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Nation First, Always First

- The theme of India's 75th Independence Day celebrations at the Red Fort from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the nation on Sunday is "Nation first, Always first"
- Why was August 15 chosen as Independence Day?



Story on
Pages
38-40



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10th India Day Parade of Long Island A Spectacular Success

Huge crowds, several floats and marching groups, scores of lawmakers and dignitaries and entertaining performances add to patriotic fervor for the motherland in the only parade in New York state to celebrate India's landmark 75th Independence Day.



Hicksville, New York (Press Release) : Under the banner of India Day Parade (IDP) USA, all sections of the Indian community joined hands to celebrate the 75th Independence Day with a spectacular parade in

Hicksville. People thronged the route of the parade, and gathered at noon at the starting point— Patel Brothers plaza where a stage was set up for the dignitaries to address the gathering -- and in the afternoon near the entertainment stage at the

parking lot near Asa Mai Hindu temple.

The Grand Marshalls this time were Consul General of India, Ambassador Randhir Jaiswal, Bollywood star Ileana D'Cruz, and Dr Jay Sarkar, philanthropist,

entrepreneur and life consultant.

The highlights of the 10th IDP USA parade, according to its President Deepak Bansal, included a record number of two score dignitaries participating. Among them one score were

elected officials including New York State Comptroller Thoams DiNapoli, Nassau County Executive Laura Curran, State Senator Kevin Thomas, Supervisor of Town of Oyster Bay Joseph Saladino, Town of



Hempstead Clerk Kate Murray, New York State Senator Todd Kaminsky and County legislator Rose Walker. The enthusiasm this time was high because it celebrated India's landmark 75th Independence Day and it came at a time when pandemic restrictions have been eased. It was also the only India Day Parade in the entire

New York state this year. Also, for the first time, the parade program started with a ceremonial flag hoisting of the tricolor.

Some light drizzle and intermittent rain were no damper for the excitement and thrill of the occasion.

The 4 Guests of Honor this time were internationally

renowned oncologist and Padma Shri Dr Dattatreya Nori, Diwali Foundation USA Chair Ranju Batra (accompanied by Ravi Batra, eminent attorney), Navika Group CEO/President Naveen Shah and young guru and motivational speaker Ishan Shivanand. Other notable guests included Farah

Mozawalla, director of minority affairs of Nassau County, Ragini Srivastava, an upcoming politician. The comely Ileana D'Cruz, wearing a floor length crème colored dress, was quite a sport, posing with fans. She is an Indian-born Portuguese actress who predominantly appears in

Telugu and Hindi language films. IDP Team leading the parade included President Bansal, Founders Bobby K. Kalotee and Kamlesh C Mehta, Past parade leaders Jay Singh, Indu Jaiswal and Beena Kothari and current officials Bina Sabapathy and Shashi Malik.

Congressman Tom Suozzi greets Indian Americans on Independence Day!

"Jai Hind to everyone celebrating Independence Day!"

Since India's independence 75 years ago, our two countries have taken pride in our vital partnership and friendship and built upon our shared democratic values and the entrepreneurial spirit of our people. It is my honor and pleasure to represent in Congress one of the largest and most vibrant Indian American communities in the United States, whose advice and counsel has been integral to my advocacy for the Indian people. I am proud of the work we have done together to foster the U.S.-India relationship and the fight against the



COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this year, I called on the Biden Administration to further assist the Indian government and its people in the battle against COVID-19 – a request that was granted. While much of our world's future remains unknown, we can count on the continued friendship between our two great nations. I look forward to continuing to elevate the U.S.-India partnership, which I know will be one of our most important friendships for the next 50 years. I wish all my friends in the Indian community happy, healthy, and safe celebrations. Jai Hind!"



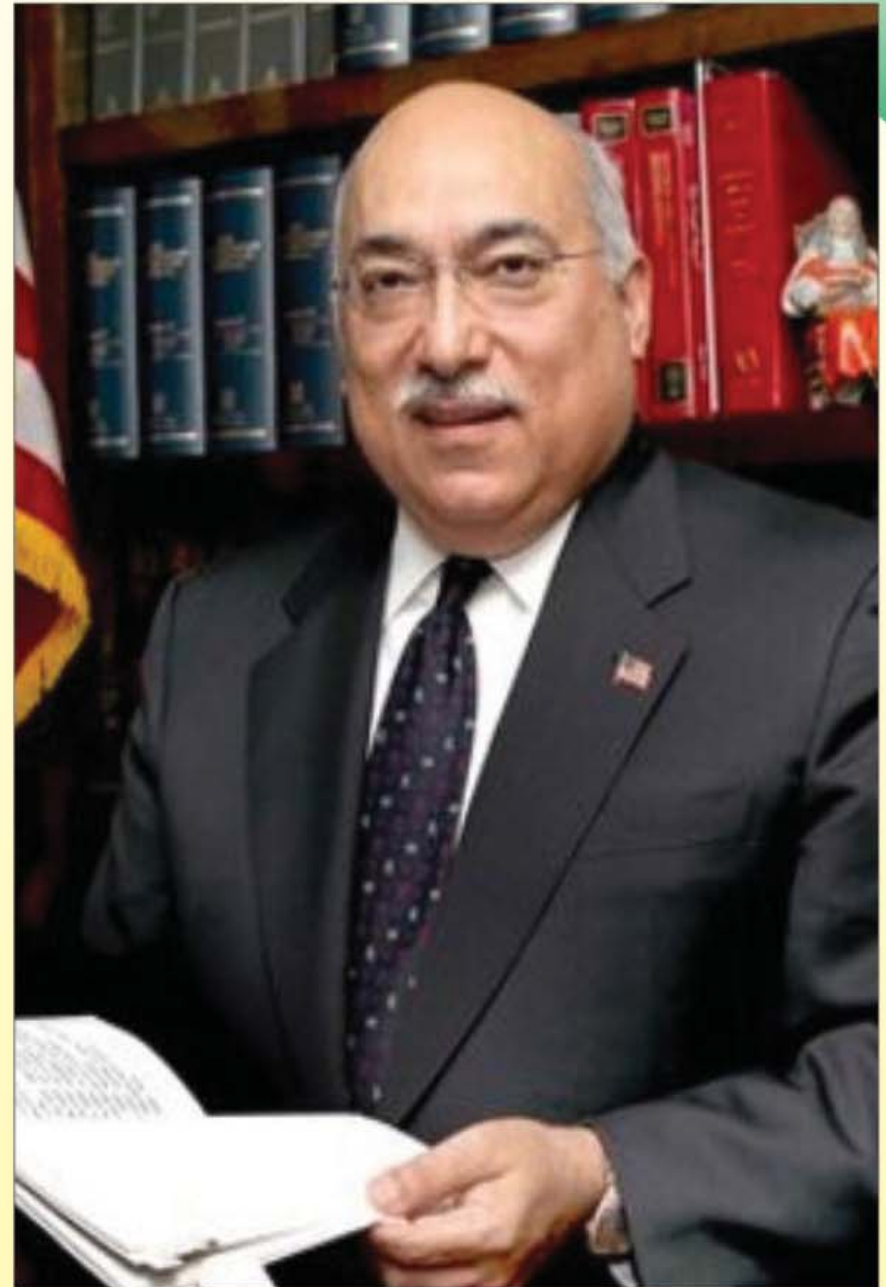
Happy 75th Independence day!

Ranju joins me in wishing India, Indian-Americans, friends of a secular and democratic India and readers of The South Asian Insider



Ranju Batra

Chair of Diwali Foundation USA



Ravi Batra

Attorney at Law

From **Pandit Nehru's** hopeful "**tryst with destiny**" celebration in 1947 to **PM Narendra Modi's** bold **Washington Declaration of "Indivisibility,"** on June 9, 2016 between India and United States, India's tryst has succeeded in full measure. Our **Constitution** is largely India's Constitution thanks to Columbia Law graduate **Dr. Ambedkar** Rule of Law and Freedoms define and underpin both the oldest and Largest democracies, which the respective citizenry of both cherish to nourish democracy itself. So, even **Benjamin Franklin** joins in wishing India a Happy 75th Independence Day.

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Sympathizers of Farmer's Issue in India, rattles India Day Parade in New York.

(Press Release) The India Day Parade, which falls on August 15, 2021, was in fact held on August 8, 2021, by the local group in Hicksville in Long Island, New York. However, before the parade started, a condition was imposed on the participating Indian Overseas Congress USA group not to raise any issue of the Farmer's agitation in Delhi in the parade - a development which totally disappointed almost all the over 100 participants who had already gathered at a location nearby the starting point of the parade. It should be recalled that the Indian government had, essentially in 2020, hastily passed unfair legislation on the marketing of crops that the farmers did not ask for and which would deter them from making a livelihood in marketing their products under the newly legislated conditions. Since the issue relating to the Farmer's plight was central to the concerns of the Indian diaspora which had gathered, this prohibition would prevent them from venting their sentiments and showing support to the cause of the farmers, as a result of which it left them no choice but to stay put at the location and voice their bitter disappointment over the unfair and undemocratic imposition of conditions which prevented them from participating in celebrating the joyous occasion of the Independence Day of India while at the same time expressing serious concern on the inaction of the

sitting government to resolve the issue.

"Indian Overseas Congress, USA threw its support behind the cause of the protesting farmers in India and objected to the heavy-handed approach of the India Day Parade organizers in Long Island to stifle dissent," said President Mohinder Singh Gilzian. "This celebration is about freedom, and it is a fundamental right of people to express one's opinion without fear of repercussions."

"The Government of India's stonewalling to the concerns of the farmers is not what one expects from a true democracy," said George Abraham, Vice-Chairman of the IOCUSA. "the current government is only interested in protecting the interests of the crony capitalists" Mr. Abraham added.

Secretary-General Harbachan Singh pointed out that after almost ten months of a peaceful demonstration by the farmers in a gathering which is said to be so large and prolonged that it broke not only records in India's recent history but perhaps the world - way more than 600 people had also lost their lives. Both the demonstrators and their families back home are not only suffering both physically and economically under the Covid-19 pandemic but also acutely enduring the record-breaking severe cold, floods and burning hot weather conditions."

Chants to the Prime Minister to settle the issues of the farmers were loud and

incessant. Even the heavy downpour of rain could not drown out their thunderous voices and their strong punches into the air. At the same time, solemn allegiance

to Mother India was repeatedly orchestrated by all Chapter Amar Singh Gulshan, President of Kerala Chapter Ms. Leela Merat, and other Satish Sharma, President of IOCUSA leaders also Punjab Chapter, Gurmit S. addressed the gathering.

Prime Time

Daily Hindi News Bulletin

Geeta Saxena

BJP expels Jitendra Singh Bablu, accused of torching Rita Bahuguna Joshi's house, days after induction



(News Agencies)-The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has expelled Jitendra Singh Bablu, who was inducted into the party last week, following a controversy after party MP Rita Bahuguna Joshi raised objection over his induction. Jitendra Singh Bablu was inducted into the BJP on August 4.

Rita Bahuguna Joshi, a sitting MP from Allahabad, had accused Jitendra Singh Bablu of being involved in setting her house on fire in 2009. Bablu, along with the then SSP and SP, were booked in connection with the case.

Bablu, who was in the BSP in 2009, is accused of setting ablaze the house of Rita Bahuguna Joshi when she was the president of UP congress and was reportedly leading a massive agitation against the then chief minister Mayawati.

Rita Bahuguna Joshi said that she had protested against Jitendra Singh Bablu's induction and is satisfied with UP BJP chief's decision to cancel his membership.

"I had lodged my protest with him [UP BJP chief]. I am satisfied and congratulate him for the action he took, Rita Bahuguna Joshi said.

Rita Bahuguna had termed Jitendra Singh Bablu's joining "unfortunate", saying that she would meet PM Modi to apprise him about it.

Rita Bahuguna Joshi had joined the BJP in 2016.

Varanasi floods:

Boats on streets as Ganga breaches danger-mark;



(News Agencies)-The rising water in the Ganges has displaced hundreds of people from their homes. The authorities are now carrying out rescue operations throughout the day to get people to safety.

There is a sense of panic among residents of low-lying areas in PM Modi's Varanasi constituency as the water level continues to rise.

Owing to the rise in water level, urban colonies have started getting inundated and boats are plying on city streets. The water level of the river Ganga has already crossed the danger mark and it is still rising.

AUTHORITIES MONITOR THE SITUATION

The rise in water level is being monitored continuously by the authorities. Given the speed at which the water levels in Ganga and Varuna are rising, the administration has set up a control room and deployed officers of different departments and issued an alert to the people, along the banks of the river.

Now, all eyes are on the water level of Ganga, which has been kept on hour-wise monitoring. The ghats are badly affected by the rising waters. Manikarnika Ghat has already got submerged and

the cremations are being done on a platform above the road. At Harishchandra Ghat, however, the cremations are being done on the street. With all options gone and roads cut off, people are now waiting hours for cremation at the ghats.

WATER CROSSES DANGER MARK

Due to the rise in water levels in Ganga and Varuna, yellow line areas are badly affected.

The water release from Madhya Pradesh, Hamirpur's Cane and Betwa and from Kanpur's Ganga barrage has resulted in flooding in the district. As per the authorities, the water level is expected to reduce by Friday but the situation will remain severe for next couple of days.

Significantly, the water level of Ganga has crossed the danger mark of 71.26m in Varanasi. According to the Central Water Commission, on Tuesday morning the water level of Ganga reached 71.74 meters, which is currently flowing .48 metres above the danger mark. The speed of rise in the water level in Ganga has been maintained at one centimeter per hour since 7am. **REVERSE FLOW AFFECTS COASTAL AREAS**

Due to the reverse flow of the Ganges, the river has also turned towards Varuna. Owing to the reverse flow, water has

now entered the houses in the coastal areas of Varuna.

The road has been closed due to the rise of water on Assi-Nagwan main road. The government has started boat operations to help people stuck in these areas. On Sunday morning, the water level was at 70.96m.

INDIA TODAY TV ON GROUND

India Today TV visited several ghats such as Nakhi Ghat, Manikarnika, Raj Ghat and Maruti Nagar area of the Holi city, where the situation is severe. The authorities have increased surveillance and are making sure that people residing in low-lying areas are safe.

Fatima, 32, a resident of Nakkhi Ghat area, said the water had reached up to their first floor and the entire family is struggling to get the basic items. Fatima added that the entire area was flooded and they had no option but to use a boat to go out. The 32-year-old added that the administration has not even provided rations for them.

WORK AFFECTED

This area, which is known to house weavers, had a deserted look. Their work has been badly affected due to the flood. The rooms are immersed under the water and the workers are

facing an acute financial crisis since their work has paused.

SITUATION IN MARUTI NAGAR AREA

Due to the rising water level in Ganga, water has entered multiple homes in Maruti Nagar area, affecting hundreds of people. People from areas in Madarwa, Maruti Nagar, whose houses have been completely submerged, were being evacuated from their homes and shifted to safer places.

Shakuntala Shukla, 39, said the drains, too, have also started rising. Shukla's house was completely submerged under water. People living around this area have demanded that the area be patrolled by police and NDRF personnel.

WHAT DM SAID Speaking to India Today TV, Varanasi district magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma said relief has been provided to the affected people. NDRF and local administration boats are carrying out rescue operations. He also said that arrangements for the distressed have been made at the relief camp.

He added that several teams are working to assist people in reaching safer places. "We expect the water flow will slow down after Friday and flow, too, is likely to reduce."



Lucknow Police sends teams to Mumbai, likely to question Shilpa Shetty in 'fraud' case

(News Agencies)- The Lucknow Police has decided to send teams to Mumbai to question actor Shilpa Shetty in connection with an alleged fraud case. The police are also expected to question her mother Sunanda Shetty.

The Lucknow Police is investigating two FIRs registered in the city against Iosis Wellness Centre last year. In the complaint, it has been alleged that staff of this wellness centre told their customers that Shilpa Shetty is its brand ambassador and would be present on its launch date.

Besides this, the customers were allegedly also promised that Shilpa Shetty would help promote the business.

However, after people took membership of the wellness centre and the launch day approached, the staff allegedly denied making its previous statement. Following this, two FIRs were lodged against Iosis

Wellness Centre in Hazratganj and Vibhuti Khand police stations in Lucknow.

Shilpa Shetty and her mother have not been named in these FIRs.

The Lucknow Police is sending two teams to Mumbai to question Shilpa Shetty. The first team has left for Mumbai while the second is likely to reach by next week. On June 19 last year, Jyotsana Chauhan, a resident of Vibhuti Khand area in Lucknow filed an FIR against Iosis Wellness Centre alleging fraud. This FIR names Kiran Bava, Vinay Bhaseen, Anika Chaturvedi, Ishwarfeel, Navneet Kaur, Aasha and Poonam Jha as accused.

Jyotsana Chauhan had alleged that these people not only promised her that Shilpa Shetty was the brand ambassador of the wellness centre, but said she would also help in promoting the business.

The accused allegedly collected nearly Rs 2.5 crore from people in the name of procuring goods for the wellness centre.



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Flood threat looms large over Patna as Ganga crosses danger-mark in Bihar

(News Agencies)-Flood threat looms large over Patna as the Ganga and Punpun rivers have crossed the danger level in many parts of Bihar.

The Ganga has crossed the danger mark in Buxar, Patna, Munger, Khagaria, Bhagalpur and Katihar districts, leading to hundreds of villages submerging under the water and leaving thousands of people affected.

Chief Minister (CM) Nitish Kumar also visited flood-hit areas of Vaishali, Samastipur, Muzaffarpur and Chapra districts to take stock of relief operations amid lurking fear of the resurgence of Covid-19 pandemic.

In Patna, the water level of the Ganges has increased significantly in the last four days, because of which several ghats along the river have been

submerged under water.

Ganga breaches danger mark in several areas

On Monday, Ganga was flowing 31 cm above the danger mark in Buxar, 41 cm above the danger mark at Digha in Patna. At Gandhi Ghat, the river was flowing 98 cm above the danger mark, while at Hathidah it was flowing 88 cm above the danger mark.



On Tuesday, India Today TV visited Mahaveer ghat in Patna city area, where the roads have been submerged under water due to the rising trend

of the river in the last one week. The construction work on Marine Drive has been disrupted due to the flooding on the road in this area.



Punjab CM asks Centre for CAPF deployment, anti-drone gadgets amid security threat

Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh met Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday and asked him to provide 25 companies of CAPF and anti-drone gadgets to Punjab for its security.

Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh met Union home minister Amit Shah on

Tuesday and asked him to urgently provide the state with 25 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and anti-drone gadgets for the Border Security Force (BSF). According to the chief minister's office, Punjab is facing an "escalating threat to its security from across the border". Captain Amarinder Singh cited a recent heavy influx of weapons, hand-grenades and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) into

the state in his conversation with Amit Shah.

He stated that the security situation in Punjab was grave and needed the Centre's immediate intervention, especially "with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) raising the ante ahead of Independence Day and in the run-up to the Punjab Assembly polls".

Captain Amarinder Singh asked for CAPF deployment for Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Mohali, Patiala, Bathinda, Phagwara and Moga, as well as anti-drone technology for the BSF deployed at the borders.

POTENTIAL TARGETS

During the meeting, Punjab CM Amarinder Singh pointed to the threat to the security of vital

infrastructure and public meetings being attended by highly threatened individuals.

Citing inputs from central and state agencies, corroborated by disclosures made by arrested terrorists, he said potential individual and mass indiscriminate targets include trains, buses and Hindu temples, prominent Kisan leaders, RSS offices, RSS/BJP/Shiv Sena leaders based in Punjab, Deras and Nirankari Bhawans.

PAKISTAN'S ROLE

Punjab CM Amarinder Singh apprised Amit Shah about alleged recent efforts by Pakistan's ISI to push large quantities of weapons, hand-grenades, RDX explosives, detonators, timer devices and

sophisticated laboratory-made tiffin bombs into Punjab for the purpose of carrying out terrorist acts.

"With the Punjab Assembly elections scheduled for February-March 2022, many militant and radical operatives are being pressurized by the ISI to carry out terrorist actions. These are very serious and worrisome developments having huge security implications for the border state and its people," he warned.

Amarinder Singh also reminded Amit Shah of the targeted killings of RSS, Shiv Sena and Dera leaders in 2016, ahead of the last Assembly polls.

Maharashtra

New IT excellence award for institutes in state named after former PM Rajiv Gandhi



(News Agencies)-The Maharashtra government has decided to name an award after former Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi. The Rajiv Gandhi Award in Maharashtra will be given to institutes doing remarkable work in the field of information technology.

The decision to start an award in the state after former PM Rajiv Gandhi was taken in a meeting chaired by Maharashtra Minister of State for Information Technology and Home Satej Patil.

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award will be called the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award.

This move came a day after India's men won the hockey bronze at the Tokyo Olympics and hours after the India women's hockey team missed out on a maiden Olympic medal. The Shiv Sena, meanwhile, had said that a bigger award could have been announced in the name of hockey legend Major Dhyan Chand instead of renaming Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award.



his attacks on govt won't bode well: Punjab CM Amarinder tells Sonia Gandhi

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Tuesday met Congress president Sonia Gandhi here, who said the government and the party must work together.

This was the first time that Singh met the party president after the appointment of Navjot Singh Sidhu as Punjab Congress chief, despite his opposition.

The meeting comes amid talk of a possible Cabinet reshuffle in the state where assembly polls are scheduled to be held early next year. All India Congress Committee general secretary in-charge of Punjab affairs Harish Rawat was present at the meeting.

"Met Congress president Sonia Gandhi ji in Delhi this evening to discuss various state-related issues. Spent an extremely satisfying one hour with her," Singh was quoted as saying after the meeting by his media adviser Raveen Thukral.

Rawat said, "The Congress president has advised that both the state government and the Congress unit in

Amid speculation of a possible cabinet reshuffle, Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Tuesday met Congress president Sonia Gandhi in Delhi.

Punjab have to work together."

Both Singh and Sidhu have to work together within their limits and should cooperate with each other, he said, adding that the Punjab chief minister is not "upset" with Sidhu and has not stated so.

Sources said Amarinder Singh gave an account of the action taken by the state government on the 18 issues raised by the AICC panel headed by senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge. These issues include taking action against the drug mafia and

transport mafia and those involved in the desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib in the state.

Sources add that Singh reportedly raised the issue of Navjot Singh Sidhu's continued attacks on the Congress government in the state. He also discussed the political situation in Punjab and also a possible cabinet expansion, sources said.

Later in the day, the Punjab chief minister met Prashant Kishor who recently resigned as his political advisor. Singh also hosted a dinner for some Punjab leaders including Rana Sodhi, Manish Tewari, Mohd Sadique, Preneet Kaur and former law minister Ashwani Kumar among others. Despite the truce between Singh and Sidhu, the cricketer-turned-politician has been attacking the government. He has questioned the "delay" in taking action by the state government against Akali leader Bikram Singh Majithia and others accused in a drug trafficking case.

Extended dry spell in Gujarat worry farmers, govt to release water for irrigation to save crops



(News Agencies)-The extended dry spell, at the peak of the monsoon season, has become a cause of worry for farmers in Gujarat.

Farmers in Ahmedabad region are concerned about the Kharif crops such as rice, cotton and moong getting affected due to the absence of rain. However, farmers of Sanand, Daskroi, Bavla and Dholka are getting water for irrigation from Kharikat and Fatevadi canals.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted that rainfall is likely to occur in the state only after August 18.

It also added that there are no active systems in the state which are likely to bring rainfall to the state.

"The rain is likely to occur between August 18 and 24 in the state due to the possibility of pressure in the Bay of Bengal," an official said.

Meanwhile, the Gujarat government has decided to release dam and reservoir water for irrigation in order to save the standing crops.

Chief Minister Vijay Rupani has asked the Water Resource Department to reserve drinking water required for the period up to September 30 this year and also asked them to release the remaining water supply for the irrigation needs of farmers.

HOW MUCH RAINFALL DID THE STATE RECIEVE?

The state has received 36.28 per cent rain of the average monsoon season this year.

Anand district received the highest percentage of rainfall at 47.07 per cent. The lowest percentage of rain of total monsoon so far was reported in Aravalli at 22.40 per cent.

The taluka with the lowest percentage of rain is Lakhani taluka in Banaskantha district, where 7.57 per cent rain was recorded. Anand taluka recorded the highest percentage of rain in the total monsoon at 71.67 per cent. The talukas which received less than 15 per cent rain of the total monsoon in the state are Lakhpat in Kutch, Santalpur in Patan, Lakhani, Tharad and Wav in Banaskantha, Bhiloda in Aravalli, Galteshwar and Thasra in Kheda, Vichhiya in Rajkot, Uchchhal in Tapi.

Police arrest man with 2 live grenades in Srinagar, claim he's a journalist

(News Agencies)-A 26-year-old man was arrested with two live grenades at Srinagar's Lal Chowk on Tuesday. Police claimed the man, Adil Farooq Bhat, works as a journalist with a local news agency. The accused is a resident of Khrew Pampore.

"Two live hand grenades were recovered from his bag," a police officer told India Today TV.



He added that Adil Farooq Bhat is being interrogated and the matter is being investigated.

Meanwhile, a grenade was lobbed by militants in Srinagar's busy Amira Kadal area. A civilian was injured in the grenade attack.

"Terrorists lobbed a grenade towards security force personnel near Amira Kadal bridge which exploded by the roadside," an official said.

The injured person has been identified as Tariq Ahmad.



New survey on NaMo app to gauge public opinion on govt performance PM's popularity in poll-bound states

(News Agencies)-The Narendra Modi government has started testing the voters' minds for the upcoming polls in five states through a survey. The survey has been launched on the MaMo app to seek people's feedback on what issues will decide their vote. The upcoming polls are in Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, Punjab and Uttarakhand.

The survey runs into 13 key templates. Since people who participate in the survey would be able to provide direct feedback, the BJP team will be able to get an advanced warning on what could be driving the votes away from the party. This will help them launch a fitting election campaign. The survey covers the performance of governments of poll-bound states, satisfaction or otherwise on infrastructure development, handling of Covid-19 and the vaccination drive. The survey also includes ratings of MLAs from their respective constituencies. The first question enlists 8 issues. Respondents have to pick which of the issues will be important considerations while voting in the next assembly elections in a specific state. The issues are government handling of Covid-19, education, law and order situation, employment,

cleanliness, price rise, corruption and farmers welfare. In the second multiple choice question, people have to pick "which of these are a bigger factor for you while voting?" The option number one is PM Modi's leadership in the country, state-level issues and local issues. A senior government official said: "The feedback from this query,

To understand the voter's nerve, the Narendra Modi government has come up with a survey on the NaMo app to take people's feedback on what issues will decide their vote in the upcoming assembly elections in five states.

especially in states ruled by non-BJP outfit, can decide the footprint of PM Modi on the campaign. If a large number of people surveyed say the Prime Minister's leadership is an issue, the campaign may be tailored accordingly. "To get feedback on how a BJP government in states like UP or Gujarat has performed, there is a direct question -- how do you rate the overall performance of your state government?" The respondent has to move in a circle to mark the performance and the aggregated performance perception will indicate the level of anti-incumbency or pro-incumbency of a state

government.

The next question is on performance of a state government on dimensions like roads and infrastructure, affordable housing, creation of employment opportunities.

To find which central or state scheme has worked the best on the ground in public perception, the survey provides space to

mention the scheme.

While campaigning in Bihar and Bengal elections, the Prime Minister and BJP leaders laid a lot of emphasis on the significance of "double engine ki Sarkar" (same party ruling state and Centre to provide a dual engine government). The survey asks "do you agree or disagree with the following" with "same government at the centre and state help in development, work culture of your state government has improved in four years and I feel more optimistic about the future. The respondents have to pick between agree and disagree. If in the last two months there have been visible attempts

by opposition parties to bury their differences and arrive at a high unity index that can be translated to anti-BJP fronts in crucial states like UP, the survey asks: "do you think opposition unity will have an impact on your constituency?" People can pick yes or no.

Through another question, the NaMo app wants to register satisfaction or dissatisfaction levels among voters over amenities like roads, power and drinking water. The options range from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. The survey goes deeper beyond the performance of the government. It will pick crucial data on the level of anti or pro-incumbency against MLAs in the five states. This will especially provide BJP with deep insight into how the party's MLAs are rated by voters, who will provide opinions without exposing their identity. Interestingly, the survey quizzes the respondents deeper as it asks them to name the three most popular BJP leaders in their state. To determine broadly what could be the factor that swings the vote at the last polling minute, the survey asks "which of these are important considerations while voting for a candidate" and the choices are "his/her caste, his/her religion and his/her development record".

Assam Assembly congratulates boxer Lovlina Borgohain for winning bronze in Tokyo Olympics



(News Agencies)- Assam Assembly on Tuesday congratulated boxer Lovlina Borgohain for winning bronze in the recently-concluded Tokyo Olympics and bringing glory to the state.

The Golaghat pugilist has brought glory to Assam by becoming the first sportsperson from the state to win an Olympic medal, the message further said.

State Sports Minister Bimal Bora said that Lovlina has already reached New Delhi from Tokyo and will arrive in Guwahati on Thursday.

"She will be felicitated by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on behalf of the state government at a function that same day," Bimal Bora said and invited all legislators to join the programme.

The legislators had been cheering for Lovlina Borgohain along with the rest of the state and country throughout her Olympic campaign.

Her performance was keenly watched in the state and the House was adjourned for 30 minutes during her semi-final bout at the Olympic Games on August 4.

A unanimous resolution wishing her luck was adopted by the Assembly on July 20. She was the lone competitor from Assam in the Olympic Games this year. The Arjuna awardee, who was also the first woman Olympian from Assam, had won the bronze medal in the welterweight (69 kgs) category at the Tokyo Games.

Look beyond one family, says SAD leader Naresh Gujral on Congress revival at Sibal's dinner



(News Agencies)-At a dinner party hosted by Congress leader Kabil Sibal on Monday evening, Shiromani Akali Dal's Naresh Gujral said the Congress should "look beyond one family" in order to revive itself, according to sources. The statement was not met with any reaction at the gathering.

A source present at the dinner stated that several leaders expressed concern over the situation of the Congress party at present. They were of the opinion that the presence of the Congress in many states of India is low and needs to be strengthened.

The dinner party was held to celebrate Kapil Sibal's 73rd birthday. The event was attended by prominent Congress and Opposition party leaders and strategies for the 2024 general elections were reportedly discussed.

KAPIL SIBAL'S DINNER

The dinner was attended by Opposition leaders including Sitaram Yechury (CPM), D Raja (CPI), Lalu Prasad Yadav (RJD), Derek O'Brien (TMC) and Tiruchi Siva (DMK). Sources said Congress leaders who attended the dinner party included most of the 'G-23' leaders who had written a letter to Congress chief Sonia Gandhi last year asking for an overhaul in the party's organisation and leadership. Among those present were Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Manish Tewari and Shashi Tharoor.

As per sources, the meeting became a rallying point for Opposition unity against the Centre. The need to strengthen the Opposition was discussed. Additionally, the leaders discussed the need for the Congress party to do well in the 2024 elections in order to defeat the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

Bengal CM

Mamata's outreach to take credit of PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojna sparks controversy



A Trinamool minister handed out signed letters by Mamata Banerjee to farmers blaming the Central government for delaying the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi fund. The BJP workers, however, blamed Mamata Banerjee for taking credit of PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojna.

A controversy erupted after a letter distributed by Mamata Banerjee's government stated that the Central government had repeatedly delayed the transfer of PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi money to Bengal. The letter added that the Bengal government has asked for funds from the Centre several times.

The letter, which was signed by Mamata Banerjee and addressed to the farmers, stated: "You all know, in 2018 the Bengal government started a kisan scheme on its own and that has now become a model in the country. Soon after, in 2019, the PM-Kisan scheme started." The letter added the

scheme initiated by the state government is much better than the Central scheme. "Many farmers have benefited from our scheme."

The letter mentioned that the farmers are getting much less than what they deserve. "The state government will fight for the recovery of arrears in the coming days," the letter mentioned. Minister of state Becharam Manna handed over the letter to some farmers at the office of Singur Block agriculture officer.

He also accused the duplicity of Central government in paying the dues to the farmers. "He said that 23,000 farmers are supposed to get money in the Singur Block. Despite sending

all the names, the Central government sent money to only 2,000 farmers. This figure is just about Singur Block. How much will it be if we measure the whole state?" On the other hand, BJP criticised Minister Becharam Manna's allegations and blamed Bengal for delaying and not giving money to the farmers.

West Bengal government initially did not allow PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi in Bengal, saying why would the PM take claim when both Centre and the state are giving money jointly. After a spate of blame games during elections, the West Bengal government allowed Centre to initiate the scheme in Bengal.

57 youngsters joined militancy after travelling to PoK on valid visas in 2017, 2018: J&K DGP

As many as 57 youngsters travelled to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) on valid visas in 2017 and 2018 and later joined the militancy, J&K Director General of Police (DGP) Dilbag Singh said. He was addressing a press conference in Rajouri on Tuesday.

DGP Singh added that 17 of these youngsters returned with weapons and were subsequently gunned down in encounters with security forces.

Out of the remaining, thirteen are still active in the Union

Territory, while 17 continue to live in PoK and are under the constant watch of the J&K Police and security agencies, added DGP Dilbag Singh.

DGP Singh, referring to the 57 youngsters, said, "Instead of studying there (PoK), they joined militancy. Of the 57 youths, 17 crossed over to this side and were killed in various encounters."

"Almost 13 are still active in Kashmir while 17 continue to remain on the other side, who are under the constant watch of J&K police," he added.

Visa processes and security

clearances for travel to PoK have been made stricter owing to the fact that youth who visit Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on the pretext of studies or tourism end up joining the militancy, J&K DGP Dilbag Singh said. Asked about cross-border infiltration, the Director General of Police said three to four groups, including one in Bandipora and nearly three in the Rajouri-Poonch sector, are believed to have infiltrated Indian Territory in recent times. "Four militants who were killed in Bandipora had crossed over to this side through Machil and



Gurez sectors, while in Rajouri, two militants were killed recently and there are apprehensions of the presence of two more," DGP Singh said. Jammu and Kashmir DGP Dilbag Singh also said that

terror launch pads operating out of PoK are full and security forces have strengthened the anti-infiltration grid both at the Line of Control (LoC) and hinterland to foil any attempts at cross-border infiltration.

BJP leader files complaint against Rahul Gandhi, Twitter for revealing identity of minor rape victim

A BJP leader has filed a criminal complaint against Rahul Gandhi, accusing him of revealing the identity of the minor who was allegedly sexually assaulted and murdered in Delhi's Nangal village.

(News Agencies)-A criminal complaint has been filed against Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and Twitter at a sessions court in Jaipur. The complainant, BJP leader Jitendra Gothwal, has alleged that a tweet by Rahul Gandhi revealed the identity of the nine-year-old girl who was murdered and forcibly cremated in Delhi Cantonment area.

The complaint in this regard has been filed at the sessions court in Jaipur's Bani Park.

Earlier this month, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi met family members of the minor from Nangal village who was allegedly murdered and forcibly cremated. Rahul Gandhi had also posted



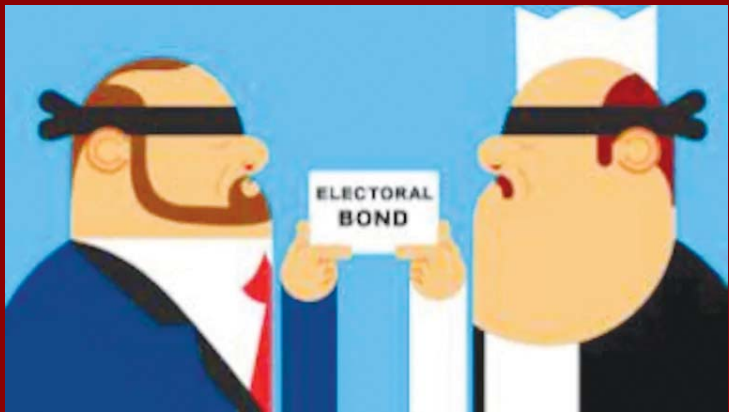
pictures of his meeting with the family on micro-blogging website Twitter. The pictures were later taken down owing to

allegations by the girl's kin that she might have been sexually assaulted by the four accused. As per the law, revealing the

identity of a minor rape victim counts as an offence. Taking cognizance of the matter, the National Commission for

Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) had reached out to Delhi Police and Twitter, asking them to take action against Rahul Gandhi for posting pictures of the girl's family that might reveal her identity. The NCPCR had stated that Rahul Gandhi's actions are in violation of the Juvenile Justice Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. In fact, the Congress even claimed that Rahul Gandhi's Twitter account was "temporarily locked" for some time last week after he posted said tweet. Apart from Rahul Gandhi, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta and CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat also met the family of the nine-year-old girl.

In 2019-20, BJP bagged 76% of poll bonds sold, Congress got just 9%



(News Agencies)-The ruling BJP bagged 76 per cent of the total electoral bonds sold in 2019-20, while the main Opposition party, the Congress, got only 9 per cent of them.

The BJP got Rs 2,555 crore out of Rs 3,427 crore raised by selling electoral bonds in 2019-20.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS?

Lalu Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal got Rs 2.5 crore, Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party Rs 18 crore, Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party Rs 29.25 crore, Shiv Sena Rs 41 crore, DMK Rs 45 crore and Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress got Rs 100.46 crore.

BJP REMAINS THE WEALTHIEST PARTY

The BJP remains the wealthiest political party in the country with a total cash of Rs 3,501 crore in hand and bank, according to documents submitted by the party to the Election Commission of India. The BJP's income in 2019-20 was more than twice that of its five major rivals put together. While the BJP's income has grown steadily year after year, the Congress' fortunes have declined over the past few years.

The BJP's share of voluntary contributions through the electoral bonds has gone up from 21 per cent in 2017-18 to 74 per cent in 2019-20.

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**News Analysis
&
Commentary**



Susmita Ghosh

Bureau Chief, India

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The problem isn't 'inflation'. It's that most Americans aren't paid enough

Hours after the Democrats passed their \$3.5tn budget for Joe Biden's American Families Plan – including childcare, community college, extended Medicare and measures to slow climate change – the West Virginia senator Joe Manchin, whose vote is necessary to get it through the Senate, made an ominous announcement. He had "serious concerns" about its size, warning it would add trillions of dollars to the national debt and spur inflation. One expects Republican lawmakers to demagogue about inflation and spending. To hear this from a Democrat is jaw-dropping. First, as a matter of simple logic, if these policies are fully paid for through higher taxes on the rich and on big corporations, as Democrats intend, there will be no effect on the national debt and no spur to inflation. Moreover, the spending is to be spread out over the next several decades. On a yearly basis, we're talking about billions, not trillions. The difference is more than a few decimals.

Let's also get real about the state of the American economy, which still has vast room for expansion without overheating. We're more than 7m jobs short of what employment would be had there been no pandemic. Factories have excess capacity. Vacancy rates in commercial real estate are through the roof. Current price increases are mostly temporary, due to bottlenecks in shipping and materials combined with a surge in pent-up demand. Some price increases are already slowing. The labor department reported on Wednesday that so-called core inflation, which excludes energy and food, rose by only 0.3% in July, well below June's rise of 0.9%.

More basically, the structure of the American economy has changed dramatically since the double-digit inflation of the late 1970s. Now, producers can easily add capacity by outsourcing worldwide. Unions are now so weak they can no longer push wages upward. In fact, the long-term problem is just the opposite of inflation. It's insufficient demand. Recall that 70% of the US economy depends on consumer spending. So if the economy is to function well, Americans need to spend enough money to buy most of the goods and services they're capable of producing. But incomes haven't nearly kept pace with productivity. Over the

past 40 years, most people's wages have basically stagnated, while worker productivity has soared. Most economic gains have gone to the wealthy – who now own more of America than at any time since the 1920s. Here's the thing. The wealthy spend only a small percentage of their income – not enough to keep the economy churning. Lower-income people, on the other hand, spend almost everything they have – which is becoming very little. Most workers aren't earning nearly enough to buy what the economy is capable of producing. The result is a gap between potential output and potential consumption. To fill that gap, the economy has depended on consumers going deeper and deeper into debt. Even in 2018, when the economy appeared strong, 40% of Americans had negative net incomes and were borrowing money to pay for basic household needs.

The Fed has had to nudge interest rates lower and lower to accommodate this buying. And the government has had to spend more and more to fill the remaining gap. None of this is sustainable. At some point, widening inequality causes the economy to collapse. We've seen this before. Years ago, Marriner Eccles, chairman of the Federal Reserve from 1934 to 1948, explained that the Great Depression occurred because the buying power of most Americans fell far short of what the economy was producing. He blamed the increasing concentration of wealth at the top: "A giant suction pump had by 1929-1930 drawn into a few hands an increasing portion of currently produced wealth. As in a poker game where the chips were concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, the other fellows could stay in the game only by borrowing. When their credit ran out, the game stopped." Sound familiar? When the housing and financial debt bubbles burst in 2008, we avoided another Great Depression only because the government pumped enough money into the economy to maintain demand, and the Fed kept interest rates near zero. Then came the pandemic.

Post-pandemic, America's wealth gap is more extreme than it has been in more than a century. Until this structural problem is remedied, the American economy will remain perilously fragile. Manchin and his ilk should stop worrying about inflation and debt. The real problem is America's staggering wealth gap. Closing it will require efforts even more dramatic than Joe Biden's spending plans.

By Robert Reich

USA in the fear of endangering the recovery from drought

By Susmita Ghosh

Scientists have been tracing an unambiguous footprint of human-caused climate change in the US. The adverse weather conditions have led the west of America to an unprecedented drought situation. The region has been drying up leaving the farmers running out of business and the farmlands going fallow. The fishermen even have to watch the parched rivers helplessly as the fishes are dying in droves or failing to spawn in shallow water.

Due to the historic drought, the lives of the people of the community are falling apart as the consequences have been cruel. They have been snatched away from their daily sustenance as the diverse basin has been barren that was once filled with flat vistas of sprawling alfalfa and potato fields. The inhabitants are even going bankrupt as their farming or fishing businesses are tearing apart. Klamath is one of those places that has fallen mostly under devastation. It extends across the border between California and Oregon where the watershed straddles 12000sq miles. The Upper Klamath Lake fed the agricultural lands and the tribal communities living around the Klamath River. These people depended on irrigation from traditional sources. However, from the depleted or federally managed lakes, they haven't been getting any water at all. The suckerfish from the Klamath River

used to be a major source of food for the Native Americans. As the fish population plunged even the migratory birds have been deprived of the salmon. This region is failing to provide wildlife retreats like before as the water shortfall has been proving deadly for these migratory birds. The sucker-fishes have been dying uncontrollably as they are either exposed to their predators or the low-oxygen content in water as the levels have dipped below.

Those living in this unmatched hardship in this region have been worried about the Klamath Basin's present situation. For them, the drought is a forerunner while global warming accelerates. The ecosystem is further endangered. A federal judge even denied extending further help to the Klamath tribe as per him "the agency is not responsible for the drought".

The people feel marginalized in their own homeland after hearing such a decision from the government. Only 10% of the salmon fish remains which was important to the other tribe's sustenance and culture. Hence these inhabitants can neither eat nor share. According to the vice-chairman of the Yurok tribe the salmon was allocated to less than 1 fish per person. This significantly gave a huge blow to the income of the tribe as it came down to \$11,000 annually.

The vice president further said that the salmon was central to their way of life. Perhaps the protein that they consume

(Contd on page 37)



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Isro GISAT-1 failure: All you need to know about anomaly in cryogenic stage



(News Agencies)-The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) suffered a setback on Thursday after it failed to place an observation satellite into orbit. The Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) F10 rocket carrying GISAT-1 Earth observation satellite (EOS-03) successfully blasted off from the spaceport in Odisha. But a "performance anomaly" made the mission unsuccessful. That anomaly was observed in the cryogenic stage, said Isro chairman K Sivan.

The 51.70-metre tall rocket lifted off as planned at 05.43am, and its performance in the first and second stages was normal, the space agency said.

What are the stages of rocket launch? A rocket launch has been divided by space agencies across the world in stages, where different thrusters and others parts help a vehicle reach desired destination in space. Depending on the distance to be covered, the space vehicle can go upto five stages, but broadly there are three. The heaviest part is the first stage, which uses the largest rocket engines the largest fuel and oxidiser tanks, and the highest thrust. Its task is to impart the initial thrust needed to overcome Earth's gravity.

After the fuel in first stage thrusters is used up, they detach and fall back on Earth, either in ocean or sparsely populated areas. The second stage now kicks in, with separate rocket engines and propellants which continues to accelerate the vehicle.

This engine too detaches itself after the intended use and falls back towards the Earth. But this time, the parts mostly disintegrate and evaporate after encountering atmospheric heating on its fall back toward Earth. The third stage then kicks in to help the space vehicle gain orbital velocity. Each of these stages are lighter than its predecessor and the entire operation is monitored by a mission control centre.

Maharashtra

Drunk man climbs atop 300-foot BSNL tower, keeps police on toes during 4.30-hour drama



A drunk man, identified as Sanjay Jadhav, climbed atop a 300-foot-high tower of the BSNL on Monday evening in Maharashtra's Buldhana district. The police succeeded in getting him down after four-and-a-half hours.

(News Agencies)-Maharashtra Police had a tough time in the Buldhana district where a drunk man staged a scene that is occasionally seen in Bollywood films following iconic comic performance by actor Dharmendra in the blockbuster Sholay, released in the 1970s. In real life, such an act becomes life threatening.

In this case, the man identified as Sanjay Jadhav climbed atop a 300-foot-high tower of the Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) on Monday evening. He refused to climb down despite repeated requests by the onlookers.

Sanjay Jadhav, a resident of Milind Nagar in Buldhana district of Maharashtra, was seen with a wire

snare around his neck, leaving the crowd gathered there stunned. He also took off his shirt and started waving it in the air.

Police said he was apparently unhappy with his parents alleging maltreatment. "He had climbed atop the tower because his parents used to harass him," police said.

No one noticed the man as he climbed the tower, but as he reached the height, a crowd started gathering at the spot. Some people even tried to make him climb down but he did not pay heed to their requests.

After receiving the information, police rushed to the spot. By then, Sanjay Jadhav was already atop the BSNL tower. His face was not clearly visible at that height, forcing the

police to use a drone camera to identify him. Police said, "With the help of the drone camera, some people identified him as Sanjay Jadhav, a resident of Milind Nagar. We asked him to come down, but in vain."

Sanjay Jadhav had climbed the tower around 5 pm on Monday and after strenuous efforts of the police and people, he came down around 9.30 pm after four-and-a-half-hours of drama.

Police said, "He seemed to be under the influence of alcohol, and we were worried that nothing untoward incident happens."

Sanjay Jadhav was arrested after he climbed down and a case was registered against him.

Kerala announces Onam bonus for govt employees



(News Agencies)-The Kerala government on Wednesday announced a bonus of ₹4,000 for

government employees for the festival of Onam. In a statement here, State Finance Minister K N Balagopal said the employees not eligible for the bonus would be given a special festival allowance of ₹2,750.

Besides, the employees can avail themselves of Onam advance of ₹15,000 which should be repaid in five equal installments.

All the part-time and contingent staff can also avail an advance of ₹5,000, said the statement. The service pensioners and those who had retired as per the participatory pension scheme would be given an allowance of ₹1,000, it said.

Despite the Covid-19 situation, it said, the government is extending the benefit to over 13 lakh employees.



Why Indian Railways failed to attract private players to run trains

Sarabjit Arjan Singh writes: The Indian Railways wants capital and technology without giving up control, while the concessioner wants a far more equal relationship

On July 1, 2020, the Indian Railways launched the formal process of inviting private parties to run trains on the Indian railway system. Bids were finally opened last month. Hopes of a large participation were belied as there were no bids for nine clusters and only two bids for three clusters. Even for these three clusters, the only serious bid was by Indian Railways' (IR) own company IRCTC, which in effect negated the basic objectives of bringing in private capital.

What are the reasons for this failure? It is an outcome of the lack of alignment of the interests of IR and the concessioners. IR wants the capital and technology without giving up control, while the concessioner wants a far more equal relationship to be moderated by a regulator. IR has imposed constraints that prevent efficient decisions and adopted an organisational design that does not take into account the characteristics and associated risks that will determine outcomes and investment decisions.

What are these risks and constraints? The biggest

dampener is the lumpiness of investment before a single passenger can be carried. Train sets have to be purchased without really knowing how much traffic the service will be able to attract in the face of rising competition from airlines. IR does not guarantee the investor that, in case the concession fails, it will acquire the train sets. The other big dampener is the absence of a regulator for resolving disputes. The proposed independent engineer is far from satisfactory. There are other risks that put off investors that we will not go into. But suffice to say that the current model of inviting private players to run trains has failed. To take forward the initiative, a new model based on a new strategy is required.

The central issue is how to align the three interests: India's need to be capable of designing and manufacturing state-of-the-art rolling stock, IR's need for private capital participation and private capital's necessity of earning a profit. They can be aligned provided the lumpiness of investment in train sets can be eliminated by establishing a company that leases rolling

stock not only to concessioners but also to IR. This will also enable reducing the concession period from 35 years to a more reasonable 10-15 years, bringing in competition. The rolling stock company, apart from leasing train sets, can also be the window for bringing in new technology, preferably by purchasing from those who manufacture in India in collaboration with one of IR's production units and are willing to transfer the technology. This will require IR to guarantee a minimum offtake, say for a period of 10 years, to the manufacturer. For starters, IRFC, which is already into leasing rolling stock, can be that company.

A word about bringing in new technology. It is essential that the opportunity opened up by inviting private players is used to move the rolling stock industry up the industrial value chain and bring about a structural change of the Indian economy. This can only be brought about by a vision that encourages long-term arrangements with rolling stock suppliers. An arrangement that gives access to IR's rolling stock

market is the only way to compel global players to share technology and form joint ventures with Indian companies.

However, technology transfer is not simply a matter of manufacturing in India. It requires understanding the critical elements of the technology and absorbing them into the design-production process. This calls for the investment of large sums of money and the involvement of universities, research institutes and national laboratories. For example, for developing high-speed train technology, the Chinese involved 25 national first-class key universities, 11

research institutes, and 51 national-level laboratories for research, development and production. India will also need to do something similar.

As far as drawing private players is concerned, all that is required is to reduce the risks for the concessioners, reduce the period of the concession to around 15 years, establish a regulator and moderate charges like the amount for the maintenance of tracks and stations. With these changes, the plan may still take off. However, the initiative will remain limited to just running trains if there is no long-term vision.



Understanding the anxieties behind Chinese aggression towards India



(By Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd) : When Chinese President Xi Jinping made a surprise visit to Tibet on July 21 - becoming the first Chinese leader to do so since Jiang Zemin in 1990 - his trip conspicuously began in Nyingchi, a town only a few kilometres from the border with Arunachal Pradesh, before he departed for Lhasa via a new, strategically important rail line. Xi's visit was, therefore, an unmistakable signal by Beijing of the seriousness with which it continues to take its Himalayan border dispute with India.

More than a year after the clash at Galwan Valley, efforts to resolve the border crisis continue to move slowly, while tensions remain high. A limited new agreement reached at the start of August has yet to be implemented, and as Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar noted in a frosty meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in mid-July (their first meeting since September 2020), the Chinese side has previously failed to complete troop withdrawals and revert to the status quo that the Indian side believed China agreed to.

These events have understandably led many in India to worry that China is determined to press its border claims and even to risk war in pursuit of territorial gain. But while China's behaviour has been calculated to demonstrate political confidence, a better understanding of China's strategic intentions requires us to grasp the wider context of Beijing's foreign and security policy challenges across Asia, as well as Xi's own domestic political anxieties at home.

In a perfect world, Xi would probably prefer a calm border and a more stable, positive relationship with India, given the many strategic challenges China now faces on all sides. Seen from Beijing, the strategic environment for China is beginning to worsen in South and Central Asia. As the US withdraws and the Taliban advances in Afghanistan, China fears the prospect of instability and an emerging haven for terrorism directed against its policies in Xinjiang.

Somit Dasgupta writes: Due to all the problems associated with reform-linked assistance schemes, an alternate approach is providing only transitional financial support to all discoms, which are privatised under the private-public partnership mode.

Why central government schemes to improve financial position of discoms have not worked

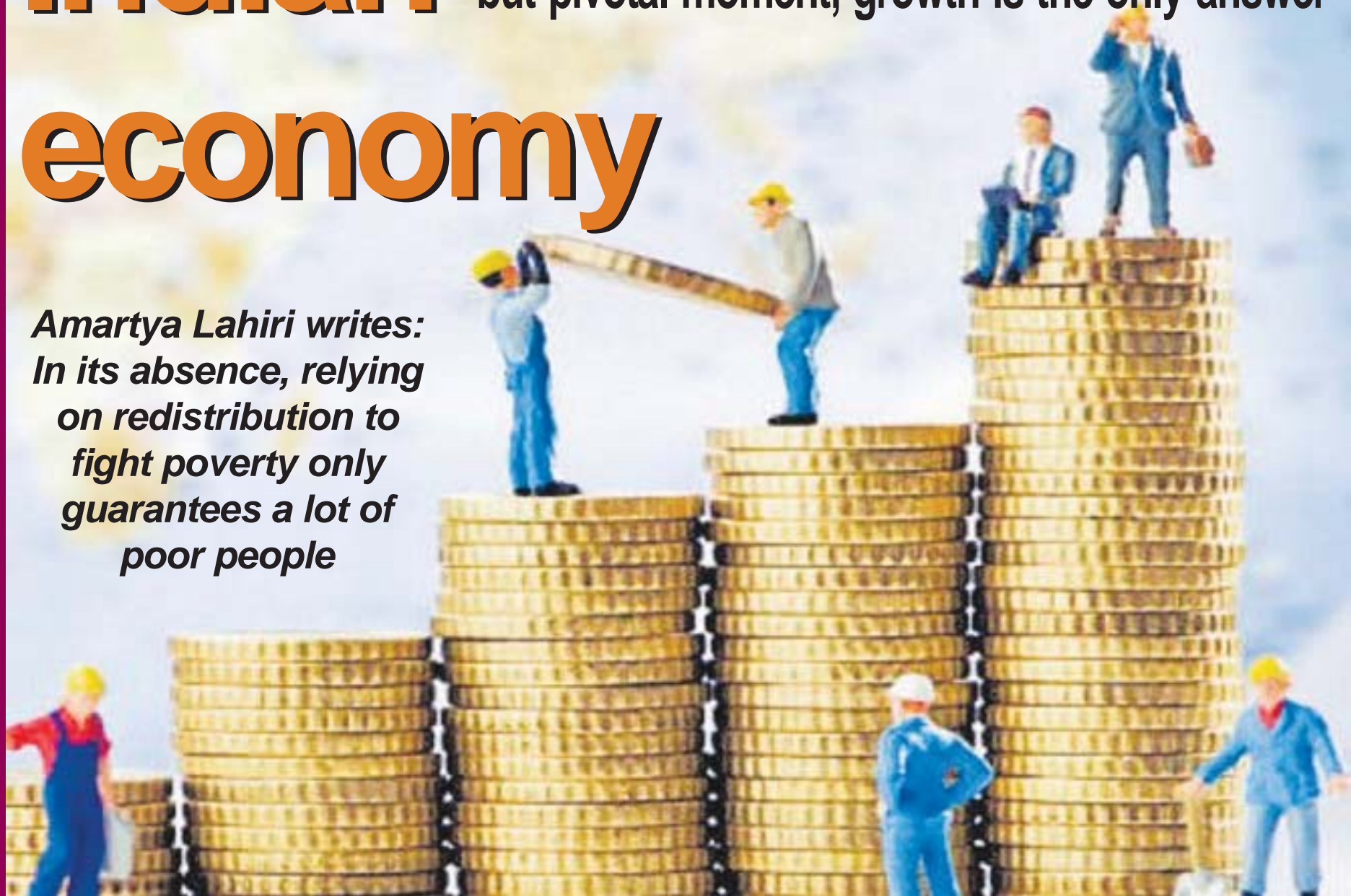
Recently, the government launched a new scheme to improve the distribution infrastructure of the distribution companies (discoms) with the primary intention of improving their financial health. Under this scheme, the discoms will be offered financial assistance provided they meet certain laid down criteria. The total outlay for the scheme is around Rs 3.03 lakh crore, spread over five years. The objective of the scheme is to bring down commercial losses in the range of 12-15 per cent and also reduce the difference between the average cost of supply (ACS) and average revenue realised (ARR) to zero by 2024-25. This kind of assistance programme for discoms is nothing new and has been going on since 2001, when the Accelerated Power Development Scheme was initiated. This was followed by various other schemes with some differences between them. But the overall principle remained the same - financial assistance will be offered in the form of grants and loans provided some pre-identified parameters move in a direction that would indicate better performance of discoms. Prior to the launching of this scheme, the government had launched the UDAY scheme in 2015. UDAY, however, did not involve any monetary assistance to the states, but only promised to help the states in reducing the cost of power through coal linkage rationalisation, etc. The problem with all these schemes (including UDAY) is that they have not delivered and the financial position of the discoms has only worsened. The Power Finance Corporation reports that the aggregate loss of the discoms (after tax) was about Rs 49,600 crore in 2018-19. A recent report of Niti Aayog has assessed the losses to be about Rs 90,000 crore in 2020-21, though this figure is not strictly comparable to the PFC figure. Surprisingly, such schemes are being formulated, one after another, with outlays running into trillions of rupees knowing fully well that they are not effective and have not worked in the past. Reduction of commercial losses is not really about improving infrastructure, it is more of a managerial issue. Though the average losses (inclusive of technical and commercial) is about 22 per cent today, several discoms have losses in excess of 40 per cent. It is common knowledge that it is possible to bring down losses from 40 per cent to about 15 per cent without any significant investments in infrastructure. Investments, however, would be required to bring down losses further to a single-digit level since all low-hanging fruits would have been consumed by then. The governance of these reform-linked schemes is a complex issue because the performance of the discoms needs to be monitored quarterly to facilitate the release of funds to deserving discoms. The two most popular parameters which are monitored are the loss levels and the difference between the ACS and ARR. There are inherent problems with these parameters since they keep fluctuating and it is very difficult to fathom their trend on a quarter-wise basis, rendering the release of funds to be tricky and cumbersome. In the scheme now announced by the government, monitoring will be all the more complex since about 26 parameters will be taken into consideration and assigned a score, though here again, loss levels and the difference between ACS and ARR will have the highest weightage. Moreover, for some of

the parameters, it may be difficult to assign a score across discoms which may lead to some amount of subjectivity. Some examples being - providing accurate energy accounts, tariff reforms initiated, consumer rights and grievance redressal handled. Some of the parameters are even questionable, for instance, liquidation of regulatory assets, since these are mandated by the regulatory commissions and therefore, the discoms have no role to play in them. Due to all the problems associated with reform-linked assistance schemes, an alternate approach that could be considered by the Centre (in lieu of such assistance schemes) is providing only transitional financial support to all discoms, which are privatised under the private-public partnership mode. One would again like to cite the case of Delhi. A transitional support of Rs 3,450 crore spread over five years proved to be exceedingly beneficial since it allowed the privatised utilities some breathing time to bring down their losses. On the flip side, one can also mention the case of the first phase of privatisation of discoms in Odisha (late 1990s), which proved to be a failure and one of the reasons often cited was the lack of any transitional support. Since in an earlier policy statement the government had mentioned that privatisation of discoms is to be promoted, it would make sense to consider this transitional support as a catalyst. The quantum of support can be worked out on some normative basis and the performance of the discom can be monitored over a five-year period. The onus would be on the privatised utility to use this support judiciously under the supervision of the regulatory commission.

Indian economy

As Indian economy heads towards an uncertain but pivotal moment, growth is the only answer

Amartya Lahiri writes:
In its absence, relying on redistribution to fight poverty only guarantees a lot of poor people



The Indian economy is heading towards an uncertain but pivotal moment. It is coming off a historically poor run with the economy having shrunk by a post-Independence record 7.3 per cent in 2020-21. This contraction was also an order of magnitude greater than the 3.3 per cent contraction of the world economy in 2020. In other words, India did poorly with respect to both its own past and the rest of the world. The economy is now expected to return to its pre-pandemic level of GDP only in 2022. The pandemic will effectively have cost India two years of lost income growth.

This isn't the only bad news. The Covid contraction was preceded by almost 13 quarters of continuous decline in real GDP growth. This backdrop of declining growth and the precipitous Covid contraction is likely going to reverse decades of progress in lifting Indians out of poverty.

A little background on poverty in India is useful here. The percentage of Indians living below the poverty line (the Headcount Index) in 1985 was almost the same as in 1952. In effect, India made little progress in poverty reduction between 1952 and 1985. It is only after 1991-92 that India began to make significant progress in fighting poverty. A 2016 study by World Bank affiliated researchers Gaurav Dutt, Rinku Murgai and Martin Ravallion found that during the period 1992-2012, the Headcount Index declined by around 25 percentage points. On a cumulative basis, the post-reform period lifted over 200 million people out of poverty between 1992 and 2012. The big difference between the pre and post-liberalisation

phases was the doubling of India's GDP growth rate. The welfare dividends of this growth turn-around can also be found in measures of economic inequality. In a series of recent research papers, Viktoria Hnatkovska and I have found evidence of declining gaps in wages and household consumption between SC/STs and non-SC/STs during 1983-2012. There is similar evidence of decreasing gaps between rural and urban workers during this period. In short, the growth pick-up after 1991-92 lifted the economic fortunes of many disparate socio-economic groups. With this background on poverty alleviation in India, consider the following facts. A recent study by researchers at the Azim Premji University estimates that 230 million people may have fallen below a poverty measure of Rs 375/day in rural India and Rs 430/day in urban India between January and October 2020. In a separate study, the Pew Research Center estimates that the number of Indians living below a more conservative measure of \$2/day increased by 75 million in the space of a year since the pandemic struck. In other words, the economic contraction of 2020 has reversed a large part of the poverty reduction that was achieved over the past three decades. And, while absorbing these facts, note that these studies do not consider the ravages of the second wave and its effects on the financial health of households and firms.

The key lesson to take away from this history of poverty alleviation in India is that the most effective way of helping the poor is faster economic growth. Social welfare programmes that work through

redistributive schemes can at best be complementary mechanisms that provide social insurance against bad luck in the labour market or in health. But, in the absence of growth, relying on redistribution to fight poverty only guarantees a lot of poor people.

So, what are India's growth prospects going forward? Unfortunately, both domestic and external conditions look fraught. On the external side, the most favourable aspect is the ongoing return of the advanced economies towards economic normalcy. The economic recovery in the advanced economies will create demand for products from the rest of the world, including India.

The external conditions however also have potentially severe headwinds.

First, there are signs of rising inflation in advanced economies which typically induces a monetary tightening cycle. Second, there is rising concern in advanced economies about the need to normalise the monetary policy stance by raising interest rates from their current near-zero levels. As growth and inflation firm up in these economies, the pressure to raise rates will only grow. These forces will make foreign capital more expensive, which will put downward pressure on an already tepid investment rate as the cost of finance rises. Third, public debt levels in advanced economies have risen sharply during the pandemic as they responded to the crisis with debt-financed fiscal expansions. There will be belt-tightening which will likely temper demand.

Olympics effect?

71% parents now support kids taking up non-cricket sports, says survey



With seven medals in the Tokyo Olympics, not only have the athletes made India proud but also inspired parents to support their kids in pursuing non-cricket sports.

As the country celebrated India's medal count in the Tokyo Olympics, more avenues opened for kids back home. A survey has said around 71 per cent of parents are now willing to support their kids in pursuing non-cricket sports after Indian athletes brought back seven medals, including one gold, two silver and four bronze medals.

Even though sports fans stayed glued to their television screens to cheer their country, there has always been apprehension in pursuing other sports apart from cricket.

However, the victory of javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, a historic bronze win by the Indian Men's hockey team after 41 years seem to have been successful in changing the narrative.

A survey conducted by Local Circles tried to understand if Indian parents grew more supportive of their kids

taking up non-cricket sports as career options, and 71 per cent said yes.

However, 19 per cent of Indian parents said they won't support their child taking sports as their career. Around 10 per cent did not have an opinion. This question in the survey received 8,348 responses.

This is a drastic rise from the survey result in 2016 where approximately 40 per cent of parents had said that they would support their child taking up a sporting career outside of cricket. **QUICK LOOK AT INDIA'S PERFORMANCE IN TOKYO**

There were many firsts in India's campaign, including the biggest ever 128-member athlete contingent, seven Olympic Medals, first Olympic gold medal in an athletics event, two successive medals in consecutive Games by Sindhu, and a medal(bronze) by the Indian men's

team in hockey after a gap of 41 years.

Also, the women's hockey team achieved its best-ever fourth-place finish in the Games.

INDIA'S MEDAL WINNERS AT TOKYO 2020

India headed to the Tokyo Games with its biggest-ever medal contingent and finished with the biggest-ever medal tally.

Neeraj Chopra - Gold in Men's Javelin

Mirabai Chanu - Silver in Women's 49kg Weightlifting

Ravi Dahiya - Silver in Men's Freestyle 57kg Wrestling

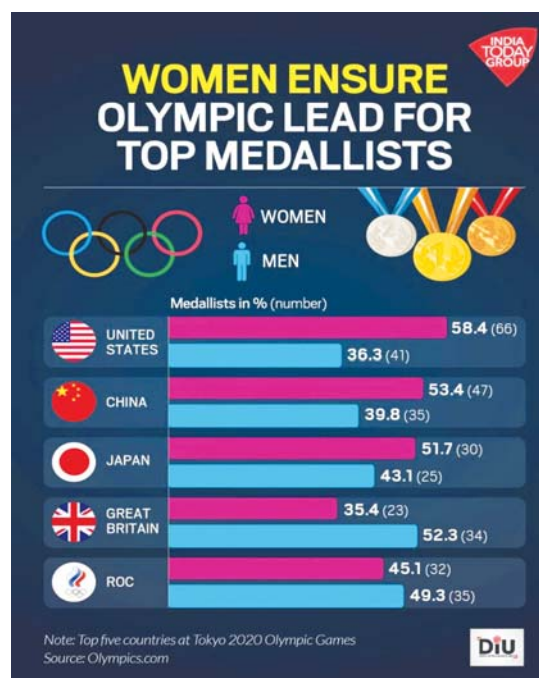
India men's hockey team - Bronze

Lovlina Borgohain - Bronze in Women's Welterweight boxing

PV Sindhu - Bronze in Women's Singles Badminton

Bajrang Punia - Bronze in Men's 65kg Freestyle

How women athletes pushed US, others ahead in Olympic medal tally



New games were introduced, old records were broken, and controversies were aplenty - all in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic - as Tokyo became the only Asian city to host the Olympics twice. But amid the sporting gala emerged stories of sheer grit, determination and female dominance.

Women athletes in a way shaped the Olympic medal table, winning more medals than their male counterparts for some of the top performing nations. For example, of the 39 gold medals the United States won, as many as 23 were won courtesy women athletes. But for the spectacular performances of US women athletes on the concluding day of the Olympics, the US risked losing the top slot on the medals tally.

Not just the US, but women athletes won more medals, even for China and Japan, which came second and third respectively in the recently concluded Olympic Games. Women from these three nations bagged a total of 143 medals against 101 medals won by men - 42 per cent more.

Country-wise data reveals that American women secured over 58 per cent (66) of the total medals won by the US. This is the highest number of medals won by women in the country's Olympic history. On the contrary, American men were able to win just 41 of the total 113 medals clinched by the US. The rest six medals came in mixed and open events. For the US, the trend of women outperforming men at the Olympics started in 2012 and has stayed that way since. The US is followed by China, where women won over 53 per cent of the total medals. Japan, the host nation, showed a similar trend, with almost 52 per cent of the medals being won by women athletes. Interestingly, 2,360 athletes participated from the top five nations, which include 1,304 (55.3 per cent) women and 1,056 (44.7 per cent) men.

Women athletes shared the honour of breaking world records too. Of the 20 records that were broken at the Tokyo Olympics in different events, women led in nine and teamed up with their male counterparts in two mixed events

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Afghan government launched offensive, we reacted



Blaming the Ghani administration in Kabul, Taliban spokesperson Mohammad Suhail Shaheen said the offensive playing out in Afghanistan was in response to the declaration of a six-month long military action by the Afghan government.

The Afghan issue has no military solution, Taliban spokesperson Mohammad Suhail Shaheen told India Today from Doha in Qatar. Mohammad Suhail Shaheen is a member of the negotiations team and the Taliban's spokesperson for international media.

In an exclusive interview with India Today, Mohammad Suhail Shaheen also said that the Taliban's offensive was in response to the Afghan government's declaration of a six-month long military action against the Taliban.

The Taliban spokesperson also denied reports and claims that the group was involved in the killing of Indian journalist Danish Siddiqui.

"We want national unity of Afghanistan. We want peaceful coexistence with all Afghans of all views," Taliban spokesperson Mohammad Suhail Shaheen said. Question: Isn't there a dichotomy that, on the one hand, the Taliban and the Afghan government are in talks and on the other hand, both sides are fighting each other in Afghanistan?

Answer: For the last 20 years, we have been demanding a peaceful solution to the Afghan issue because we said time

and again that the Afghan issue has no military solution.

Right now, fighting in Afghanistan simultaneously with negotiations underway in Doha right now is because the head of the Kabul administration announced a six month military operation against us on the day of Eid. And after that, they started bombing not only our position, but also bombing hospitals, clinics, schools and markets of the common people. So, it was our reaction.

We acted to the military operation. When we reacted, they started evacuating cities, provincial cities and other cities. And we have captured, for now, nine provincial cities.

Question: The Taliban claims to have captured nine provincial cities but the Afghan administration is rejecting Taliban's claims. What's your reaction?

Answer: We have evidence of the ground realities. Our forces are there, they have made videos of capturing those provincial cities.

The people are happy. They are welcoming our forces. But on the other hand, the Kabul administration has resorted to bombing and hitting, targeting the common people, the hospitals. They have also

resorted to spreading fake videos. All those videos have been taken from atrocities committed by Daesh (IS/ISIS) and some videos from the past and made fake videos, splice the videos, one with another. Now they are spreading that it is right now happening in areas under our administration. All this is propaganda.

They do not know about the ground realities because they are sitting in Kabul. We are right on the ground. We are the people of Afghanistan who have struggled for the liberation of the country for the past 20 years.

Question: If the talks are on, where is the need to capture territories? If the Taliban wish to be part of the Kabul administration in the future, then why capture land?

Answer: What was the need for the Kabul administration to announce a six-month military operation against the Taliban? What is the need of them to say that they have killed hundreds of Taliban members, as they claim every day?

So this was started by them. They started the offensive, we reacted. Secondly, we are not negotiating to be part of the Kabul administration. The negotiations are to agree on a new government, on a new political roadmap to replace this



about a new government, and we will take care that they will not be harmed. He was embedded with the Kabul administration and they launched an attack against us. It was during the fighting that he was killed. It is not so that. I heard reports that he was mutilated, that is not true. We don't do that. It's against the rules of Islam.

Also, his body was taken by the government forces and not by us, so how can it be possible? Question: Reports say that he was taking shelter in a mosque, he was identified as an Indian, pulled out, then tortured and killed. Answer: It's not correct. Our forces are strictly instructed not to harass journalists who are doing their job.

Answer: We are holding negotiations here in Doha and that negotiation is for reaching an agreement about a new political roadmap, for a new government which will be acceptable to all parties.

Question: Is election part of that roadmap? Answer: Any idea can be put forth by anyone. We have our own agenda, they have their own agenda. They can bring it to the table for negotiation and then it will be discussed.

We came to a conclusion and decided to resolve it through peaceful negotiation and we reached an agreement.



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A minor from Delhi's Trilokpuri area was brought to a local hospital on Wednesday with severe injuries. Her medical report confirmed signs of sexual assault.



India Today Group Digital

Six-year-old raped by neighbour in Delhi's Trilokpuri, admitted to hospital with severe injuries

A six-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her neighbour in Delhi's Trilokpuri area on Wednesday. One person has been arrested in connection with the case and further investigation is underway. The matter was first brought to the attention of the Delhi Police around 11 am on Wednesday. Officials were informed that a six-year-old girl had been brought to a local hospital in a serious condition. A medical report later confirmed that the minor had been

sexually assaulted. In their statement to the police, family members have accused a 34-year-old neighbour of the crime. The police have registered a case in this regard at the Mayur Vihar police station on the basis of the family's complaint. The accused has been booked under Section 376 AB of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and Section 3(2)(v) of the SC/ST Act.

Officials confirmed that the child had been admitted to a local hospital for treatment for serious injuries. She has now been referred to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) for a pediatrician's opinion. The incident comes on the heels of a similar case in Nangal village in Delhi Cantonment area that triggered outrage earlier this month. A nine-year-old girl was murdered and forcibly cremated by four individuals in Nangal

village, the minor's family alleged. In their statements to the police, family members also accused the four men of sexual assault.

Initial reports had hinted that the accused tried to convince the family to cremate the child's body without informing the police as it would 'complicate matters'.

A court on Tuesday sent the four accused to three-day police custody on Monday.

Twitter locks accounts of several Congress leaders and all the latest news

Congress, Twitter face off as accounts of more leaders are locked

The Congress on Thursday hit out at the government for "scuttling free speech" after Twitter accounts of several leaders of the party were temporarily locked for sharing a photograph of the family of a nine-year-old rape victim.

At opposition protest march in Delhi, Rahul Gandhi says voice of people crushed

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said that the opposition were not allowed to speak in the Parliament and termed it as "murder of democracy".

MG Hector gets new variant Shine, gets new Havana Gray



colour

MG Motor India on Thursday has announced the launch of a new variant for the Hector SUV. Named Shine, the new variant is available at a price range of ₹14,51,800 and ₹16,49,800 (ex-showroom).

Preparations done: Team India ready for action-packed 2nd

Test at Lord's, BCCI shares training video

The stage is set for an epic encounter between India and England as the two teams face off against each other in the 2nd Test at Lord's. The first Test between the two teams ended in a draw with rain playing the villain in the encounter.

Malaika Arora reveals she and son Arhaan Khan discussed possibility of her adopting a girl and giving her 'a family'

Actor and fitness enthusiast Malaika Arora has said that she and her son Arhaan Khan discuss the possibility of her adopting a girl to 'give her a family and a home'. Malaika also revealed that though she loves Arhaan 'to the moon and back' she wished she 'had a daughter'.

Rakul Preet lets her spirit fly high as she does aerial yoga pose, see post here
Bollywood celebrities love doing yoga, and many even credit their healthy lifestyle to this workout technique. One of those stars is Rakul Preet

Singh, who makes sure to include yoga in her daily routine. Apart from traditional asanas, the avid yoga practitioner even does aerial yoga to keep herself fit and healthy. And she did the same for her latest workout.

Enjoy 'intergalactic stargazing' with this incredible post from Nasa. Watch

Is stargazing something you love to do? Then this visualization video by Nasa is tailor-made for you. It takes you on an 'intergalactic stargazing' trip. Shared on Instagram, the video makes for an incredible watch. Chances are, the clip will make your jaw drop in astonishment.



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PM Modi uses silver brick to lay the foundation stone of Ram Mandir

Inside, 175 guests waited patiently in chairs spaced two-feet apart under a waterproof canopy in shades of red, gold and yellow. Outside, in the temple town, people thronged shops with television sets to watch the event, and rooftops of houses near the temple site became vantage viewing points as people jostled to get a glimpse of the Prime Minister.

Loud cheers of Jai Shri Ram, the chanting of Vedic hymns and the blowing of conches greeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he stepped into the Ram Janmabhoomi site in Uttar Pradesh Ayodhya town at 12.07pm on Wednesday. Inside, 175 guests waited patiently in chairs spaced two-feet apart under a waterproof canopy in shades of red, gold and yellow. Outside, in the temple town, people thronged shops with television sets to watch the event, and rooftops of houses near the temple site became vantage viewing points as people jostled to get a glimpse of the Prime Minister. "Bhoomi puja (the ground breaking ceremony) is a new beginning for us and end of a bitter past," said Sujeet Bahadur, 65, a local resident who is old enough to remember the movement for the Ram temple.

Dressed in a traditional silk dhoti and gold-coloured kurta, Modi offered prayers to the infant deity, Ram Lalla, at the makeshift temple and performed a circumambulation, before planting a sapling. He then participated in the ground breaking ceremony.

The Vedic ceremony, presided over by Senapati Shastri of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham in Tamil Nadu, began with prayers to Ganesha, the Hindu god of beginnings. Hymns dedicated to Lord Hanuman, Kaal Bhairav and Goddess Kali, the clan deity of Ram, were also recited. A 40kg silver brick donated by temple trust chief Mahant Nritya Gopal Das, was used for the ritual. The main foundation-laying event began at 12.45pm, a pre-ordained time decided by astrologers and seers. The priests dug a pit in the sanctum sanctorum of the proposed

temple, the silver brick was removed and nine other bricks, engraved with the words 'Jai Shri Ram' [Hail Lord Ram], placed instead. All the bricks were donated by devotees around the world in 1989, when Hindu groups started mass mobilization to build the temple in what they believed is the birth place of Lord Ram. A lotus and the PM's personal offering, a kalash (holy pitcher) made of five metals (gold, silver, copper, iron and zinc) was placed on the bricks. A copper plaque donated by Shankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, one of Hinduism's holy seats, inscribed with Sanskrit hymns was also laid at temple's foundation. As the PM offered prayers,

Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat, Uttar Pradesh governor Anandiben Patel, chief minister Yogi

Adityanath, Salil Singhal, nephew of late Vishwa Hindu Parishad chief Ashok Singhal, and his wife looked on. All were wearing masks.

Soil from at least 2,000 Hindu holy sites and water from at least 100 sacred rivers were used for purification and other rituals. The 175 guests included 135 seers from various spiritual traditions and eminent people from Ayodhya.

"Nine bricks are kept here... these were sent by devotees of Lord Ram from around the world in 1989. There are 2,75,000 such bricks, out of which 100 bricks with 'Jai Shri Ram' engraving have been taken," said a priest officiating the ceremony.

The ceremony lasted 40 minutes, after which the PM released a postage stamp on the Ram temple designed by the Ayodhya Shodh Sansthan, an organisation of the Uttar

Pradesh government's culture department. Adityanath presented a three-feet high statue of Kodanda Ram carved from rosewood to PM Modi. Kodada (literally, with bow) Ram represents the deity from the period during which Ram was looking for Sita after her abduction in the epic Ramayana.

In the evening, fireworks lit up the sky and tens of thousands of earthen lamps glittered across the town as locals said they hoped the ceremony marked a new beginning.

Authorities said 100,000 lamps were lit along the banks of the Saryu river.

"Lord Ram belongs to everyone. Ram temple will also bring overall development to Ayodhya," said Iqbal Ansari, son of the oldest litigant in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title suit decided by the Supreme Court last year.

Bangladesh begins COVID-19 vaccinations for Rohingya refugees



(News Agencies)-Bangladesh began vaccinating on Tuesday Rohingya refugees living in congested camps as the impoverished South Asian nation battles a record surge in coronavirus cases.

Health officials say 2,600 COVID-19 cases and 29 deaths have been recorded in the camps housing 850,000 Rohingya but many experts say

this is likely a gross underestimate.

The initial inoculation phase will see around 48,000 refugees aged over 55 get Chinese-made Sinopharm shots in the coming three days, local health chief Mahbubur Rahman told AFP. At Kutupalong, the largest refugee settlement home to more than 600,000 people, Rohingyas including many elderly people

queued up to get their shots from health workers in protective suits.

"We are scared of corona. We heard it would be good for us if we get vaccinated, that's why I came here today," said 60-year-old grandmother Rahima Khatun. "We need the vaccine to live through the current crisis. It will save us from the disease everyone is worried about," said Mohammad Zafar, an elderly

man.

Officials said they conducted a massive awareness campaign in the camps with volunteers going door to door among the flimsy shacks where the refugees live.

Shamsud Douza, Bangladesh's deputy refugee commissioner, told AFP that a vaccination drive would also begin this week for 18,000 Rohingya controversially

relocated to an island in the Bay of Bengal.

Bangladesh has been hit by a major surge in cases in recent months and much of the country of 169 million people is under lockdown, including the Rohingya camps.

The coronavirus has killed nearly 23,000 people and infected about 1.4 million in Bangladesh, most of them in recent months. Around 98 per cent of new infections are from the more transmissible Delta variant first detected in neighbouring India.

'Global divide'

Most of the Rohingya in Bangladesh fled an offensive by security forces in neighbouring Myanmar in 2017 and four years later, there remains little prospect of them returning home. "Vaccination of all age groups is the only effective way to stop the virus (from) spreading further among the Rohingya population in the camps," said Romain Briey, head of the medical charity MSF in Bangladesh. Hrusikesh Harichandan from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said the Rohingya were "living in the shadow of the global vaccine divide".

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China to fund Myanmar projects in agreement with junta

(News Agencies)- China will transfer over \$6 million to Myanmar's government to fund 21 development projects, Myanmar's foreign ministry said, in a sign of cooperation resuming under the junta that overthrew an elected government on February 1. Unlike Western countries that have condemned the junta for cutting short democracy and the killing and imprisonment of its opponents, China has taken a softer line and said its priorities are stability and not interfering in its neighbour.

A foreign ministry statement said the funds were to be transferred from China for projects within the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation framework. It said those included animal vaccines, culture, agriculture, science, tourism and disaster prevention. An agreement was signed on Monday with China's ambassador to Myanmar, the statement said. The Chinese embassy's Facebook page



confirmed the signing. Opponents of Myanmar's junta have accused China of supporting the military takeover, in which elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi was ousted and detained. Beijing has rejected such accusations and said it backs regional diplomacy on the crisis. Western countries have continued to provide some emergency aid to Myanmar,

including \$50 million announced by Washington on Tuesday to support relief groups in Myanmar dealing with the fallout from a surge in COVID-19 infections. China's influence had grown in Myanmar in recent years, with the opening of oil and gas pipelines that cross the country and plans for economic zones and a major port development.

India mints first crypto unicorn even as doubts remain

(News Agencies)- CoinDCX became India's first cryptocurrency unicorn after the exchange raised 6.70 billion rupees (\$90 million) from investors led by Facebook Inc. co-founder Eduardo Saverin's B Capital Group, even as local authorities push back against crypto assets.

The latest funding round values the firm at \$1.1 billion, Chief Executive Officer and co-founder Sumit Gupta said in an interview Tuesday. Other

investors include existing partners Coinbase Ventures, Polychain Capital, Block.one, and Jump Capital. Gupta plans to use part of the funds to double his team in the next six months to about 400 people in India, where investments in crypto grew to nearly \$6.6 billion in May from \$923 million in April 2020, according to Chainalysis. The investment comes as policymakers continue to debate on the status of digital

currencies in India - as recently as last week the central bank said it has "major concerns" about private currencies and the government will take a final stance on the matter. "I am pretty sure the industry will be regulated at the right time," Gupta said. "We have chosen to put at stake our money and career as we feel this is going to be a very good wealth generation opportunity for people." The 30-year-old engineer from the elite Indian

Institute of Technology spent several hours daily reading about blockchain and cryptocurrencies before setting up CoinDCX in 2018. Registered in Singapore as Primestack Pte., it aims to expand its user base to 50 million from 3.5 million over the next few years and focus on educating users on crypto and blockchain. Investments surged after the Supreme Court last year quashed a ban on banks facilitating crypto trades.

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ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਨਿਬਰਸਨ ਰੋਡ ਤੇ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਈ

ਮੌਜੂਦਾ ਸਥਿਤੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਦੀ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਦੀ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੂੰ 1-2 ਨਵੰਬਰ 1984 ਦੇ ਘਾਟੇ-ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨੀ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਟਾ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਹੈ।

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Nepal Struggling to Find Affordable Black Fungus Drug After India Banned Exports

(News Agencies)-The Nepal government is facing "a roadblock" in procuring at a cost-effective rate a drug to treat rising cases of black fungus infections in the country because an Indian company that had entered the bid after India had banned the drug's export is now unable to promise supply.

The Nepal government has thus far not disclosed the name of the company.

According to a Kathmandu Post report, the unnamed company won the opportunity to supply 10,000 vials of liposomal amphotericin B, the primary drug to treat mucormycosis infections.

Mucormycosis is an opportunistic infection in which fungal spores infect a body that has been 'distracted' by another infection or disease, especially diabetes. The number of mucormycosis recently sky-rocketed in India

after doctors treated COVID-19 patients - both diabetic and non-diabetic - with steroids, which suppress the immune system. Officials at Nepal's department of health services told Kathmandu Post that three foreign companies - one each from India, China and Bangladesh - had submitted bids to supply the drug in response to a June 15 tender. But, according to the news report, the Nepal government is in a bind now as it is unable to award the contract to the Indian company even though it bid the lowest amount. This is because, "despite participating in the bid," the company hasn't been able to "assure the supply of the medicine citing the ban on export of the medicine by the Indian government".

The Government of India had banned exports of amphotericin B on June 1 - two weeks before the Nepal government issued the tender and a week before

parties could bid. "The Indian company says that it will supply the medicine as soon as India lifts the ban," an unnamed official from the health services department told the newspaper. "But how long should we wait for the Indian government to lift the ban?"

Although the Chinese company was reportedly the second-lowest bidder, its rate is more than double the one the Indian company quoted - around Rs 11,000 per vial.

"As per the law, we have to award the contract to the lowest bidder. So we will ask the Indian company if it can supply the medicine within a few days," Bhim Sing Tinkari, director of management at the department of health services, told the Kathmandu Post. "If it cannot supply the medicine as per our requirement, we may scrap the current bids and issue a fresh order." Tinkari added the department is not willing to pick



the Chinese company as its price was very high. He also said it was considering asking "hospitals to procure the drugs themselves".

Curiously, Krishna Prasad Paudel, the spokesperson for Nepal's health ministry, had also recently said that the government had received some doses of the drug and that they were being distributed to government-run hospitals in the mountainous country. Following a spike in mucormycosis cases

across India, the directorate general of foreign trade, under India's commerce ministry, restricted exports of amphotericin B on June 1, with immediate effect.

According to news reports, over 45,000 people in India have reported contracting the infection and over 4,300 people have died of it. Mucormycosis infections have to be treated early because they progress and deteriorate rapidly.

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Afghan finance minister quits, leaves country as Taliban advance



(News Agencies)- Afghanistan's acting finance minister, Mr Khalid Payenda, has resigned and left the country after the Taliban captured key Customs posts, bleeding the administration of revenue and reinforcing the government's isolation as the militants make swift gains.

Mr Payenda has "resigned and left the country because Afghanistan is grappling with declining revenues after the takeover of the Customs posts", Finance Ministry spokesman Mohammad Rafi Tabe said in a phone interview on Wednesday (Aug 11).

"The deteriorating security situation" and travelling to be with his ailing wife abroad, were the other reasons Mr Tabe gave.

It was not immediately clear where Mr Payenda was going.

The former minister tweeted on Tuesday to say that he was quitting his post but gave no reasons for it.

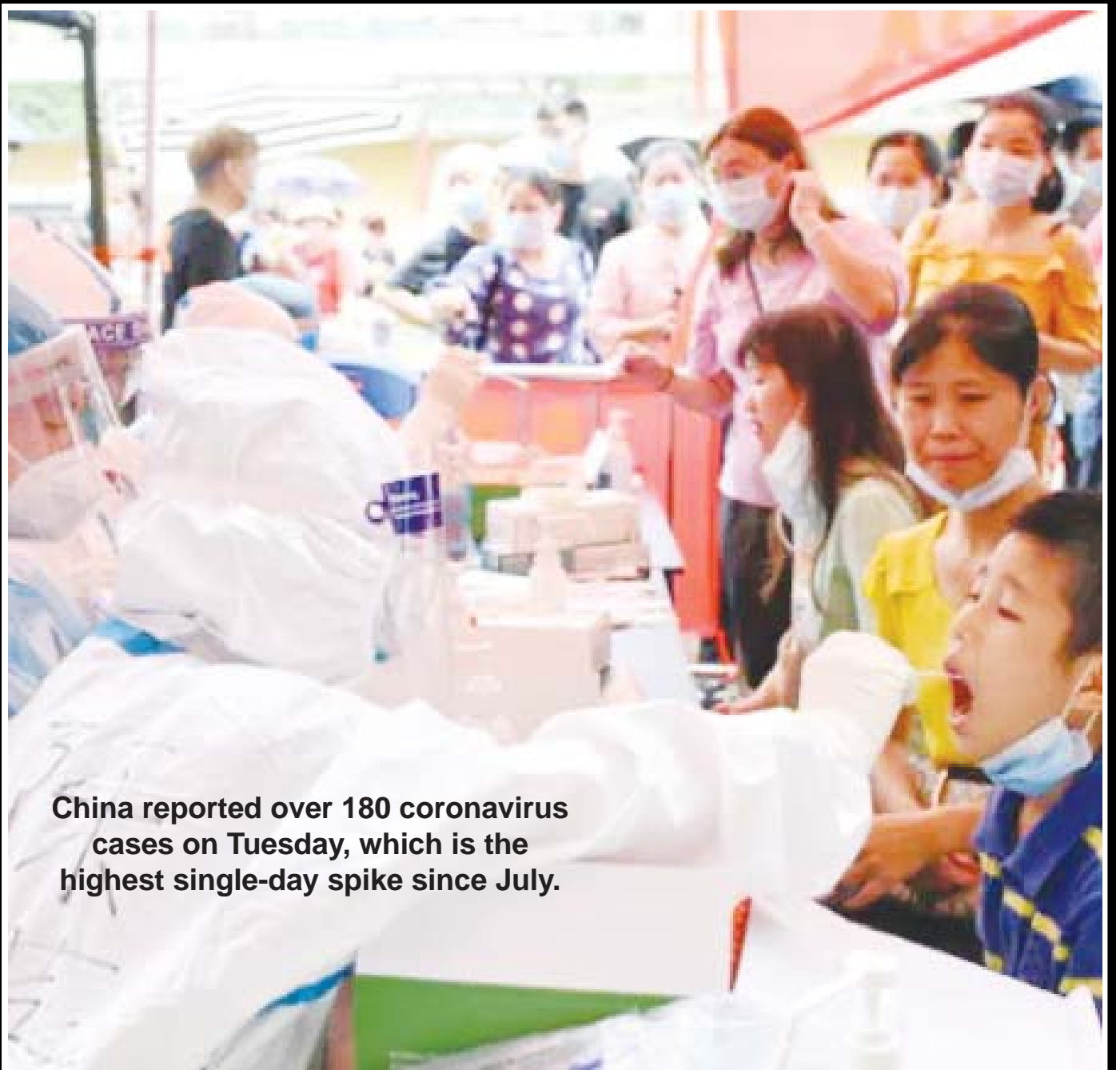
The deputy minister for Customs and revenues, Mr Alem Shah Ibrahim, will be in charge until a new appointment is announced.

Mr Payenda was not immediately available for comment.

With United States and Nato troops slated for a complete exit by Aug 31, a resurgent Taliban have overrun several provincial capitals in recent days.

The militants have also seized several crucial Customs posts, causing President Ashraf Ghani's government to lose as much as US\$30 million (S\$41 million) in import duties last month alone.

The taxes account for about half of Afghanistan's total domestic revenues, estimated to be about 216.5 billion afghanis (S\$3.6 billion) this year.



China reported over 180 coronavirus cases on Tuesday, which is the highest single-day spike since July.

China logs highest single-day locally transmitted Covid-19 cases since July

China reported over 180 coronavirus cases, including 108 locally transmitted infections on Tuesday, the highest single-day rise since the current outbreak began last month amidst a growing concern over the spread of the more virulent Delta variant.

The National Health Commission (NHC) said in its daily report that the country reported 108 locally transmitted cases, 35 imported and 38 asymptomatic infections on Monday.

The new wave of infections spread after a cluster of cases reported in Nanjing airport and later at Zhangjiajie, a tourist destination in China's south Hunan province last month.

Significantly, Hubei province is currently treating 68 confirmed Covid-19 cases, including 55 locally transmitted ones, mainly in the provincial capital Wuhan, where the coronavirus first emerged in December, 2019.

Wuhan city has already carried out

mass testing of its 12 million population.

CHECK THESE OUT

There were also 80 asymptomatic cases under medical observation in the province, with 63 of them being locally transmitted cases, state-run Xinhua news agency quoted local health officials as saying.

There is a growing concern among authorities over the spread of the Delta variant in about 13 of the country's 23 provinces.

Since Sunday, Beijing has stepped up measures to prevent the spread of the contagion by virtually banning people from travelling to the Chinese capital from provinces having Covid-19 cases.

Beijing, which also reported Covid-19 cases last week, has rolled out a range of measures to strengthen the management of people returning from regions with relatively high virus transmission rates, including imposing restrictions on their purchase of railway tickets and air services.

Among all affected provinces, Jiangsu had the severest situation, with 642 confirmed cases since July 20 with 394 from Yangzhou and 233 from Nanjing, data released by Jiangsu provincial health authorities on Tuesday showed, state-run Global Times reported.

After five rounds of mass nucleic acid tests, Yangzhou reported 48 confirmed infections on Monday alone.

Meanwhile, cities across China started to strengthen their management in organising people taking nucleic acid tests after 35 infections were reported at a testing site in Yangzhou due to poor epidemic prevention and control management.

According to the NHC, as many as 1,702 people are receiving treatment for Covid-19 in China. The condition of 54 of them was serious.

The death toll due to coronavirus since last year stands at 4,636, as per the official data.

Five Indian-Americans feature in Forbes list of 'America's Richest Self-Made Women'



Richest Self-Made Women

Five Indian-American women -- Jayshree Ullal, Indra Nooyi, Neerja Sethi, Neha Narkhede, Reshma Shetty -- have been featured in the Forbes list of 'America's Richest Self-Made Women'.

Five Indian-American women have been featured in the Forbes list of 'America's Richest Self-Made Women' which was released on August 5.

This year, fifteen newcomers have been featured on the Forbes rich list, including PepsiCo's former chair and CEO Indra Nooyi. Other Indian-Americans on the list include Jayshree Ullal, president, and CEO of Arista Networks; Neerja Sethi, co-founder, Syntel; Neha Narkhede, co-founder and former chief technology officer of Confluent; and Reshma Shetty, co-founder of Ginkgo Bioworks.

Jayshree Ullal

London-born Jayshree Ullal, 60, heads Arista Networks, a computer networking firm, since 2008. Ullal, who was raised in India, has a net worth of \$1.7 bn and stands 16th on the Forbes rich list. According to Forbes, she owns about five per cent of Arista's stock, some of which is earmarked for her two children, niece, and nephew. Jayshree Ullal joined the board of directors of Snowflake, a cloud computing company that went public in September 2020. Ullal studied electrical engineering at San Francisco State University and

engineering management at Santa Clara University.

Neerja Sethi

Neerja Sethi stands at 26th place in the Forbes rich list with net worth of \$1 bn. Sethi, 60, co-founded the IT consulting and outsourcing firm Syntel with her husband Bharat Desai in 1980 in their apartment in Troy, Michigan. French IT firm Atos SE bought Syntel for \$3.4 billion in October 2018, of which Sethi got an estimated \$510 million for her stake.

Neha Narkhede

Neha Narkhede, who grew up in Pune, stands at 29th place in the Forbes rich list with net worth of \$925 mn. Narkhede is co-founder and former chief technology officer of cloud company Confluent. As a LinkedIn software engineer, she helped develop the open-source messaging system Apache Kafka to handle the networking site's huge influx of data.

In 2014, Neha Narkhede and two LinkedIn colleagues left to found Confluent, which helps organisations process large amounts of data on Apache Kafka. The company went public in June 2021 at a \$9.1 bn valuation, of which Narkhede and her family own around 8 per cent, according to Forbes.

Neha Narkhede studied Computer Science at Georgia Tech.

Reshma Shetty

Reshma Shetty stands at 39th position in the Forbes rich list with net worth of \$750 mn. Shetty, 41, co-founded Ginkgo Bioworks, a synthetic biotechnology company, in 2009 with four others, including her husband Barry Canton. Reshma Shetty received a PhD in biological engineering at MIT, where she met Ginkgo Bioworks' other co-founders. The company, named after a dinosaur-era tree, uses data analytics and robotics to speed up the process of discovering and making new organisms. It is slated to go public in a \$17.5 billion SPAC deal, according to Forbes.

Indra Nooyi

India-born Indra Nooyi stands at 91st position in the Forbes rich list with net worth of \$290 mn. She served as CEO and chair of PepsiCo for 12 years before stepping down as CEO in 2018 and chair in 2019. Her fortune stems from stock she was granted while working there.

During her tenure, Indra Nooyi thwarted a bid to break up the company, nearly doubled sales to \$65 billion and introduced healthier products and environmentally friendly practices, according to Forbes. She joined Amazon's board in 2019.

Eight-year-old Hindu boy in Pakistan youngest to be charged with blasphemy: Report



An eight-year-old Hindu boy, whose bail last week saw a group of Muslims attacking a temple in Pakistan's Bhong, has reportedly become the youngest person ever to be charged with blasphemy in the country.

The boy is presently in protective custody, the Guardian reported. Blasphemy charges may attract death penalty in Pakistan.

WHY WAS THE TEMPLE ATTACKED IN PAKISTAN?

Last week, a group of Muslims went on a rampage in Bhong, a town in eastern Punjab province, and damaged statues and burnt down the main door of the temple. The group accused the boy of desecrating a local religious school.

On Monday, the temple was handed over to the Hindu community following repairs to the structure, news agency Associated Press quoted a Pakistan government official as saying. Around 20 people have been arrested in connection with the temple attack.

HOW HAS THE BOY'S FAMILY REACTED?

However, the situation is yet to normalise in the area. Following the attack, several Hindu families fled the area while the boy's family has gone into hiding.

A member of the boy's family told the Guardian that any meaningful action had not been taken against the culprits or to safeguard the minorities living there.

"The boy is not even aware of such blasphemy issues and he has been falsely indulged in these matters. He still doesn't understand what his crime was and why he was kept in jail for a week," the relative said. WHAT

After Cuomo's exit

Kathy Hochul to become New York's first woman Governor in 233 years



With embattled New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announcing his resignation amid sexual harassment allegations, his Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul is now set to become the first woman governor in the state's 233-year history. Cuomo, 63, said Tuesday that his resignation will be effective in 14 days and the transition should be seamless.

"Kathy Hochul, my lieutenant governor, is smart and competent. This transition must be seamless. We have a lot going on. I'm very worried about the delta variant (of coronavirus) and so should you be. But she can come up to speed quickly and my resignation will be effective in 14 days," Cuomo said.

Hochul, 62, is expected to serve in office as Governor till Cuomo's current four-year term ends in December 2022. She will be the first woman to lead New York state in its 233-year history.

"I agree with Governor Cuomo's decision to step down. It is the right thing to do and in the best interest of New Yorkers. As someone who has served at all levels of government and is next in the line of succession, I am prepared to lead as New York

After Andrew Cuomo decided to step down over allegations of sexual harassment, Kathy Hochul is set to become the first Governor in New York's 233-year history.

State's 57th Governor," Hochul tweeted.

Hochul was inaugurated as the 77th Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York on January 1, 2015. She was elected with Cuomo on November 4, 2014. Prior to her election, she served as a Group Vice President for Strategic Relationships at M&T Bank, serving as liaison for community matters and significant economic development projects.

Born and raised in the state, Hochul through her political life has focussed on fighting for working families. She "was a strong voice in the successful fight for a USD 15 minimum wage and paid family leave. Every day, Kathy is working with the Governor and state legislature to prioritise making lives better for all New York families - because no one working full-time should live in poverty," according to her profile.

From 2011 to 2013, then Congresswoman Kathy Hochul served in the House of Representatives from New York's 26th Congressional District, her official profile said. Prior to her time in Congress, Hochul was the highest-ranking female elected official in Erie County while serving as County Clerk from 2007 to 2011.

The Lieutenant Governor also served 14 years as a Hamburg Town Council member.

Hochul holds a bachelor's degree from Syracuse University and a JD from Catholic University in Washington, DC.

In 2006, the lieutenant governor joined her mother and aunt in establishing the Kathleen Mary House, a transitional home for victims of domestic violence, and served on its board of directors. She co-founded Village Action Coalition to help local businesses survive

competition from big box stores.

Cuomo announced his resignation on Tuesday, a week after independent investigators said he had sexually harassed multiple women, including former and current state employees, by engaging in unwanted groping, kissing and hugging.

"When I took my oath as Governor I became a fighter, but I became a fighter for you. And it is your best interest that I must serve. This situation by its current trajectory will generate months of political and legal controversy. That is what is going to happen.

"That is how the political wind is blowing. It will consume government. It will cost taxpayers millions of dollars, it will brutalise people," he said, referring to the sexual harassment allegations and case against him.

Cuomo said the State Assembly on Monday outlined the weeks of process that will then lead to months of litigation and "time and money that government should spend managing COVID-19, guarding against the delta variant, reopening-up state, fighting gun violence, and saving New York City, all that time would be wasted."

Belarus tells US to cut diplomatic presence after sanctions



(News Agencies)-Belarus on Wednesday ordered the United States to reduce its embassy staff there after Washington imposed a fresh round of sanctions on the regime of President Alexander Lukashenko.

"The American side was suggested to reduce the number of staff in its Minsk embassy to five people by September 1," foreign ministry spokesman Anatoly Glaz said in a statement.

He added that the decision comes in response to Washington's "impudent and openly hostile actions".

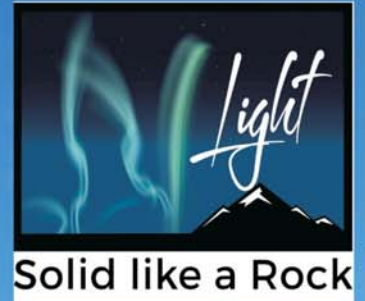
"Against the backdrop of Washington's actions to reduce cooperation in all spheres and to economically suffocate our country, we quite objectively don't see any sense in the presence of such significant personnel," Glaz said.

He also said Belarus has revoked its consent for the appointment of Julie Fisher as US ambassador to the ex-Soviet country.

Western governments, including the United States, have slapped Belarus with several sets of sanctions over the regime's crackdown on dissent that began when protests erupted across the country following a disputed election last year.

Belarusians took to the streets demanding the resignation of 66-year-old strongman Lukashenko, who has ruled for nearly three decades and claimed to have won another presidential term in the polls last August.

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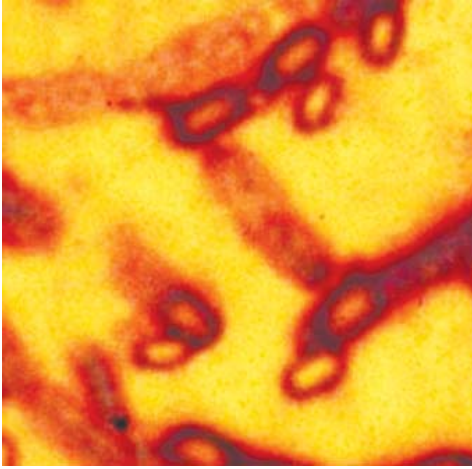


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China reports deadly anthrax pneumonia case



China reported an anthrax pneumonia patient from northern Hebei Province's Chengde city on Monday, who had contact history with cattle, sheep and products that come from these animals. The patient was transported to Beijing by an ambulance four days ago after showing symptoms and the person was later quarantined and put under treatment, state-run Global Times reported, quoting the Beijing Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Beijing CDC).

Anthrax is prevalent among cattle and sheep. Human beings usually get infected after coming in contact with sick animals or contaminated products. The most common way of infection -- 95 per cent of reported cases -- are caused by skin contact which lead to blisters and skin necrosis, the Beijing CDC said. Watch | India-China faceoff: Ground report from Ladakh

The most dangerous infection is anthrax pneumonia, which happens when a patient inhales dust containing bacillus anthracis and gets infected.

People can get intestinal anthrax after eating contaminated food, usually meat, and will develop symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Anthrax can be transmitted directly between human beings but it is not as infectious as flu or Covid-19.

Bacillus anthracis is a bacterium and multiple antibiotics are effective for treatment, the report said.

Since Sunday, Beijing has stepped up measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus cases by virtually banning people from travelling to the Chinese capital from provinces with Covid-19 cases in the country.

Beijing has rolled out a range of measures to strengthen the management of people returning from regions with relatively high virus transmission rates, including imposing restrictions on their purchase of railway tickets and air services.

Pentagon to seek approval to make Covid-19 vaccine mandatory for US military



The Pentagon will seek approval to make Covid-19 vaccines mandatory for member of the US military.

Members of the U.S. military will be required to get the COVID-19 vaccine beginning next month under a plan laid out by the Pentagon Monday and endorsed by President Joe Biden. In memos distributed to all troops, top Pentagon leaders said the vaccine is a necessary step to maintain military readiness.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the mid-September deadline could be accelerated if the vaccine receives final FDA approval or infection rates continue to rise.

"I will seek the president's approval to make the vaccines mandatory no later than mid-September, or immediately upon" licensure by the Food and Drug Administration "whichever comes first," Austin said in his memo, warning them to prepare for the requirement.

The Pentagon plan provides time for the FDA to give final approval to the Pfizer vaccine, which is expected early next month. Without that formal approval, Austin needs a waiver from Biden to make the shots mandatory, and Biden has already made clear he supports it.

Austin's decision reflects similar moves by governments and companies around the world, as nations struggle with the highly contagious delta variant that has sent new U.S. cases, hospitalizations and deaths surging to heights not seen since last winter. The concerns are especially acute in the military, where service members live and work closely together in barracks and on ships, increasing the risks of rapid spreading. Any large virus

outbreak in the military could affect America's ability to defend itself in any security crisis.

Austin warned that if infection rates rise and potentially affect military readiness, "I will not hesitate to act sooner or recommend a different course to the President if I feel the need to do so. To defend this Nation, we need a healthy and ready force." In a statement Monday, Biden said he strongly supports Austin's message to the force and the plan to add the COVID vaccine "to the list of required vaccinations for our service members not later than mid-September."

Biden said the country is still on a wartime footing and "being vaccinated will enable our service members to stay healthy, to better protect their families, and to ensure that our force is ready to operate anywhere in the world."

Austin's memo, which went out Monday, was followed quickly by one from Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "The Secretary of Defense intends to mandate vaccinations for all Service members in the coming weeks," said Milley, adding that the military's medical professionals recommended the move. At the bottom of his message, Milley scrawled a handwritten note: "Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is a key force protection and readiness issue." The decision comes a bit more than a week after Biden told defense officials to develop a plan requiring troops to get shots as part of a broader campaign to increase vaccinations in the federal workforce.

More broadly, the COVID-19 crisis has worsened around the country, with hospitals experiencing deeper strain in unvaccinated areas of the South. Mississippi reported that 35 medical centers are completely out of intensive care unit beds, Arkansas topped its pandemic record for COVID admissions, and the average number of people hospitalized nationwide has returned to levels not seen since February. More patients are being parked in emergency rooms while they wait for beds to open up and the average number of daily deaths is now above 500.

The country is averaging about 108,000 new infections and 700,000 vaccines administered a day.

Austin said the military services will have the next few weeks to prepare, determine how many vaccines they need, and how this mandate will be implemented. The additional time, however, also is a nod to the bitter political divide over the vaccine and the knowledge that making it mandatory will likely trigger opposition from vaccine opponents across state and federal governments, Congress and the American population.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Monday that he believes the military has enough vaccines to meet the requirements. He added, "You can consider this memo not just a warning order to the services but to the troops themselves."

Democratic and Republican leaders of the House Armed Services Committee said vaccines have proven effective.

US, China clash over South China Sea at high-level UNSC meeting chaired by India

The US and China clashed over the South China Sea during a high-level UNSC meeting on maritime security chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday.

The US and China clashed over the South China Sea during a high-level UNSC meeting on maritime security chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday. The US and China on Monday clashed during a high-level meeting on maritime security chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with Washington asserting it has seen "provocative actions" to advance unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea by Beijing which retorted that America is not qualified to make "irresponsible remarks" on the issue.

Prime Minister Modi chaired the virtual high-level open debate on maritime security, one of the three signature events of India's current Presidency of the powerful 15-nation UN body. The meeting was later chaired by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar as foreign ministers and UN envoys made their national statements.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke of "some of the critical areas where we see maritime rules and principles under threat."

In the South China Sea, we have seen dangerous encounters between vessels at sea and provocative actions to advance unlawful maritime claims," Blinken said, in a

thinly-veiled attack on China which claims almost all of the 1.3 million square-mile South China Sea as its sovereign territory.

China has been building military bases on artificial islands in the region also claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

"The United States has made clear its concerns regarding actions that intimidate and bully other states from lawfully accessing their maritime resources. And we and other countries including South China Sea claimants have protested such behavior and unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea," Blinken said. "Some may assert that resolving the dispute in the South China Sea is not the business of the United States or any other country that is not a claimant to the islands and waters. But it is the business, and even more, the responsibility of every Member State to defend the rules that we've all agreed to follow and peacefully resolve maritime disputes.

"Conflict in the South China Sea or in any ocean would have serious global consequences for security and for commerce. What's more, when a State faces no consequences for ignoring these rules, it fuels greater impunity and instability

everywhere," Blinken said.

China's Deputy Permanent Representative Dai Bing, speaking last in the meeting, said that he wishes to "point out that the Security Council is not the right place to discuss the issue of the South China Sea. The US just mentioned the South China Sea issue and China firmly opposes this act." He said that at present "with the joint efforts of China and ASEAN countries, the situation in the South China Sea remains generally stable. All countries enjoy freedom of navigation and overflight in accordance with international law."

The Chinese diplomat said that Beijing is "determined and able to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea."

Hitting out at Washington, he said the US itself is not qualified to make irresponsible remarks on the issue of the South China Sea.

"The US has been stirring up trouble out of nothing, arbitrarily sending advanced military vessels and aircraft into the South China Sea as provocations and publicly trying to drive a wedge into regional countries, especially countries concerned.

"This country itself has become the biggest threat to peace and stability in the South China Sea. The US itself does not join the UNCLOS (United Nations

Convention on the Law of the Sea) but considers itself a judge of the Convention pointing fingers at other countries," he said, adding that Washington has no credibility on maritime issues.

"The United States" hype in the Security Council is entirely politically motivated. The South China Sea arbitration tribunal violated the Principle of State consent," the Chinese diplomat said, adding that "there were obvious errors in the determination of facts and application of the law and its award was invalid and without any binding force."

He said China and ASEAN countries are committed to fully and effectively implementing the declaration under the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and strive to reach the code of conduct in the South China Sea at an early date.

Blinken referred to the unanimous and legally binding decision five years ago by the arbitral tribunal constituted under the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention "firmly rejecting unlawful, expansive South China Sea maritime claims as being inconsistent with international law."

He stressed that Washington has consistently called for all countries to conform their maritime claims to the International Law of the Sea as

reflected in the 1982 convention.

"This is in keeping with the peaceful resolution of disputes and the sovereign equality of member states, which are core principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter," he said, adding that efforts to resolve maritime disputes through threat or use of force flout these principles.

Blinken conveyed Washington's gratitude to Prime Minister Modi for "bringing us together for this critically important discussion" on maritime security and for "India's leadership on these issues," especially in the Indo-Pacific. He said despite having a clear body of international law that nations have committed to abide by and uphold and despite the indispensable role the maritime order has played in fostering economic activity, security cooperation, scientific innovation, environmental sustainability, "the order is under serious threat." "That's why I'm grateful for India's leadership in bringing us together today and calling on all nations to recommit to defending and strengthening the maritime rules and principles that we forge together and committed to uphold."

China's wandering elephants may finally be heading home



(News Agencies)-An elephant herd that fascinated locals and people around the world by making a yearlong journey into urbanised southwest China, raiding farms and even a retirement home for food, appears finally to be headed home.

Local authorities have deployed trucks, workers and drones to monitor the elephants, evacuated roads for them to pass safely and used food to steer them away from populated areas. Despite their entrance into villages and a close approach to the Yunnan provincial capital of Kunming, no animals or humans have been injured.

The 14 Asian elephants of various sizes and ages were guided across the Yuanjiang river in Yunnan on Sunday night and a path is being opened for them to return to the nature reserve where they lived in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

The elephants left the reserve more than a year ago for unknown reasons and roamed more than 500 kilometers (300 miles) north. After reaching the outskirts of Kunming, a center for business and tourism, they turned south again, but still are far from the reserve.

One male that separated from the herd was subsequently tranquilized and returned to the reserve.

Asian elephants are among the most highly protected animals in China and their population has grown to around 300, even while their habitat has shrunk because of expanded farming and urban growth.

As of Sunday night, the herd was still in Yuanjiang County, approximately 200 kilometers (125 miles) from the reserve. However, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration said the animals were in a "suitable habitat" after crossing the river. A notice issued by provincial government said the herd's progress was significant and it would continue to work on getting the elephants back in their natural habitat soon.

Local authorities have deployed trucks, workers and drones to monitor the elephants, evacuated roads for them to pass safely and used food to steer them away from populated areas.

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Man or woman?

1000-year-old grave in Finland likely of a non-binary human being



year-old grave could be of a non-binary person.

The new findings not only challenge pre-held notions, but also raise the possibility that non-binary people were accepted as well as respected among their peers in ancient times. The findings of the DNA analysis, which were published in the European Journal of Archaeology, state that the occupant of the grave was a respected person whose gender identity may have been non-binary.

A woman with a sword?

The early medieval grave, likely dated 1050-1300 AD, had a person buried with two swords -- a hiltless sword placed on the person's left side and another buried above the original grave. The interpretation of the occupant being a woman was made based on dress accessories and jewellery, which suggested that the individual was dressed in feminine clothes.

"For decades, the grave has been a popular example of powerful women in Late Iron Age and early medieval societies. The grave was used as evidence of female leaders in the past. The decorated bronze-hilted sword allegedly found in the Suontaka burial is presented as a female warrior's weapon," the researchers behind the latest findings said in their paper. Ulla Moilanen, an archaeologist from the University of Turku said that the buried individual seems to have been a

highly respected member of their community. A chromosomal mystery

Researchers conducted a study of microscopic animal hair and fibre remains from soil retrieved from the grave and studied ancient DNA (aDNA) from the skeletal remains to infer the chromosomal sex of the individual. It is to be noted that historically, the gender identity of buried individuals is inferred based on the remains of objects or items found alongside. However, with the advancement of technology and modern genetics, new methods have been developed to determine gender of remains.

DNA analysis of the 1000-year-old grave in Finland showed that the occupant of the grave had Klinefelter syndrome -- a condition where boys are born with an extra X chromosome. Normally, a female has two X chromosomes (XX) and a male has one X and one Y (XY). According to UK's National Health Service (NHS), the X chromosome is not a "female" chromosome and is present in everyone. The presence of a Y chromosome denotes male sex. People with Klinefelter syndrome (XXY) don't exhibit any specific symptoms during childhood. They are usually marked with shyness and low self-confidence. During the teenage years, the syndrome leads to broader hips, poor muscle tone, and reduced facial and body hair that starts growing

later than usual. In adulthood, the syndrome could lead to inability to have children naturally and a low sex drive.

The researchers believe that the body in the Finnish grave had XXY chromosomes and that the person was non-binary. "It is rare in a Nordic context to find a sword in a grave with several artefacts with feminine gender association," the researchers said in the paper. What is non-binary?

Non-binary people are those who do not identify themselves with a particular gender. According to the National Centre for Transgender Equality, people whose gender is not male or female use many different terms to describe themselves, with non-binary being one of the most common. Other terms include genderqueer, agender, and bigender among others.

None of these terms mean exactly the same thing -- but all speak to an experience of gender that is not simply male or female.

"The complexity of gender is evident in the problem of determining the sex or gender of individuals based on the artefacts recovered from their graves. It is unclear how well the grave goods represent the gender roles and identities of the past, and whether these roles should be interpreted from a binary perspective," the paper said. Non-binary identities have been recognised by cultures and societies around the world.

Initial interpretations of the remains suggested that the grave contained a woman - but, the interpretations have always been debated. Now, DNA analysis of the grave,

including an examination of its content, soil sample and microremains, have once again challenged long-held beliefs. The analysis suggests that the 1000-



Boeing looks for launch window in August to blastoff Starliner into space

"She's not going to want a war with the mayor of New York City," said political consultant Chris Coffey, who has advised Michael Bloomberg, Andrew Yang and other leading Democrats. "Hochul's biggest liability will be a perceived or real lack of support among people of color, so I would think the last thing she would want would be to be at war with Eric Adams." propulsion system valves and inspections showed no signs of damage or external corrosion.

"Seven of the 13 valves are now operating as designed, with inspection and remediation of the

remaining affected valves to be performed in the days ahead," the company said.

Boeing said it was working with NASA and United Launch Alliance, its partnership with Lockheed Martin Corp (LMT.N), to confirm launch dates when the spacecraft is ready. The CST-100 Starliner will take people to and from low-earth orbit and Boeing has said a manned mission will take place no earlier than December, as it competes with Elon Musk's SpaceX to be the first to return NASA astronauts to the space station from U.S. soil in nearly a decade.

No sign of damage:

Andrew Cuomo resignation, comment by Ravi Batra, a noted attorney



"Ranju & I know Andrew Cuomo as a dear friend when he was New York State Attorney General and supported him fully. I saw in him qualities of a president Teddy Roosevelt - and said so - to reporter Liz Benjamin. He is "blue-blood" to power, which to

paraphrase Mark Twain in "The Prince and the Pauper," Andrew is a Prince who would never use the great seal of New York "to crack walnuts." But, unfortunately, that which made him American royalty or political aristocracy, was also his Achilles' heel: as in a nation of laws, under-pinned by our exceptional "separation of powers" regime, no one can control the government. Andrew, amazingly did. Indeed, to avoid going to war with my friend, I quit the powerful New York State Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) in September 2012, even as I was one of its founding commissioners warmly supported by my dear friend, the late great District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau Jr. I even sent him a letter, as both he and I are "blue-blooded" sons of great fathers. But, he was surrounded by a tight circle of "yes" men and women,

benefitting and roasting warmly in his power.

His accumulation of extra-constitutional control permitted him to act - in public policy or private conduct - as if he was above the law. And just like a car without "brakes" and only an "accelerator," a crash is inevitable as it is unavoidable. Andrew's crash has been happening over 10 years, like a fine Opera taking time to build to a crescendo: a tragic end of Andrew the Great. I knew his Dad, Hon. Mario Cuomo, albeit, not as well as Andrew. Still, he was the happy personification of the American Dream, and an orator Mark Anthony would applaud. There is no joy in seeing my old friend Andrew self-destruct like Lazarus flying too close to the sun. In time, his private conduct will have met a full measure of justice, but history will always weep for what he would and could have wrought, as a



sensible centrist Democrat worthy of being president of the United States and keeping us all safe from enemies foreign and domestic. I wish Andrew to heal, enjoy fatherhood fully, and find himself, outside of politics, as a Sphinx of a man."

How rich is the Taliban? And where does their money come from?

All in all, the Taliban of 2021 no longer look the rabid; ragged; dishevelled militia they used to be on grainy shaking visuals, caning and executing women (and men), during their barbaric rule over Afghanistan.

Now, they look a disciplined legion of well-fed, well-to-do fighters on a mission to take over the governance of country. And why wouldn't they look smug and self-satisfied? Their organisation is flush with funds as everyone knows nothing spells success better than a thick fat wallet. In 2016, Forbes listed Taliban as the fifth richest of the 10 'Terrorist' organisations that they had featured. ISIS had a turnover then of 2 billion USD and was top dog, Taliban at number five had a modest annual turnover of \$400 million.

Forbes listed Taliban's primary sources of revenue as drug trafficking, protection money and donations, and this was 2016 when it was not even the dominant force in Afghanistan. According to a NATO confidential report accessed by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty the annual

budget of the Taliban in financial year 2019-20 had been \$1.6 Billion, a 400 per cent increase in four years when compared to the Forbes figures of 2016.

Mining: \$464 million

Drugs: \$416 million

Foreign Donations: \$240 million

Export: \$240 million

Taxes: \$160 million (Protection/Extortion money?)

Real Estate: \$80 million

The confidential NATO report highlighted the fact that the Taliban leadership was chasing self-sufficiency in order to become an independent political and military entity.

Over the years the organisation had been reducing its dependency on foreign donations and contributions. In 2017-18 it had reportedly received an estimated \$500 million or about half of its total funding then from foreign sources; this had reduced to roughly 15 per cent of their total revenues, by 2020.

In that same fiscal year, the Government of Afghanistan's official budget stood at \$5.5 Billion, out of this only less than

2 per cent was for defence.

However, the bulk of funding the 'keep Taliban out of Afghanistan project', was taken up by America. The US, which is in such a hurry now to get out of Afghanistan, spent almost a trillion dollars over 19 years in military expenditure in either

directly fighting the Taliban or in training Afghan forces to fight the Taliban. Now, it seems that the Taliban are the better business venture in Afghanistan getting more bangs out of their buck than the USA. Looking at it purely from an economic point of view, the Taliban's return on investment

(ROI) is getting better by the day; no wonder that they look so pleased with themselves as they quickly fill the gap being left by the dislodging of US and NATO forces; their business is flourishing; the prospect of higher profit almost a reality as Afghanistan readies itself to pay the price of defeat.

Cuomo's collapse smooths path for next New York mayor

Adams, should he win in November, will be the first former state lawmaker to helm City Hall since Mayor David Dinkins. He knows the rhythms of Albany and the perennial conflicts between city and state, giving him an advantage as he pushes an agenda to curb the influx of handguns into the city, tamp down a surge in crime and get the city economy back on its feet. But the biggest thing working in Adams' favor may be Hochul's promise of a collaborative government — a sharp turn from Cuomo, whom fellow Democrats have dubbed a "tyrant, a "bully" and a "sociopath."

"She is the kind of woman who will be open to other people's ideas and recommendations and thoughts," said Karen Hinton, a former press secretary to de Blasio who also worked for Cuomo, and accused him of hugging her inappropriately two decades ago. "More estrogen and less testosterone will go a long way," she added. Facing impeachment, Cuomo announced his resignation on Tuesday after an investigation by the state attorney general's office found he sexually harassed 11 women. Hochul, who hails

from Buffalo, will become the state's first woman governor.

Adams and Hochul spoke on Tuesday after Cuomo announced his departure. And on Wednesday, Adams said he was hopeful for a positive working relationship. "When you turn over the state to an individual, you need someone with a steady hand. She has a steady hand. And I believe that she's going to be able to navigate the challenges we're having, and then voters will decide what's going to happen in the future," he told reporters. Adams said he's developed a rapport with Hochul — who announced she'd run for governor Thursday — since she took over her current role. "When she became lieutenant governor, we really developed a great relationship during her time," he said. Adams had called for Cuomo to resign over sexual harassment allegations — but also appeared alongside him in Brooklyn last month. The embattled governor for his part lavished praise on Adams — not missing an opportunity even as he was engulfed in scandal to needle his old rival de Blasio.

USA in the fear of endangering the recovery from drought

from the harvest of salmon benefits their mental, physical and spiritual health as well. Life without salmon is non-existent to them.

The water crisis has been proving fatal to the migratory birds who took refuge in the Lower Klamath and Tule Lake. The drought came with several

deadly consequences as mentioned. Another such consequence includes bacteria which produces avian botulism and grows in the warm, stagnant water in the marshes. According to an estimate, it killed 60,0000 ducks and shorebirds. The environmental torture has been striking us

back in several ways. Flood, drought, ice-melting, earthquakes and more such natural calamities along with the new looming coronavirus that the world has been fighting for 2 years now. The USA had just begun to enjoy their normal lives as restrictions had eased. At this time, the challenge of the

coronavirus is too much to handle for the Government. With limited resources, public health and normal living again fell vulnerable to environmental conditions like extreme heat-wave and drought. With the flora and fauna behaving in a manner consistent with the

environmental crisis at this rate, the world is expected to experience such devastations every 5 years now. Unless a sustainable development plan is executed in these areas, more such calamities may follow suit and we have to be prepared for that.

By Susmita Ghosh

Nation First, Always First

Theme for Independence Day celebrations

'Nation First, Always First' will be the theme of India's 75th Independence Day celebrations at the Red Fort from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the nation on Sunday.

All the Olympians who won medals at the 2020 Tokyo Games have been sent special invites for the event.

Like 2020, this year's event will be restricted for the public and no cultural performance will be staged by children. A group of NCC cadets will attend the event, said an officer. From paintings to floral arrangements, all aspects of

the programme will bear 'Nation First, Always First' theme, said Delhi police sources.

Drone alert

After the recent drone attacks in Jammu, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has asked the Delhi police to strictly adhere to the Standard Operating Procedures for drone operations.

"We have increased the total number of secured rooftops from which the Red Fort or the potential route of the Prime Minister's cavalcade is remotely visible. Personnel have been told to take down

drones or aerial objects in case they see one approaching the Red Fort or to alert higher-ups if they don't have the requisite skills," said a police officer.

A makeshift wall of containers has been erected at the periphery of the Red Fort to rule out any security breach owing to the ongoing farmers' protest. The containers have been painted in hues reflecting the solemnity of the august occasion.



75th Independence Day: History, significance and rare facts

India's Independence Day is significant as it stands as a reminder of the sacrifices that many freedom fighters made to get independence from British rule.

India will be celebrating its 75th Independence Day on August 15, 2021, with the usual pride as on this day India got its freedom from British rule.

Following the victory of the British at the Battle of Plassey, the East India Company began its rule in India in 1757. The Indian Independence movement began during World War I and was led by Mohandas Karamdas Gandhi. On August 15, 1947, India got its freedom, ending an almost 200-year British rule.

Know the history of India's Independence

The Indian Independence Bill was introduced in the British House of Commons on July 4, 1947, and passed within a fortnight. It provided for the end of British rule in India on August 15, 1947. After that, India became a free country with the bifurcation of India and Pakistan.

Some of the great freedom fighters who helped in India's freedom struggle include Mahatma Gandhi, Rani

Lakshmi Bai, Bhagat Singh, Mangal Pandey, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Subhas Chandra Bose and many more.

Significance of India's Independence Day India's Independence Day is



significant as it stands as a reminder of the sacrifices that many freedom fighters made to get independence from British rule. It is a national holiday and it is usually observed throughout the nation with the hoisting of the tricolour, parades and cultural events. In commemoration of the day, India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru raised the Indian

national flag above the Lahori Gate of Red Fort in Delhi on August 15, 1947. It is a tradition that has since then been followed by the incumbent Prime Minister, followed by an address to the country.

Rare facts of India's Independence Day

1. The song 'Bharoto Bhagyo Bidhata' composed in 1911 by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore was renamed as 'Jana Gana Mana' and adopted by the Constituent Assembly of India as the national anthem on January 24, 1950.

2. The Indian national flag with three horizontal stripes of red, yellow and green was hoisted on August 7, 1906, at Parsee Bagan Square in Kolkata. The first variant of India's current national flag was designed by freedom fighter Pingali Venkayya in 1921. The current flag with saffron,

white and green colours and the Ashok Chakra in the middle was officially adopted on July 22, 1947, and hoisted on August 15, 1947.

3. Five other countries celebrate their independence on August 15 along with India. They are Bahrain, North Korea, South Korea, the Republic of Congo and Liechtenstein.

4. The Indian flag is manufactured and supplied from only one place in the nation. The Karnataka Khadi Gramodyoga Samyukta Sangha (KKGSS), located in Dharwad in Karnataka, has the authority to manufacture and supply the Indian national flag. According to the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), the flag is manufactured only with hand-spun and handwoven cotton khadi wafting.

5. Even after India's independence, Goa was still a Portuguese colony. It was annexed to India by the Indian Army only in 1961. Thus, Goa was the last state to join the Indian territory.



India Independence

Why was August 15 chosen as Independence Day?



For a period of almost 200 years, the British ruled India. From being controlled to gaining control of our own nation, it has been a significant journey. The desire to attain independence began in the year 1929 when Jawaharlal Nehru as the Congress President gave the call for 'Poorna Swaraj' or total independence from British colonial rule.

Initially, January 26 was chosen as Independence Day. Also, the Congress party continued to celebrate it from 1930 onwards,

till India attained independence and January 26, 1950, was chosen as the Republic Day. Lord Mountbatten had been given a mandate by the British parliament to transfer the power by June 30, 1948.

However, as per C Rajagopalachari's memorable words - If he had waited till June 1948, there would have been no power left to transfer.

Therefore, Mountbatten preponed the date to August 1947. With this, he claimed that by advancing the date, he was

ensuring that there will be no bloodshed or riot.

As per Mountbatten's inputs, the Indian Independence Bill was introduced in the British House of Commons on July 4, 1947, and passed within a fortnight. It provided for the end of the British rule in India, on August 15, 1947, and the establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan. However, he later claimed, as quoted in Freedom at Midnight, "The date I chose came out of the blue. I chose it in reply to a question. I was

determined to show I was master of the whole event. When they asked had we set a date, I knew it had to be soon. I hadn't worked it out exactly then - I thought it had to be about August or September and I then went out to the 15th August. Why? Because it was the second anniversary of Japan's surrender [in World War II]." Since then, August 15 is celebrated as India's Independence day. This year will be marked as the 75th Independence day of the nation.

'Nation First, Always First' will be the theme of India's 75th Independence Day celebrations at the Red Fort from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the nation.

The Olympians who won medals at the 2020 Tokyo Games have been sent special invites for the event. However, similar to last year, this year's celebrations will be tone down, keeping in mind all the social distancing measures due to the Covid pandemic.

Is India Celebrating 74th or 75th Independence Day This Year?



Independent India has a long history of freedom struggle and this day also marks the anniversary of undivided India's partition into India and Pakistan.

Independence Day 2021: On 15th August 1947, India got its freedom, ending an almost 200-year British rule in the subcontinent. It is a day of immense pride for all Indians as we commemorate the sacrifices made by millions of our freedom fighters, who had sacrificed their lives in the freedom struggle and with their unfaltering grit and patriotism, forced the British empire to finally retreat.

Besides, August 15 also marks the anniversary of undivided India's partition into India and Pakistan, which took place on August 14-15 in 1947. Let's not forget our roots and our history which led to this significant day.

History & Significance

India had a long battle and we are here celebrating the independence only due to the selfless sacrifices and headstrong commitment to Azad (free) India by our great freedom fighters. It all began with the Battle of Plassey in 1757 when the British got control over India and the East India Company began ruling in our country - often referred to as British Raj. The rule and slavery persisted for about a century. Our first attempt to get freedom in 1957 yielded no result and yet, Indians did not lose their

heart and continued to strive and fight for the country's independence.

The struggle, the hardship and the non-violence campaigns during the freedom struggle are remembered to date across the globe. People across the world were inspired by India's unfaltering march to independence. Some of the great freedom fighters of India, whose courage and patriotism continue to inspire us to work for a prosperous and even stronger India, include legends like Mahatma Gandhi, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Bhagat Singh, Mangal Pandey, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Subhas Chandra Bose and hundreds and thousands more.

We have also had iconic leaders who strongly believed that "a pen is mightier than a sword" and wrote to freedom like Sarojini Naidu, B.R. Ambedkar, Rabindranath Tagore, Jyotibai Phule and many more.

It was an equal contribution of everyone - people who participated in wars, people who wrote about the discrimination and the injustice, people who participated in all manner - no matter how huge or small their contribution was. It was the collective effort of

millions of people that led us to the path of independence!

On the eve of India's independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime minister, had said in his "Tryst with destiny" speech - "At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom."

Significance of the Tri-colour

Every year, on Independence Day, the Prime Minister of India hoists the national flag at Delhi's historic old Red Fort monument and makes an address to the nation, which is followed by a military parade. The President of India also then delivers a speech. In honour of the occasion, twenty-one gun shots are fired on this day every year. The tri-colour flag flies highest in the sky, signifying that we now live in a Swatantra Bharath (Independent India).

The colours of our national flag have a great significance and a profound meaning. Did you know the national flag was adopted in its present form during the meeting of Constituent Assembly held on the 22 July 1947, twenty-three days before India's Independence on August 15, 1947? Interestingly, the flag is made from khadi which is domestically spun Indian cotton as a symbol of nationalism and

freedom.

Check out its significance here:

" Kesari (Saffron)

This colour, which is at the top, represents strength and courage of the country.

" White

The white colour of our flag indicates honesty, purity, peace of the nation.

" Ashoka Chakra

The Ashoka Chakra is rendered in navy blue on a white background replacing the symbol of the charkha of the pre-independence version of the flag. The chakra signifies that there is life in movement and death in stagnation. It has 24 equally spaced spokes.

" Green

The green colour at the bottom indicates prosperity, growth and fertility of the land.

Is India Celebrating 74th or 75th Independence Day This Year?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently launched 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav' on 12 March 2021 in Gujarat to commemorate India's 75 years of Independence. Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav is basically a series of events that began on March 12, to mark the 75-week countdown to the nation's 75th Independence Day. The

Mahotsav will conclude only on 15th August 2023.

The significance of the event is to emphasise on India's glorious history and showcase India's development since Independence. Besides, as per the reports, according to the format set by the government, a program will be held every week under the 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav', in which, apart from the ministry of culture, more ministries will participate in the event. Moreover, programs will also be organised in all the Indian embassies outside the country.

However, one thing remains unanswered. Well, several official websites have quoted 2021 as the 75th Independence Day whereas the Government of India is seen planning on celebrating 75th independence day in 2022. According to the official website of 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav', the Ministry of Culture, Government of India said that the celebrations of 75th Independence Day will be on 15th August 2022. Yet the official handles of Independence Day have 15th August 2021 as their 75th Independence Day.

Sensex, Nifty trim losses as metal stocks shine



Benchmark stock market indices S&P BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty50 pared losses after a strong performance by metal stocks.

Indian shares trimmed early losses to end flat on Wednesday as metal stocks surged, while small-and-mid cap firms came off session lows after a bourse said a new set of price limits to curb volatility would only impact a few companies for now.

The blue-chip NSE Nifty 50 index rose 0.01% to 16,282.25 and the benchmark S&P BSE Sensex was down 0.05% at 54,525.93, after hitting record highs on Tuesday.

The S&P BSE Smallcap index closed 0.83% lower and the BSE Midcap index fell 0.22%. The indexes had earlier fallen as much as 2.2% and 3.3%, respectively, after a circular on Monday from BSE Ltd placing additional price limits on securities to curb excessive price movement.

The stock exchange clarified on Wednesday that the new price circuit rules would be applicable on stocks that are priced above 10 rupees and have a market capitalization of less than 10 billion rupees (\$134.37 million). It issued a list of 31 stocks on which the rules would be applicable for now.

Investor sentiment was also dampened by weakness in Asian shares on worries about the economic impact of the rapidly spreading Delta variant. India's tally of COVID-19 cases has crossed 32 million.

In Mumbai trading, the Nifty Metal index rose 3.14% and was the best performing sub-index.

Cairn Energy executives to meet govt officials, resolve retrospective tax dispute



Cairn Energy executives and finance ministry officials will meet this week to settle the retrospective tax dispute. The development comes after a bill was passed to scrap the controversial tax law. Here is all you need to know.

Executives from UK-based energy major Cairn Energy Plc are all set to meet finance ministry officials this week to resolve the long-pending retrospective tax dispute issue. The meeting takes place days after the government passed a bill in parliament to scrap retrospective taxation. The recent scrapping of the controversial tax law indicates that the government is ready to settle the issue and refund Cairn Energy. The energy company had earlier secured a \$1.2 billion arbitration award against India and had moved courts in multiple countries to seize Indian assets after the

government challenged the verdict. However, the dispute is likely to be settled as Cairn Energy executives and finance ministry officials meet. The meeting could be held as early as Wednesday, reported The Economic Times after speaking to people familiar with the matter. One of the people quoted in the ET report said Cairn would just want the Indian government to refund the principal amount and the company is willing to let go of the remaining part of the arbitration award. The report also indicated that Cairn had earlier proposed the offer to the government, but it was not

entertained. The company hopes to end the dispute as soon as possible. **SCRAPPING RETRO TAX TO HELP GOVT**

The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was passed last week, allowing the government to withdraw the controversial retrospective taxation clause introduced in 2012. The amendment paves the way for the government to withdraw past demands and settle retrospective tax dispute cases with companies by refunding only the principal tax collected under the clause. However, resolving the dispute involves the withdrawal of cases by the parties involved.

EPFO to soon credit interest to PF accounts. Check details

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will soon credit interest to the PF accounts. Here is everything you need to know.

EPF account holders, we've got some good news for you! The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is expected to credit the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) interest to accounts of around six crore subscribers very soon.

The EPFO recently tweeted, "The process is in pipeline and may be shown there very shortly. Whenever the interest will be credited, it will be accumulated and paid in full. There would be no loss of

interest. Please maintain patience."

As per media reports, the retirement fund regulator is likely to credit 8.5 per cent EPF interest for FY2020-21 by the end of this month. Although, the process is still in the pipeline.

The EPF subscribers are advised to keep a check on their PF balance as their accounts are likely to be credited on any working day. The account holders can check their EPF balance and the status of the interest in four ways.

Steps to check the PF balance online

- Go to the official site of EPFO at <https://www.epfindia.gov.in>.

- Now, select the option 'Services' and tap on the option 'For Employees' from the drop-down menu.

- After that, from the 'Services' section, click on 'Member Passbook' which will redirect you to the login page.

- Enter your UAN and password to sign in to your account.

- After signing in, you will be able to check your PF balance and



also access other account-related services under the dashboard.

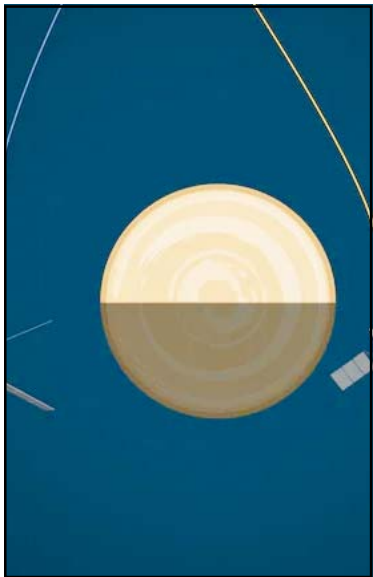
Steps to check PF balance using the UMANG app

- Firstly, download the UMANG app on your mobile phone.

- Open it and search for 'EPFO'. - Now, click on the 'View Passbook' and enter your UAN and password to sign in.

- Now, you will be able to access your PF passbook online and track your current PF balance.

Europe's double date with Venus:



Two spacecraft set to swing past Earth's mysterious twin

Two spacecraft are set to swoop past Venus within hours of each other this week, using the maneuver to do a little bit of bonus science on the way to their main missions at the center of our solar system.

The European Space Agency's Solar Orbiter probe, a cooperation with NASA, will swing around Venus early Monday, using the planet's gravity to help put it on a course to observe the Sun's poles.

About 33 hours later, the European-Japanese spacecraft BepiColombo will get even closer to Venus in a maneuver designed to help it slow down sharply and safely steer into the orbit of Mercury in 2025.

"Without the flyby, we would not be able to reach our target planet," said Elsa Montagnon, the spacecraft operations manager for BepiColombo. "The energy required to enter into orbit of Mercury would be prohibitively expensive in terms of propellant."

Both probes have numerous scientific instruments on board, some of which will be used to take a closer look at Venus as they zoom past.

The measurements will add to those taken by the Japanese probe Akatsuki, which is already in orbit around Earth's hotter neighbor. NASA and the European Space Agency are planning to send three more missions to Venus toward the end of the decade.



Earth Observation Satellite launch on Aug 12: Isro looks to gain lost pace due to Covid-19

The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) is aiming to gain its lost momentum as it launches the Earth Observation Satellite on August 12. The launch will mark the resumption of services by the premier space agency that has largely come to a halt due to the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

The satellite, also dubbed the Geo Imaging Satellite-1 (GISAT-1) was initially set to be launched in March 2020. However, it was scrubbed following a technical glitch. The satellite will be launched onboard the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle-F10 (GSLV) at 5.43 am on August 12 from Sriharikota. The final launch will depend on weather conditions.

The GSLV flight will be carrying the satellite in a 4 metre diameter-Ogive shaped payload fairing, which is being flown for the first time on the rocket, that has so far conducted 13 other flights deploying satellite and partner missions into space.

What is Earth Observation Satellite?

The Earth Observation Satellite will play a key role in disaster management and mitigation for India as it enables near-real-time monitoring of natural disasters



like floods and cyclones that have become common in the Indian subcontinent. The satellite will image the whole country four to five times on a daily basis, sending in key data related to weather and environmental change to different agencies.

The satellite will be placed in the geosynchronous transfer orbit by GSLV after which it will move in sync with Earth. The satellite

will have payload imaging sensors of six band multi-spectral visible and near infra-red with 42 metres resolution, 158 bands hyper-spectral visible and near infra-red with 318 metres resolution and 256 bands hyper-spectral short wave infra-red with 191 metres resolution.

What is GSLV?

The August 12 launch will be the second flight for the

Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) Mk III, which had last blasted off with the ambitious Chandrayaan-2 spacecraft to the Moon. The launch vehicle had emerged as a major achievement for Isro engineers after it placed the lunar spacecraft in a higher orbit, efficiently saving fuel. Meanwhile, Isro has introduced new changes to its fairing capsule, that will act as the cargo hold, giving it a 4-metre diameter-Ogive shape that will boost aerodynamics. The fourth generation launch vehicle is a three-stage vehicle with four liquid strap-ons, and the indigenously developed cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS), forms the third stage of GSLV Mk II.

According to Isro, "GSLV's capability of placing up to 5 tonnes in Low Earth Orbits broadens the scope of payloads from heavy satellites to multiple smaller satellites."

Isro finding lost momentum With the launch of the Earth Observation Satellite, Isro is aiming to conduct four more such launches in the next five months. The agency, which was planning to launch big missions like the first uncrewed flight of Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan-3 and the Aditya L1 to the Sun have all been delayed.

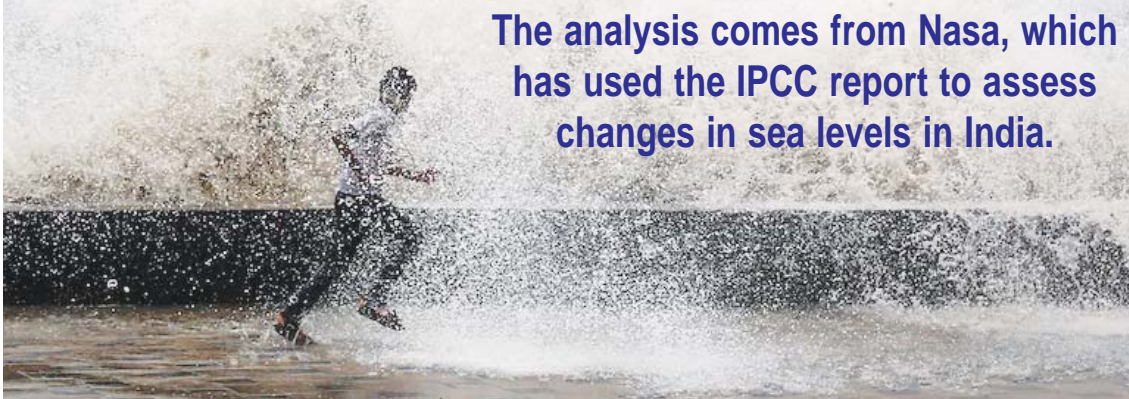
Cave paintings found in Spain prove that Neanderthals had a fondness for creating art.

Prehistoric cave paintings in Spain show early Neanderthals were artists

Neanderthals may have been closer to our species of prehistoric modern human than previously believed after cave paintings found in Spain proved they had a fondness for creating art, one of the authors of a new scientific report said on Sunday. Red ochre pigment discovered on stalagmites in the Caves of Ardales, near Malaga in southern Spain, were created by Neanderthals about 65,000 years ago, making them possibly the first artists on earth, according to the study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) journal. Modern humans were not inhabiting the world at the time the cave images were made. The new findings add to increasing evidence that Neanderthals, whose lineage became extinct about 40,000 years ago, were not the unsophisticated relatives of Homo sapiens they been long been portrayed as. Pigments were made in the caves at different times up to 15,000 and 20,000 years apart, the study found, and dispel an earlier suggestion that they were the result of a natural oxide flow rather than being man-made. Joao Zilhao, one of the authors of the PNAS study, said dating techniques showed that ochre had been spat by Neanderthals onto the stalagmites, possibly as part of a ritual. "The importance is that it changes our attitude towards Neanderthals. They were closer to humans. Recent research has shown they liked objects, they mated with humans and now we can show that they painted caves like us," he said. Wall paintings made by prehistoric modern humans, such as those found in the Chauvet-Pont d'Arc cave of France, are more than 30,000 years old.

These Indian cities likely to go three feet underwater by century-end, IPCC report rings warning bell

The analysis comes from Nasa, which has used the IPCC report to assess changes in sea levels in India.



(News Agencies)-A new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has dire warnings for India, which is already going through an unpredictable upheaval in weather patterns and environmental factors. The most dangerous risk factor is rising sea level that threatens to submerge 12 coastal cities in the country by the end of the century. The cities could be nearly three feet underwater by the century's end, the climate change report has warned. The cities include Mumbai, Chennai, Kochi, and Visakhapatnam, among others. The analysis comes from Nasa, which has used the IPCC report to assess changes in sea levels across the world. The space agency has identified 12 Indian cities that are likely to experience the brunt of climate change and rising sea levels if the situation is not contained. The IPCC has been providing global-scale assessments of Earth's climate every five to

seven years since 1988, focusing on changes in temperature and ice cover, greenhouse gas emissions, and sea levels across the planet. Their sea-level projections are based on by data gathered by satellites and instruments on the ground, as well as analysis and computer simulations.

Why are coastal cities vulnerable?

The IPCC report indicates that the sea level around Asia has been increasing at a faster rate than the average global rate. The report indicates that extreme changes in sea levels, previously seen once in 100 years, could happen every six to nine years by 2050. Coastal areas will see continued sea-level rise throughout the 21st century, contributing to more frequent and severe coastal flooding in low-lying areas and coastal erosion with extreme sea-level events that previously occurred

once in 100 years could happen every year by the end of this century," said the IPCC Working Group I report. It added that climate change is bringing multiple different changes in different regions - which will all increase with further warming. These include changes to wet and dryness, to winds, snow and ice, coastal areas and oceans.

It is to be noted that the global mean sea level is rising at a rate of around 3.7 millimetres per year, according to estimates made between 2006 and 2018. Meanwhile, glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region will keep shrinking and the snow cover will retreat to higher altitudes. One of the authors of the report, Krishna Achuta Rao, said in the HKH region, the snow cover has reduced since the early 21st century and glaciers have thinned, retreated and lost mass since the 1970s.

Climate change

**US wants
airlines to stop
using fossil
fuels by 2050**



The Biden administration is contemplating incentives to support private-sector production of sustainable aviation fuel as it searches for ways to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions.

US President Joe Biden's administration is quietly discussing a target date of 2050 for weaning aircraft off fossil fuels as part of the White House's broader push to fight climate change, sources familiar with the matter said.

The White House in recent days has stepped up efforts aimed at transforming the U.S. economy, including promotion of climate-directed infrastructure spending and bringing auto companies on board for its push for more electric vehicle use.

The Biden administration is contemplating incentives to support private-sector production of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) as it searches for ways to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions in the hard-to-electrify aviation industry.

The administration is looking at a 2050 target for airlines to fly on 100% jet fuel from renewable sources, said two sources, who spoke to five times more expensive than standard jet fuel. Sustainable aviation fuel, made from feedstocks such as used cooking oil and animal



anonymously to be candid about the discussions. The discussions are still in the early stages with few details available, the sources said. The United States and Europe are trying to find ways to encourage production and adoption of SAF, which is two

fat, at present accounts for only a minuscule amount of overall jet fuel use. The administration confirmed that SAF is on its radar but did not comment on or confirm the 2050 target. "As part of the Build Back Better agenda, President

Biden proposed catalytic investments to propel innovation and deployment of sustainable aviation fuels," said Ali Zaidi, the Deputy National Climate Advisor for the White House. "The administration is committed to advancing climate solutions in every sector and segment of the economy - with the urgency that the climate crisis demands." CARROT AND STICK -The aviation sector cannot count on electrification as a near-term solution because of the weight of the batteries. Biden's administration, which has set a goal for net-zero emissions by 2050, has discussed incentives and targets to increase SAF. It is currently taking a different approach than Europe, where regulators are seeking to force suppliers to blend rising amounts of SAF into their kerosene, a move

opposed by U.S. airlines. The White House and industry groups are expected to meet virtually later this month to promote alternative jet fuels, although specific actions that might be taken are not clear, three sources said. Environmentalists say a European-style mandate is needed to raise production and bring down SAF's price. However, Angel Alvarez Alberdi, secretary general of the European Waste-based and Advanced Biofuels Association, fears the EU's mandate will redirect the limited pool of affordable feedstocks available to make SAF. It could be a debate around the carrot and the stick," John Slattery, head of engine maker GE Aviation, a unit of General Electric Co (GE.N), said of SAF demand during a recent Eurocontrol podcast.



European spacecraft beams back picture from double date with Venus

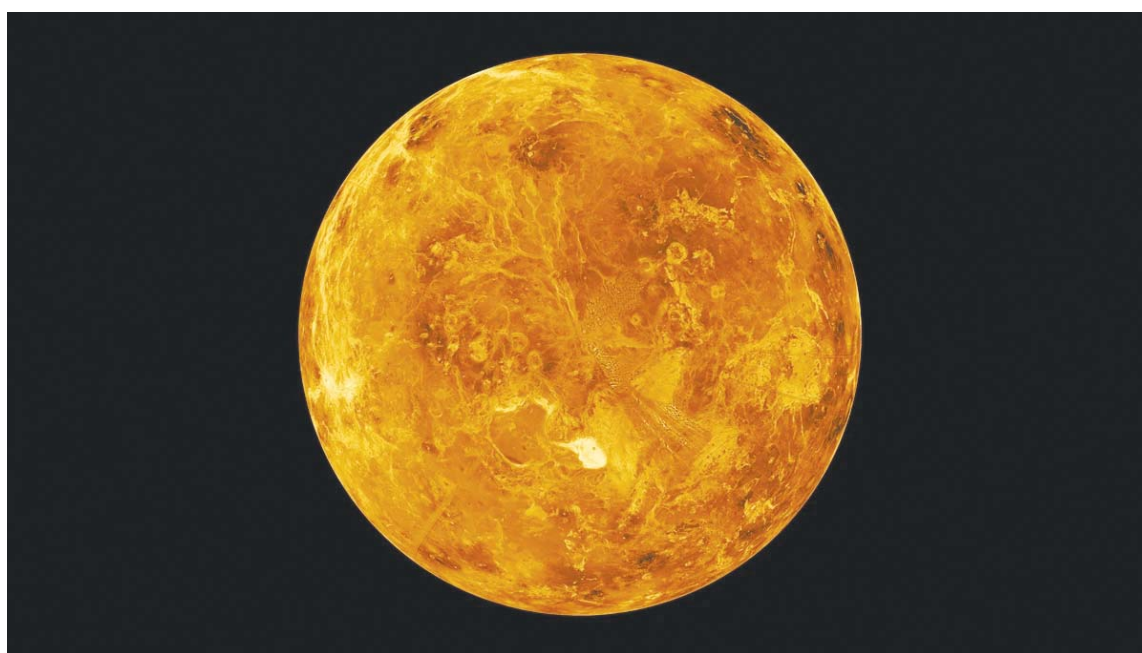
The image was taken by the Mercury Transfer Module's Monitoring Camera 3, which captured a black-and-white snapshot in 1024 x 1024 pixel resolution.

10 August 2021
13:57:56 UTC

After two European spacecraft used Venus to slingshot their way around the centre of the solar system, a new picture of their double date with Earth's mysterious twin has arrived home. The European Space Agency's (ESA) Solar Orbiter and the BepiColombo mission used Venus's gravity for course correction on their way to the centre of the solar system.

During the flyby, the European-Japanese BepiColombo mission came as close as 552 km to Venus as it headed towards its destination, Mercury. The image was taken by the Mercury Transfer Module's Monitoring Camera 3, which captured a black-and-white snapshot in 1024 x 1024 pixel resolution.

The picture shows the high-gain antenna of the Mercury Planetary Orbiter and part of the body of the spacecraft in front of Venus, at the top left.



"The image has been lightly processed to enhance contrast and use the full dynamic range. A small amount of optical vignetting is seen in the bottom left of the image," ESA said in a statement as it released the first images.

How did Venus assist in journey to the centre of the Solar System?

The manoeuvre, the second at Venus and the third of nine flybys overall, helped steer the spacecraft on course for Mercury. The spacecraft need the gravitational swingby to help them lose a little orbital energy in order to reach their destinations towards the centre of the Solar System.

Meanwhile, the flyby also offers an unprecedented opportunity

to study the Venus' environment from different locations at the same time. While the solar orbiter repeatedly uses Venus' gravity to get closer to the Sun in order to get the best and first views of the solar poles, the BepiColombo needs flybys of Earth, Venus and Mercury itself to help it reach the mysterious innermost planet of the solar system.

The solar orbiter did not click any picture of Venus since the science cameras onboard the spacecraft must remain facing the Sun, two of BepiColombo's three monitoring cameras captured the planet in all its glory. During the closest approach, Venus filled the entire field of view, but as the spacecraft changed its orientation, the planet was seen passing behind the spacecraft structural elements. "Solar Orbiter has been acquiring data near-constantly since launch in February 2020 with its four in situ instruments that measure the environment around the spacecraft itself. Both Solar Orbiter and BepiColombo's Mercury Planetary Orbiter and Mercury Magnetospheric Orbiter will collect data on the magnetic and plasma environment of Venus from different locations," ESA had said earlier.

Chandrayaan-2



delivers again, confirms presence of water molecules, hydroxyl on Moon

Instruments onboard Chandrayaan-2 orbiters confirmed the presence of hydroxyl and water molecules on the Moon that could be deeply analysed by future explorations.

The Chandrayaan-2 mission, whose rover had a fatal ending on the Moon, continues to lead to new discoveries thanks to its orbiter that is currently orbiting the Moon. The latest is the detection of hydroxyl and water molecules on the lunar surface.

Researchers used the data obtained by the Chandrayaan-2 orbiter's imaging infrared spectrometer (IIRS), an instrument that collects information from the Moon's electromagnetic spectrum, to understand the mineral composition of the satellite. They analysed data from three strips on the Chandrayaan-2 IIRS sensor for hydration, which led to "unambiguous detection of OH (hydroxyl) and H₂O (water) signatures."

The research findings, published in the journal Current Science, state that hydration absorption was observed at all latitudes and surface types in varying degrees. "The initial data analysis from IIRS clearly demonstrates the presence of widespread lunar hydration and unambiguous detection of OH and H₂O signatures on the Moon between

29 degrees north and 62 degrees north latitude," researchers said. It was also observed from the data that the brighter sunlit highland regions at



higher latitudes of the Moon were found to have higher hydroxyl or possibly water molecules. Scientists at the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing (IIRS) in Dehradun opine that the formation of hydroxyl and water on the Moon is due to space weathering, a process of interaction of solar winds with the lunar surface. This combined

with impact events lead to chemical changes that further triggered the formation of reactive hydroxyl molecules.

"The proper interpretation of hydration feature through spectral analysis is significant as it provides important inputs regarding the geology and geophysics of the mantle in terms of their mineralogy, chemical composition, rheology and solarwind interaction," the researchers said in their paper. The stability of these hydration features depends upon how they interact with one another, with the surface and their environment at a particular temperature range and therefore provides important clues about their origin and evolution.

The paper notes that the new discovery is "significant for future planetary exploration for resource utilisation" -- something that would be of interest for countries rushing to the Moon with plans to build lunar bases. Several countries including India are

in the process of returning to the Moon with new probes and tools to harness rare-Earth minerals that are likely present on the natural satellite.

The Chandrayaan-2 mission was launched in 2019 to explore the far side of the Moon, however, the rover part of the mission ended when it crash-landed on the surface. While the lander and rover did not survive the crash, the orbiter is still hovering above the Moon, leading to path-breaking new discoveries. Isro is set to launch Chandrayaan-3 a successor to the second mission likely in the next year. While Isro has been known for discovering water on the moon with Chandrayaan-1, the new findings were done by a team of scientists from IIRS Dehradun that included Prakash Chauhan, Mamta Chauhan, Prabhakar Verma and Supriya Sharma, along with Satadru Bhattacharya, Aditya Kumar Dagar, Amitabh, Abhishek N. Patil, Ajay Kumar Parashar, Ankush Kumar, Nilesh Desai from Space Applications Centre and Ritu Karidhal from URRSC Bengaluru and AS Kiran Kumar from ISRO.

Perseids meteor shower

All you need to know about the celestial spectacle

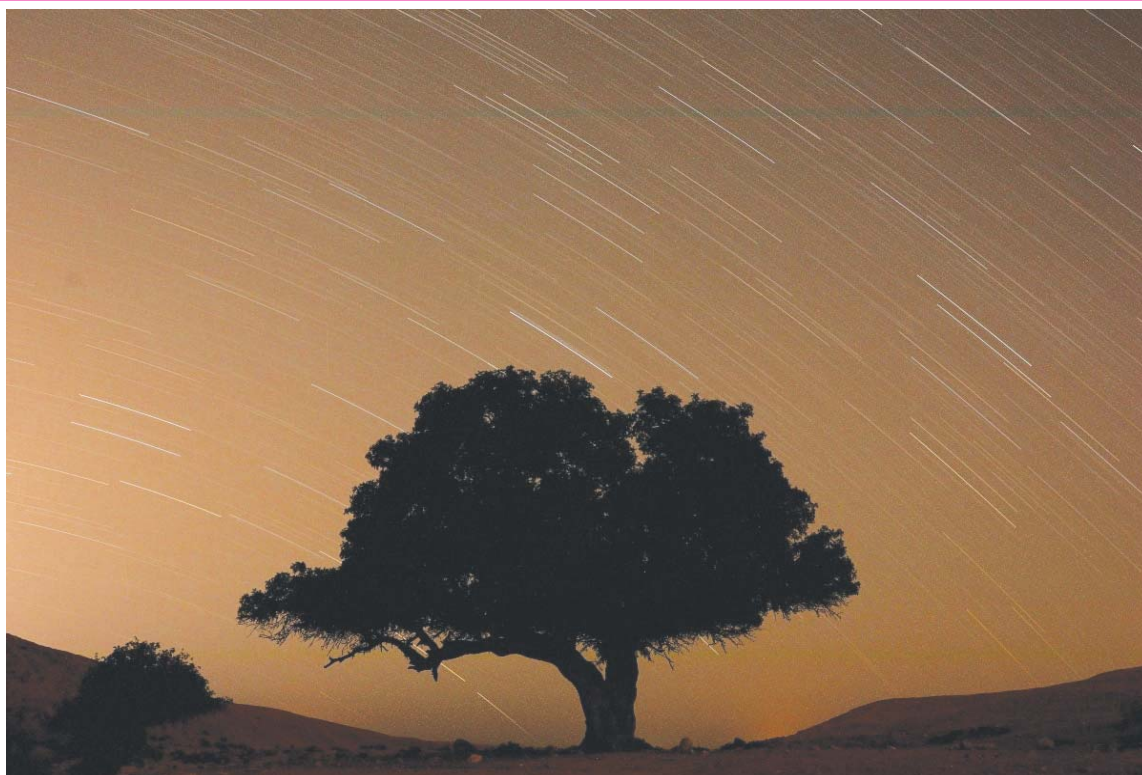


The annual event that occurs in August saw peak meteor showers on August 12 and according to astronomers, it was expected to be most visible between midnight and dawn in the northern hemisphere.

Weeks after the world witnessed Saturn and Jupiter come opposite to each other, stargazers were able to see another celestial event, this time with their naked eyes. The Perseid meteor shower hit Earth's upper atmosphere from the night of August 11.

The annual event that occurs in August saw see peak meteor showers on August 12 and according to astronomers, it was expected to be most visible between midnight and dawn in the northern hemisphere.

According to Nasa, with very fast and bright meteors, Perseids frequently leave long "wakes" of light and colour behind them as they streak through Earth's atmosphere. Also known for their fireballs, Perseids are larger explosions of light and colour that can persist longer than an average meteor streak.



Live TV
READ | Perseid meteor shower: Here's how to photograph the stunning celestial event
Perseids are best viewed in the Northern Hemisphere during the pre-dawn hours, though at

times it is possible to view meteors from this shower as early as 10 pm, Nasa said.
What are Perseids meteors?
Perseid comes from comet 109P/Swift-Tuttle that orbits around Sun once every 133

years and is named after Lewis Swift and Horace Tuttle, who first spotted it in 1862. The comet is almost twice the size of the asteroid that led to the extinction of dinosaurs on Earth. The Perseid meteor shower, on

the other hand, gets its name from the point in the sky from which the meteors appear to come - the constellation Perseus.

How to capture Perseid meteor shower?

Those looking to capture Perseids should find a dark spot away from bright lights with a wide-open view all around. If it is a clear sky, you don't need any equipment and you can watch the beautiful meteor shower with naked eyes. Moonlight has always been a concern for stargazers interested in catching a glimpse of the perseids.

The Perseids generally appear to radiate from a point high in the north, called the "radiant". But you need to only point yourself towards the north and look up, Nasa said. Stargazers may also get a glimpse of stray meteors from the Delta Aquariid meteor showers.



The top Covid developments you need to know: August 11

In the works: India-made drug to cure mild Covid-19

A little-known biosciences

company near Kolhapur is testing a drug that may become India's first indigenously developed cure for Covid-19, at least for mild and moderately-infected patients. In early tests, the drug is promising to turn infected patients RT-PCR negative in 72-90 hours, company officials told The Indian Express. The candidate drug is currently undergoing phase 1 human trials that are likely to be completed by the end of this month. The cocktail comprises very specific Covid-19 neutralising antibodies, purified to remove all extraneous chemicals. The antibodies are developed in horses by injecting them with specific antigens obtained from the virus.

Maharashtra's SOP for schools: Panels to decide on reopening, all teachers to be vaccinated

The Maharashtra government on Tuesday came out with a detailed SOP for schools, which will reopen from August 17. Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad had last week

Mixing Covishield and Covaxin, the two main vaccines against Covid-19 in use in India, has been found by a new ICMR study to be safe and also to provide better immunity.

announced that offline classes will commence in rural areas for students of Classes 5-8, and in cities for students from Classes 8-12 following Covid-19 protocol. The state government has directed setting up of a four-member committee headed by Municipal Commissioners in Mumbai, Mumbai Suburban and Thane to take a decision on reopening schools in their respective jurisdiction. Similar committees headed by respective collectors of districts have been tasked with taking a decision keeping in view the Covid situation in the area.

Explained: Why mix two different Covid-19 vaccines, or why not

Mixing Covishield and Covaxin, the two main vaccines against Covid-19 in use in India, has been found by a new ICMR study to be safe and also to provide better immunity. The two use different platforms: Covishield is an adenovirus vector platform-based vaccine, while Covaxin is an inactivated whole virus vaccine. Worldwide, studies are under way to understand if a combination of two different vaccines can

outperform two doses of the same vaccine. Experts caution, however, that mixing should not be random but should be based on understanding multiple issues

New research: Booster shot can protect against coronavirus variants

Scientists have confirmed that an autumn "booster" dose of a Covid-19 vaccine will be an effective way to protect people from existing (and potentially future) variants of concern. They found that antibodies generated by a single dose of the Pfizer vaccine were less effective at neutralising key variants. However, the second dose, especially in those previously infected, dramatically increased neutralising antibody responses against variants - to a level comparable with those seen for the original strain of SARS-CoV-2. This suggests that an additional boost, even using vaccines containing the original strain of coronavirus, will increase protection against variants of concern, the scientists said.

Covid cases stabilising but reproduction number in newer

states a concern: Government Raising a red flag, the Centre on Tuesday said that while Covid-19 cases are "stabilising" across the country, the reproduction number (or R value) greater than 1, specifically from newer states, including Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, is a "significant reason to be concerned". The warning by the head of India's Covid-19 task force, Dr V K Paul, came after the Health Ministry on Tuesday said that eight states are reporting R value equal to 1 and above, which indicates how fast the virus is spreading in a region.

'Economic recovery picking up; 3rd wave to have lower impact' The third Covid wave is unlikely to be as devastating as the second one as the country's vaccination drive gathers speed, but there is a need to remain guarded against the virus, the Finance Ministry said on Tuesday in its Monthly Economic Report for July. The receding of the second wave, along with rapid progress in vaccination, has set the stage to accelerate economic recovery, it said. With the

second wave abating in most parts of the country and states lifting restrictions in phases, there are visible signs of economic rejuvenation since the second half of May, it said. This resonates with the economic impact of the second wave expected to be muted.

Canada extends India flight ban: What are the options for travellers?

Transport Canada, the North American country's department for transportation, has extended the ban on direct flights from India till September 21. This extension has come at a time when several jurisdictions have been relaxing restrictions for Indian travellers. The decision is expected to further aggravate the plight of those applying for student visas for higher education in Canada. In a statement, Transport Canada said that the country's phased approach to easing border measures is informed by the continued monitoring of available data and scientific evidence, including the vaccination rate of Canadians and the improving epidemiological situation.

WHO likely to take decision on authorisation of Bharat Biotech's Covid-19 vaccine in September



Atop vaccines official at the World Health Organisation says the agency expects to make a decision next month on an emergency authorisation for the Indian-made Covid-19 vaccine made by Bharat Biotech, a shot that has yet to be authorized by any Western regulatory authorities.

Dr. Mariangela Simao, a WHO assistant director-general for vaccines, says the UN health agency's assessment of the Bharat Biotech vaccine was "quite advanced" and officials hoped for a decision by mid-September.

Few studies have been published on the shot. Indian researchers have yet to share any advanced research about the vaccine, which has been authorised and used in India. Scientists in India say the vaccine is about 78% effective, but there are some questions about how the vaccine performs in the real world, including against Covid-19 variants.

WHO CONSIDERING OTHER VERSIONS OF LICENSED VACCINES

Simao says WHO is also considering other versions of vaccines already licensed by the agency, including one made by Sinopharm. She expects they'll begin evaluating vaccines made by Sanofi Pasteur and Novavax in September.

"There are many, many vaccines in the final stages of the pipeline," Simao says.

Last week, the US makers of Novavax said they would prioritise seeking authorization in developing countries and from WHO before getting the green light in the U.S. and European Union.

Kerala reports over 40,000 breakthrough Covid cases raises concerns of new variant



While India has reported a total of 1 lakh breakthrough Covid-19 infections, Kerala alone has recorded over 40,000 cases, raising concerns of a new variant spreading.

Kerala has reported over 40,000 cases of breakthrough Covid-19 infections, which are of people contracting the disease a second time or those who were fully vaccinated.

Top health ministry sources privy to the containment and mitigation work being done in Kerala have said that the role of a new coronavirus variant cannot be ruled out.

While India has reported a total of over 1 lakh such breakthrough Covid-19 cases,

of this, Kerala alone has over 40,000 infections, as per sources at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

A source in the Union health ministry, who had visited Kerala, have told India Today TV, "The rise in number of breakthrough infections and re-infection is possibly due to a variant which is escaping immunity."

The role of a new mutant variant, which is leading to a large number of breakthrough infections, cannot be ruled out.

The number of breakthrough

cases have now raised concerns of a new coronavirus variant.

Sequencing of breakthrough samples will tell the researchers if there is a different coronavirus variant that is escaping the immunity generated by vaccination, leading to infection among fully vaccinated individuals.

"Genomic sequencing should be carried out for all breakthrough infections to understand if there is a different variant," the source added. The

health ministry is now planning 100% genomic sequencing of all 40,000 samples to rule out the possibilities of a new variant. They have communicated the same to the Kerala government.

Breakthrough Covid-19 cases were high in Pathanamthitta and a similar situation was seen in other districts as well. A team of the Union health ministry is now expected to visit Kerala after August 15.

Kuruthi movie review:**What can men do against such reckless hate?**

Kuruthi movie review: Kuruthi is a claustrophobic and nerve-wracking thriller. The home invasion setup is powered by Tarantino-esque suspense building and character reveals.

The battle at Helm's Deep is nearing its end. Countless people have perished, Wizard Saruman's army of orcs have overrun Helm's Deep and defeat seems inevitable. "What can men do against such reckless hate?" King Theoden wonders as his impenetrable fort crumbles from the onslaught of enemies in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.

While watching Amazon Prime Video's latest release *Kuruthi* you may also wonder what men can do against such reckless hate? Screenwriter Anish Pallyal constructs a trap from which no character emerges unscathed. Under the grab of darkness, each character reveals their true self, and transforms to the point that they are unrecognisable when the sun rises again.

Ibrahim (Roshan Mathew), a man in his early 30s, is coming to terms with a massive personal loss. His wife and daughter died

in a landslide that killed 24 people. We see how people, irrespective of their religion, are dealing with losing their loved ones. The scene is a reminder that when a catastrophe strikes, it affects all human beings the same way. Death is not prejudiced by caste, religion, creed, language or the colour of skin. It is the ultimate leveller. Ibrahim turns to spirituality to seek answers and ensure a place for him in heaven, because he believes that is where his daughter is. When Ibrahim expresses he's full of doubt as to what God wants from him, his spiritual guru tells him that doubt is the sign of a true believer. The guru says when in doubt, pray. A similar situation plays later on in the movie. Ibrahim's brother Rasool (Naslen K. Gafoor) is simmering with anger. He has been semi-radicalised but is on the fence about being an accessory to a cold-blooded murder. Laiq (Prithviraj

Sukumaran) asks Rasool whether he's doubtful if he's doing the right thing? Laiq tells Rasool that doubt is his biggest enemy and if he encourages it, it will cost him dearly. In effect, Laiq says, when in doubt, kill. All hell breaks loose when S.I Sathyan (Murali Gopy) barges into Ibrahim's house uninvited, with a murder accused named Vishnu (Sagar Surya). Vishnu has murdered a man for hurting his religious sentiments. Now he's being chased by a group of men who are baying for blood. Sathyan, however, is determined not to let that happen.

After a few twists and turns, the responsibility to protect Vishnu's life falls on Ibrahim. Now, he has to choose between supporting the vengeance of his friends or saving the life of a stranger. What does God want him to do?

As various strands of the conflict develop, like Helm's Deep, human bonds that were once believed to be strong and



unbreakable, begin to crumble. Ibrahim's shock is palpable as he realises that people who he thought were above communal differences have fallen for the rising tide of hatred. It is the same shock one feels when they find out their closest friends was a closet bigot all along.

Kuruthi is a brave film in more ways than one. It discusses the growing fear of majoritarian sentiment, the alienation of minorities, and the mounting human cost of communalisation in a way that will have a profound effect on the audience. The film is a microcosm of our society, which

is increasingly becoming paranoid of the Other. The film doesn't take sides or justify any acts of its characters. It simply observes the eroding harmony and a sense of brotherhood. It helps us to see senselessness of violence committed in the name of God. It is a vicious cycle that won't stop until an individual takes one for the greater good of human civilization.

Besides the politics, *Kuruthi* is also a claustrophobic and nerve-wracking thriller. The home invasion setup is powered by Tarantino-esque suspense building and shuddering reveals.

Salman Khan is on the agenda for Indian Idol 12's Mohd Danish

'It's my dream'



For Indian Idol 12 finalist Mohammad Danish, the finale is bittersweet. "I am actually very sad that this beautiful journey is coming to an end. Even though it's been almost a year, I feel like I just came in yesterday," he shared in an exclusive chat with indianexpress.com.

The singing reality show is set to wrap up on August 15 with a 12-hour long grand finale. Besides Danish, others competing for the trophy include Pawandeep Rajan, Arunita Kanjilal, Sayli Kamble, Nihal Tauro and Shanmukhapriya.

Calling his time on Indian Idol a life-changing journey, the singer shared that he never expected to reach this far on the show. "This feels unreal honestly. The kind of love and respect I have received from people, I think it's all thanks to my parents' prayers. It's a blessed feeling for me. Having toiled for months, finally, we have reached our destination," Danish shared, adding that he believes this show has been special from the start.

"It's the first time we had online auditions, and during the pandemic, this show came as a ray of hope for many. While we got to live our dreams, many enjoyed the musical journey. I truly believe there was some divine intervention this season," he said. Danish also got a chance to work on a music video with judge Himesh Reshammiya. "Never in my wildest imagination, I thought I will have my own video so soon in my career. This success is god-sent and I cannot thank Himesh sir enough for this. He is such a humble man that he has worked not just with me but all the top contestants, and soon their songs will also come up. I cannot thank Indian Idol 12 for changing my life," he said. Given the kind of talent, it has been difficult to guess who will win the trophy. We wondered if he would have preferred being in another season, where maybe he had a better chance to emerge victorious. Pat comes the reply, "Not at all. I feel this time everyone is so talented in their own field, and I feel lucky to be around such strong contenders. As for competition, I think now we have all become family."

Sonalli Seygall

Children should be taught about animal cruelty in schools

Over the past few years, Sonalli Seygall has worked with multiple NGOs dedicated towards animal welfare and rescue. On World Elephant Day today, the actor wishes that laws related to animal cruelty become stringent so that the perpetrators don't get away easily. "I've personally called out culprits and taken them to the police. But they've all gotten away by paying a fine of just ₹50. It's heart-breaking! Even if anyone tries to bring about a change, they aren't paid heed to because human cruelty assumes a greater importance. But I believe animal and human cruelty is at par," the actor shares.

Last month, a 60-year-old blind elephant named Nina who was abused in Uttar Pradesh created headlines. Following the incident, a few Bollywood actors came together in support of a petition to prevent abuse against blind elephants. Talking about it, Seygall says, "One of my friends from the industry said that unless there's uproar, nothing will change. And that's a sad fact. Do we really need celebrity influence for justice? But maybe that's the only notice to

draw attention of the public".

A year back, a pregnant elephant was brutally killed after a local in in Malappuram, Kerala, fed her a pineapple stuffed with crackers. The Jai Mummy Di (2020) actor asserts that increased urbanisation is also a reason:

"Many people felt that it wasn't a big deal because it happened by accident. But we've to be more careful. When we encourage such barbaric acts, we give culprits the licence to commit bigger crimes in the future."

Seygall is confident that the solution to this is introducing curriculums on animal cruelty at schools. "If children are taught about the consequences of animal cruelty, the by-product would be that cases of animal cruelty might reduce but it will make them compassionate human beings," she ends.



R Balki to work with Sunny Deol, Pooja Bhatt, Dulquer Salmaan, Shreya Dhanwanthary in new film



Filmmaker R Balki, announced a new thriller, which will star actors Sunny Deol, Dulquer Salmaan, Pooja Bhatt and Shreya Dhanwanthary in the lead roles. Talking about his new project, Balki said, "After months of waiting, for me, it is exciting to start shooting anything. And to make a film in a genre that I haven't attempted before is even more exciting. I have had the idea for a long time but never quite got around to writing it, and while it's fundamentally a thriller, it banks so much on these four stunning performers. I just can't wait to get into the edit room."

Balki further spoke about getting Sunny

to join the ensemble and said, "I am ecstatic to be working with Sunny, an actor whose booming screen presence conveys so much. Am glad he is back and hoping this new adventure will add a new dimension to his glorious filmography."

The director also spoke about the movie's other male lead, Dulquer, and said, "Dulquer is possibly one of the most charming actors in Indian cinema today, and even though I cannot say much about his role except at this point, I am really looking forward to his distinct and cool interpretation of it."

Rajkummar Rao shuts down trolls criticising his Robert De Niro comparison post, reacts to being called next Aamir Khan

Actor Rajkummar Rao has reacted to mean comments he received on his 2018 post in which he compared his look with Godfather's Vito Corleone, played by Robert De Niro. The actor read out comments during his appearance on Arbaaz Khan's show Pinch 2.

In 2018, Rajkummar Rao shared a post in which he thought that his look for a shoot was similar to Robert De Niro's Vito Corleone from Godfather. "When you unintentionally dress up like Vito Corleone," he had captioned the post. Arbaaz dug out the old post and asked Rajkummar to read a few reactions he

received to the post. A fan compared his look with Keshto Mukherjee while another said he was nowhere close to Vito. However, after a follower pointed

out that he failed 'miserably,' Rajkummar clarified, "That's okay. I wasn't even really trying to look like Vito Corleone." He read another

fan's comment who said that nothing except the hair matches. Responding to the comment, Rajkummar said in Hindi, "If everything else would

Lara Dutta opens up about potential uproar for playing Indira Gandhi



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How rich is the Taliban? And where does their money come from?



(SAI Bureau)- The Taliban of 2021 look very different, on TV news clips, from the Taliban of the late 1990s. For one, the quality of telecast has no doubt improved but so has the visual getup of the Afghan militant outfit. Their weapons look brand new and shining; their Humvee or Humvee type vehicles are in perfect running order; the clothes they wear look clean and new; their neat coiffure a significant departure from the tousled looks of yore. (Contd on page 36)

Cuomo's collapse smooths path for next New York mayor



(SAI Bureau)- NEW YORK — Mayor Bill de Blasio spent eight years in office being tormented by Gov. Andrew Cuomo. New York's next mayor, likely Eric Adams, will be spared that ordeal. An embattled Cuomo may not have gone as hard against Adams as he did de Blasio, for fear of alienating crucial Black voters in New York City. But Adams stands to have a much easier time navigating Albany with Gov. Kathy Hochul than he would have with her predecessor.

(Contd on page 36)

Man or woman?

1000-year-old grave in Finland likely of a non-binary human being

(SAI Bureau)-It was in 1968 when archaeologists discovered a weapon grave at Suontaka Vesitorninmäki in Finland. Ever since then, the remains found in the grave have been at the centre of a major debate over the gender of its occupant.

(Page 37)



10th India Day Parade of Long Island A Spectacular Success

(Page 2-3)



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