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MODI LANDS IN U.S. CAPITAL, TO MEET BIDEN TODAY



Global stage: Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a yoga session at the UN headquarters in New York on Wednesday. PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Washington DC on a wet Wednesday afternoon to kick off the main part of his first state visit to the United States. Some 200 of his supporters had gathered outside the Willard Hotel in the capital to greet Mr. Modi upon his arrival from New York, where he spent the night.

Mr. Modi walked up to the crowd and shook hands before heading off to Virginia for his first official engagement in the city — a visit with First Lady Jill Biden to the National Science Foundation. The Prime Minister and the First Lady were scheduled to participate in a moderated conversation with students, with a focus on workforce training.

Mr. Modi was scheduled to hold meetings with business leaders as per his schedule and have a private dinner with the Bidens at the White House. Earlier in the day, in what the government sees as an exercise of India's soft power, Mr. Modi led a yoga session at the United Nations headquarters to mark the International Day of Yoga, a UN-designated day for yoga since 2014.

The main part of the state visit is scheduled for Thursday, when Mr.

Modi will be formally welcomed to the White House and where he will hold bilateral talks with U.S. President Joe Biden. The White House also announced a joint press appearance with the two leaders, and said they will "take questions from the press". Mr. Modi does not normally engage in interactive press sessions on his foreign visits.

The Prime Minister's presence in Washington and the U.S.-India relationship will be commemorated with a state dinner on Thursday evening.

Series of meetings

On Tuesday, shortly after arriving in Manhattan, Mr. Modi met with people from academia, think tanks and business, including the founder of electric car company Tesla Inc and commercial space exploration company SpaceX, Elon Musk, Nobel laureate and economist Paul Romer and author Nassim Nicholas Taleb. He also met with a group from academia including presidents and deans of U.S. universities and business schools as well as individuals in the health care sector.

Significantly, Mr. Modi also met with Robert Thurman, who is a Professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist studies at Columbia University (and father of actor Uma Thurman) as well as actor Richard Gere, both active and influential names in the cause of the preservation of Tibetan culture and freedom. Mr. Gere joined Mr. Modi for his yoga session on Wednesday.

Mr. Modi invited Mr. Musk, who also owns Twitter, to explore investment opportunities in India in the electrical mobility and commercial space sectors, the Ministry of External Affairs readout of their meeting said. Mr. Modi said he and Mr. Musk had broad discussions from "energy to spirituality".

Mr. Musk said India had "more promise than any large country in the world", and said he was a "fan" of Mr. Modi. He also indicated his keenness to invest in India.

"We don't want to jump the gun on an announcement, but I think it's quite likely that it will be a significant investment, a relationship with India," he said..

"One cannot just apply America to Earth," Mr. Musk told India Today after his meeting with Mr. Modi, as he responded to Twitter founder Jack Dorsey's assertion that Twitter was threatened by the government with raids and a shutdown if it did not act on accounts the government found problematic. "If we don't obey local government laws then we will get shut down," Mr. Musk said adding that Twitter will try and support "the freest speech" that is possible within the limits of the law. Mr. Musk said not obeying the local rules might mean Twitter getting blocked and its staff getting arrested.

MEITEI BODY FILES PLEA TO DEFER HEARING ON APPEAL AGAINST ORDER

Ground situation: Army and police personnel patrol through Kanto Sabal village near Imphal on Tuesday. AFP

The Meitei Tribes Union had sought a review of the March 27 order; on Monday, the court issued notices to the Centre and the State govt.

Members of the Meitei Tribes Union (MTU) have filed a petition to defer the hearing in the appeal filed against the contentious March 27 order of the Manipur High Court, which became the immediate trigger for the ethnic violence that has riven the State for over a month-and-a-half now.

The organisation was the first to approach the High Court and secure an order directing the State to recommend the Meiteis' inclusion in the ST list.

Soon after the violence began, the All Manipur Tribal Union filed an appeal against the March 27 order, which was opposed by the MTU and its representatives in the court.

In the second week of June, MTU representatives filed a petition to review the March 27 order. As a result of this, the Division Bench of the High Court hearing the appeal said last week that it would wait for an order on the review petition.

With a Bench of the Acting Chief Justice M.V. Muralidharan admitting the review



petition for hearing on Monday (this week) and issuing notices to the Centre and the State government, the MTU filed an application to defer the appeal hearing, citing this development. Justice Muralidharan had also authored the contentious March 27 order.

In the March 27 order, Justice Muralidharan had ordered the State government to reply to the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry on a request for including

Meiteis on the ST list. In addition, he had also directed the State government to consider the inclusion expeditiously.

This latter part of the order has been called into review by the MTU, which has argued that they had only sought for a direction to the State to reply to the Union government and nothing more.

The review petition filed by the MTU has been listed for next hearing on July 5.

MORE HIT THAN MISS IN INDIA-NEPAL TIES

On his return to Kathmandu after concluding his four-day official visit to India, Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' described it as "successful". He has reason to be satisfied. This is Prachanda's third stint as Prime Minister and compared to his earlier official visits in 2008 and 2016, the visit in 2023 has delivered many more concrete outcomes. But what is more important is that many controversial issues were successfully skirted.

Prachanda's politics

Under Prachanda's leadership, the Maoist Centre had fought the elections last year in coalition with the Nepali Congress (NC). There was a falling out over claims to the post of Prime Minister, and Prachanda switched sides to team up with the K.P. Sharma Oli-led UML. Prachanda was sworn in as Prime Minister on December 26. However, the NC decided to support Prachanda in a vote of confidence, suggesting that since he had emerged as a consensus Prime Minister supported by 268 members in a 275-member House, he should also go for a national consensus apolitical President. Though Prachanda had earlier agreed to support UML candidates for the post of President (due for election in March) and Speaker (in return for making him Prime Minister), he began to backtrack.

Relations between Mr. Oli and Prachanda soured with Mr. Oli accusing Prachanda of 'betrayal' and Prachanda claiming that he wanted to ensure political stability by taking all parties along. The opportunistic Oli-Prachanda alliance collapsed and by end-February, the UML withdrew support. In order to stay in power, Prachanda went back to the NC, ready to support its candidate for President. On March 20, NC returned the favour by helping Prachanda win a fresh vote of confidence, with the UML sulking in the opposition.

A complex power-sharing arrangement has been worked out with Prachanda continuing as Prime Minister for two years, followed by the Madhav Nepal (CPN-Unified Socialist) for a year, and then the NC leader, Sher Bahadur Deuba, for the remaining two years. Nepal's transition to a federal republic (it began in 2008 with the abolition of the monarchy and the election of a new Constituent Assembly) has been politically tumultuous, but largely peaceful. Following the adoption of a new Constitution in 2015, two rounds of elections have been held, in 2017 and last November. Hopefully, the current coalition has enough incentive to hold together, providing an opportunity to the government to focus on the economy.

During his path-breaking visit to Nepal in August 2014, Prime Minister Modi had invoked 'neighbourhood first' to denote a new beginning in relations. To highlight the focus on connectivity, he coined the acronym HIT, covering Highways, Infoways, and Transways. However, relations took a downturn in 2015 with the economic blockade. Repairing the relationship has been a slow process but results are now visible, leading Mr. Modi to recall and revive the old acronym.

Hydropower cooperation

For years, there have been statements about cooperation in the hydropower sector, but, gradually, things are looking up. Nepal is endowed with an economically viable potential of 50,000 MW of hydropower, but till a decade ago, had an installed capacity of barely 1,200 MW, making it dependent on electricity imports from India.

Today, Nepal has an installed capacity of 2,200 MW, and in season, can export power to India. A 400 KV transmission is now operational. In 2021, Nepal made a modest beginning by exporting 39 MW; the following year it went up to 452 MW, earning Nepali rupees 11 billion in export earnings. In the lean season, Nepal does import power from India but its dependence has dropped from 20% to 10% during the last five years.

Both sides have finalised a long-term power trade agreement targeting the export of 10,000 MW within a 10-year time frame. The 900 MW Arun III project started in 2018 by the SJVN (formerly the Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam) will be operational later this year.

In addition, it signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the 695 MW Arun IV project last year. The National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) signed two projects last year — a total of 1,200 MW. During the visit, announcements were made about the SJVN signing the 669 MW Lower Arun project and the NHPC Limited, the 480 MW Phukot-Karnali projects.

To keep pace, work has begun on a second high voltage transmission line between Butwal and Gorakhpur; two more have been planned under a line of credit of \$679 million. By agreeing to the Nepali demand for the facility to export electricity to Bangladesh using the Indian grid, India has highlighted the prospects for sub-regional cooperation.

To facilitate the movement of goods and people, the Rupaidiha-Nepalgunj Integrated Check Post was inaugurated, work begun on the Sunauli-Bhairahawa integrated check post and an MoU signed for another at Dodhara Chandni. There is a plan to extend the Jaynagar-Kurtha railway line inaugurated last year, while more links are to be taken up. After the Motihari-Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline was operationalised in 2019, work has begun to extend it to Chitwan and an MoU for a new pipeline between Jhapa and Siliguri signed, which includes terminals and other infrastructure. Negotiations on these projects have been time consuming; the challenge is to ensure their implementation on time.

Avoiding irritants

The fact that both sides successfully avoided controversial issues and public disagreements went a long way in keeping the focus on economic ties and ensuring that the Prachanda visit was successful. Of the three difficult issues, two are of recent origin and the third is a legacy issue.

The latest issue is the Agnipath scheme that impacts the recruitment of Gurkha soldiers into the Indian Army's Gurkha regiments, a practice that began in 1816 by the British Indian Army. This was continued under a 1947 treaty based on 'equal treatment'. The Agnipath revision of the terms needs to be discussed between the two armies and the defence and finance officials concerned. But a resolution is possible given the traditional ties between the two Services.

The second is the Kalapani boundary issue that was deliberately stoked as a nationalist cause by Mr. Oli in 2020, when his position as Prime Minister was under threat. A constitutional amendment was pushed through and Nepal's map changed unilaterally. Resolving this will need time because a lasting solution will need political wisdom and understanding.

The legacy issue is the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950. In Nepal, conviction has taken root that the Treaty is unfair as it was imposed somehow. This ignores the reality that in 1949, the Nepali regime was perturbed by the Maoist revolution in China and the subsequent takeover of Tibet. It sought an understanding with India, and the 1950 Treaty, in large measure, reflects the provisions of the 1923 Treaty between Nepal and British India. In fact, the Treaty enables Nepali nationals 'equal treatment' in terms of employment and permits them to apply for any government job, except for the Indian Foreign Service, the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service. Nepali nationals work in the Indian private and public sector, have joined the revenue services, and in the Army, have risen to become two-star generals.

The demand to review the Treaty was officially raised first in 1995; in 1996, it was on the agenda of the Foreign Secretary's meeting. Subsequent summits have included a reference to 'review and update' it, but substantive talks have not taken place. However, some of the cobwebs of history need to be cleared so that discussions can take place in an objective manner that addresses the concerns of both countries.

For the present, as Mr Modi and Prachanda have demonstrated, the focus on HIT will go a long way in rebuilding trust.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

WILL U.S. FED RESUME THE RATE HIKE CYCLE?

The U.S. Federal Reserve (Fed) last week paused its rate hike cycle by deciding to hold interest rates after ten rate hikes since March 2022. The central bank kept its target for the benchmark federal funds rate between 5% and 5.25% until its next policy meeting. Many analysts, however, expect the Fed to resume its rate hikes and some even expect the federal funds rate to hit 6% soon.

What does a pause in rate hikes mean?

Central banks around the world try to steer their economies primarily by targeting interest rates at which lending/borrowing happens in the short-term credit markets. For instance, if a central bank wants to lower short-term interest rates, it can enter the market where banks borrow funds for their short-term needs with fresh funds, bid up the price of these loans and thus lower interest rates. The fresh money injected into the banking system, in turn, would tend to percolate into the economy and cause prices to rise in the wider economy.

A central bank can thus use monetary policy to influence prices in the wider economy. And keeping inflation within a certain target range is a major goal of central banks.

Another policy goal that central banks try to meet along with the inflation target is to keep the economy operating at its full capacity wherein all resources are fully employed. Many economists believe that there is a trade-off between inflation and unemployment. According to this framework, if inflation falls too low, this can cause a rise in unemployment and hence unused capacity. So, the agenda of most central banks is to keep inflation up at a certain level at which the economy functions at full capacity. Inflation above a certain level, however, is seen as having no positive effect on economic activity.

Why did the Fed decide to hold rates steady?

U.S. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said that the central bank is waiting for signs that there has been a decisive slowdown in inflation before it decides on further actions. It should be noted that the Fed began raising interest rates after inflation hit multi-decade highs as the U.S. economy slowed down due to COVID-19 lockdowns and the central bank responded by flooding the economy with dollars. While inflation has dropped from a peak of 9.1% in June last year to 4% in May this year, it is still higher than the Fed's stated target of keeping inflation within 2%. And even though U.S. unemployment has risen slightly to 3.7% in May this year, it has witnessed a steady fall since the highs seen during the pandemic. In other words, the labour market does not seem to be heavily affected by the Fed's rate hikes since last year. Moreover, the effects of monetary policy usually take time to impact prices in the wider economy. So, the Fed may be cautious after a series of ten rate hikes about allowing interest rates to rise too much and too soon. A rapid withdrawal of monetary support can cause prices to



Taking a break: Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell speaking at the Federal Reserve in Washington, D.C., on June 14. AFP

What is meant by a pause in rate hikes? Did the labour market get affected by the Fed's rate hikes? Why did they pause the cycle suddenly? Is there a decisive slowdown in inflation? What were the factors that led to the U.S. Fed to take such an action?

undershoot the Fed's inflation target, something the U.S. central bank may not want.

What lies ahead?

The Fed's rate hike pause is no guarantee that there won't be any future rate hikes in the short term.

Other western central banks have continued to raise rates after a pause, and major central banks such as the European Central Bank and the Bank of England continue to raise interest rates as inflation continues to be a challenge in their economies.

It is hard to predict the trajectory of economic indicators such as growth and inflation, or even the response of central banks with any level of certainty since there are multiple complex variables at play at the same time.

It can only be said that the U.S. Fed's actions are likely to be influenced by several factors including inflation, economic growth and political compulsions ahead of the U.S. Presidential elections next year.

WHAT IS THE NEW COLLECTIVE QUANTIFIED GOAL?

What was the earlier commitment by developed countries to developing nations? Was that target achieved? Why do we need a fresh process/target for climate financing?

The recently-concluded Bonn climate conference in Germany, expected to outline the political agenda for the crucial end-of-year Conference Of Parties-28 (COP28) in Dubai, was critical for reviewing and reforming the climate finance architecture. The conference has, according to Teresa Anderson, ActionAid International's Global Lead on Climate Justice, "exposed a gaping hole in the funding needed to pay for climate action". This comes from a long standing impasse between developed and developing countries, over where money for climate change policies should come from and in what form.

What is the NCQG?

A commitment of '\$100 billion per year till 2020' to developing nations from developed countries was a target set at the Conference of Parties (COP) in 2009. But estimates since then show addressing climate change may cost billions, and even, trillions of dollars. Therefore, the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement agreed on setting a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) for climate financing prior to 2025 — a reference point which accounts for the needs and priorities of developing nations. The NCQG is thus, termed the "most important climate goal". It pulls up the ceiling on commitment from developed countries, is supposed to anchor the evolving needs and priorities of developing countries based on scientific evidence and should respond "to the ever-increasing sums of funding necessary for Loss and Damage in response to failed and/or delayed financial support", climate groups note.

Why do we need a new finance goal?

Out of the promised \$100 billion per year, developed countries provided \$83.3 billion in 2020, as per a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. These figures may be misleading and inflated by as much as 225%, an Oxfam analysis found, as "there is too much dishonest and

shady reporting". Moreover, the \$100 billion target set in 2009 was seen more as a political goal, since there was no effort to clarify the definition or source of 'climate finance'.

The economic growth of developed countries has come at the cost of high carbon emissions, and thus they are obligated to shoulder greater responsibility. While funds available for climate finance have quantitatively increased, they are inaccessible, privately sourced, delayed and not reaching countries in need. A recent study by the Centre for Science and Environment found roughly 5% of climate finance comes from grants; the rest through loans and equity which burden developing countries with a "debilitating" debt crisis. Countries most in need of finances have to wait years to access money and pay interest high rates, thus increasing their debt burden.

What do developed countries say?

Developed countries argue that NCQG must be viewed as a "collective goal" for all developed and developing countries. Experts worry this argument pushes the "net zero" pathways onto developing countries, which cannot feasibly pay for mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, along with sustainably developing key elements of infrastructure. Countries also argue for mobilising private-sector investments and loans as the critical component of climate finance. The Global Stocktake at COP28 will chart a pathway for the long road of climate action.

What is at stake in 2023?

Countries are on a tight deadline to agree upon the NCQG ahead of 2024. There's no official number yet, but a global transition to a low-carbon economy requires investments of at least \$4 trillion to \$6 trillion a year, as per last year's Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan. Some argue that instead of

identifying a single aggregate figure, the NCQG could also set separate targets (or sub-goals) for focus areas such as mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. The aim is to focus on scaling up concessional financing, stopping debt

creation and allowing NCQG to be more of a "process" rather than a goal towards equitable and people-led transition.

ALLIES VOW BILLIONS TO REBUILD UKRAINE AT LONDON CONFERENCE



Real projects: Volodymyr Zelensky delivering a speech via videolink at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in London.AFP

The World Bank estimates the cost of the reconstruction at more than \$400 billion, a figure rising daily alongside the human toll; Zelensky, on video, says his country needed action, not just pledges

Ukraine's allies pledged several billion dollars in non-military aid on Wednesday to rebuild its war-ravaged infrastructure, fight corruption and help pave the country's road to membership in the European Union.

Stressing the vast scale of the task, diplomats and political leaders at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in London urged private-sector companies to invest and revive an economy battered by almost a year and a half of war.

Delegates from more than 60 countries attended the conference, which is both a fundraising forum and a message to Russia that Ukraine's Western supporters are in it for the long haul.

The World Bank has estimated the cost of the reconstruction at more than \$400 billion, a figure rising daily alongside the human toll of Russia's invasion.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky, who addressed delegates by video, said his country needed action, not just pledges.

"We must move from vision to agreements and from agreements to real projects," he said.

BIDEN EQUATES XI WITH 'DICTATORS'; CHINA PROTESTS

Joe Biden

U.S. President Joe Biden on Tuesday equated his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping with "dictators" as he addressed a Democratic Party donors reception in the presence of journalists.

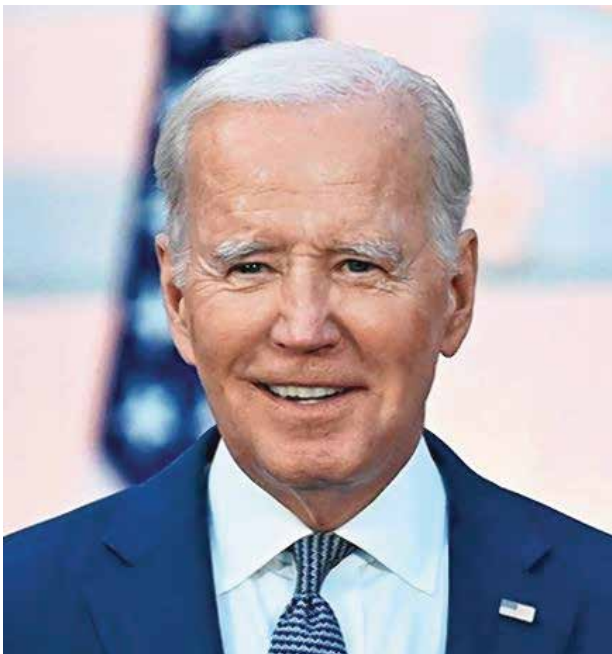
Speaking at a fundraiser in northern California, Mr. Biden said Mr. Xi had been angered over an incident in February when a Chinese balloon — which Washington says was used for spying — flew over the United States before being shot down by American military jets.

"The reason why Xi Jinping got very upset in terms of when I shot that balloon down with two box cars full of spy equipment is he didn't know it was there," Mr. Biden said.

"I'm serious. That was the great embarrassment for dictators, when they didn't know what happened." Mr. Biden's remarks come days after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken concluded a visit to Beijing aimed at re-establishing lines of communication in order to avoid conflict between the two global powers.

Responding to Mr. Biden's comments on Wednesday, Beijing slammed them as an "open political provocation".

"The relevant remarks by the U.S. side are extremely absurd and irresponsible, they seriously violate basic facts, diplomatic protocol and China's political dignity," Foreign Ministry spokesperson told a briefing.



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INDUSTRY EYES ACCESS TO GATI SHAKTI PORTAL TO BOOST CAPEX IN CONNECTIVITY

Multimodal multiplier

Industry says the portal's data spanning multiple ministries could help direct investments into key connectivity projects



- Platform brings together 16 ministries to spur an integrated approach to projects
- Access to data, which include detailed maps and economic, social infrastructure, is currently restricted to Central, State agencies
- Idea has been received without any major pushback, says CII's Dinesh

CII moots that government could share information from portal after blocking out 'sensitive' data so as to facilitate greater private capital investments in infrastructure projects; data can help improve planning especially in logistics, allied sectors

Industry is hopeful that the government may soon agree to open up access to the PM Gati Shakti portal developed for planning multi-modal infrastructure projects, thus helping facilitate greater private capital investments especially in connectivity projects that are seen as critical to sustain the economy's momentum.

Unveiled in October 2021, the PM Gati Shakti platform brings together 16 ministries, including Railways and Roadways, so as to spur an integrated and coordinated approach to planning and implementing infrastructure connectivity projects. So far, access to the portal's data, which include detailed maps with existing economic and social infrastructure as well as upcoming projects, is restricted to Central and State government agencies.

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) president R. Dinesh, who is also the executive vice chairman of TVS Supply Chain Solutions, told The Hindu that some access to the portal's information

trove would help not just logistics firms plan operations, but also enable fresh capital spending across allied sectors.

"We are saying [to the government] that we want access to the data," Mr. Dinesh said. "And of course, you can block the sensitive data... and the rest should be made available. That can be a big benefit for all of the planning of the

private sector as well. And that will actually help attract more capex and outside funding," he added.

"I think that has been received and I hope it will happen soon... I don't think there's any major pushback to the idea," the CII president said.

AT SPIEF, PUTIN SEEKS ALTERNATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Alternative partnership: Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (middle) at the SPIEF in St. Petersburg. Reuters

As the war in Ukraine drags on, taking a heavy toll on both sides of the frontline, Russia, faced with the biggest standoff with the West in its modern history, keeps looking for alternative economic and geopolitical partnerships to navigate the "challenging times". At the 26th edition of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), held last week in Russia's second-largest city, the Kremlin made its message clear to the entire world: the economy is holding up despite unprecedented Western sanctions.

This year's "wartime" SPIEF turned out less international and lavish than its past editions, for obvious reasons, even though organisers claimed the participation of over 17,000 people from 130 countries, including high-ranking officials from the UAE, Algeria, Armenia, Cuba and delegations from China, India and Brazil.

Elite gathering

The SPIEF used to be called "Russian Davos" as it was probably the only such elite gathering of global business community leaders in this part of the world.

Except Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó, who made his appearance at the forum and addressed one of the key sessions on energy security, high-ranking delegates and CEOs from the West were missing at SPIEF. So were the international media.

This year, the only international leader addressing the plenary session on the stage was Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune. Sitting in the audience was the President of the UAE, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who had a personal meeting with the Russian leader on the sidelines of the SPIEF.

In his opening speech, Mr. Putin did not mention Ukraine even once, instead focused on Russia's economic growth despite all odds — the economy contracted 2.1% in 2022, which was way less than the 7-10% decline projected by the Bank of Russia, and is forecast to grow by 0.8-1.2% this year. "Today, we can say in all confidence that the strategy chosen at the time by both the state



and Russian businesses [has] proved its worth. Positive macroeconomic trends are gaining momentum and becoming increasingly apparent," he said.

Payments and logistics indeed remain the key obstacles for Russia's trade with what it sees as friendly countries. Moscow is pushing the development of the Northern Sea route, which takes off at Russia's Murmansk and leads to Shanghai, and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a 7,200 km-long multimodal transport route connecting Russia's north with Iran and India via the Caspian Sea. According to Oleg Belozorov, CEO of the Russian Railways, the transit of goods via INSTC could reach over 100 million tonnes in seven years. In 2022, around 9mt of cargo were transported along the corridor — a 60% increase from the previous year.

According to Iranian Minister of Transport and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash, who spoke at the session on the INSTC, both Russia and

INDIA'S RUSSIAN OIL PURCHASES SCALE NEW RECORD IN MAY

India's rising imports of Russian oil hit a record high of about 1.95 million barrels per day (bpd) in May denting purchases from Iraq and Saudi Arabia, tanker data from sources showed.

India, the world's third biggest oil consumer and importer, buys more than 80% of its oil overseas. Its refiners have been gorging on Russian oil since the West imposed sanctions on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine.

Russian oil accounted for about 40% of India's crude imports in May, cutting imports from Iraq to a three-year low and from Saudi Arabia to their lowest since September 2021, an analysis of the data showed. India imported 8,01,400 bpd of Iraqi oil in May, down about 13.7% from April, while supply from Saudi declined 15% to 6,16,100 bpd.

Oil imports from Russia are expected to remain high, as its landed price remains far cheaper than West Asian crude. In April, the landed price of a tonne of oil from Russia was about \$500, equivalent to \$68.21/barrel using a conversion factor of 7.33, while that from Iraq cost \$570 and from Saudi Arabia was \$637.40, according to the government data.

Due to higher purchases of discounted Russian oil, the share of imports from West Asia — traditionally its top source — fell to an all-time low of about 39% in May, from 44% in April.

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'INDIA UNABLE TO FILL 30% OF CYBERSECURITY JOBS DUE TO SKILL GAP'

Although India had 40,000 job openings for cybersecurity professionals as of May 2023, 30% of these vacancies could not be filled due to huge skill shortage, reported TeamLease Digital, a subsidiary of TeamLease Services.

The demand for cybersecurity professionals has far exceeded supply, causing many businesses to struggle to recruit qualified personnel. Cybersecurity skill sets that are in high demand include data privacy, cloud security, AI security, and network security. Soft skills such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and collaboration were also most sought after.

Sunil Chemmankotil, CEO of TeamLease Digital, said that as India Inc. embraced digital infrastructure, the heightened vulnerability to cyber threats required a comprehensive approach to safeguarding the digital frontiers.

Enterprises in the country had experienced over 2,000 attacks every week in Q1 2023, marking an 18% increase compared with the previous year, found TeamLease Digital. The healthcare industry was a prime target, with 7.7% of attacks directed towards it.

OVERKILL

The Manipur High Court, on Tuesday, granted limited Internet access in designated places in the State after a petition seeking the restoration of net access. Shutdowns began following the violent conflagration on May 3 and there were extensions of restrictions since then, the last one being an extension order on Wednesday, till June 25. The request made is legitimate as shutdowns have a crippling effect on many an economic activity and livelihoods. Citizens have been unable to access vital services such as e-commerce-related activities, except for those who can get exemptions from the shutdowns with government permission. Violent incidents have occurred in the State since May 3 and relations between Meiteis and Kukis remain tense. But the orders seeking to extend the shutdown cite threats to "law and order" and the role of "anti-social elements" — a euphemism for extremists indulging in violent acts or the posting of violence-promoting material — rather than explicitly seeking to retain these bans because of a public emergency or in the interests of public safety, as required by Section 5(2) of the Telegraph Act, 1885 and Telegraph Rules. The Manipur government also told the High Court that the shutdowns were needed to block websites where inflammatory material could be published, but such a sledgehammer approach is clearly problematic.

The Supreme Court, in *Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India* (2020), had

held that an indefinite suspension of Internet services was in contravention to the law as freedom of speech and the freedom to carry out commercial work using the Internet was a fundamental right. It also held that such suspensions should adhere to the "principle of proportionality and must not extend beyond necessary duration". Continuing a dragnet suspension in Manipur in this fashion suggests that the government is merely using the shutdown as a substitute for enforcing law and order — another ploy that the Court had come down heavily upon in this judgment. The situation in Manipur can be tackled effectively by a regime that seeks to restore the confidence of all stakeholders, engages with civil society actors in restoring inter-community dialogue, isolates the extremists and pursues a step-by-step approach towards restoring peace and normalcy. But with a beleaguered Chief Minister at the helm — a leader who has lost the confidence of many of his colleagues — and the intransigence of many community representatives and their inability to rise above their ethnic identities to pursue peace, sporadic violence continues even as those displaced are unable to return home. This, however, does not lend to the continuation of the Internet shutdown that has been in place for over a month-and-a-half, and which must end.

HEAT AND STATE

In the brutal heatwave beating down on Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, one district in U.P., Ballia, reported the most deaths. The medical superintendent at the local government hospital was reportedly transferred after ascribing the deaths to the heat, followed by a visit by a State-appointed team to assess the local conditions. A member later told journalists that the team had expressed its doubts about the heat being a factor since the toll due to the same heatwave was lower in districts nearby. The member's statement is a timely reminder that a heatwave is only half heat, the other being bad public infrastructure and social security. Ballia's toll could be high because of, as the team suspects, contaminated water, or because the local people could not cool themselves. Heat's deadliness depends on an individual's general well-being, acclimatisation, physical exertion, comorbidities, location, relative humidity, and extent of heat exposure. But for all the complexity the interplay of these factors augurs, the fight against this mode of the climate crisis, which India is expected to suffer more often, can benefit considerably from some literacy and access to resources. Literacy needs to be rooted in a simple fact: heat is deadly when our bodies are unable to shed it as quickly as it accumulates. This can happen due to poor living conditions, adherence to caste- and gender-based strictures, or even in

overcrowded hospitals. Amenities that can help include access to drinking water, indoor ventilation, health care, regular work breaks, and protections against wage loss. If a person dies in a heatwave, it is only fair to ask whether he/she was able to access these amenities.

If U.P. and Bihar are to forge a better way forward vis-à-vis their heat response, they need to register all heat-related deaths, assign the cause, ensure the medical certificates of the cause of death (MCCDs) follow the proper codes of the most recent revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, and issue them. Next, the Office of the Registrar General should compile and release MCCD data every year to facilitate independent research and policy input and to prevent time-wasting disputes over official versus actual figures. However, the office has not released the corresponding reports for 2021 and 2022. In the 2020 report, which was uploaded only last year, Bihar assigned causes to just 3.4% of registered deaths — the worst among States. Not everyone who dies during a heatwave has died due to the heat, but only if good living conditions have been the norm. If they have not, the state is as much to blame as the heat.

SPARE A THOUGHT FOR PSYCHIATRIC CAREGIVERS TOO

According to National Health Mission estimates, 6%-7% of India's population suffers from mental disorders — i.e., one in four families is likely to have at least one member with a behavioural or mental health disorder. The situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic as long periods of isolation, the fear of losing loved ones, financial difficulty, and uncertainty about the future increased stress levels across social segments. Most of these cases remain untreated due to ignorance and social stigma. In the absence of visible proof of illness, deviations in behaviour are generally attributed to attitudinal issues, marital troubles, financial problems or job stress, while love affairs and examination stress are cited as the usual culprits in the case of teenage behavioural issues. Without proper diagnosis, the patient and their families keep suffering as mental health responses remain mired in myths, stigmas, and taboos.

Causes for caregiver stress

Over 90% of psychiatric patients in India live with their families. The

caregiver is under considerable stress because of the physical and emotional caregiving along with the social isolation, financial difficulties and troublesome behaviour of the patient. A patient's non-adherence to treatment, prevalent in such cases, further exacerbates caregiver stress. In larger families, the primary caregiver burden is shared among family members, but with reducing family sizes, the role falls on the spouse. Chronic mental illness in a nuclear household disrupts daily life and drains family resources. Moreover, women caregivers face challenges in balancing caregiving, career, child rearing, and household chores, and are less likely to receive informal support for psychiatric treatment.

Prolonged caregiving negatively impacts the psychological well-being of caregivers. Caregivers use various strategies to cope which include sharing, spirituality, hobbies, and self-gas lighting; but unhealthy coping mechanisms can negatively impact both caregivers and patients. Hence, the importance of caring for the family caregivers. Counselling services are currently provided to

caregivers on request. This is not sufficient as the situation of the caregiver is similar to that of the 'boiling frog' where the individual might not be aware of the emotional strain, and hence will not request for support.

Structured intervention is essential

The National Mental Health Programme and the decentralised District Mental Health Programme remain focused on the patient but neglect the caregiver. Given the prolonged distress experienced by caregivers, it is essential to introduce a structured intervention programme to educate and support the caregivers of psychiatric patients. It should educate them about the illness and their roles and responsibilities, leading to a better sense of control over their own life and helping to cope with the caregiver role. Studies in developed countries show that providing support to family caregivers at the onset of the psychiatric illness of loved ones is crucial for the success of the intervention. Successful intervention models include cognitive behavioural therapy, psychoeducational skill building, family counselling, and peer-support. In psychoeducational meetings with the families, the topics covered include a brief overview of the condition, current symptoms, early warning signals of relapse, available therapies and their effectiveness, safety of treatment, typical side-effects, treatment-related expenses, burden identification, and coping mechanisms. Caregivers receive behavioural interventions, counselling, and helplines to manage anxiety and stress.

A preliminary inquiry into the preparedness of health-care systems to provide caregiver support raises multiple concerns. A lack of trained specialists hinders cost-effective intervention model implementation. India has 43 State-run mental health institutions with 3,800 psychiatrists and 900 clinical psychologists

— i.e., one psychiatrist and psychologist for every four lakh and 16 lakh citizens, respectively. Insufficient budget allocation for mental health patients also raises the concerns of developing intervention for psychiatric care-givers.

The gaps in insurance

Though private mental health institutions provide some fillip, their services are expensive and beyond reach for many. Mental illnesses are excluded from the list of ailments covered by leading medical insurers in India. The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 provided a corrective step with the mandate to treat mental disorders on a par with physical disorders for insurance coverage. Government schemes provided by public sector insurance companies such as the flagship Ayushman Bharat provide coverage for mental disorders. However, coverage by private insurers remains limited.

Several non-governmental organisations and community movements such as Mindroot, Lonepack, and the White Swan Foundation have been engaged in community support work for people with mental illness and their caregivers. However, given the severity of the issue, their scale remains insignificant.

In the backdrop of reducing family size, increasing life expectancy and poor institutional support, the caregiver burden in case of psychiatric illnesses is expected to keep worsening. The lack of tailored interventions may negatively affect caregiver well-being and patient treatment participation. A comprehensive treatment of severe psychiatric illnesses in the future would need building effective partnerships between health-care professionals, informal caregivers, and psychosocial interventions, where required.

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