

Earth's original shape revealed

SARAH KNAPTON

London: The Earth may have been originally flatter, resembling a Smartie rather than a sphere, a new study suggests.

Computer simulations of planet formation developed by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) show that newborn planets form as oblate spheroids — orbs squashed from the top and the bottom but bulging in the middle.

Earth today is still classed as an oblate spheroid, being slightly flatter at the poles and larger at the equator.

But the simulations suggest rocky planets, such as Earth, start out life far more squashed, like a flying saucer.

Over time, planets grow and become more spherical as material falls onto them mainly on the poles rather than the equator. Dr Dimitris Stamatiou, a reader in astrophysics at UCLan, said: "We have been studying planet formation for a long time but never before had we thought to check the shape of the planets as they form in the simulations."

"We had always assumed that they were spherical. We were very surprised that they turned out to be oblate spheroids, pretty similar to Smarties." Today Earth is flattened by just 0.3 per cent, but young planets can be flattened to around 90 per cent, the simulation suggests.

The team said the discovery could help explain how planets form.

The Daily Telegraph, London

India to 'replace' Maldives force

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi: Maldives on Friday claimed that India has agreed to a phased replacement of the Indian military personnel stationed in the archipelago from March 10 and complete the exercise by May 10. Male made this announcement after the second meeting of the India-Maldives High-Level Core Group in Delhi earlier in the day.

According to a statement issued by the Maldivian foreign ministry on the meeting, "both sides agreed that the Government of India will replace the military personnel in one of the three aviation platforms by 10 March, 2024, and will complete replacing mil-



Mohamed Muizzu. (PTI file picture)

itary personnel in the other two platforms by 10 May, 2024."

The Indian readout on the meeting had no mention of these dates. "Both sides also agreed on a set of mutually workable solutions to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms that provide humanitarian and medevac services to the people of Maldives," the external affairs ministry said.

The use of the word "re-

place" in the Maldivian statement is a shift from their demand for the withdrawal of military personnel. In the first meeting of the core group last month, Maldives had claimed that "both sides expressed willingness to intensify co-operation and agreed to fast-track the withdrawal of Indian military personnel" while India maintained that they had discussions "on finding a mutually workable solution to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms that provide humanitarian and medevac services to the people of Maldives".

This was the second meeting of the core group in less than a month, the first was held in Male on January 14 soon after bilateral relations

worsened over offensive remarks by three Maldivian ministers against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi after his Lakshadweep visit was projected by members of the ruling ecosystem as a challenge to the island tourism offered by the atoll nation.

Ever since President Mohamed Muizzu assumed office in the Maldives in November, Male has been publicly pushing for the early withdrawal of Indian military personnel from the archipelago in keeping with his election campaign slogan of "India Out". The military personnel are on the ground in the Maldives to operate the two helicopters and Dornier aircraft that India has gifted to Male in 2013 and 2020 respectively.



A Palestinian woman tries to get an Internet network on her phone near the border with Egypt in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, on Thursday. (Reuters)

Gazans struggle with mobile network

Rafah, Southern Gaza Strip: Hamzeh Tabash walks to the Egyptian border every day from his tent in Gaza for a faltering mobile signal so he can send voice messages to loved ones separated by war and hopefully receive one in return.

"One message revives the soul," he says. Most of bombed-out Gaza's 2.3 million people have fled their homes under Israel's intense bombardment and ground assault, scattered into tent cities where their only news of those they care about most depends on a broken phone network.

With the local telecom network almost entirely out of operation, especially in the north and centre of the Palestinian enclave, many people try to connect to the Egyptian network by standing along the border.

"Mother, how are you? I hope you're well. Things are fine here. I wanted to reassure you. Don't worry," Tabash said, recording a short voice note and holding his phone into the air to try to transmit it.

Reuters

Use weapon of vote to overthrow crooks: Ex-PM

Imran says he defied US coercion



Imran Khan. (Reuters file picture)

Lahore: Days before the February 8 general elections in Pakistan, jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan on Friday claimed he had not challenged the US might, no Pakistan Premier could have dared to withstand such blatant foreign interference in its internal matters in the future.

Khan, currently lodged at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, took to X to explain why he was "punished" in several concocted cases and also urged the people to use the weapon of vote in the elections to overthrow the "crooks".

Khan, 71, handed down 10- and 14-year prison sentences for revealing state secrets and selling state gifts, has been imprisoned since August. His party symbol, the cricket bat, has been snatched away, his and his party leaders' nomination papers have been rejected and earlier this week, one of his party leaders was killed in poll-related violence.

It is believed that his X handle is being used by his relatives to post messages on behalf of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder.

"When the cipher case emerged, I warned that unless we dealt with it decisively, no Prime Minister in the future would be able to withstand such blatant foreign interference in Pakistan's internal matters. General Musharraf also surrendered to the US threats of bombing Pakistan into Stone Age, he said.

Khan said the unfolding of the Toshiakha, Cipher, and Iddat cases only highlights their "frivolous, baseless, and politically motivated" nature. "But to appease their masters, who orchestrated the regime change operation, I was deprived of my legal right of cross-examining the witness or presenting my witnesses, as the handlers knew that it would unmask another great betrayal in our political history just like that of Mir Jafer of Bengal," he said.

Because of his role in helping the British colonise India in the eighteenth century, Mir

Jafar is reviled in the Indian subcontinent as a traitor.

The PTI leader said he led his life with impeccable financial integrity and credibility with the people of Pakistan donating billions of rupees for his philanthropic projects.

"Therefore, the Toshiakha case was concocted because no evidence of financial corruption against me could be found," he said.

"Even during the sham trial, when they sensed that the trial would conclude in absolving me, they deprived me of my fundamental right to cross-examination.

Meanwhile, the Iddat case has been expedited only because they want to create a narrative against my dream of establishing Pakistan on the principles of Riasat-e-Madina. Therefore, they are concluding it in haste without an iota of fairness in the trial just to announce me guilty," Khan alleged.

Urging people of the country, he said: "You must know that all of these cases have no legal basis; they are part of an ongoing political circus in the country for the past 22 months. The hasty manner in which all these cases are being concluded is for only one purpose, which is to demoralise the voters, especially the youth."

"But, you must not be disheartened, as Allah is the ultimate planner. Our most powerful and meaningful weapon is that of our vote, and we must wield it to overthrow crooks who have been imposed upon us," he concluded in his long X post.

PTI

Half of US adults say Israel has gone too far: Poll

Washington: Half of US adults say Israel's 15-week-old military campaign in Gaza has "gone too far", a finding driven mainly by growing disapproval among Republicans and political independents, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Broadly, the poll shows support for Israel and the Biden administration's handling of the situation ebbing slightly further across the board. The poll shows 31 per cent of US adults approve of Biden's handling of the conflict, including just 46 per cent of Democrats. That's an earlier spike in support for Israel following the Hamas attacks on October 7 says.

Melissa Morales, a 36-year-old political independent in Rummel, New Jersey, says she finds herself watching videos and news from Gaza daily. Images of Palestinian children wounded, orphaned or un-

housed by the fighting in Gaza make her mind go to her own 3-year-old boy. "I just can't even imagine, like, my son roaming the streets, wanting to be safe. Wanting his mom. Or just wanting someone to get him," she said. Israel's offensive has gone too far, Morales says, and so has the Biden administration's support for it. Biden has supported Israel militarily and diplomatically since the first hours after the Hamas militant group's October 7 attacks, which Israel says killed 1,200 people.

The US has become in-

creasingly isolated in its support of Israel as the Palestinian death toll rises past 27,000, with two-thirds of the victims women and children. The Biden administration says it is pressing Israel to reduce its killing of civilians and allow in more humanitarian aid.

"These kids ... they're needing the end of this," Morales said. "It's such an unfair fight." John Milor, a cybersecurity expert in Clovis, California, who describes himself as a Republican-leaning independent, says he remains "100 per cent" behind Israel.

But Milor notices more young people in his circle speaking out against Israel. A visit to a family friend led to Milor being aghast when the man's stepson denounced Israelis as "warmongers."

APPTI

Belgium summons Israeli envoy

Brussels: Belgium on Friday summoned the Israeli ambassador after a Belgian development agency building in Gaza City was bombed, and said it planned to raise the issue of compensation.

"Attacks on civilian infrastructure breach the principles of international humanitarian law. All parties must adhere to it", foreign minister Hadja Lahbib posted on X.

The Belgian ministry for development cooperation said it was not aware of any civilian casualties and that the building, which was shared with Handicap International, should have been empty at the time of the bombing. A ministry said the Israeli ambassador had promised an investigation.

Reuters

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CHANGE OF NAME. I, Moutima Bhowmick, D/O Arun Kumar Bhowmick, residing at 20/2, Kejar Chatterjee Lane, Behala, Kolkata-700034, P.S. Parnasree, declare that after divorce my name has changed from Moutima Roy to Moutima Bhowmick vide affidavit before 2nd Court of the Judicial Magistrate, Alipore, Kolkata on 29.01.2024. Moutima Roy and Moutima Bhowmick are one and identical person.

The Boss's mother Adele dies at 98

New York: Adele Springsteen, who nurtured the budding musical talent of her son, pioneering rock star Bruce Springsteen, died on Wednesday. She was 98. Bruce Springsteen announced his mother's death in an Instagram post on Thursday. No cause was given, but Adele Springsteen had struggled for more than a decade with Alzheimer's disease. Her son has been outspoken about his relationship with his mother and her influence on him. Springsteen rented him his first guitar when he was 7, he said in 2021 during his Broadway show, Springsteen on Broadway, which ran for more than two months that year as the city began to emerge from pandemic-related closures. The show had wide-ranging reflections, including thoughts about his mother. He also spoke of his mother's ability to persist in her vivacious spirit even as a punishing disease took their toll.