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Violence on transit has increased post-pandemic, police and union officials say

Violence on public transit and in city spaces across Canada has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, Calgary police Chief Mark Neufeld said in relation to a spate of assaults in his city as well as Edmonton, Metro Vancouver and Toronto.

Neufeld said he's talked to his counterparts in other cities and it's hard to know what's driving the violence, but calls related to mental health have been on the rise.

"There has been a post-pandemic impact that I don't know that we fully understand," he told a news conference on Thursday.

"But it's manifesting itself in public spaces across the country and I think we've gone as far down this dark road as we are prepared to go."

Neufeld said everyone hoped things would return to normal post-pandemic, and governments have been making investments in mental health supports.

"I just don't think it's taken effect just yet. I think there's a lot of promise with respect to a lot of the policies," he said. "But what we've seen is an entrenchment of violence and individuals who are resistant to the services right now."

Neufeld said Calgary remains a safe city and statistically, there has not been a large increase in violent crime. In fact, he said, there have been fewer shootings this year than the same time last year.

His comments come after a series of violent incidents in cities in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta, including Calgary, where someone was stabbed on a bus Thursday and a shooting on a bus left a man injured on Wednesday.

In Edmonton, police said a 48-year-old man was sitting by himself at a bus stop on Thursday when someone approached from behind and stabbed him in the back.

The Alberta government announced last week that 100 additional street-level police officers would be hired over the next 18 months, with most of them deployed in Edmonton and Calgary in response to the rising violence.

In B.C., a 17-year-old boy was stabbed to death on a bus in Surrey on Tuesday.

A director with the union representing Metro Vancouver transit operators said their members have seen an increase in violence in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Gavin McGarrigle, the western regional director for Unifor, said in an interview there's a sense of "lawlessness" aboard buses that will require a "culture shift" to fix.

That shift would require a more visible, consistent presence of transit police and security personnel on board buses, not just at hubs, he said Thursday.

McGarrigle said it was "infuriating" to hear Metro Vancouver Transit Police saying this week they cover 1,800 kilometres square, so enforcement must be targeted.

The region's public transit system is "the backbone of our economy and saying you don't have enough resources to make sure the passengers and the workers feel safe is like saying you're putting buses on the road with no tires," he said.

The lack of security has created a sense that buses are "almost like a lawless environment," McGarrigle said.

Metro Vancouver Transit Police say officers are deployed throughout the system based on intelligence reports and crime statistics.

Premier David Eby said Thursday that police have stepped up their patrols on buses and trains after the 17-year-old was killed this week.

The teenager's death is every parent's nightmare, he said.

Public Safety Minister Mike Farnworth is reaching out to transit authorities and police to see if more resources are needed to ensure safety, Eby said.

The teen's death was "horrific," said McGarrigle, who's concerned that any increased security presence, specifically aboard buses, will fade away again.

"Our members are traumatized, the passengers are affected, and this overall feeling of an unsafe system is really counter to what all levels of government have been trying to do in Vancouver in building that world-class system," McGarrigle said.

With transit ridership recovering from the pandemic and expanded bus service planned for the region, he said the union wants safety concerns addressed head on.

Young Canadians are earning more today - but barriers in labour market remain

Young, educated workers today are earning more than in previous generations, according to a new report from Desjardins.

But it's not all rosy for young Canadians, with women in particular facing declining mental health and ongoing barriers in the labour market.

The new report from Desjardins is the first in a series looking at how young Canadians are faring in today's economy.

"The narrative around how young people are faring tends to have a negative tone," said Randall Bartlett, senior director of Canadian economics for Desjardins and co-author of the report.

"What we found in the data was a lot more room for optimism."

The report builds on recent census data that showed the Canadian population is highly educated, with a larger proportion of people holding a post-secondary degree than any other G7 country.

Desjardins found young Canadians are more educated today than in the past, with more of them holding college certifications and bachelor's degrees than many of the countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

That has implications for earnings, given that those who complete a post-secondary education tend to earn more money throughout their lifetime.

For the report, Desjardins compared the earnings of Canadians who graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1991 versus in 2001.

They found the younger cohort earned several thousand dollars more each year, adjusted for inflation, than those who graduated a decade earlier, suggesting the return on education is rising.

There are also more young people from lower-income families pursuing post-secondary education today than in previous generations. For those who come from families in the bottom 20 per cent of income earners, enrolment increased 28 per cent. That's compared with a 10 per cent increase in enrolment for young Canadians from families in the top 20 per cent of income earners.

However, the report found that there are very real challenges in the labour market for young people as they move from school to the workplace.

Young women, for example, were facing declining mental health even before the pandemic hit, while young people in general saw their mental health decline significantly during the pandemic.

Women also continue to disproportionately carry the burden of caring for a child or family member.

"If you look at adults ages 25 to 44, women report caring for children as the primary reason for working part-time, while it barely registers for men the same age," the report said.

Working fewer hours or leaving the labour market can result in lower earnings, which explains some of the wage gap between men and women.

The report also highlights that young immigrants are doing better in the labour market than they have historically, but they still face challenges putting their skills to work.

Desjardins chief economist and lead report author Jimmy Jean said these findings have implications for policymakers in Canada.

The first is the important role subsidized childcare programs can play in helping women rejoin the labour market. Quebec, which has had subsidized childcare for over 20 years, has seen more women join the labour force during that time.

Jean said the federal government's pursuit of a national childcare program, which aims to deliver childcare that costs on average $10 a day, is a good start.

"(But) it needs to be made widely and easily accessible, without having to go through the long waiting time. So the execution of it will be crucial going forward," he said.

Addressing mental health would also be a "very worthwhile investment," he said, noting that poor mental health can affect young people's abilities to successfully transition into the workforce.

The other consideration for policymakers, Jean said, is how to make it easier for immigrants to get their foreign credentials recognized.

Amid labour shortages, various governments across Canada are moving to ease credential recognition, particularly for health care workers.

Ontario Liberal Party set to announce new leader on Dec. 2

Ontario Liberals are set to vote for their new leader through ranked ballots in late November, with the results to be unveiled Dec. 2. The party's executive announced Sunday that it has set out the rules and timelines for the race to replace Steven Del Duca, who resigned after the Liberals did not win enough seats in the 2022 election to have official party status at the legislature for the second campaign in a row. Several would-be candidates have said they are exploring leadership bids, including MP Nate Erskine-Smith, MP and former Ontario cabinet minister Yasir Naqvi, and current provincial caucus member and former MP Ted Hsu. The party said it will host at least five debates around the province during the race. The Liberals say they will soon announce the opening date for official candidate registration, but the deadline has been set as Sept. 5 and candidates must have an entry fee of $100,000 and a refundable $25,000 deposit.

"Selecting our next leader is central to setting the stage for a successful campaign that will end Doug Ford's disastrous term as Premier," party president Kathryn McGarry said in a statement. "Liberals from all across Ontario are feeling energized following our party's largest annual meeting in over 20 years, and are eager to continue building on this momentum as we prepare for a strong and competitive leadership race."

The word competitive was in italics in McGarry's statement, suggesting a dig at the NDP. Marit Stiles was officially crowned leader of the New Democrats in early February after she was the only contender when nominations closed in December.

Bank of Canada maintains policy rate, continues quantitative tightening

The Bank of Canada today held its target for the overnight rate at 4½%, with the Bank Rate at 4¾% and the deposit rate at 4½%. The Bank is also continuing its policy of quantitative tightening.

Inflation in many countries is easing in the face of lower energy prices, normalizing global supply chains, and tighter monetary policy. At the same time, labour markets remain tight and measures of core inflation in many advanced economies suggest persistent price pressures, especially for services.

Global economic growth has been stronger than anticipated. Growth in the United States and Europe has surprised on the upside, but is expected to weaken as tighter monetary policy continues to feed through those economies. In the United States, recent stress in the banking sector has tightened credit conditions further. US growth is expected to slow considerably in the coming months, with particular weakness in sectors that are important for Canadian exports. Meanwhile, activity in China's economy has rebounded, particularly in services. Overall, commodity prices are close to their January levels. The Bank's April Monetary Policy Report (MPR) projects global growth of 2.6% this year, 2.1% in 2024, and 2.8% in 2025.

In Canada, demand is still exceeding supply and the labour market remains tight. Economic growth in the first quarter looks to be stronger than was projected in January, with a bounce in exports and solid consumption growth. While the Bank's Business Outlook Survey suggests acute labour shortages are starting to ease, wage growth is still elevated relative to productivity growth. Strong population gains are adding to labour supply and supporting employment growth while also boosting aggregate consumption. Housing market activity remains subdued.

As more households renew their mortgages at higher rates and restrictive monetary policy works its way through the economy more broadly, consumption is expected to moderate this year. Softening foreign demand is expected to restrain exports and business investment. Overall, GDP growth is projected to be weak through the remainder of this year before strengthening gradually next year. This implies the economy will move into excess supply in the second half of this year. The Bank now projects Canada's economy to grow by 1.4% this year and 1.3% in 2024 before picking up to 2.5% in 2025.

CPI inflation eased to 5.2% in February, and the Bank's preferred measures of core inflation were just under 5%. The Bank expects CPI inflation to fall quickly to around 3% in the middle of this year and then decline more gradually to the 2% target by the end of 2024. Recent data is reinforcing Governing Council's confidence that inflation will continue to decline in the next few months. However, getting inflation the rest of the way back to 2% could prove to be more difficult because inflation expectations are coming down slowly, service price inflation and wage growth remain elevated, and corporate pricing behaviour has yet to normalize. As it sets monetary policy, Governing Council will be particularly focused on these indicators, and the evolution of core inflation, to gauge the progress of CPI inflation back to target.

In light of its outlook for growth and inflation, Governing Council decided to maintain the policy rate at 4½%. Quantitative tightening continues to complement this restrictive stance. Governing Council continues to assess whether monetary policy is sufficiently restrictive to relieve price pressures and remains prepared to raise the policy rate further if needed to return inflation to the 2% target. The Bank remains resolute in its commitment to restoring price stability for Canadians.

PSAC workers to strike if union doesn't reach deal with Ottawa this week

More than 155,000 federal public servants will strike on Wednesday if no deal is reached between the government and the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

National president Chris Aylward told reporters on Monday that despite progress being made on several fronts, there has been little movement on the union's key priorities. If no deal is reached by 9 p.m. Eastern on Tuesday, workers will be on strike as of 12:01 a.m. Eastern Wednesday.

"Despite some progress at the bargaining table, our members are frustrated that while negotiations drag on, they continue to fall behind," he said.

"We've already been at the table for nearly two years and these workers can't wait any longer."

What is at stake in the negotiations?

Last Friday, more than 155,000 federal public servants were in legal position to strike as negotiations for new collective agreements between the unions, Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and its tax agency unit and the employers, the federal government and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), continue to drag on.

The unions have been fighting for increased wages, benefits and remote work. Both sides are at the bargaining table and want to reach a deal, but Aylward has threatened "one of the largest strikes in Canadian history" if one is not reached.

PSAC is pushing for a 13.5 per cent retroactive increase in wages over three years, with Aylward saying the rate of inflation was 13.8 per cent over the same period.

In response to PSAC, the government said in a statement it was "disappointed" to hear about the strike news. It said it tabled a wage package of nine per cent over three years on Sunday, "a fair and competitive offer." It called on PSAC to work with the government to reach an agreement "as quickly as possible."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was asked by reporters Monday whether he would consider back-to-work legislation, but he said the government is keeping its focus at the bargaining table.

"We're going to stay focused on putting forward reasonable, responsible offers to try and make sure that we're both recognizing and continuing to recognize the extraordinary work done by federal public servants across this country, while at the same time being responsible about the taxpayer investments ... that go to pay their salaries," he said.

"Getting that balance right is something that we all want, but that happens not in negotiating in public. It happens when we sit down and roll up our sleeves at the bargaining table, as both sides are doing in good faith."

Earlier this year, the federal government filed two complaints against PSAC over claims the union is not negotiating "in good faith" for a new deal.

The government alleges that PSAC has "flooded the bargaining tables with costly proposals," with at least 500 proposals over its five bargaining units, while saying that PSAC has "refused to prioritize their requests, refused to move on their initial proposals, and did not respond to the employer's comprehensive offers."

PSAC left the bargaining table on Sept. 1, 2022, during the sixth negotiation session and declared an impasse. The parties had been negotiating since last summer.

The union has said that the federal government's move to file a complaint is "just another stalling tactic to deny workers a fair contract." It has alleged the government has refused to "negotiate remote work and better work-life balance at the table."

"If this government (...) is committed to introducing anti-scab legislation before the end of the year, then I hope they're not really quick on the trigger for back-to-work legislation," Aylward said.

"If you believe in workers, then allow us the right to strike and don't legislate us back to work."

What will a strike mean for you?

Canadians could face serious delays in accessing federal services if strikes were to happen, most notably in the tax department with 35,000 CRA workers off the job.

Aylward said Monday the PSAC's Union of Taxation Employees, which represents the CRA workers, was back at the negotiating table.

"If this is going to come together, it will have to come together rather quickly," he said.

"Our intention is still to get a deal at the table and avoid a strike. That's still our goal."

The 120,000 PSAC members also in legal strike position work in the Treasury Board Secretariat, a central government agency that operates effectively as a nerve centre for a significant amount of work related to the basic functioning of the federal government.

Members include cleaners and cooks on military bases, clerks and maintenance workers, tradespeople, Coast Guard search and rescue teams, teachers, firefighters and workers who process employment insurance, passport applications and immigration documents.

"If this government forces us to go on strike, we will have picket lines set up across the country in very strategic locations," Aylward said.

"We will want to have an impact on the government. We will try to have as least impact on Canadians as possible."

Several government departments have warned of delays in the event of a strike.

The CRA has said some services may be delayed or unavailable. Specifically, the CRA anticipates there may be delays in processing some income tax and benefit returns, particularly those filed by paper, and increased wait times in contact centres.

However, the CRA has no plans yet to extend the May 1 deadline for Canadians to file their taxes - a move the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says "poses a threat to small businesses" if there is no extension.

The Canadian Transportation Agency, which is dealing with a massive backlog of air passenger complaints, said job action will likely result in delays to dispute resolution and information provision activities, such as answering phone calls.

Employment and Social Development Canada and Service Canada says delays to passport services and grants and contributions programs will be expected.

Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada, two agencies that have played a major role during the COVID-19 pandemic, have said they will maintain all essential services that "could affect the safety, security and health of Canadians and other clients."

Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is warning to expect delays in processing applications, in-person appointments, communication with IRCC, citizenship ceremonies and passport services.

Diljit Dosanjh made history with his performance at Coachella 2023 this weekend

Diljit Dosanjh, an Indian musician, took over the Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival in Indio, California, this weekend. Many South Asian fans gathered at the American music event to see him perform live.

Additionally, a video shared by Diljit on Instagram of American DJ Diplo dancing to Diljit's live performance at the Sahara stage went viral on social media.

Diljit is also the first singer from Punjab to take the stage at Coachella. During his live performance, the actor-singer dressed in a black Kurta and Tamba, a traditional Punjabi attire for men.

Coachella's official Twitter account also shared a video of Diljit's performance with their fans.

Diljit gave us a sneak peek of his Coachella backstage activities earlier today. In the photos, he was sporting a striking blue co-ord set with a black hat.

Coachella, one of the most lucrative music festivals in the world, is held over two weekends in California. The festival's lineup this year has some of the most popular South Asian performers, including Ali Sethi, a vocalist best known for his work on Pasoori.

Additionally, there will be international performances by BLACKPINK, Kid Laroi, Charli XCX, Labrinth, Jai Wolf, Joy Crookes, Jai Paul, Frank Ocean, and Underworld.

Yash Raj Films decides to take a break from Ranveer Singh after his hat-trick of flops

Ranveer Singh made a memorable debut with Band Baaja Baaraat (2010) and there were times when he was considered to be the next big thing in Bollywood. However, post-pandemic, the actor's track record has been severely affected. His much-awaited film '83 (2021) failed at the ticket windows. Jayeshbhai Jordaar (2022) was a disaster, collecting just Rs. 15.59 crores. A lot was also expected from Cirkus (2022). However, audiences were left unimpressed. It ended its lifetime with Rs. 35.65 crores and a 'Disaster' verdict. The industry is abuzz with reports that Yash Raj Films (YRF), which launched him, have decided to not do any films with him, at least for the time being.

"Aditya Chopra, the YRF head honcho, and his core team are heavily invested in the YRF Spy Universe at the moment. They recently delivered an all-time blockbuster with Shah Rukh Khan-starrer Pathaan (2023) and are gearing up for the release of Salman Khan's Tiger 3. They are also planning forthcoming films in this universe. A lot is at stake as each film is going to be heavily budgeted and hence, there can't be room for error. Each film needs utmost concentration, right from pre-production to the last mile release."

The source added, "In such a scenario, a film with Ranveer Singh is the last thing on their mind. Of course, they'll be making non-Spy Universe films too. But of the 6 films that Ranveer has done with YRF, there's only one film that was not a flop. And that's Gunday (2014). This film, too, was a semi-hit. Band Baaja Baaraat, Ladies Vs Ricky Bahl (2011) and Befikre (2016) were average grossers. Kill Dil (2014) and Jayeshbhai Jordaar, meanwhile, flopped."

Palak Tiwari Cannot Stop Gushing Over Shah Rukh Khan's Son Aryan

Palak Tiwari is gearing up for her big Bollywood debut alongside Salman Khan in Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan. The actress has already become a part of Bollywood's A-listers and she is good friends with Ibrahim Ali Khan and now in the same interview, she also spoke about Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan.

The young actress has already been making it to the headlines for her link-up rumours, even before her big debut. Well, the reason behind these rumours do not seem entirely baseless.

Palak has been nothing but praises for SRK's eldest son. Not to mention, the similarities Aryan Khan holds with his father Shah Rukh Khan. The star kid is also known for his humility and charm with every person he interacts with, he is all smiles and cheerful mostly.

In a recent interview with Siddharth Kannan, Palak Tiwari gave us a few insights into Aryan Khan's personality.

While several memes about Aryan claim that he hardly smiles, Palak paints a completely different narrative around SRK's son and his personality.

Palak Tiwari said, "He's exactly how he seems. He'll say a few words and he'll make an impactful statement, leave and go back into the crowd. He's very like that." She added, "He's a very sweet guy, very nice and quiet… good guy."

She also revealed how Aryan is at social gatherings like parties, and regarding that, she said, "He's always on his own at parties." She further mentioned, "He's sweet like if you want to talk to him, he'll speak to you and all, but he's more like a quiet kinda guy."

Speaking of her big Bollywood debut, Palak will be seen alongside the likes of Shehnaaz Gill, Raghav Juyal, and others in the film. Pooja Hegde will play the lead opposite Salman Khan. There are only a few days left before the film's release, and the actors are all busy with its promotion.

Ton-up Babar puts Pakistan 2-0 up against New Zealand

LAHORE: New Zealand seemed to have applied the brakes with four wickets in the space of 14 deliveries but they couldn't stop Babar Azam. The Pakistan captain led from the front, scoring a majestic 101 not out off 58 balls to help his side overcome New Zealand by 38 runs in the second Twenty20 International at a raucous Gaddafi Stadium on Saturday night, taking a 2-0 lead in the five-game series in the process.

Babar had seen four of his partners perish in quick time, including fellow opener Mohammad Rizwan (50) - with whom he'd shared a 99-run stand to start the innings after Pakistan had elected to bat, but he stayed till the end and raised an unbroken 87-run partnership for the fifth wicket with Iftikhar Ahmed (33 not out) to power his side to an imposing 192-4 by scoring his third century in the format with three sixes and 11 fours.

New Zealand gave a better account of themselves than Friday's opener, which they lost by 88 runs, with Mark Chapman hitting an undefeated 65 featuring four sixes and as many fours but ultimately Pakistan had too much firepower with Haris following up his four-wicket show a day earlier by taking 4-27 to restrict the tourists to 154-7.

Rizwan and Babar had fallen early on Friday but they were back to their usual business here. After a sedate start, they broke loose in the fifth over, getting 20 runs off Henry Shipley with Rizwan hitting a towering six. The pugnacious Rizwan also hit six fours in his 34-ball knock before being dismissed by Matt Henry.

It brought New Zealand back in the game with Fakhar Zaman chopping Henry onto his stumps first ball and Saim Ayub holing out at the square leg fence to James Neesham, who soon had Imad Wasim caught behind. It was as good as it got for New Zealand as Iftikhar led the counterattack, smashing three sixes and a four during his 19-ball stay.

It was Babar, though, who stole the limelight. He launched Henry for a six over midwicket in the 18th over, following it with a four off the next ball and a six over point. In the final over, he slammed Neesham down the ground for the third six of his innings and then hit his 10th and 11th fours off the last two balls to bring up his century in stunning fashion.

KL Rahul not 'plagued' by captaincy, feels Rhodes after his patient fifty vs PBKS

Lucknow Super Giants fielding coach Jonty Rhodes is of the opinion that skipper KL Rahul has never been 'plagued' by captaincy after the opener struck his first fifty of the ongoing IPL season. A prolific run-getter in the IPL, Rahul smashed 74 off 56 balls albeit in a two-wicket loss. He had also captained the Punjab Kings and Rhodes was part of that support staff.

"The captain is someone who likes to lead from the front. He has always been a successful, dominating batter in all the IPLs. Captaincy isn't something that's ever plagued him. Many great batters when given captaincy don't quite handle it. He's led from the front and I think it's great to see that," Rhodes said at the post-match conference," said Rhodes.

The opener, however, struggled to get going this season, managing a high score of 35 before Saturday's knock.

"When the captain is scoring runs, the way that he plays he lays a really good platform for others to play around them. We always knew that he was just one knock away. He's been batting in the nets superbly. He's not the kind of player anybody worries about because we always know it's literally one innings away."

While all other LSG batters failed to make an impact, Rahul batted till the 19th over but Rhodes felt the skipper could have stayed around and provided the final flourish. "I think he himself will be satisfied with the way the knock turned out today but possibly could've batted deeper," he added.

On a two-paced wicket, Rahul displayed great composure en route his 56-ball 74 as he added 53 and 48 runs with Kyle Mayers (29) and Krunal Pandya (18) for the first and third wickets respectively. His batting heroics went in vain as the side couldn't finish things with a flourish after losing four wickets for 48 runs in the last five overs, with Sam Curran picking up three of those

Patidar, Iyer to take treatment in UK

Rajat Patidar will take treatment in England and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) also confirmed on Saturday that Shreyas Iyer too is on way to the United Kingdom for his back surgery.

The BCCI said it will bear all the expenses of Patidar's surgery to his left heel, which has ruled him out of the entire IPL 2023. "The BCCI will send Patidar for surgery although he is not a centrally contracted player. He is one of the targeted players and we will ensure he gets the best treatment," a BCCI official said.

Patidar (29) shot into national limelight with a swashbuckling century in the IPL playoffs last year for Royal Challengers Bangalore and followed it up with some stellar performances in domestic cricket. He had been undergoing rehab at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) before the decision was taken to send him for surgery. He is currently at home in Indore, waiting for his visa papers to fly to the UK for the treatment.

Earlier, his franchise issued a statement about his injury status. "Unfortunately, Rajat Patidar has been ruled out of IPL 2023 due to an Achilles Heel injury. We wish Rajat a speedy recovery and will continue to support him during the process," RCB said in a statement recently.

Meanwhile, the BCCI said Iyer will undergo an operation next week. "Mr Shreyas Iyer is scheduled to undergo surgery for his lower back issue next week. He will remain under the surgeon's care for two weeks and will return to the NCA after that for rehabilitation," a BCCI statement on Saturday said.

The BCCI also provided an update on Jasprit Bumrah, who has already completed surgical treatment and started rehab at NCA from Friday. "Mr Jasprit Bumrah underwent surgery in New Zealand on his lower back, which was successful and he remains pain-free. The fast bowler was advised by the specialist to start his rehab six weeks after the surgery and accordingly, Mr Bumrah has commenced his rehab management at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru from Friday," the BCCI statement read.

Economists divided on when the Bank of Canada could cut interest rates

The Bank of Canada on Wednesday announced it would once again be holding the overnight interest rate steady at 4.5 per cent for a second time in a row.

The latest consumer price index report showed Canada's inflation rate had slowed to 5.2 per cent, the lowest it's been in over a year. Bond yields in Canada have also fallen, suggesting the market is betting on future interest rate cuts. But even as inflation continues to cool, economists are split on when we can eventually see lower interest rates.

Sal Guatieri, senior economist and director at BMO Capital Markets, says he's not expecting a rate cut until "early next year."

"If we see much more weakness in the economy – a real recession – yes, the Bank of Canada almost certainly would swing into action in reverse gears and cut interest rates," he told CTV News Channel on Wednesday. "But we don't see that. We just see a very mild downturn and growth resuming by the end of this year."

Rather than a sharp recession, Guatieri says BMO is forecasting a "technical downturn in the next couple of quarters," one he expects will be "very mild, very shallow" and over by the end of this year.

"Canada has kind of mixed as to whether we will slip into recession. The general forecast calls for continued growth, very modest growth for the rest of this year, but they're not ruling out the possibility that we could see small declines for a quarter or two this year. So that could meet the technical definition of recession," he said.

Meanwhile, Randall Bartlett, senior director of Canadian economics at Desjardins Economics, is projecting the Bank of Canada could cut rates "as early as the end of the year," given how fast inflation has been slowing, and how some banks in the U.S. have run into trouble in the last month.

"Most importantly, inflation has come down faster than the Bank had previously anticipated and financial conditions have tightened on the back of banking sector turbulence outside of our borders," he wrote in a research note on Wednesday. "Together, these look to have outweighed the sustained strength in the Canadian economy and labour market."

Canada also continues to have a strong job market. In the last labour report, StatCan reported Canada gained 35,000 jobs while the unemployment rate was unchanged at 5.0 per cent, which is near record lows.

"Canadian households continue to benefit from significant government financial supports with a job market at full employment. The combination has reignited consumer spending through the first quarter of this year. With government policy at odds with the central bank, it could forestall the needed calming in price pressures as the year presses forward," economists from TD wrote in a research note on Thursday.

The economists also said in order for rate cuts to occur, there would need to be "a convincing slackening in the job market and erosion in economic momentum."

"This places the timing close to year-end or early 2024. In other words, just as the rate hike cycle started in Canada and the U.S. in close alignment, so too will the rate cut cycle," they wrote.

When asked about whether rate cuts are on the horizon, Bank of Canada governor Tiff Macklem told reporters on Wednesday the rate cuts the bond markets have been anticipating "don't look like the most likely scenario to us," and didn't rule out a future rate hike to get inflation down to two per cent.

Royal LePage changes year-end forecast following boost in housing market activity

Royal LePage is forecasting that the average price of a home in Canada will increase 4.5 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2023, compared to the same quarter in 2022. This revised forecast anticipates an earlier-than-expected boost in activity in major housing markets across Canada.

The projection is included in the real estate company's house price survey released Thursday, which drew from national property data as well as statistics collected from 62 of Canada's largest real estate markets.

"Coming out of a correction, it is common to underestimate the speed at which the market will turn itself around," Phil Soper, president and CEO of Royal LePage, said in a press release. "As market activity is rebounding quicker than anticipated, we are looking ahead with a sense of cautious optimism. While we do not expect huge price gains this year, some sense of normalcy is returning to the market."

The average price of a home in Canada reached its peak in February 2022. Over the course of a year, the national average fell 18.9 per cent, according to the Canadian Real Estate Association. According to Soper, the housing market's "inevitable correction" was triggered by the Bank of Canada's aggressive interest rate hikes, which were aimed at combating worsening inflation. After a series of increases throughout 2022, the Bank of Canada recently decided to hold its policy rate steady at 4.5 per cent. Royal LePage cited an early return of buyer demand that might be a result of stabilizing interest rates.

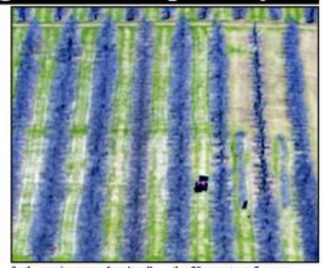
"We have turned the corner and the housing economy is growing again; none too soon for many buyers, who have been waiting patiently for prices to bottom out," Soper said in the release.

The survey also shows that the aggregate price of a home in Canada has decreased 9.2 per cent year-over-year in the first fiscal quarter of 2023, while the aggregate price of a home on a quarter-over-quarter basis has increased 2.8 per cent.

According to the data, three of Canada's biggest cities saw aggregate price gains between the fourth quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023. Toronto showed an increase of 4.8 per cent, while Montreal and Vancouver both showed a rise of 1.3 per cent quarter-over-quarter. When categorized by housing type, Royal LePage's report indicates that the median price of single-family detached home fell 10.7 per cent year-over-year, now standing at $808,700. A smaller decline was reported in the median price of a condominium in Canada, which fell 6.7 per cent year-over-year and now stands at $571,700.

"Sanity is slowly returning to the housing market," Soper said in the release. "While some buyer hopefuls will remain sidelined by a reduced capacity to borrow in this higher rate environment, our market data shows that many of those who chose to pause their search to see where prices and interest rates would land have resumed their home buying plans. Unfortunately, the challenge they must now deal with is a severe shortage of homes for sale."

Canada's farming future in trouble unless 30,000 immigrants fill gap of retiring farmers, report says



As Rehan Khan scans his 160 acres of muddy, partially snow-covered field, he sees golden - and red - opportunity.

"The first year, I seeded oats. Then in 2022, it was wheat. This year, it's red lentils," said the father of two who farms near Yorkton, Sask.

Khan left Pakistan in 2018 so his kids could go to school in Canada.

He said goodbye to his family farm and 20-year career in agriculture advising farmers on chemical and fertilizer use.

Getting into Canada's ag sector was the natural move, but Khan warns other migrants it's not easy.

"There must be local support. Then [immigrants] can be successful farming."

Researchers say Canada needs 30,000 new immigrants like Khan to either start up their own farms, or take over existing ones, to avoid a looming labour crisis in the agriculture industry. Some worry, however, current programs aren't set up to attract or support that workforce.

40 per cent of farmers to retire by 2033: report

About 40 per cent of Canadian farmers are expected to retire within the next 10 years, while 66 per cent of farmers don't have a succession plan, according to a recent report from RBC.

At the same time, researchers expect the agriculture industry to be down 24,000 farm, nursery and greenhouse workers.

To fill this gap, the report suggests Canada update its immigration programs to specifically bring in 30,000 farm-focused newcomers. One solution, the report states, is to create a federal process for experienced temporary foreign workers (TFW) to get permanent resident status.

The TFW program only "scratches the surface of the labour shortage," said Evan Fraser, co-author of the report and director of the Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph, where he is a professor of geography.

"We're also talking about radically new forms of agriculture like the explosion of the greenhouse industry … and the emergence of the vertical farming sector," he said.

"These are year round operations…. So the very notion of a temporary migrant worker that comes in simply for the growing season doesn't really make sense."

Ag-focused immigration pilot ends in May

In 2020, Canada started an agriculture-specific immigration pilot program designed to give a path to permanent residency for non-seasonal workers with experience, but it's set to end this May.

Ottawa says as of February 2023, more than 1,500 people have been admitted through the program. The pilot was designed to handle up to 2,750 people.

Immigration Minister Sean Fraser was unavailable for an interview due to travel.

A department spokesperson told CBC in an email they are assessing the pilot "and the possible extension beyond its scheduled expiry."

The spokesperson said giving migrants permanent residence "is not the solution to labour shortages."

"These newcomers will only remain in the sector, like other permanent residents and Canadian citizens, if it offers competitive wages, good working conditions and long-term prospects for themselves and their families," he wrote.

The report also suggests Canada seek out farmers in countries such as the Netherlands and New Zealand who may be forced to downsize or close if they don't meet strict climate change rules regulating emissions.

Support needed through the process

There are other hurdles for experienced farmers who want to get started in Canada. For example, the price of farmland has increased more than 20 per cent over five years.

In many areas, a budget of $1 million might not cover a small farm, according to Rajin Gill, who specializes in farm realty in Abbotsford, B.C.

"I think there's a big discrepancy between pricing and what [newcomers] can afford," said Gill.

"We get lots of calls from people who are eager to start. They're the people you want opening the farms because they're passionate. But there's that gap between what they can afford and what they're going for."

Saskatchewan has the cheapest price per acre in Canada. Khan said he's invested $223,000 on his land since he bought it in 2021. He said he was lucky enough to buy when he did, since prices have gone up since then.

Beyond money, the support isn't there, he said.

"Unfortunately, in the very beginning, I couldn't find so much information. But now I know how to buy something, from where to buy … where to sell grain. With the passage of time, I got this," he said.

Khan struggled to find affordable, fertile land in his price range near Regina, where his family settled. He bought land near Yorkton, and rents a place there so he can stay near the farm.

Khan's 160 acre-farm is relatively small compared to many operations in Saskatchewan, which made it tough to find a company willing to rent out machinery, he said. Luckily, a neighbouring family offered to rent out their machines - even showed him how to use it.

"They're more like family friends now," said Khan.

Khan wants to see government employees support newcomers with information up front on everything from renting machines to tips on selling the product.

"All these things should be considered not only for the immigrant, but for the government agency who wants to get farmers in here to occupy and take over these lands."

Labour shortage affects food costs

A labour crisis like the one forecasted could force Canadians to spend more at the grocery store.

Heather Bruce, chair of the department of Agriculture Food Nutritional Science at the University of Alberta, said COVID-19 was a taste of the possible future.

"We saw significant slowdowns in the ability to process meat. We also had a shortage of ingredients for foods as harvests were compromised. All of these things can contribute to food insecurity, increased prices, empty food shelves at retail stores," she said.

"Our immigration policies support our food security and allow our companies to be competitive not just in terms of their ability to supply food, but also to supply food at a reasonable price."

Investing in tech and people

The report suggests existing farmers do their part to avoid the labour crisis, by automating operations so it takes fewer people to work a farm.

Steven Donald is on it.

"We've spent a lot of money on technology such as auto-steer, GIS mapping and air seeders that can run full prescriptions without an operator manually telling it what to do," said the 43-year-old grain and livestock farmer near Moosomin, Sask.

This summer, Donald is also upgrading his grain cleaner, a machine that sorts grain based on weight and size, so it can run 24/7 without supervision.

"But at the same time, to manage an operation properly - doing all your weed scouting and seed timing - it boils down to so many acres per person to manage that," he said.

That's why Donald is hiring a temporary foreign worker this summer. For the first time in his family farm's history, he can't find local, consistent help.

"Weather dictates 100 per cent what we do. Sometimes we have a very narrow window to put our crop in or take it off," he said.

"When the crunch comes on and we have to put so many acres in a short time, that's when we need the extra help. And that help is harder and harder to get."