 'overall promoter leverage' and strengthen the balance sheets; Hindenburg had in its report flagged the group's high level of debt

CHINA JAN.-FEB. EXPORTS, IMPORTS DIP AGAIN AS GLOBAL DEMAND TRIPS



A fall in China's exports for the January-February period pointed to continued weakness in demand for the country's products, backing government concerns that a global slowdown will be felt at home. Imports dropped, too, government data showed, also partly reflecting weak foreign demand, since the country brings in parts and materials from abroad for many of its exports.

Exports in the two months were 6.8% lower than a year before, after a 9.9% annual fall seen in December. Imports were down by 10.2%. December imports had been 7.5% lower than a year earlier.

Inflation impact

"Given the high inflation in the U.S. and Europe, demand from there should keep weakening, which also dampens the processing demand in China," said Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at ING.

Commerce Minister Wang Wentao on Thursday cautioned that downward pressure on China's imports and exports would increase significantly this year, because of the risk of a global recession and weakening external demand.

China has set a target for gross domestic product growth this year of about 5%, after the economy, the world's second largest, grew 3% in 2022, one of its slowest rates in decades.

FED LIKELY NEEDS TO RAISE RATES HIGHER, POSSIBLY FASTER: POWELL

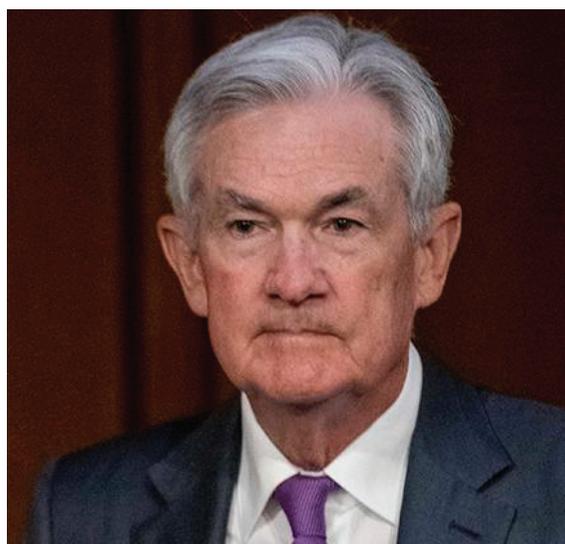
The Federal Reserve will likely need to raise interest rates more than expected in response to recent strong data and is prepared to move in larger steps if the 'totality' of incoming information suggests tougher measures are needed to control inflation, Fed Chair Jerome Powell told U.S. lawmakers.

The remarks were his first since inflation unexpectedly jumped in January and the U.S. government reported an unusually large rise in payroll jobs for that month.

While some of that unexpected economic strength may have been due to warm weather, Mr. Powell said that the Fed was cognisant it may also be a sign the U.S. central bank needs to do more to temper inflation.

The Fed will hold its next policy meeting on March 21-22, with the release this Friday of the government's monthly jobs report and an inflation report next week.

Inflation has declined since Mr. Powell's last appearances in Congress. After topping out at 9.1% in June, the Consumer Price Index slid to 6.4% in January; the separate Personal Consumption Expenditures price index, which the Fed uses as the basis for its 2% target, peaked at 7% in June and had fallen to 5.4% as of January.





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