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South Asian Generation Next

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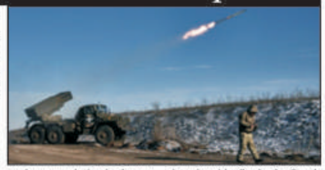
Ukrainian ambassador says 'ice' is breaking on allied arms shipments



Ukraine's ambassador to Canada says she thinks there has been a breakthrough in the supply of weapons being shipped to her embattled country, as Canada prepares to send a major air defence system and other allies provide more arms.

"I would call it the ice breaking, because a lot of kind of the weapons that the government of our partners and allies are supplying us now, we have been asking [for] since February 24," Yulia Kovaliv said in an interview on Rosemary Barton Live airing Sunday.

The United Kingdom recently announced it would send battle tanks to Ukraine, while Germany is facing pressure to make a similar commitment. Canada announced this week it would buy a National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAMS) for Ukraine, at a cost of $406 million.

"These are the clear signals that our partners and allies are standing firm with the Ukraine, as they've declared steadfast support, whatever it takes for as long as it takes," Kovaliv said.

The war in Ukraine is just over one month away from a full year of conflict. While Ukraine has been able to recapture much of the territory taken by Russia in its initial invasion, Russia controls significant parts of the south and east, where fighting continues.

Russia has argued that the supply of weapons to Ukraine by North American and European countries marks an escalation in the war. Russia itself recently shook up its military command, and Ukrainian intelligence claims the country could soon mobilize half a million new conscripts.

Attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure continue

Canada's announcement of the purchase of an air defence system comes as an intense Russian airstrike campaign targets Ukrainian electricity infrastructure. A Russian missile attack on an apartment building in Dnipro, meanwhile, killed upwards of 23 people, as the death toll continues to climb Sunday.

"NASAMS is one of the best-in-the-world air defence system and we do value this big support from the Canadian government," Kovaliv said.

The air defence system Canada is set to purchase is not yet in place. The head of Raytheon Technologies, one of the companies that produces NASAMS, has said it takes about two years to produce the system.

But Defence Minister Anita Anand told Barton in a separate interview airing Sunday that Canada was targeting a shorter timeline, noting they had purchased both the system and munitions at the same time.

The delivery "will occur as soon as possible, may involve multiple shipments and will be delivered as soon as possible.... We are not contemplating years at this point," Anand said. She added that a close partnership with the United States was a key factor in the purchase.

"We are working all together and we are hoping that it will be coming as soon as it is physically possible and what assurance we've got that the Canadian government from our side and from U.S. will put all the efforts to deliver it as quickly as as it possible," Kovaliv said.

Anand said she remained focused on procuring equipment for the Canadian military even as the government moves to support Ukraine.

"There's no question that we are examining capabilities that are needed across the board, including the Canadian Armed Forces," she said.

Trains, buses and trucks: How 2023 could be pivotal for hydrogen technology in Canada

As the Canadian Pacific Railway locomotive moves along the tracks in Calgary, something is clearly amiss.

It's the typical size and look that you'd expect, but what's absent is the low rumbling noise of the diesel engine.

Instead, this locomotive is powered by hydrogen fuel cell and battery technology as part of a trial by the railway to explore whether the low-emission vehicles are strong enough and reliable enough to potentially one day revolutionize operations at the company.

Over the last several years, there has been an increased focus on the potential for hydrogen to decarbonize many industries and help countries reach their climate goals, while revamping energy systems along the way.

The next 12 months will be critical, experts say, in understanding whether that vision could plausibly become a reality in the near future or remain part of the imagination for decades to come.

There is excitement in the Canadian industry about what 2023 will bring as several demonstration projects are set to take place, while construction will also begin on a massive new hydrogen production facility.

Testing underway

For CP Rail, the hydrogen locomotive completed its first "revenue trip" a few months ago with the expectation to have the trains operating in Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary by the end of 2023. The next step will be testing out the technology through the Rocky Mountains.

"It's a perfect test bed. If you can operate there: heavy haul, cold temperatures, the most challenging operational conditions I've ever experienced in my career. And if it works there, it will work everywhere," CP's chief executive,

Keith Creel, said during a speech at the RailTrends 2022 conference in November.

"If this proves its mettle and it shakes out through the very tough validation test we'll give it, [it will] truly be transformational for this industry."

Relying on hydrogen as a fuel source isn't a new concept, but technology is advancing to improve performance, at the same time as there is an increased focus on climate change around the world.

This year will mark the start of a few other experiments as hydrogen-powered buses and semi-trucks hit the road.

A pair of transit buses will transport passengers in Edmonton and nearby Strathcona County as part of a one-year pilot project.

New production plant

Meanwhile, a hydrogen fuelling station is under construction in Edmonton to allow the Alberta Motor Transport Association to test out semi-trucks on the province's highways. The organization is looking to offer up to four different truck models this year for local companies to try out.

"I think the next 12 months is largely a proof of concept," said David Layzell, an energy systems architect with the Transition Accelerator - a non-profit organization set up to help Canada reach its climate goals - and professor emeritus in biological sciences at the University of Calgary.

"We can actually make hydrogen cheaper than diesel fuel today," he said, although the challenge is the much higher cost of transporting hydrogen and constructing the fuelling station.

"We are only going to get those prices down by getting to scale," Layzell said.

Hydrogen has been around for a long time, but there is renewed enthusiasm for the sector as a way to jump-start the transition to a world reliant on low-carbon energy.

Hydrogen is an energy carrier, and experts say it can be used primarily for heating and as a fuel for transportation.

The amount of pollution associated with hydrogen depends on how it's made. For instance, if solar or wind facilities - rather than a coal power plant - produce the electricity that is used to create hydrogen, the emissions are relatively low.

Construction has just begun in northeast Edmonton on what is expected to be the largest net-zero hydrogen plant in the world by Air Products Canada. The $1.6-billion facility will use natural gas to produce hydrogen with the goal of sequestering 95 per cent of the emissions and store them underground.

"The challenge with hydrogen is a little bit of the chicken-or-the-egg challenge," said Kevin Krausert, chief executive of Avatar Innovations Inc., a Calgary-based firm that helps develop energy transition technologies.

"Who's going to build a major hydrogen facility if there's no demand for it, and who's going to build a whole bunch of hydrogen trucks or trains if there's no hydrogen to supply it? So you've got this sort of supply-demand challenge."

Construction of the Air Products facility, he said, begins to overcome that problem.

'Too little, too late'

There is momentum in the hydrogen sector in Canada, but some experts warn that the most critical question in the next 12 months is not so much about the technology itself but how willing governments are to support the industry.

"That is relative to what's going on to the south of us with the United States' policy supports that are very strong and very attractive and could take all the capital [investment] that we might spend up here and divert it southward," said Ed Whittingham, an Alberta-based public policy consultant.

The U.S. government's Inflation Reduction Act [IRA] includes significant subsidies to not only offset the cost of constructing a hydrogen facility but to subsidize its operations, among other funding programs.

In some cases, Whittingham said, up to 75 per cent of the cost to produce low-carbon hydrogen could be covered by the U.S. government.

"What really is going to determine whether hydrogen stays niche and stays small scale in Canada or whether it goes mainstream and Canada really becomes a serious competitor is our response to what the U.S. has done," he said.

"And it could be a case, frankly, of too little, too late."

The federal government is proposing a clean hydrogen investment tax credit to entice companies to develop new clean hydrogen projects. The tax credit will be worth at least 40 per cent for projects that meet certain labour and low-emission requirements.

In its 2022 fall economic statement, the federal government warned that the subsidies offered in the United States were more generous and increase the challenge to attract investment north of the border.

"Canada will need to do even more to secure our competitive advantage and continue creating opportunities for Canadian workers," the report said. "Without new measures to keep pace with the IRA, Canada risks being left behind."

Average Canadian house price fell 12% last year, new CREA numbers show

The average price of a Canadian home that sold in December was $626,318, a decline of more than 12 per cent from where it was the same month a year ago.

The Canadian Real Estate Association, which represents more than 150,000 realtors across the country, released new numbers about the country's housing market on Monday, showing that the number of homes sold and the prices they fetched were both sharply lower in December than they were the same month a year earlier.

Sales fell by more than 39 per cent from December 2021's level. And prices were also well down from an average of $713,500 at the end of 2021, and a peak of $816,720 reached in February 2022, before the Bank of Canada started aggressively raising lending rates.

The realtor group says the average selling price can be misleading since it is easily skewed by sales of expensive homes in places like Toronto and Vancouver. So it tabulates a different number - known as the House Price Index - that adjusts for the volume and type of housing sold.

The HPI was down by 13 per cent from its peak last year, with Ontario and British Columbia seeing the biggest declines, while just about everywhere else saw either small declines or even slight increases in some cases.

On an annual basis, the HPI went up by 2.4 per cent in Victoria, 8.6 per cent in Calgary, 6.4 per cent in Quebec City and 6.3 per cent in Halifax, CREA says.

In Saskatoon, where Guylaine Patenaude lives, the market is essentially flat, but that suits her just fine. She recently sold the condo she has owned in the city for 15 years, and is now on the hunt for something larger.

She's relieved to have sold, and says it's nice to be able to be a little choosy on what she hopes will be her forever home. And even after the uptick in lending costs, mortgage rates right now are about the same as what they were the first time she bought, in 2008.

"That's encouraging in the sense that I can still afford what I hope to afford," she told CBC News in an interview.

Rishi Sondhi, an economist with TD Bank, says that while it's clear that Canada's housing market has cooled significantly from its red-hot status earlier in the pandemic, the numbers for December "signal that a bottom in the housing market may be forming."

Prices fell by 0.3 per cent on a monthly basis, the smallest decline since the market began correcting in March.

"With new listings dropping significantly last month and the level remaining low, there are no real signs so far that forced selling is dominating the supply picture."

Why are Canadians' cellphone bills higher than other countries?

Despite government promises to lower the cost of mobile wireless plans and efforts to promote more competition in the market, many Canadians feel they're paying too much with few options for getting better rates.

But the industry will tell a different story: that of a market with fierce or at least adequate competition, and companies providing Canadians with rates comparable to the rest of the world despite extraordinary challenges.

A Marketplace investigation into the cost of telecom services in Canada has found that many of the oft-quoted industry explanations for high wireless prices - costly operating margins and a sparse Canadian population, for example - are insufficient to explain lower prices found in other countries and even between some provinces.

"I'm a snowbird, and [when] I get my service in Mexico from Telcel it costs 200 pesos, which is about $14 a month Canadian," said Quebecer Cam Moody. Moody, like many Canadian travellers, is fed up with coming home from travelling to higher prices for wireless services than he sees in other countries.

"I get three gigs of data and I get calling to Mexico, Canada and the United States. Why is Canada so expensive?" he said.

Canadian prices still among highest in the world

Rewheel, an independent telecom research firm based in Finland, publishes reports on the mobile data pricing across 50 countries worldwide twice a year. Its latest, published in May of last year, once again ranked Canada among the most expensive countries for wireless rates.

Canada's cost-per-gigabyte is seven times more expensive than Australia, 25 times more than Ireland and France, and 1,000 times more than Finland, according to the analysis.

Marketplace calculated the data usage of common cellphone tasks using Rewheel's cost-per-gigabyte analysis in order to put those numbers into perspective.

"Canada didn't used to be one of the most expensive countries when I started measuring about 10 years ago," said Antonios Drossos, managing partner and researcher at Rewheel. He says that although prices have been falling in Canada, they have been falling much slower than most other countries.

The Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association says some experts dispute Rewheel's price-per-gigabyte methodology.

Price-per-gigabyte isn't the only measure to compare wireless affordability across countries. Several academics in Canada and around the world have measured the cost of mobile data usage using different methodologies and datasets, but any way you slice it, Canada nearly always comes out among the most expensive.

In fact, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) in its 2021 review of mobile wireless services in Canada found that the only report that didn't find Canada more expensive (submitted to the regulator by Telus) was flawed because it "artificially lowered the average price" by excluding many types of plans from the analysis.

The federal government tried to tackle mobile data pricing in 2020 when then-Minister of Innovation Navdeep Bains demanded that companies lower the costs of their low-data plans by at least 25 per cent, or face more industry regulation. The ministry says the companies have achieved those reductions.

However, critics say the government needs to do more if it wants the industry to stop overcharging Canadians.

"The only thing that makes economic sense when you have three players [each] having around one third of the market is to maintain the price levels at the same levels or even try to increase it," Drossos said.

"When a new operator comes into the market and you're starting from zero and want to build a 15-20 per cent market share ... you have to do something different to get those customers in."

Drossos says he has watched prices plummet in several markets around the world with just one so-called maverick disruptor entering the market with a way lower price and shaking up the status quo.

Francois-Phillipe Champagne, the minister of Innovation, Science and Industry who is responsible for overseeing the CRTC and the telecommunications industry, would not sit down for an interview with Marketplace, but said in a statement that his ministry is "committed to continue doing everything [it] can to make life more affordable for Canadians."

Big three own much of budget competition

When it comes to the competitive landscape in Canada, most Canadians do have more than one option when choosing their wireless provider, and perhaps even a budget-friendly value brand. But Rogers, Bell or Telus actually own many of those value brands.

Marketplace found that in provinces where there is an additional major regional competitor that wasn't owned by Rogers, Telus or Bell (or had only recently been acquired), prices offered by the big three were cheaper.

Many budget-friendly wireless competitors are actually owned by Rogers, Telus and Bell. (CBC)

Each of the big three's websites for Saskatchewan and Manitoba show at least a $10 reduction compared to the same plans offered in Ontario or British Columbia. Crown corporation Sasktel is a major competitor in Saskatchewan, and MTS was, until recently, a major independent competitor driving down prices in Manitoba. (Bell acquired MTS in 2017.)

In Quebec, where Videotron is a major player, the websites also show more options, including budget options with lower gigabyte allowances.

The Competition Bureau conducted an in-depth review of the Bell-MTS acquisition in 2017 and found mobile wireless pricing in Saskatchewan, Thunder Bay, Quebec and Manitoba - all areas that had a strong regional competitor - was substantially lower than in the rest of Canada, where "co-ordinated behaviour among Bell, Telus and Rogers" causes mobile wireless prices to be higher.

Wind founder says big three pushed him out

In France, the prices have been low for decades and experts say that's because they have had healthy competition for many years. Ireland, however, had prices similar to Canada prior to 2014, when new competitors entered the market and drove prices down drastically. Rewheel's research shows that since these maverick companies launched in Ireland, the minimum monthly price for a 10+ gigabyte smartphone plan has dropped by 86 per cent.

The federal government had just decided that measures needed to be taken to enhance competition in the wireless market, and set up policies requiring existing companies to share towers with new entrants and allow them to roam on their networks. This would mean new companies could offer national service coverage as soon as they launched.

Lacavera wanted to be Canada's disruptor, and he succeeded - for a time - offering lower prices than the incumbents. Unlike the big three, his business was focused solely on mobile wireless rather than legacy cable, landline and home internet bundles.

"That was a real threat to Bell, Telus and Rogers and so they went to the wall with the government, lobbying against our entry into the market," said Lacavera. "I underestimated what a hurricane I was going to be going up against."

The big three, he says, fought to keep Wind out from the start, arguing that Lacavera had too much foreign investment, which delayed Wind's entry into the market by over a year.

The next hurdle was trying to ensure his subscribers had access to data roaming. CRTC found Rogers charged Wind "many times more" to roam on its network than the price it offered its customers or other mobile carriers, including carriers based in the U.S.

"Of course we were not able to offer roaming to Canadians," said Lacavera.

Even though the legislation was also supposed to allow new competitors to share incumbents' towers, he found he had to build new ones, often right beside the existing towers.

"We built 1,564 cell sites," said Lacavera. "We shared one tower successfully, over that entire time."

Eventually, he said, the pressure from the incumbents became too much.

Tiger Shroff Pays Tribute To RRR's Naatu Naatu With His Victory Dance Following The Song's Big Win At Golden Globes; Fans Call Him 'Best Dancer Of India'

Indian regional film RRR has made India proud as it picked up its first Golden Globes award on Wednesday for Best Original Song. Shortly after its release the song garnered much fame as netizens grooved to the song in their reels and the song has once again made it to the trend after its success at this year's Golden Globe Awards.

Now, actor and dancer Tiger Shroff has joined the trend as he danced his heart out to Naatu Naatu song for winning the award. He treated his fans with a victory dance on Thursday and his followers seem to be mighty impressed with his sweet and groovy gesture. His dance steps invited a lot of appreciation and congratulatory messages in the comments section.

For the dance video, Tiger was seen grooving in a sleeveless black T-shirt with a pair of pants. The actor dished out fashion goals as he was seen accessorizing himself with a black fedora hat and shoes. During his performance, Tiger performed Naatu Naatu's hookup steps while the song played out in the background. The Heropanti actor was full of energy on the dance floor, flaunting his lean build and chiseled muscles. He was all smiles as he lip-synced to the song, playing in the background.

Sharing the clip on his IG handle, Tiger wrote: "This should be our victory dance after yesterday's (Indian flag, big smiley and high voltage sign emojis) huge win for Indian Cinema! congratulations to the whole team of RRR @ssrajamouli @mmkeeravani @jrntr @alwaysramcharan."

Shahid Kapoor BREAKS silence on why Farzi couldn't be made into a film and why it turned into a web series

Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK, popularly known as Raj and DK, started their career in Bollywood with the acclaimed and quirky 99 (2009). They followed it up with another wacky film, Shor In The City (2011), zombie comedy Go Goa Gone (2013) and then a romcom, Happy Ending (2014). After Happy Ending, they were supposed to make Farzi, with Shahid Kapoor and Nawazuddin Siddiqui. In an exclusive interview Raj and DK had even said that "Farzi is like Shor In The City on steroids".

Almost 9 years later, in the present day, Raj and DK are all set to release Farzi. But now, it has turned into a web series. While Shahid Kapoor has been retained, Vijay Sethupathi has stepped in. At the trailer launch of Farzi today, Raj Nidimoru, Krishna DK and Shahid Kapoor explained why Farzi was turned into a web series.

Krishna DK said, "Raj, I and writers Sita Menon and Suman Kumar had conceived the idea of Farzi some eight years ago. It was supposed to be a feature film. And finally, it saw the light of day a couple of years back when we decided to make it into a series. It's been a long journey from where it started to this day."

Shahid Kapoor elaborated, "We started talking about the show even before the film fraternity started getting onto OTT. This is because I love their shows. I loved The Family Man 1 and 2. They (Raj and DK) called me to offer a film. I asked 'Film toh theek hai. OTT mein kya kar rahe ho?'. They asked me, 'Are you serious or are you joking?'. I said 'Absolutely I would love to do a show'. They narrated an idea that strangely eight years back, we had discussed with each other as a movie (idea).

Siraj thrives in the blaze of the wobble ball

It was the last edition of IPL when Mohammed Siraj once again felt the need to move the ball back into the right-handers. With only outswing left in his arsenal, he was getting predictable with his bowling and that reflected in how he endured his worst season in terms of economy and average, and even took home the unwanted record of conceding the most number of sixes in a season.

Fast forward to 2023 and it feels like an entirely different time in Siraj's career. He is almost single-handedly responsible for India's resurgence with the ball in the PowerPlay overs, picking wickets with the new ball match after match. A lot of it is down to his refurbished confidence and his fine-tuning of the wobble ball. The delivery once again formed the basis of his figures of 4 for 32 in the third ODI against Sri Lanka.

"I used to get natural inswing but I lost it, so I developed an outswing and worked on the wobble seam delivery," Siraj said after India's Record win in Thiruvananthapuram. "It took a lot of time to be effective and for me to get confident about it. I practiced a lot in the nets and during the IPL I got the confidence that I can bowl it. I also spoke to Dale Steyn during the IPL when I wasn't getting good outswing, so wobble seam helped me then too.

"When I didn't have a good IPL, I thought that I should also work on my white-ball skills. So I did that and when I got through a couple of good matches, I got the confidence. Now I have stopped thinking about performance and that has helped me. My focus is on executing every ball. Whether I get wickets or not is secondary; my lines and lengths should be consistent."

So how does he bowl the wobble ball, which has compensated for his lack of an inswinger? "The way I hold the ball, it naturally swings out. When I bowl scrambled seam, I tilt it a bit towards fine leg and really hit the deck. I don't bowl a loopy delivery when I bowl the wobble ball.

"In the wobble seam, neither me nor the batter know which way the ball will go. It goes straight sometimes and the other times, it moves sideways. Whatever success I got, I got it through a wobble seam. It's very effective and has proved to be successful for me and I trust it."

Siraj finished the three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka with nine wickets, the highest tally across both sides. What stands out is that the series was played on very good batting wickets.

"This series went very well. My plan was to pick wickets with the new ball and put pressure on the middle order. I was trying to swing the ball and I didn't mind being hit for boundaries," Siraj said.

The only thing Siraj couldn't get in the evening was his maiden five-wicket haul in white-ball internationals. To help him out, Mohammed Shami bowled a standalone over to let him swap ends, even Shreyas Iyer rolled his arms over but the milestone kept evading him. Nothing though compared to the final ball of his spell, which managed to trap Kasun Rajitha on the back pad and raise the umpire's finger, only for the DRS to put paid to all that.

The way Siraj is bowling this year, when a World Cup is set to be played at home, India will take all the four-wicket hauls they can from him. And as his captain Rohit Sharma said after the game, "the four wickets are all his and the fifers will come too."

Adair helps Ireland level series against Zimbabwe

HARARE: Opener Ross Adair struck a brisk 65 as Ireland levelled a three-match T20 Inter-national series against Zimbabwe with a six-wicket victory here on Saturday.

Zimbabwe made 144 with captain Craig Ervine top scoring on 42 and Ireland knocked off the runs with two balls to spare, setting up a series decider on Sunday.

Apart from Adair, skipper Andy Balbirnie (33) and Harry Tector (26) made significant contributions for the tourists.

Adair faced 47 deliveries and struck four sixes and two fours at sun-drenched Harare Sports Club.

It was a huge change of fortunes for him as he made only five runs in his international debut on Thursday, with Zimbabwe winning by five wickets.

Adair departed after trying to clear long-on off left-arm quick Richard Ngarava, miscuing his shot and picking out Wessly Madhevere.

Balbirnie atoned for a poor showing in the first match with his runs coming off 31 balls in an innings that included a six and three fours.

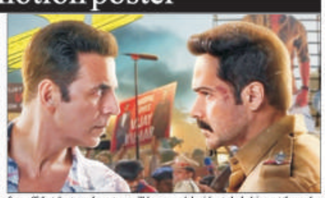
When Adair departed, Ireland were 119-3 and needed 26 runs from four overs to win. Tector departed with nine still required before George Dockrell hit a six to secure victory.

Leg-spinner Ryan Burl was the best of the Zimbabwe bowlers, taking two wickets for 26 runs in his four-over spell.

With former England Test batter Gary Ballance ruled out by concussion and star Sikandar Raza playing franchise cricket in Bangladesh, Ervine assumed the mantle of chief run-getter.

Put in to bat after losing the toss and one wicket down with just six runs on the board, Ervine took charge with his 40-ball innings, which included four fours.

Selfiee: Karan Johar reveals a glimpse of Akshay Kumar and Emraan Hashmi face off in this motion poster

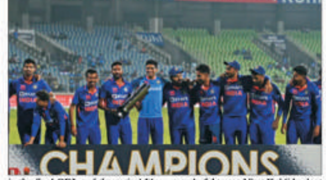


Akshay Kumar and Emraan Hashmi starrer Selfiee, which is a remake of the Malayalam film Driving License, will be seeing the two stars together for the first time. To add to that, it is produced by Dharma Productions. Considering that the film brings an unconventional trio, there has been immense buzz about it. And now adding to the anticipation, the makers have unveiled a special motion poster of the film.

Readers would be aware that the original film Driving License featured Prithiviraj Sukumaran in the role of a popular superstar whereas Suraj Venjaramoodu essays the character of a Motor Vehicle Inspector. Going by the recent motion poster, Akshay Kumar will be taking up the role of Prithviraj whereas Emraan Hashmi will be seen as the cop. The latest motion poster clearly showcases the massive face off that the two characters will be seen having in the film. Sharing it on his Instagram, producer and head honcho of Dharma Productions, Karan Johar said, "Superstar aur Superfan ki aisi kahaani, apne suni na hogi kahin! Dekhiye #Selfiee in cinemas on Feb 24th."

The film revolves around a MVI who is a massive fan of the superstar and decides to help him get through a sticky situation, albeit in an illegal manner but with one condition - he wants to meet him in person. However, the meeting turns out to be a bust with the two of them locking horns and the resulting fight impacts their professional as well as personal lives.

India Record Biggest-Ever Win In ODI History: Here's How The World Reacted



Team India had a memorable outing on Sunday as they thrashed Sri Lanka in the third and final ODI of the three-match series by a gigantic margin of 317 runs. With this win, the Rohit Sharma-led side got a 3-0 clean sweep in the series and also registered the biggest win by any team in the 50-over format. Opting to bat first, Team India posted a huge total of 390/5 after Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill smashed 166* and 116 runs respectively. It was Virat's 46th ODI ton while it was the second one for Gill. Later, Mohammed Siraj shone with the ball and scalped four wickets as Sri Lanka were bowled out for 73.

After Team India registered a historic win at the Greenfield International Stadium in Thiruvananthapuram, people from all walks of life took to Twitter and congratulated the Rohit Sharma-led side on achieving such a landmark.

"What absolute dominance by India in the final ODI, and the series! It's wonderful to see Virat Kohli back at his best in white-ball cricket, this unbeaten 166 was special even by his lofty standards. Shubman Gill continues to impress with his poise and pleasing strokeplay," tweeted National Cricket Academy (NCA) chief VVS Laxman.

What absolute dominance by India in the final ODI, and the series! It's wonderful to see Virat Kohli back at his best in white-ball cricket, this unbeaten 166 was special even by his lofty standards. Shubman Gill continues to impress with his poise and pleasing strokeplay…cont- VVS Laxman (@VVSLaxman281) "Total domination! Well played Team India, congratulations on a record breaking win," tweeted former India batter Wasim Jaffer.

Are Canadian hospitals prepared for another COVID surge? What experts say

Over the last couple of years, Canada has been through several COVID-19 waves that have extensively strained the country's health-care system. And now, with the number of confirmed cases of the new XBB.1.5 subvariant on the rise, concerns are growing over the preparedness of hospitals should there be more waves.

Dr. Melissa Yuan-Innes, emergency physician at the Hôpital Glengarry Memorial Hospital in Alexandria, Ont., said that their hospital isn't preparing for another wave in any "special way," simply because there isn't room in the health-care system for a surge in cases.

"We don't have the capacity. Our health-care system is starting to look like a set of dominos that you're starting to knock over," she told Global News.

'We don't have any magic'

"People call the hospital the first line of defense. We're actually the last line of defense. We're there if everything else fails. So, we're asking you to do your part," said Yuan-Innes.

To avoid a surge, Glengarry Memorial hospital staff are continuing to wear personal protective equipment and the vast majority of them are vaccinated, according to Yuan-Innes.

But they are still short-staffed, she said.

"It's not a question of do we have enough experience with it, it's do we have enough personnel," she said. "And we don't.

"We want you to stay healthy and you want to stay healthy," she added. "So please don't count on the system. We don't have any magic.

"Vaccination is the best step to take here because it makes your body recognize the disease instead of having to start from scratch," Yuan-Innes said.

Hospitals have been battered with numerous waves of the coronavirus over the last three years, but according to Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious diseases specialist at Toronto General Hospital, upcoming waves, if any, won't impact the health-care system the same way they previously did.

And that is because "we have two things going for us," he told Global News.

"One is pretty high rates of vaccination."

"But on top of that, we can't ignore that a significant portion of our population has been infected and recovered from infection. When you combine recovery from infection with vaccination, it's what's called hybrid immunity and you have some pretty robust protection at the community level," Bogoch explained.

"We've sort of been there, done that."

Moreover, the XBB.1.5 subvariant that has already been found in 35 countries around the world isn't spreading as fast as was first thought, he said.

"It's still growing and still expanding, but at a smaller rate," he added.

However, it's still important to acknowledge that the subvariant is around in Canada and there is still a lot of uncertainty, he said.

Another COVID wave 'might happen'

As of Jan. 9, the total number of XBB.1.5 cases in Canada sat at 42, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

This was double the number of confirmed cases reported from the week before.

"It's important to never sweep anything under the rug," Bogoch said. "We've dealt with some really, really challenging waves. That might happen again."

According to Dr. Brian Conway, medical director of the Vancouver Infectious Diseases Centre in British Columbia, the subvariant could likely become the dominant variant in Canada soon, especially given how rapidly it's spreading in the United States and Asia.

"It may spread more easily, it may attach to cells more easily, it may not be as susceptible to protection by vaccination as the original Omicron (variant) or as some of the other variants, so we need to keep an eye on this going forward," he told Global News.

Statistics Canada has released 10 months of death data for N.S. Here's why it matters

The recent release of almost 10 months of death data for Nova Scotia covering October 2021 to August 2022 is shedding light on COVID-19 deaths in the province, a researcher says.

Nova Scotia has lagged behind most other provinces in providing the data to Statistics Canada, but the latest excess mortality update from Statistics Canada on Thursday included a mass of new numbers for Nova Scotia.

The federal agency uses death data to track excess mortality - the actual number of deaths above what is expected.

"I think that it's really crucial for decision-makers to see these data, as well as for people to see these data," said infectious diseases researcher Tara Moriarty, who is based at the University of Toronto.

The data, which is broken down into weekly periods, shows consistent periods of positive excessive mortality for the latest time period.

"That means that we have steady excess mortality, but we're not really ever dipping," said Moriarty. "So, the fact that we don't see negatives - or very few of them - we're running kind of at a constant state of excess mortality."

Moriarty said this is a big departure from the early days of the pandemic in Nova Scotia, when strong public health restrictions meant fewer people were dying than expected.

There can be many causes of excess mortality, said Moriarty.

Besides the COVID-19 epidemic, it may signal problems with toxic drugs, or problems accessing health care. But excess mortality is a cue for authorities to take action, she said.

"Is there something else also going on that we should be aware of and that we need to deal with?" said Moriarty.

She said that in Quebec, which has robust reporting of COVID-19 cases and deaths, excess mortality statistics resemble the official COVID-19 death numbers.

Moriarty is also the lead for the COVID-19 Resources Canada project, which does modelling to help members of the public better understand the COVID-19 situation. It receives funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada for its work.

Omicron deaths

The deadliest wave of the pandemic in Nova Scotia began with the arrival of the Omicron variant, with 589 of the reported 701 deaths happening since then.

Moriarty notes the Statistics Canada data also shows significant excess mortality from September 2021 to November 2021.

While the official COVID-19 death count in Nova Scotia increased by 16 deaths during this time (from 94 to 110), Statistics Canada pegs Nova Scotia's excess mortality as 109 deaths.

Moriarty isn't surprised by this.

"Across the country we saw quite a bad wave of mortality and excess mortality associated with [the] Delta [variant] that continued on into Omicron," she said.

Ontario releases 3-step plan to invest in private care to reduce surgical backlog

Ontario has released a new three-step plan that will see some for-profit community surgical and diagnostic centres take on more responsibilities, including additional surgeries and other medical procedures.

Speaking to reporters Monday morning, Health Minister Sylvia Jones said this will help reduce wait times and eliminate surgical backlogs.

"We need to be bold, innovative and creative," she said, adding that all of these procedures will be covered for patients under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP).

"We need to build on the spirit of collaboration on display across the health-care sector."

The first step would be to invest in "new partnerships with community surgical and diagnostic centres" to reduce the waitlist for cataract surgeries, ensuring 14,000 more surgeries will be performed each year. These centres include both not-for-profit and for-profit clinics.

The government will also invest more than $18 million in existing centres to cover other procedural care such as MRI and CT scans, ophthalmic surgeries, minimally invasive gynecological surgeries and plastic surgeries.

The second step involves a further expansion of "non-urgent, low-risk and minimally invasive" procedures. Little detail has been provided regarding what additional procedures will be included.

The province will also be introducing legislation next month that will, if passed, allow these private clinics to conduct more MRI and CT scanning "so that people can access publicly funded diagnostic services faster and closer."

As part of the third and final step of the province's plan, private clinics will be allowed to conduct hip and knee replacement surgeries as early as 2024.

"We have great hospitals working hand in hand with the clinics and that's the way we're going to operate, excuse the pun," Premier Doug Ford told reporters at Monday's news conference. "That's the way we're going to move forward with this."

CHANGES WILL BE PERMANENT

The legislative changes that will allow private clinics to perform more surgeries is not a temporary measure to deal with the backlog, Ford clarified.

"This would be permanent," he said, citing an aging population and immigrant population who are in need of healthcare.

"This is one step of making sure we provide care. No matter if cataract, hip replacements, knee replacements, foot surgeries, diagnostics," he said while stressing this will take the burden off hospitals and allow them to focus on critical procedures.

Health-care experts have warned about the possibilities of exacerbated staffing shortages in hospitals, arguing that investing in independent centres will squeeze resources from the public sector.

Last week the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario said any expansion of private surgical centres would create challenges for hospitals.

"Many months ago, we were consulted and shared our opinion that stand-alone surgical centers need to be connected to the hospital system to ensure continuity of care and patient safety," Registrar and CEO Dr. Nancy Whitmore said in a statement.

"We also shared that this wasn't the solution to the health care crisis and would further tax our health human resources shortages and further increase wait times for more urgent hospital-based care."

Ontario's five major healthcare unions issued a call Monday for the Ford government to halt its plan, calling it "a risky venture that will cost Ontarians dearly and damage access to public care."

When asked about staffing concerns, Jones touted the province's previous commitments to hire more nurses and expedite licenses for international staff. She said that any new clinic will have to provide a human resources plan.

The Ontario Hospital Association has also come forward in support of the government's investments in community clinics, saying it is an essential tool given the impact of COVID-19 on hospitals and human resources.

OVERSIGHT QUESTIONED

A 2021 auditor general report identified instances in which some surgeons conducting outpatient surgeries provided "significantly high or unreasonable billings."

"Further, there has been no provincial oversight of surgery providers to protect patients from being misled about their right to receive the standard publicly-funded surgery without having to pay any fees out of pocket," the report read.

"We also noted that providers of outpatient surgeries operate in silos, follow different reporting requirements, and are overseen by different parties."

Jones was asked Monday about the concern of "upselling" services at for-profit clinics, which the auditor general previously said could result in patients being misinformed about what OHIP-covered services are available to them. She said that if a patient was not offered an OHIP model first, there is an avenue to bring it forward for a ministry investigation for a refund.

"Your family clinician is part of that process all the way through and they are truly the clinical experts to know what is appropriate and what is available in the province of Ontario," she said.

The government has promised further legislation as part of the third step of their plan that will "strengthen oversight of community surgical settings so that patients can continue to expect to receive the world class care they know and deserve."

No information was provided about what that oversight will include.

Most Canadian businesses and consumers expect a recession in next 12 months: BoC surveys

More than 70 per cent of Canadian consumers and two thirds of business firms think a recession is likely in the next 12 months, according to Bank of Canada surveys.

One third of firms expect their rate of sales to decline over the next year, according to the Business Outlook Survey released by the central bank on Monday.

Despite an anticipated economic slowdown, most businesses think it will be mild. Nearly 70 per cent of firms expect their rate of sales to remain the same or grow over the next 12 months.

In December, the Canadian economy added 104,000 jobs. Firms are taking a more cautious approach to hiring, but still almost half of firms plan to add staff over the next year to meet demand.

The majority of Canadian consumers are finding it difficult to access credit, according to the BoC's Canadian Survey of Consumer Expectations released on Monday. Wage growth expectations have dipped and nearly half of Canadian workers don't expect their earnings to catch up to the recent inflation.

"I spend a lot of money to buy little things," said one survey respondent.

In response to higher inflation, Canadian consumers are cutting back the most on travel, accomodation, food service and recreation, according to the survey.