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**Canada hits pause on trade mission to India after tensions at G20 summit**

Canada has announced it would postpone an October trade mission to India, in the midst of strained relations between the two countries.

A spokesperson for Canadian Trade Minister Mary Ng confirmed the change on Friday, though no reason was offered for the delay.

"At this time, we are postponing the upcoming trade mission to India," the spokesperson, Shanti Cosentino, said.

Earlier in the day, anonymous Indian officials also told reporters that negotiations over a trade deal were on hold, due to objections over "political developments in Canada".

In May, Ng and her Indian counterpart, Piyush Goyal, had issued a joint statement saying they hoped to boost trade and investment between their two countries by the year's end.

But those talks have hit several high-level snags. Most recently, during last weekend's Group of 20 (G20) summit in New Delhi, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose not to hold a formal bilateral meeting with Canadian leader Justin Trudeau, a decision many perceived to be a snub.

G20 ends with leaders sidestepping Ukraine

Modi also pulled Trudeau aside to criticize Canada's handling of recent Sikh protests.

Videos circulated in June showing a controversial parade float in Brampton, Ontario, that was themed



after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The former Indian prime minister had been killed by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984 after she ordered military action against Sikh separatists at the Golden Temple in the state of Punjab.

The parade float sparked fury in the Indian government, which called the display a celebration of separatist violence.

On Sunday, in a press release after Modi's encounter with Trudeau, the Indian government reiterated its "strong concerns about continuing anti-India activities in Canada."

"Extremist elements" in the country, the press release said, were "inciting violence against Indian diplomats, damaging diplomatic premises, and threatening the Indian community in Canada."

However, since his election in 2014, Modi has been accused of overseeing a rising tide of conservative Hindu nationalism in India, while minority groups in the

country raise concerns about threats to their human rights.

Canada, meanwhile, has the largest Sikh population outside of Punjab. Among them are separatists who hope to create an independent Sikh state called Khalistan in northern India.

For his part, Trudeau has defended Canadians' right to "freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and freedom of peaceful protest", though he did say he would "push back" against "hate".

He also dismissed the scale of the protests. "It is important to remember that the actions of the few do not represent the entire community or Canada," he said.

But the controversy has cast a pall over Indian-Canadian relations. On September 1, in a surprise move, Canada said it would pause the trade treaty talks - something Indian officials echoed in their statements to the press on Friday.

The trade negotiations between the two countries have been happening on and off since 2010.

**Metroland to cease print publication of dozens of community newspapers across Ontario**

Metroland Media Group, the Toronto Star's sister company, has sought bankruptcy protection and will cease the print publication of its weekly community newspapers across Ontario, moving to an online-only model.

The move involves 605 layoffs, nearly two-thirds of the workforce, the company said in an announcement Friday morning.

The proposal under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act will spare the company's daily newspapers - including the Hamilton Spectator, Peterborough Examiner, St. Catharines Standard, Niagara Falls Review, Welland Tribune and the Waterloo Region Record - which will continue both in print and online.

The Toronto Star will also continue to operate, and is not part of the bankruptcy proposal.

"Metroland has faced substantial declines in both print advertising and the flyer business over the past several years, to the point where the community newspaper business is no longer viable in printed form. We simply don't have the financial resources required to fund large, sustained operating losses indefinitely," states an FAQ prepared by the company.

No termination or severance pay will be paid because "the Company does not have sufficient funds," according to the FAQ.

"Affected Employees will have the opportunity to file a claim in the course of the restructuring process for the amounts that they are owed by Metroland."

In response to questions, Metroland spokesperson Bob Hepburn said the company is hopeful the bankruptcy process will "provide all of the affected staff with an opportunity to recover some of the loss they are suffering in the way of lost termination and severance pay."

According to a breakdown of the



jobs affected, 68 out of 198 journalists have been laid off.

"Community journalism is turning into a lost art form," tweeted Hunter Cowler, a reporter with the Bradford West Gwillimbury Topic who was laid off.

In an email to company employees, Neil Oliver, CEO of Toronto, said the 71 Metroland community publications will be digital only going forward. A few small news sites - including OurWindsor.ca and a similar site for North Bay - will close.

"We are all aware of the pressures our industry faces these days. There's no mistake it's challenging. We fought to avoid this situation, and hoped that, post-pandemic, revenues would return," Oliver wrote.

Metroland's layoffs are the latest in a long series of cutbacks for Canadian media, which is in crisis as the advertising that once underwrote robust news gathering and employed tens of thousands of people, now exists as a shadow of its former self.

In a tweet posted in reaction to the news, Union National President Lana Payne said: "Local news, Canada, you are going to wake up one day and there won't be any."

"Devastating for our members. Devastating for local news. Devastating for communities. Devastating for the fabric of democracy."

Canadian Association of Journalists

"We're letting people in Silicon Valley and other parts of the world who have no investment in this country dictate what we read, and are taking all the revenue on the other side of it," Bitove said at a speech at the Canadian Club in March.

Bitove was not available for comment Friday. But a statement put out by Metroland echoed his sentiments.

"The media industry continues to face existential challenges, largely because digital tech giants have used their dominant positions to take the vast majority of the advertising revenue in Canada," it said.

Metroland's community newspaper business, which saw millions of free weekly papers delivered to homes muddled with advertising flyers that covered the cost of the operation, has suffered as advertising revenue plummeted.

"The decline of the print and flyer distribution business was significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and by the reduction of flyer usage both by readers and advertisers as a marketing vehicle," the statement added.

"The Company has determined that in order to survive as a going concern, it must end its weekly paper and flyer businesses and convert to a digital strategy."

In a column published online, Metroland Media vice president Lee Ann Waterman lamented the layoffs but said community journalism isn't dead.

"Our newspapers are gone but we are still here," she wrote.

"We are still committed to community journalism, to writing stories that engage and inform our readers and shed light on issues of importance to our communities. Our priority is still to provide you the local information you've told us you need and community journalism you can't find anywhere else."

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# Ontario Liberal leadership race heats up as candidates take aim at Bonnie Crombie

Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie was a popular target at Thursday's Ontario Liberal leadership candidates' debate in Thunder Bay, Ont.

Nate Erskine-Smith, MP for Beaches-East York in Toronto; Ottawa Centre MP and former provincial cabinet minister Yasir Naqvi, and former Liberal MP and current provincial caucus member Ted Hu all took turns taking aim at Crombie.

Multiple public opinion polls have suggested Crombie is the current front-runner. Naqvi, in particular, criticized Crombie's past statements about being open to Greenbelt land swaps as well as donations she has taken from developers.

"You cannot elect a leader who one day says they're going to open the Greenbelt and the next day changes their mind," said Naqvi. "Or one who takes money from the same people who are donating to Doug Ford and says that somehow they're going to do anything different."



Erskine-Smith criticized Crombie for past statements about governing "right of centre" and her track record on housing as mayor.

"Young people have left the city of Mississauga more than any other municipality because housing did not get built in the last decade," he said. "Are we going to win with a leader who has a track record of failing to build homes?"

In response, Crombie said she is proud of Mississauga's track record on housing.

"We have unlimited heights and densities in our downtown," said Crombie. "People want to live in Mississauga."

Current provincial caucus member Adil Shamji did not directly criticize Crombie. Instead, he leaned heavily on his experience as an emergency room physician and working at homeless shelters. Shamji said his priorities would be to make more family doctors available in northern Ontario and prevent ER closures.

Crombie strong but still faces challenges, experts said. The Ontario Liberal Party said earlier this week that roughly 80,000 Ontarians registered to vote in the leadership contest.

# New Brunswickers clean up in Lee's wake, thousands still without power

As cleanup continued on Sunday in the wake of post-tropical storm Lee, the New Brunswick government said the damage doesn't warrant disaster financial assistance.

Based on "initial information from communities that damages to infrastructure and properties are high, disaster financial assistance is not expected," stated a government news release sent out Sunday afternoon.

The release went on to say, "Wind and surface flooding are insurable losses. Impacted individuals should contact their insurance providers to report damage."

Cleanup, meanwhile, continued on Sunday in communities across the province. Power crews were still working to restore power to thousands who were without. By 5:30 p.m. AT Sunday, there were about 4,000 N.B. Power customers waiting for power—the majority of them in the Fredericton and southwestern areas of the province — down from a storm peak of about 38,000.

In all, N.B. Power said about 88,000 customers were impacted at some point during the storm.

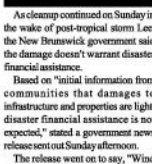
Some will have to wait until Monday. The utility estimates that some customers will have to wait until Monday evening before their power is restored. The latest restoration times can be found online.

"As customer outages are restored in some communities, crews are being relocated where they are most needed. Rest assured, we have crews in every district to respond to outages," the utility said in a statement Sunday morning.

Lee, meanwhile, left New Brunswick and passed over Prince Edward Island overnight. The storm is closing in on Newfoundland's west coast, with the eye expected to make landfall on the western coast around 9 p.m., although with much less power. By mid-afternoon, the Canadian Hurricane Centre estimated Lee's sustained winds to be 74 km/h.

Lee's tropical storm warnings have ended in Atlantic Canada, although gale warnings are still in effect for waters to the south and east of Lee's track.

Communities along the Bay of Fundy felt some of the strongest gusts



With so many roads closed in the province, motorists "should plan ahead if they are considering travel today and continue to check 511 New Brunswick or dial 511 within New Brunswick for updates" on road conditions.

At a gas station in New Maryland, the underside of the canopy over the gas pumps collapsed.

On the Bay of Fundy, ferry service resumed on Sunday morning to Deer Island, Grand Manan and White Head Island.

On the Northumberland Strait, meanwhile, restrictions that were in place on Saturday for the Confederation Bridge were lifted Sunday morning, but authorities warned that due to the "site-specific weather forecast" for wind, restrictions are possible until about 4 p.m. Sunday.

With Lee's exit from the province overnight Saturday, the New Brunswick Emergency Measures Organization's shifted the focus to "assessing the impact of the storm," said director Kyle Lovitt.

"We continue to ask for the public's cooperation, as damages and restoration continue to be assessed. We also encourage residents to check on their neighbours, particularly the elderly, who might require assistance."

A release from the New Brunswick government said residents "are advised to stay away from areas where trees are in contact with powerlines or blocking roadways, and to call 911 if there is an immediate safety concern. They should not prune or remove trees on lines, as direct or indirect contact with power lines can be fatal."

Outages going down. N.B. Power spokesperson Dominique Couture said the utility had 700 people ready to go before Lee

hit, and all of those people are still supporting the restoration response. "So, we're definitely using all the resources that we had planned for this event and I think in this case we were accurately prepared for what we were coming this weekend," she said Sunday morning.

She said N.B. Power was still being notified about new outages overnight on Saturday and into Sunday morning as people awake to discover they had lost power overnight.

Even with so many personnel in the field, some customers will have to wait until Monday before they get their power back, Couture said.

She said crews in the field experienced some "very challenging conditions" on Saturday.

"We know that we had high winds, rains and the leaves were very heavy [and] branches on the lines were very heavy. So very physical work for our crews yesterday."

"Today, the day is a little clearer. It's easier for crews to, you know, put their heads down and get to work to restore power to the most customers possible."

Although weather conditions have improved, Couture said there's still a lot of debris to contend with, along with saturated ground and "very heavy leaves on lines."

"So it does make work challenging for crews today."

Couture reminded customers without power to let the company know.

"Customers can do that either by reaching out to us online or by calling our customer care number. That number is 1-800-663-6272. Please don't assume that we know your power is out and make sure we are aware."

Not as bad as expected in Saint John.

In Saint John, not far from where the eye of the storm hit on Saturday evening, things were "far better than we anticipated," said Mayor Donna Henderson on Sunday morning.

She said several city crews were on standby during the storm and ready to respond.

"So, I would say we fared fairly well, you know, considering what it could have been."

She said Saint John Energy had about 900 customers affected by outages, but all were restored by Sunday morning.

"We had about 50 or so trees down," said Reardon, including some in King's Square.

She said crews have prioritized the trees that have fallen onto roads and buildings, and that work will continue, followed by the cleanup of smaller debris.

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# Karan Johar On QUITTING Twitter! Here's The REAL REASON He Left The Platform!

Karan Johar has disclosed the actual reason behind his departure from the social media platform Twitter and it is not the nepotism controversy. During a recent interview with Mid-Day, he shared that his decision was purely instinctual, triggered by the moment he came across abusive comments targeting his young twins, Yash and Rishi Johar. Speaking about this Kjo said "That quitting Twitter was an instinctive decision I made when I started reading abuse to my children. When that happened... this is the lowest you could get. Abuse me, say what you want. They also abused my mother. My mother is still an older person. My children were five at that time, when I took the decision. Now, I'm not going back on this platform for anything."

The Dhrama Productions founder faced some serious backlash on Twitter over nepotism debate and everyone throughout he left Twitter because of that trolling. Karan further



said "It's not that I've stopped casting people from the industry. Or I've isolated myself from the sheer wonderfulness of Alia Bhatt. I have not listened to anyone. I've just left a platform. That had nothing to do with the things I was saying. It was about my kids. I couldn't read that." Karan Johar is a single parent and the filmmaker welcomed twins into his life in 2017 through surrogacy. He named his son Yash in tribute to his late father and film producer, while his daughter was named Rishi, a clever play on his mother's name. Hiroo. Kjo recently made his directorial comeback with Alia Bhatt and Ranveer Singh's Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahani. The film raked Rs 150 crore domestically.

# Parineeti Chopra and Raghav Chadha wedding festivities begin with ardaas

Although Parineeti Chopra has maintained silence about her wedding and wedding date, for the past few weeks, several reports of her impending marriage with fiancé Raghav Chadha have been doing the rounds. After detailed reports of her wedding plans were unveiled, and later her wedding invite was found its way on social media, recent reports suggest that the festivities have already begun in Delhi. To add to that, the couple were recently spotted in the Mumbai airport as they were taking off to the capital.

According to current reports, the wedding festivities have already begun with 'ardaas' and 'shabad kirtan', both of which hold extreme importance in Punjabi culture and traditions. Followed by this, we hear that the couple has planned a few intimate functions which will only be attended by family and close ones before taking off to Rajasthan to kick start the major wedding functions, which may include Sangeet, Mehendi, Haldi, and the wedding, along with a reception gala in the evening for the guests.

For the unversed, the couple is expected to tie the knot in the picturesque The Leela Palace in Udaipur, Rajasthan. In fact, we hear that the bookings for the hotels for the friends and family close to the couple have already been taken for. Going by the invites that went viral last week, we hear that the Baraat along with Raghav might be staying at Taj Palace and the Bazarati is expected to proceed to The Leela Palace for the wedding ceremony. For the wedding, Parineeti Chopra will be attended by Pooja Kher along with her husband Nick Jonas along with a lot of prominent political personalities who are close to Raghav Chadha. Parineeti Chopra and Raghav Chadha got engaged in a beautiful ivory-themed nika ceremony in Delhi in May 2023 and are now expected to have a week-long celebration for their wedding.

# India celebrates World Cup 'booster shot' after Sri Lanka 'battered'

India celebrated the 10-wicket thrashing of Sri Lanka in the Asia Cup final as "a booster shot" on Monday for the one-day World Cup starting on home soil in a fortnight.

Pace bowler Mohammed Siraj got four wickets in one over to help skittle Sri Lanka out for 50 on Sunday, a total the Indian openers Ishan Kishan and Shubman Gill surpassed in 61 overs.

It was India's eighth Asia Cup crown but his first major tournament title since winning the same competition in 2018.

"Siraj's dream spell ended India's five-year title drought," The Times of India wrote. The India Express called it a "Booster shot before World Cup" and praised what it called the team's "clinical and ruthless" performance. "Triumph lifts India's morale... Just like the pre-mega-event," it added, referring to the World Cup, which starts on October 5. In the Sri Lanka capital Colombo, where the final took place, the mood



was gloomy. "Abject surrender of Asia Cup by Sri Lanka," said a headline in the daily FT newspaper. The home team were bowled out in just 15.2 overs with Siraj ripping through the Sri Lankan batting with his 6-21. Sri Lanka were playing their 11th Asia Cup final but the 116-minute humiliation left fans disappointed and angry. "One fan complained in a video post on social media that Sri Lanka was all out even before he could get to his seat at the 35,000-capacity Prerna stadium. Another on social media said the Sri Lanka innings lasted less than the time taken to drink a bottle of arak, the island nation's firewater spirit made from fermented coconut or sugarcane. Colombo's Daily Mirror said the final was a "mammoth battle between two opponents in completely different weight classes." "As heavyweights India completely battered, bruised, bloodied and bashed-in Sri Lanka's flyweight batting line-up for an emphatic 10-wicket win."

# Want to give Tim Southee every chance of proving his fitness - Stead

New Zealand will make a decision on Tim Southee only after the pacer consults specialists back home, said head coach Gary Stead. "Until then, we can't make a call around the World Cup," he added.

Southee broke a bone in his right thumb while fielding in the fourth ODI against England at Lord's on September 15.

"We'll just need to understand the timeframe and what that looks like and once we have that information, we will then be able to move forward and make a decision," Stead further said.

Southee, part of the 15-man squad for the World Cup in India, will get "every chance" of being fit and available, the coach stressed.

"We'll want to give Tim every chance of proving his fitness," said Stead. "There will be an element of the unknown being that it's a bone fracture, and at some stage, he will have to start catching balls and bowling again."

"The healing process in the next 10 to 12 days will be pretty important for him as well."

Up next in Bangladesh starting September 21 before the World Cup warm-ups against Pakistan (September 29) and South Africa (October 2). They open their campaign against defending champions England in Ahmedabad on October 5.

# SCOOP: Amitabh Bachchan's iconic song 'Saara Zamana' recreated in Tiger Shroff-starrer Ganapath

A few hours ago, the poster of Ganapath: A Hero Is Born was unveiled, featuring a blazing Tiger Shroff whose cloth take is on fire. The poster has grabbed eyeballs and has given an indication that it can be a promising mass entertainer, and has learned that through this film is set in the future, it has an interesting retro touch.



The song 'Saara Zamana Haseno Ka Deewana', from the film Yamma (1981), has been recreated in Ganapath. The makers have used it as an important juncture in the film. It will be unveiled before the movie is released in cinemas. They are confident that it'll be liked and help in enhancing the buzz for the action entertainer.

"Saara Zamana Haseno Ka Deewana" is considered an iconic song not just for its energetic composition but also because it starred Amitabh Bachchan in a light bulb outfit. Amitabh, in a blog, once wrote that it was his idea to have the lights on his attire and also to shoot the song at Kharak's Navaji Stadium. As per reports, the light bulbs on the outfit would go on or off through a switch which was firmly placed on Amitabh's hand.

Incidentally, Amitabh Bachchan also features in Ganapath. It now remains to be seen if he will also be seen in the song. Kriti Sanon is the female lead in this Vikas Bahl-directorial, which releases in cinemas on October 20, that is, in the Dussehra week. As per the new poster which was unveiled today, Ganapath will be released not just in Hindi but also Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

The source also added, "Around a month is left for Ganapath to arrive in cinemas. With the poster launch today, the promotional campaign has begun. The makers will drop the film's trailer and songs, including the recreated version of 'Saara Zamana', in the next couple of weeks."

# Jason Roy left out, Harry Brook added to England's World Cup squad

Defending champions England have made a late change to their World Cup plans, replacing Jason Roy with Harry Brook from their provisional squad. Roy, 33, was an integral member of the team's renaissance in the format and also in his run to the title four years ago but has endured misadventure post that win.

He missed each of the just completed four-ODI series against New Zealand with back spasms. While there were suggestions from captain Jos Buttler that he might be added to the squad to face Ireland later this week, the selectors decided to leave him out altogether. This decision could signify the end of his international career with Roy having previously said that the marquee quadrilateral event would be his swansong after declining a central contract with ECB.

Roy scored crucial centuries this year, in Hloemfontein and Mirpur, but his overall average of 31.78 in the period post last World Cup and his recent troubles with a back injury effectively sealed his fate. In a double whammy for him, Dawid Malan made 277 runs from three games at 92.33 against New Zealand and finished as the Player of the series, rubber-stamping his position in the squad. Roy's replacement in the squad, Ben Stokes reversed his retirement and made himself available for the ODI World Cup defence. He played in three of the four games against New Zealand - twice as an opener - but only managed scores of 25, 2 and 10. He has, however, enjoyed an otherwise sensational start to his international career in the last year and a half, particularly in the Test format through his belligerent performances in the middle-order.



players with Jason Roy missing out and Harry Brook coming into the squad".

"We have selected a squad we are confident can go to India and win the World Cup," Luke Wright, England's national selector, said. "We are blessed with an incredibly strong group of white-ball players which was underlined by the performances in the series win against a very good New Zealand team." "The strength of the group has meant that we have had to make some tough decisions on world-class

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## Canada extending small business emergency loan repayment deadline

Canada is giving small businesses in Canada more time to pay back emergency loans offered during the COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Tuesday.

The Liberals have decided, after consistent calls from businesses, to give them another year to pay back their Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) loans, despite previously taking the position that repayment deadlines were "inflexible and not to be changed."



"We know that some need a bit more runway," Trudeau said.

Groups across Canada representing hundreds of thousands of small businesses have been pleading with the federal government to grant them an extension, ideally a two-year grace period and the ability to maintain access to the forgivable portion of their loans.

But, what was announced Thursday falls short of advocates' expectations.

The federal government created CEBA early in the pandemic as one of a suite of financial aid measures aimed at keeping businesses afloat in the face of forced closures and other restrictions.

Offering initially up to \$40,000 to small businesses and non-profits that have

experienced a loss of revenue due to COVID-19, an expansion was then granted, saving businesses able to apply to receive up to \$60,000 interest-free loans.

Open for applications between April 2020 and June 2021, the loans were approved for \$98,271 businesses, totaling \$49.2 billion in forgiveness.

In January 2022, in the wake of the Omicron variant surge and new restrictions, the Liberals announced they would be extending the repayment deadline by a year to the end of 2023. This meant that eligible businesses "in good standing" would have until Dec. 31, 2023 to repay and be eligible for debt forgiveness of one-third up to \$20,000 of their loan.

According to background provided by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's department, the repayment deadline for CEBA loans to qualify for this partial loan forgiveness is only being extended by a couple of weeks, from Dec. 31, 2023, to Jan. 18, 2024, "recognizing that the end of December is a busy time for many Canadian businesses."

Or, if businesses make a refinancing application with the financial institution that provided their CEBA loan by Jan. 18, 2024, the repayment deadline to benefit from the partial loan forgiveness extends until March 28, 2024.

Without the extension, many local businesses particularly in the tourism sector were facing the prospect of closing their doors for good.

outstanding loans after the 2023 deadline would be converted to two-year term loans with a five per cent interest rate, starting on Jan. 1, 2024, with the loans due in full by Dec. 31, 2025.

Now, small businesses that are in a position to pay back their CEBA loan in time to benefit from the partial loan forgiveness have until Dec. 31, 2026 to pay their loan back in full.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) was quick to say it was "disappointed" with the announcement, calling it "not good enough." "It is helpful that the government has given business owners an additional year to repay the full balance of the loan, but the plan misses the most central issue - the loss of the forgivable portion," said CFIB president and CEO Dan Kelly in a statement. "We need more."

The NDP, local chambers of commerce, tourism and industry groups that were imploring the government to grant this loan repayment leniency made the case that while the government gave businesses in crisis a lifeline with these loans, years later, many still are trading water in their post-pandemic coffers.

This has left many unable to make much more than a dent in the debt they've taken on, in the face of supply chain and hiring woes, as well as high inflation.

Without the extension, many local businesses particularly in the tourism sector were facing the prospect of closing their doors for good.

## Government calls for meeting with CEOs of Canada's biggest grocery chains to talk food prices



The federal government says it expects the heads of five of Canada's biggest grocery chains to attend a meeting in Ottawa on Monday to discuss ways to stabilize food prices.

The office of Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne told CBC News it asked the CEOs of Loblaw, Sobeys, Metro, Costco and Walmart to attend in person.

Champagne's office said it sent out the invitation Thursday afternoon as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was delivering his affordability announcement in London, Ont. at the Liberal's national caucus street.

"It's not okay that our biggest grocery stores are making record profits while Canadians are struggling to put food on the table," Trudeau told a press conference Thursday.

Durham 28

All summer long, the Trudeau government has been hammered by the Conservatives on the issue of affordability. The Liberals are now facing the worst polling they've seen since the Trudeau government first took office in 2015.

After what some MPs called a "frank discussion" with the prime minister behind closed doors at the Liberal's caucus room, Trudeau and his ministers announced a series of affordability measures.

"It's always a good time to fight," Champagne said Thursday. "We're going to be fighting and finding solutions to help Canadians. That's what they want from us."

Champagne's office said they've

asked the grocery CEOs or company chairpersons - not lawyers or other representatives - to meet with the minister in person.

So far, Metro, Loblaw and Walmart have told CBC News their CEOs will be attending Monday's meeting.

Trudeau said the grocery chains have until Thanksgiving to share their plans to stabilize their prices. If they don't, he said, Ottawa will take action.

"And let me be very clear," said Trudeau. "If their plan doesn't provide real relief... then we will take further action and we are not ruling anything out, including tax measures."

But the Retail Council of Canada, which speaks on behalf of Canada's big grocery chains, said focusing solely on grocery stores will not solve the problem.

Karl Linder, senior vice president of public relations with the Retail Council, told CBC News Network's Power & Politics that grocers are also facing higher costs.

"In the face of a storm of broader factors... there's a limit to what grocers can do alone," Linder told host David Cochrane in an interview airing Friday.

Linder argued that the prices Canadians pay at grocery stores are "just the tip of the iceberg."

"If they don't look at what's below the surface and what's actually driving food prices, then it's not going to be a very helpful exercise," he said.

A parliamentary committee investigating high food prices said in

March that if Canada's Competition Bureau finds the grocery store giants are profiting excessively from food inflation, Ottawa should consider hitting the companies with a windfall tax on excess profits.

The Competition Bureau found in June that Canada's grocery business doesn't have enough competition and is dominated by three domestic giants. It called on the government to encourage new entrants to bring down prices.

After spending months examining Canada's grocery sector, the bureau concluded it's mainly controlled by three domestic companies - Loblaw, Metro and Sobeys owner Empire - along with foreign giants Walmart and Costco.

The government said it plans on changing the Competition Act to give the bureau more power to take action. The legislative changes would include allowing the bureau to "conduct the production of information to conduct effective and complete market studies," a government press release said.

The release said the bureau would also be given the authority to take action against "collaboration that stifles competition and consumer choice, in particular situations where large grocers prevent smaller competitors from establishing operations nearby."

"We're going to start with the five largest grocers in Canada. They represent about 80 per cent of the market and we're going to be in

solution mode with very clear outcomes and very clear deadlines," Champagne said Thursday.

Champagne said he's been looking at what happened in France when supermarket chain Carrefour slapped price warnings on various food products in an effort to shame manufacturers into cutting their prices.

In a statement sent to CBC News, Walmart said it's "doing everything" it can "to fight inflation and keep prices low" but it needs "the government's help" to help control "costs from processors to suppliers to retailers."

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh said that after remaining silent for months on the issue, Trudeau has released a "vague" plan that "doesn't force CEOs to act."

"Asking [outgoing president and CEO of Loblaw] Galen Weston nicely to make less profit is like asking [Conservative Leader] Pierre Poilievre to care about climate change," said Singh. "Canadians are paying for Loblaw's inaction on corporate greed every time they go to the grocery store."

"Just today, Empire released their profits for the first quarter of the 2024 fiscal year. Their net profits rose by \$92 million."

Conservative Party spokesperson Sebastian Skamki blamed Liberal policies - specifically the carbon tax - for higher grocery prices.

"Trudeau taxes the farmer who grows the food, the trucker who transports the food, and then the store that sells it. All of those costs show up on the grocery bills of the families who then buy the food," Skamki said in an emailed statement.

As complaints about possible profiteering by big grocery store chains grew in number, the heads of three of Canada's biggest grocery chains were called to testify before a parliamentary committee in March.

"No matter how many times you read it on Twitter, the idea that grocers are causing food inflation is not only false, it's impossible," said Weston.

Weston said in March that retail prices have not been rising faster than costs.

Loblaw told CBC News that Weston will be at Monday's meeting, adding that "beyond the steps we've already taken to help, we are always open to discussions about how more can be done across the industry."

## Government to extend pandemic small business loan repayment deadlines

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says the government is extending the repayment deadline for its small business pandemic loan program by one year - but businesses will still lose the forgivable portion of the loan if they don't repay in the coming months.

The Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) was introduced at the height of the pandemic to help out small businesses forced to close or limit their operations due to public health measures. The program offered interest-free loans backed by the federal government.

A business could apply for up to \$60,000 through the program - up to \$20,000 would be forgiven if the rest was repaid by a certain deadline. The original repayment deadline was the end of 2022. It was later extended to the end of 2023.

Any business that missed that deadline would start accruing interest and have to repay the loan in full by the end of 2025. That deadline will now be extended to the end of 2026.



"While many have paid these loans back, we know that some need a bit more runway," Trudeau said Thursday.

Businesses will be given a small extension - until Jan. 18, 2024 - to qualify for debt forgiveness. Businesses that refinanced their loans will be given until March 28 to qualify.

All loans will start accruing five per cent interest if not repaid by Jan. 19.

Nearly 900,000 businesses were approved for the program, which distributed just over \$49 billion in loans. But only 21 per cent of those businesses had fully repaid their loans

as of May 31.

The federal government has been under immense pressure from a number of business advocacy groups to extend the deadline past 2023. Others have been calling for complete forgiveness of the outstanding loans.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business said it is disappointed with the government's announcement.

"The government has failed to address the most critical issue on outstanding CEBA loans - the loss of the \$20,000 forgivable portion for those unable to repay the loans by year end," CFIB president Dan Kelly

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