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The fall of Afghanistan

The United States has lost. The US exit was understandable. But the way it was managed is unpardonable. The Inter-Services Intelligence (of Pakistan) has won. India stares at a crisis.



**Story on
Pages
36-43**



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Indian-Origin Woman Jailed In Singapore For Cheating As Travel Agent: Report

S Leelavadi cheated at least eight victims over 19 fake trips to India and the city of Dubai, reported TODAY newspaper.

Singapore: A 55-year-old Indian-origin woman in Singapore was sentenced to 20 weeks' jail on Tuesday for misappropriating around SGD 35,000 from customers who had paid her for tour packages to India and Dubai that never materialised, according to a media report. S Leelavadi, who worked as a freelance travel agent for over a decade without the requisite licence to do so, cheated at least eight victims over 19 fake trips to India and the city of Dubai, reported TODAY newspaper. The Singaporean pleaded guilty earlier this year to one criminal breach of trust charge and two counts of practising as a travel agent without a licence from the Singapore Tourism Board. Seven other similar charges were taken into consideration for sentencing.

Leelavadi will not begin serving her sentence immediately as she

intends to file an appeal, the report said. The court heard that she began working as a freelance travel agent sometime in 2000, only stopping for a few months in 2004 when she joined a licensed travel agency. When she struck out on her own, she told customers that she could book tours for them to India and Dubai. She advised them on how to travel there, where to stay and their itinerary, and gave them a quotation for their desired tour. They would then pay her a SGD 500 deposit which she said was necessary to make the relevant bookings. She directed them to make payments in cash or through a bank transfer to her mother's bank account. In the months before the departure date, she would chase them for the balance payments while sending them itineraries and advising them on various aspects of their trips, such as

insurance, currency exchange and local tours, the report said.

Whenever the date of departure drew close or had passed and the trips did not materialise, she would lie to the customers that her mother was hospitalised or in the intensive care unit, so that they would postpone the trip or accept a refund. When customers pressed her for the plane tickets so they could go on their own, she would say she could not provide them. She ended up pocketing SGD 34,950 from eight victims between 2013 and 2017. One such victim was 82-year old Muniyandi Karuppayee whom Leelavadi offered to arrange a tour to Kasi for SGD2,400 in 2017. On the planned date of the trip, Karuppayee packed her luggage and waited for Leelavadi to give her a lift to the airport. Leelavadi did not turn up and did not pick up the shop

owner's calls. Two days later, she called and claimed her mother had been hospitalised. She was unable to show any proof that she had even booked flight tickets for the trip. That same year, Leelavadi also offered to arrange a seven-day tour to Dubai for eight people. The group paid her a total of SGD 15,450. The day before the trip, she asked them to postpone it, saying her mother had suffered a heart attack that morning. She separately told one of them that the trip had to be cancelled as she was required to attend a court hearing soon. As of mid-last year, Leelavadi had made full restitution to her victims. For criminal breach of trust, she could have been jailed for up to seven years or fined, or both. For working as an unlicensed travel agent, she could have been jailed for up to two years or fined up to SGD10,000, or both.

3 Indians Rescued In Afghanistan From Area Not Under Control Of Afghan Forces

The embassy cited the rescue of the engineers in fresh security advisory while calling upon all Indians in Afghanistan to strictly adhere to the measures advised by it in view of a spike in violence in that country.

New Delhi: Three Indian engineers, who worked at a project site in an area not under the control of Afghan government forces, were rescued by air recently, according to the Indian embassy in Kabul on Thursday. The embassy cited the rescue of the engineers in fresh security advisory while calling upon all Indians in Afghanistan to strictly adhere to the measures advised by it in view of a spike in violence in that country.

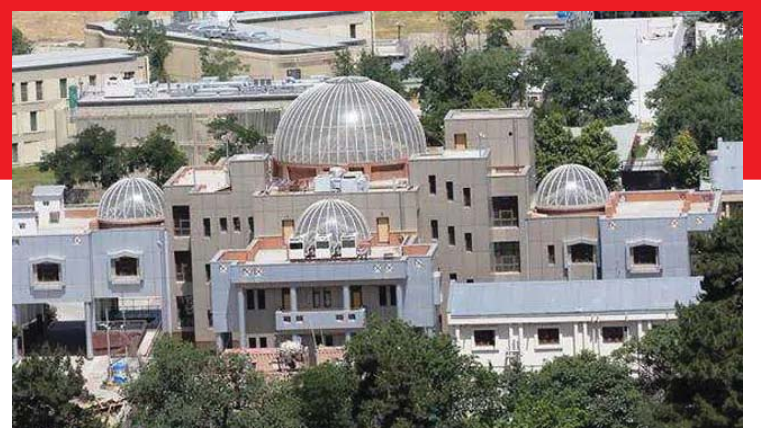
"A recent case that required emergency air rescue of three Indian engineers who remained at a dam project site, in an area not under the control of government forces, has brought to light that Indian nationals receiving this embassy's advisories are not heeding its advice and continue to put themselves in mortal danger," the embassy said in a fresh advisory. It is learnt that the engineers were working in an area that has been under the control of the Taliban.

"Embassy of India Kabul once again underscores the need for all Indian nationals to fully adhere to steps in the security advisories provided from time to time," the advisory said. The embassy had issued separate

security advisories on June 29, July 24 and August 10, recommending a series of measures to ensure the safety and security of the Indians living in that country. "Precautions and security measures advised in the above three advisories continue to remain valid. All Indian nationals in Afghanistan are once again requested to strictly adhere to the measures advocated," the new advisory said. In its advisory on Tuesday, the embassy strongly

advised all Indian citizens residing in Afghanistan to make immediate travel arrangements to return home before commercial air services are discontinued from the country in view of the massive spike in violence.

It also strongly advised the Indian companies operating in Afghanistan to immediately withdraw their Indian employees out of project sites before air travel services from the country are discontinued. In the latest



advisory, the embassy also of Indian journalists in Afghanistan entails additional risks," it said, in an apparent reference to the killing of Pulitzer Prize-winning Indian photojournalist Danish Siddiqui in Kandahar last month.

Indian-Origin Scotland Yard Officer Dismissed For Misconduct In London

London: An Indian-origin police officer, who pleaded guilty to harassment in a London court, has been dismissed from Scotland Yard ranks in London for gross misconduct. Ajay Singh, attached to the North Area Basic Command Unit of the Metropolitan Police in London, faced a misconduct hearing and was found to have breached the Standards of Professional Behaviour in relation to Discreditable Conduct to the level of gross misconduct on Tuesday. Earlier, Singh pleaded guilty to five counts of harassment in relation to five colleagues - four women and a man - at Woolwich Crown Court in May. He is due to be sentenced for

the crime on September 8. "The actions of PC [Police Constable] Singh were reprehensible, particularly given they were committed against his own colleagues. His motive for these malicious offences remains unclear, and they have had a significant negative impact on his victims," said Detective Chief Superintendent Treena Fleming, in-charge of local policing in Enfield and Haringey area of London. "This kind of conduct has no place in the Met and the hearing has rightly determined that PC Singh should be dismissed," she said.

During October 2020, an off-duty Singh made a number of

malicious and threatening phone calls to the fellow police officers in question. All calls were made from a withheld number. The victims were subjected to threats, personal insults and verbal abuse. One of the victims reported the matter on October 19 last year and following enquiries by officers, it was established that the phone used during the offences belonged to Singh. He was arrested later that day before being released on bail. On November 16, 2020, he was further arrested in connection to the offences against the remaining victims. Singh was charged in March this year via postal requisition and has been suspended from duty since October 2020.

Tamil Nadu panchayat sets an example by turning trash into electricity

The Kanjirangal panchayat in Tamil Nadu's Sivaganga district has set an example of sustainable waste management by turning trash into electricity. The panchayat with eight villages has produced 600 units of electricity in a week.

(News Agencies)-The Kanjirangal panchayat in Tamil Nadu's Sivaganga district is setting a perfect example of sustainable waste management by turning trash into electricity. The panchayat with eight villages has produced 600 units of electricity in a week. This initiative helps in the proper disposal of waste and reduces electricity bills.

Eight villages - Arasanipatti, Elanthangudipatti, Kanjirangal, Kakkanji Colony, Kamarajar Colony, Darasatha Nagar, Thendral Nagar and T Pudur - with over 14,000 people produce about 500 kg of garbage daily.

Sivaganga District Collector P Madhusudhan Reddy came up with the idea of generating electricity after finding out that the villagers did not have any place to dump waste.



After spending Rs 65 lakh from the National Rurban Mission, an electricity-generating unit was set up on Thirupattur Road, opposite the panchayat office to convert waste into electricity.

Biodegradable and non-biodegradable wastes are segregated by sanitation workers from residents' doorsteps and brought to the electricity-generating unit. The biodegradable waste is converted into biogas, which is used to

produce electricity. Without wasting anything, the byproducts are later sold as pesticides.

The unit is capable of generating 200 units of electricity from two tonnes of garbage.

Panchayat chief KSM Manimuthu told India Today TV, "Rs 12 lakh can be saved on electricity bills in the eight villages if 200 units of power are generated regularly. This initiative helps in the proper disposal of waste and reduces electricity bills. Providing pesticide from this process will be added revenue to the panchayat."

"The money saved in this scheme can be used to develop the panchayat," added Manimuthu.

Meghalaya Human Rights Commission to head judicial probe into former militant's death: CM Sangma

(News Agencies)-Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said on Wednesday that the chairperson of the Meghalaya Human Rights Commission will be heading the judicial inquiry, which was set up by the state government, to investigate the death of former militant Cheristerfield Thangkhiew on August 13. The 54-year-old was the former general secretary of Hynñiewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), which is a proscribed insurgent outfit.

"We have asked the Meghalaya Human Rights Commission chairperson Justice T Vaiphei to head this judicial inquiry. The committee is completely independent. Once the report comes to us from the committee, we will take all appropriate actions in terms of suspension or any other kind of extreme order," said Conrad Sangma.

After a meeting held with the headmen, leaders of organizations and NGOs of Mawlai area in Shillong, the chief minister said they had submitted a memorandum and took it up with the state government.

"They have mentioned several points in the memorandum, including suspension of the

The chairperson of Meghalaya Human Rights Commission will head the judicial inquiry into the death of former HNLC general secretary Cheristerfield Thangkhiew, said Chief Minister Conrad Sangma.

individual who was involved in the incident that took place on August 13 and shifting of CRPF camp located at Mawlai area. We have noted down all their concerns," said the chief minister.

Conrad Sangma added: "The curfew has already been lifted for a few hours and we are observing the situation. The internet service will be restored from today evening. On their point about the CRPF camp, we said that a camp is never permanent and steps have been taken to change the location. The CRPF, too, has been positive in their approach. We will shift the camp from Mawlai after due process."

The Meghalaya government had already relaxed curfew timings from 5 am to 4 pm on Wednesday.

Prime Time

Daily Hindi News Bulletin

Geeta Saxena

IAF aircraft awaits clearance to evacuate more Indians stranded in Afghanistan



Government sources said an Indian Air Force aircraft is awaiting permission to land in Kabul. India has so far airlifted 180 people from the war-torn nation. Sources added both IAF and commercial aircraft have been kept on stand by to evacuate more Indians.

An Indian Air Force transport aircraft is awaiting clearance for landing in Afghanistan's Kabul airport to evacuate Indian citizens who were stranded after the fall of the Ashraf Ghani government.

Government sources said both the Air Force and commercial planes are the stand by to bring back more Indians from Afghanistan.

The Indian Air Force has already evacuated around 180 Indian passengers. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) was briefed in detail on the current and evolving security and political situation in

Afghanistan.

The CCS was also briefed on the recent evacuations of Indian Embassy officials, some members of the Indian community, as well as Indian media personnel. The Prime Minister instructed all officials concerned to undertake necessary measures to ensure the safe exit of Indian nationals from Afghanistan in the coming days.

120 EMBASSY OFFICIALS AIRLIFTED

An Indian Air Force C-17 aircraft on Tuesday morning brought back 120 Indian officials, including the last batch of the Indian embassy staff, ITBP personnel and four media persons, from the Kabul airport.

Indian Ambassador Rudrendra Tandon and other staff members were onboard the flight from Kabul. The plane with the Indian officials landed in Gujarat's Jamnagar at around 11 am.

The evacuees were then flown to Hindon airport in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad in a C-130J Super Hercules aircraft operated by the Indian Air Force (IAF). "In view of the prevailing circumstances, it has been decided that our Ambassador in Kabul and his Indian staff will move to India immediately," MEA spokesperson said.

46 people evacuated on Monday An Indian Air Force (IAF) evacuation flight returned to India from Kabul on Monday

afternoon with personnel and equipment, sources said, adding that more evacuation sorties are planned.

As per the available information, 46 people have been evacuated from Kabul.

A high level official meeting is likely to be held on Monday evening in Delhi to discuss the options and future course of action for the Indian embassy and the staff there.

The Indian contingent in Afghanistan has also been talking to officials on the ground to be able to move to the airport and fly back to India, sources said.

Govt of India closely monitoring situation in Afghanistan: MEA The Ministry of External Affairs

(MEA), in a press conference on the situation in Afghanistan on Monday, said that the Government of India has been "closely monitoring" all developments there.

MEA Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had said the security situation in Kabul has deteriorated significantly in the last few days, adding: "It is changing rapidly even as we speak". "The Government of India has been closely monitoring all developments in Afghanistan. We have been issuing periodic advisories for the safety and security of Indian nationals in that country, including calling for their immediate return to India," the MEA spokesperson said.

Anarchy in Northeast, men armed with AK-47 marched in Shillong like Taliban: Congress

(News Agencies)-The Congress has drawn parallels between pictures of Taliban militants on the streets of Kabul and the situation in Meghalaya. Referring to a recent video of masked men marching with AK-47 rifles in Shillong, Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala alleged that the Northeast has been pushed into arson and constitutional anarchy.

Addressing media persons at the party headquarters, the chief spokesperson of Congress, Randeep Singh Surjewala, said, "While we see disturbing scenes in Afghanistan, the truth of Northeast is being hidden by the government. When the Taliban brandish weapons we can understand because it happens in Afghanistan. But a similar video of masked men brandishing AK-47 rifles on the streets of Shillong has surfaced. It is the abdication of duty by the Government of India." "The Modi government remained deaf to the



situation in the Northeast. This is the result of blind lust to latch on to power in the Northeast by the BJP," he added. The Congress leader also alleged that situation turned violent in several parts of the Northeast due to the abdication of constitutional duties and failure to restore rule of law from the Centre.

The situation in Meghalaya turned violent on Sunday,

following the death of Chesterfield Thangkhiew, former leader of banned militant group HNLC. Chesterfield Thangkhiew, who had surrendered in 2018, was shot dead on August 13 when he allegedly tried to attack a police team with a knife during a raid at his house in connection with a series of IED blasts in the state.

Meanwhile, Randeep Singh Surjewala also spoke about the recent violence along the Assam-Mizoram border and said the violence and police firing on July 26 and again on August 17 led to further tension between the two states. He asked, "Assam and Mizoram are acting against each other as if they are enemies, will the home minister own responsibility?" He added, "On the Independence Day, curfew was imposed, the internet was shut down, the Governor's convoy was attacked, but where is the Modi government, where is the home minister?"

PM Modi to virtually lay foundation stone of Somnath Promenade in Gujarat on August 20



(News Agencies)-Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple projects in Somnath, Gujarat on August 20 via video conferencing.

The PMO said in a statement on Wednesday that the projects to be inaugurated include the Somnath Promenade, Somnath Exhibition Centre and reconstructed temple precinct of Old (Juna) Somnath.

He will also lay the foundation stone of Shree Parvati Temple during the event.

The Somnath Promenade has been developed under PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive) scheme at a total cost of over Rs 47 crore.

The Somnath Exhibition Centre, developed on the premises of 'Tourist Facilitation Centre', displays the exhibits from dismantled parts of the old Somnath temple and its sculptures having Nagar style temple architecture of old Somnath.

Navies of India

Vietnam undertake bilateral maritime exercise in South China Sea

The navies of India and Vietnam carried out joint drills in South China Sea as part of maritime cooperation between the two countries.



The Indian Navy on Wednesday carried out joint drills with the Vietnamese Navy in the South China Sea as part of maritime cooperation between the two countries.

INS Ranvijay and INS Kora undertook bilateral maritime exercises with Vietnam People's Navy (VPN) frigate VPNS Ly Thai To (HQ-012), the Indian Navy said in a statement. The Indian Naval ships arrived at Cam Ranh, Vietnam, on August 15 for harbour phase which included professional interactions with VPN

maintaining extant Covid-19 protocols.

The bilateral interaction aims to consolidate the strong bond shared by the two navies and would be another step towards strengthening India-Vietnam defence relations.

The sea phase included surface warfare exercises, weapon firing drills and helicopter operations. Regular interactions between the two navies over the years have enhanced their interoperability and adaptability, the Indian Navy said.

"This has ensured a quantum jump in the complexity and scale of professional exchanges. This

visit also holds special importance as Indian Naval ships celebrated the country's 75th Independence Day in Vietnam," it said.

"The defence ties between the two countries have been robust. In June this year, the two countries undertook a defence security dialogue and Indian Naval ships have been frequently visiting Vietnamese ports. The training cooperation between the two navies has been on the rise over the years," Indian Navy said in the statement. About INS Ranvijay and INS Kora INS Ranvijay is a guided-missile destroyer and the

latest of the Rajput class. The ship was commissioned on December 21, 1987, and is equipped with an array of weapons and sensors which includes a surface-to-surface missile, anti-air missiles and guns, heavy weight torpedoes, anti-submarine rockets and capable of carrying anti-submarine helicopters (Kamov 28).

INS Ranvijay is in company with INS Kora which is the lead ship of Kora class missile corvette. The ship is fitted with surface-to-surface missiles and anti-air guns.

Chandiwale Committee imposes Rs 25000 fine on ex-Mumbai Police chief Param Bir Singh

(News Agencies)-The commission of inquiry, headed by retired Justice K U Chandiwale, has imposed a fine of Rs 25,000 on former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh for not appearing before it. The single-member committee was formed by the Maharashtra government to investigate the charges levelled by Param Bir Singh against former home minister Anil Deshmukh.

The committee has given a "last chance" to Param Bir Singh to appear before it.

Advocates Sanjay Jain and Anukul Seth, appearing for Param Bir Singh, informed the committee that the former

Mumbai top cop has filed a plea before the Bombay HC challenging the "very existence of the committee and the summons sent by the committee." Param Bir Singh's lawyers sought adjournment of the committee's hearing by stating that his plea is likely to be heard in the

high court on August 23. He pleaded that the committee hearing should be adjourned to any date after

that. However, other advocates present for other witnesses opposed Singh's move. Justice Chandiwale said, "After hearing learned advocates, it is obvious that the inquiry is to be completed within a scheduled time. The July 30 order though is questioned belatedly, for that purpose the inquiry ordinarily should not have been stalled." He further added, "Ignoring other aspects and

development, the fact remains that the parties will have to adhere to time schedule."

The order further reads, "As a last chance, keep the matter for evidence of Param Bir Singh on August 25, subject to payment of costs of Rs. 25,000 to be deposited by Param Bir Singh in Chief Minister's Relief Fund-Covid-19."

This money has to be deposited by Singh within three days from August 18. The committee will now meet on August 25 for recording of evidence. This is the second time that a cost has been imposed on Param Bir Singh. Earlier in June, the committee had imposed a fine of Rs 5,000 on Singh for not appearing.



Cabinet nod for Rs 11,040 cr mission to boost oil palm farming



(News Agencies)-The Cabinet approved the National Mission on Edible Oils Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) with a financial outlay of Rs 11,040 crore to promote domestic cultivation of oil palm in the next five years, and reduce the country's dependence on edible oil imports.

The decision comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the new central scheme on August 15 during his Independence Day speech at Red Fort.

Briefing the media, Union Information and Broadcasting

Minister Anurag Thakur said the Cabinet approved the NMEO-OP with a focus on the northeast region and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands with a financial outlay of Rs 11,040 crore.

Of the total outlay, Rs 8,844 crore would be the central government's share while Rs 2,196 crore would be states' share. This includes the viability gap funding also, an official statement said.

The new scheme will subsume the current National Food Security Mission-Oil Palm programme.

Agriculture Minister Narendra

Singh Tomar said the new scheme aims to cover oil palm in an additional area of 6.5 lakh hectare by 2025-26 and thereby reaching the target of 10 lakh hectares.

With this, the domestic production of crude palm oil (CPO) is expected to go up to 11.20 lakh tonnes by 2025-26 and up to 28 lakh tonnes by 2029-30.

Stating that the new scheme addresses several challenges faced by farmers, the minister said oil palm cultivation has been happening in the last few years and is being undertaken in 12 states at present.

"Since oil palm cultivation takes at least 5-7 years to give yield and profits. It was not possible for small farmers to wait for this long. Even if farmers were successful in cultivation, they were unsure of getting returns due to fluctuation in prices," he said. At present, only 3.70 lakh hectares is under oil palm. Although there is scope for oil palm cultivation in the north east,

it was not happening in the absence of processing industry and investment, he added.

Keeping this in view, Tomar said the government has decided to give assistance under the NMEO-OP to further boost cultivation of oil palm.

For the first time, the government will give a price assurance to the oil palm growers producing Fresh Fruit Bunches (FFBs). This will be known as the 'viability price', he said. The 'viability price' will be the annual average CPO price of the last five years adjusted with the wholesale price index to be multiplied by 14.3 per cent, he said, adding that this will be fixed yearly for the oil palm year (November to October). "This assurance will inculcate confidence in the Indian oil palm farmers to go for increased area and thereby more production of palm oil," he said. An official statement also said a formula price will also be fixed which will be 14.3 per cent of CPO and will be fixed on a

monthly basis. The viability gap funding will be the viability price-formula price and if the need arises, it would be paid directly to the farmers accounts in the form of direct benefit transfer, it added.

Further, the assurance to farmers will be in the form of the viability gap funding and the industry will be mandated to pay 14.3 per cent of the CPO price which will eventually go up to 15.3 per cent. There is a sunset clause for the scheme which is November 1, 2037.

To give impetus to the North-East and Andaman, the government said it will additionally bear a cost of 2 per cent of the CPO price to ensure that farmers are paid at par with the rest of India.

The states which adopt the mechanism would benefit from the viability gap payment proposed in the scheme and for this they will enter into a memorandum of understanding (MoUs) with the central government.



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Shillong curfew to be relaxed from 5 am to 5 pm on Thursday: Meghalaya govt

The curfew in Shillong and its adjoining areas, which was imposed to curb violence in the region following the death of former HNLC leader Cheristerfield Thangkhiew, will be relaxed from 5 am to 5 pm on Thursday.

The Meghalaya government announced that the curfew in Shillong Agglomeration,

which was imposed to curb violence in the region following the death of a militant leader, will be relaxed from 5 am to 5 pm on Thursday, August 19. The announcement came on Wednesday in an order issued by the East Khasi Hills District administration. However, the curfew will be reimposed from 5 pm on Thursday till 5 am on Friday.

SHOPS, OFFICES TO OPEN
During the period of relaxation,

essential and non-essential shops will be allowed to remain open till 4 pm. The government offices would be allowed to operate till 4 pm with 30 per cent strength.

Movement of inter and intra district vehicles will be allowed only with valid passes. However, commercial vehicles will be allowed to run.

Public gatherings and events have been banned. Only activities permitted by the government will be allowed.

WHY THE CURFEW WAS IMPOSED?

The law and order situation in Shillong Agglomeration deteriorated on August 15 in the wake of the killing of former

HNLC leader, Cheristerfield Thangkhiew, in an 'encounter' with police in the wee hours of August 13. Chesterfield Thangkhiew, who had surrendered in 2018, was shot dead on August 13 when he allegedly tried to attack a police team with a knife during a raid at his house in connection with a series of IED blasts in the state. In view of the violence and arson that had rocked the state on Independence Day, the Meghalaya government imposed a curfew in Shillong Agglomeration and suspended internet services in four districts for 48 hours on Sunday.

THE WAY OUT

The Meghalaya government has

started discussing with headmen, religious leaders, civil society groups, and organisations to bring back normalcy in Shillong and other parts of the state.

On the other hand, heavy security personnel have been deployed in several pockets in Shillong to maintain the law and order situation.

Earlier, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma had informed that the state government has formed a peace committee, headed by Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong for discussing ways to restore normalcy in Shillong and its adjoining areas.

Coordinating with Centre to bring back 200 West Bengal residents stranded in Afghanistan: CM



(News Agencies)-West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said that her government is coordinating with the Centre for the safe return of over 200 people from the state who are still stranded in Afghanistan.

She said that the stranded West Bengal residents are from Kalimpong and Terai who were working in Afghanistan.

"The chief secretary will write to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to bring them back," she told reporters.

Holding that the Afghanistan crisis is a big problem, she said, "We must first look after the safety of Indians."

To a question whether the BJP government at the Centre should revisit the immigration policy in light of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, "It is a sensitive issue and a major policy decision. The MEA is monitoring the crisis situation. I shouldn't comment on it at present."

Situation along Assam-Mizoram border under control: Hailakandi SP

(News Agencies)-Hailakandi SP Gaurav Upadhyay said the situation is under control at the Assam-Mizoram border after an incident of fresh firing incident on Tuesday.

According to reports, miscreants from the Mizoram side fired bullets from the top of Darasing Hills when workers were constructing a road leading to the border from Bilaipur.

Hailakandi district Superintendent of Police (SP) Gaurav Upadhyay claimed miscreants from the Mizoram side had tried to occupy the Darasing Hills area, and opened fire at a police team that reached the spot.

The police officer added that the situation is now under control. "The incident occurred while an Assam Police team had tried to occupy Darasing Hills area which

is under the Assam territory. An exchange of fire took place in the bordering area. Now, the Darasing Hills area is now under our control. Miscreants from the Mizoram side had tried to occupy the area. Now the situation is under control," Gaurav Upadhyay said.

A senior official of the Hailakandi district said Assam Police personnel also fired several rounds.



Mizoram's Kolasib district deputy commissioner H Lalthlangliana said shots were fired by the Assam Police at three Mizo civilians.

"One of the civilians who was injured while fleeing the scene was treated and released on Tuesday morning from PHC, Vairengte," H Lalthlangliana.

CCEA approves Rs 77.45 cr for revival of north eastern agri-marketing corp

To revive the state-run North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited (NERAMAC), the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved a Rs 77.45 crore package.

(News Agencies)-The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved a Rs 77.45 crore package on Wednesday for the revival of state-run North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited (NERAMAC).

NERAMAC is a central public sector enterprise under the administrative control of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER). "CCEA, chaired by the Prime Minister has approved a revival package of Rs 77.45 crore for NERAMAC," Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur said in a media briefing.

The revival package will help NERAMAC to

implement various innovative plans like providing better farming facilities, training to farmers in clusters, organic seeds and fertiliser, post-harvesting facilities in order to promote the products of north east farmers in the world market, he said. In a statement, the government said out of the total revival package, Rs 17 crore is towards fund-based support and Rs 60.45 crore is non-fund based support.

With the implementation of the revival package, the government said remunerative prices to farmers of the north eastern region of their products will be ensured. GI (Geographical Indications) tagging and

marketing of organic products in the north eastern region in other parts of India and the globe, will enhance the export of these products which will improve the economic status of farmers. That apart, it will help increase revenue of the Corporation and reduce overheads as a result of VRS and other cost cutting measures.

The Corporation will start making profits on a sustained basis and its dependency on the central government loan will cease.

After the implementation of the revival of NERAMAC, employment is expected to be generated to about 33,00 persons, it added.

Tamil Nadu: AIADMK members walk out from Assembly over fresh probe into Kodanad murder case

AIADMK leader Edappadi K Palaniswami said the state government's 'special interest' in the 2017 Kodanad murder case is to tarnish the Opposition's image.

(News Agencies)-All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) MLAs wore black badges while demonstrating against the Tamil Nadu government's decision to conduct an additional probe into the 2017 Kodanad murder case. The Opposition walked out from the Budget Session of the Assembly on Wednesday. The Leader of the Opposition and former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K

Palaniswami asked why Chief Minister MK Stalin's government was showing "special interest" in the case. Palaniswami told India Today, "This is being done to make sure that AIADMK doesn't come to power again. False cases are being filed against our leaders like MR Vijayabhaskar and SP Velumani. All this is done to tarnish AIADMK's image. They do not work for people. They didn't fulfill their poll promises.

Why is DMK showing so much interest in the Kodanad case, which was filed in Kerala? Is it trying to protect the criminals?" The Kodanad case involved the murder of a security guard, Om Bahadur, on April 23, 2017, at the premises of former chief minister Jayalalithaa in Kodanad Estate in Nilgiris. The Tamil Nadu Police investigating the case questioned one of the accused, Saiyan, on Tuesday.





DV Act can't be invoked after divorce proceedings attain finality: Bombay HC

(News Agencies)-The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court observed that the Domestic Violence Act cannot be invoked against a man by his ex-wife "much after the divorce proceedings had attained finality and findings had been rendered against her."

The observation came during the hearing of an application filed under the DV Act by a woman in 2016 against her husband. She was seeking various reliefs including monthly maintenance, compensation, residence order and other monetary benefits.

THE CASE

The couple got married in March 2011. However, a matrimonial discord between them led to the husband filing for divorce on the ground of cruelty before the Family Court at Akola on September 16, 2014.

The court's finding was that the wife had indeed inflicted cruelty on the husband. The court had also rejected an application by her for restitution of conjugal rights. She had then appealed in the Bombay High Court and then moved the Supreme Court. But her appeal was rejected at both the courts.

Finally in May 2016, she filed an application under the DV Act,

where she made allegations similar to those made in the proceedings pertaining to the divorce decree and the application for restitution of conjugal rights and thereafter, claimed that the husband had treated her with

The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court said that the Domestic Violence Act cannot be invoked against a man by his former wife "much after the divorce proceedings had attained finality".

cruelty, by performing a second marriage.

The husband opposed this by filing an application challenging the tenability of the wife's plea and spoke about the earlier round of litigation between the two. However, by the end of that year, the magistrate court rejected the husband's application. The husband and his family members, against whom the domestic violence case was registered, approached the High Court. During the hearing, Justice Manish Pitale of the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court observed that the divorce decree granted and rejection of the restitution of conjugal rights filed

by the wife had attained finality. BOMBAY HC'S OBSERVATION The question before the court was whether the act of the husband of performing a second marriage after the grant of a divorce decree can be said to be an act of

domestic violence under the provisions of the DV Act. The other related question before the court was whether the proceeding initiated by the wife under the provisions of the DV Act can be said to be an abuse of the process of law.

Justice Manish Pitale said that the husband and wife were married at one point and thus had a domestic relationship but the DV act cannot be invoked against him as their divorce proceedings had attained finality.

Justice Manish Pitale further said, "It was not as if the respondent (wife) had initiated a proceeding under the DV Act

during the course of the matrimonial discord between the parties. It is after the respondent suffered adverse orders in the proceedings concerning the divorce petition and the application for restitution of conjugal rights, which stood confirmed right up to the Supreme Court, that she turned around and sought to invoke the provisions of the DV Act.

"This demonstrates that the manner in which the proceedings were sought to be initiated under the provisions of the DV Act was nothing but an abuse of process of law. The respondent could not be permitted to keep the applicants engaged in litigation in this form, when the requirements of the DV Act, on the face of it, did not appear to be satisfied."

He also observed that the wife "appeared to be interested in initiating and continuing such proceedings as a tool of harassment" against the husband and his family. His further view was of "considered opinion that continuance of further proceedings in such a matter would amount to permitting abuse of the process of law. The same cannot be permitted.

ITBP's hero combat dogs airlifted from Kabul to India after Taliban takeover



(News Agencies)-

Maya, Bobby and Roobi -- three combat canines of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) -- returned to India along with nearly 100 troops. The combat dogs were airlifted from Afghanistan's Kabul.

Roobi (a Malinois), Maya (a Labrador), and Bobby (a Doberman), returned to India on Tuesday after serving a stint at the Indian embassy in Kabul.

The ITBP's K9 heroes, along with troops, were airlifted by an Indian Air Force C-17 aircraft from Kabul to Air Force Station Jamnagar in Gujarat on Tuesday. They reached the ITBP's Chawala Camp in Delhi on Wednesday.

The three K9 heroes were on security duty at the Indian embassy at Kabul for the past three years. They had helped detect several IEDs and protected lives of not only the Indian diplomats but also local Afghan civilians working in the embassy.

DIG (Vet) Sudhakar Natarajan told India Today TV that he prides on the "superb professional sound performance of the brave darlings - Maya, Roobi and Bobby - who have worked with zero error to sniff terror and secure Indian assets in Kabul during their deployment". Head constable (HC) Kishan Kumar, HC Bijender Singh and Ct Atul Kumar were the handlers of these K9 heroes. They report that all three brave heroes are "extremely happy to reach India and come back to familiar sights, smells and sounds of our nation". Maya, Bobby and Roobi were trained at NTCD Bhanu, an elite dog training school at Panchkula district in Haryana.

Vaccinating every officer, increasing booths: EC's top priority for upcoming polls in 5 states



The Election Commission is expecting to vaccinate every polling officer and significantly increase the number of staff, central forces and polling booths for the upcoming assembly polls in five states next year.

As the Election Commission (EC) begins discussions about the upcoming elections in five states of Manipur, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Goa, which are scheduled for next year, the priority is to get every officer, who will be involved in the polling process, to be fully vaccinated and increase the number of polling booths.

The EC has been receiving regular updates from the Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) of the five states about advance preparations going on for the upcoming polls. The CEOs have been asked by the commission to be prepared to implement fresh guidelines in case Covid numbers increase during the election period.

FULL VACCINATION OF POLLING STAFF

Learning from the West Bengal experience, the EC is now

preparing a plan to fully vaccinate all officers who will be involved in the polling exercise. After the Bengal election, the commission was in the firing line of the Calcutta High Court which blamed it for not being able to implement the Covid guidelines. Guidelines are being prepared to make sure every polling staff is vaccinated by December this year, in time for the early 2022 polls.

INCREASING POLLING STATIONS

The commission is in a wait-and-watch mood in regard to deciding the number of voters per booth.

However, the fact that the country is still witnessing Covid-19 cases, the EC has told the CEOs to increase the number of polling stations. According to an assessment by the commission, if the 1,200 voters-per-booth formula is applied in Uttar Pradesh, the number of polling booths will increase by 25,000.

However, if only Covid-19 numbers start to decline during the assembly elections in the five states, the EC will increase the number of voters per booth to 1,200 against 1,000 people per booth in elections held so far since the Covid-19 outbreak.

While the norm has been to allow 1,600 voters in one booth, this formula was revised by the poll panel in the 2020 Bihar Assembly polls. During the Bihar elections, which were the first polls to be conducted amid the pandemic, the number of

voters were reduced to 1,000 per booth.

But if Covid numbers see an upswing, then the number of voters per booth will be reduced by the poll panel. A decision regarding this will be taken closer to the polls.

HYBRID FORM OF CAMPAIGNING

Visuals of campaigning from West Bengal during the pandemic still haunt the nation and the commission is privy to it. The CEOs have been asked to get in touch with political parties in their

state to lay the groundwork for Covid appropriate behaviour during campaigns. If the number of cases increases during the election period, the election commission is mulling a hybrid campaigning system. Part of the campaigning can be done online and part on the ground. The final decision will be taken closer to the elections depending on how the pandemic behaves in the country, especially in the election-bound states.

SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN STAFF, MACHINERY

Not wanting a repeat of the West Bengal elections, the commission is expecting to significantly increase the number of polling staff, central forces, polling booths, and overall law and order machinery, besides increasing the number of EVMs and VVPATs to prevent any further spread of the virus.

In a state as populous as Uttar Pradesh,

these numbers are expected to be staggering. To prevent any last-minute obstruction, the EC has also given orders to update election rolls immediately. New legislatures have to be in place in Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand, and Punjab by March 15, 19, 23, and 27 next year respectively. The term of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly ends on May 14, 2022.

Don't play with emotions of Bengal, India: TMC slams Congress over Netaji death anniversary tweet

(News Agencies)-The Trinamool Congress on Wednesday objected to a statement issued by the Congress observing August 18 as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's death anniversary.

Slamming the Congress, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh wrote, "Strongly object to this tweet. This date of death is not proved. Both Congress and BJP government didn't try to find out the real facts regarding the last moments of Netaji. Don't play with the emotions of Bengal and India. First, prove the death. Publish the classified files."

Earlier in the day, Congress tweeted an image of Bose mentioning August 18, 1945, as the date of his demise. "We pay tribute to the hero of Indian Independence Movement Shri Subhas Chandra Bose. A valiant freedom fighter, a defiant patriot,

and a proud son of India. His contribution to the nation will be remembered and honoured till the end of time," Congress tweeted.

Several Union ministers like Ashwini Vaishnaw and Hardeep Singh Puri posted similar tributes to Netaji.

The Bose family has reiterated their demand for a DNA test of the alleged remains of Netaji preserved at the Renkoji temple in Japan.

"Almost two decades ago in the course of Justice Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry (JMCI), a precious opportunity to conduct a DNA test, and to bring the remains of Netaji home to his beloved motherland, was sadly lost. According to the JMCI Report, the Renkoji authorities were not willing to allow a DNA test of the alleged remains. We can now affirm that



the JMCI Report misrepresented the stand taken by the Renkoji authorities," reads a joint statement issued by the Bose family.

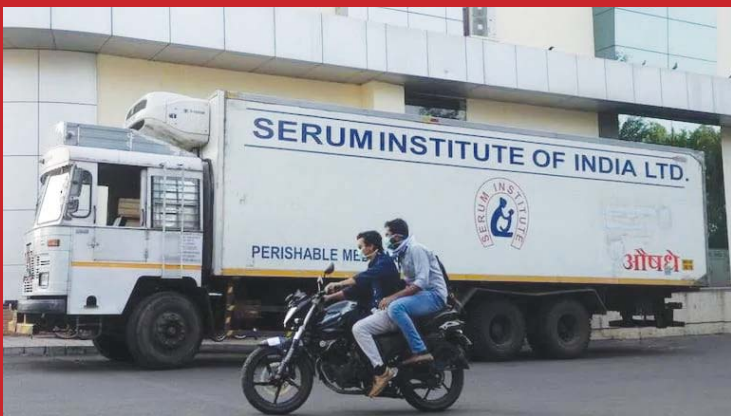
The Justice Mukherjee Commission had concluded that Netaji "did not die in the plane crash as alleged" on August 18, 1945, and "the ashes in the Japanese temple are not of Netaji". "In the name of the people of India, it is time to seize the opportunity missed by

Justice Mukherjee to conduct a DNA testing procedure on the reported remains of Netaji. This procedure would necessarily be preceded by a science-based confirmation that DNA testing is possible on the remains. There is every reason to believe that this entire process would be fully acceptable to and supported by the Renkoji Temple authorities, as well as by the Governments of both Japan and India," the statement said.

Chandra Kumar Bose, Netaji's grandnephew, has yet again appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah to accept the family's demand.

"On the eve of August 18, it's imperative to conduct a DNA test of the Renkoji remains to arrive at closure on the long-pending issue! It's the responsibility of the Government to take the case to its logical conclusion," he said.

SCHOTT, SII announce joint venture for pharmaceutical packaging



(News Agencies)-Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine producer and manufacturer of highly effective biologics, has bought a 50% stake in the Indian joint venture SCHOTT Kaisha from former co-owners Kairus Dadachanji and Shapoor Mistry. With this acquisition, Serum is securing its supply of high-quality pharma packaging amid rising global demand.

Adar Poonawalla, CEO of Serum Institute of India said, "Even the best medication can't reach the patient without the right packaging. Securing this supply chain is of strategic importance. SCHOTT is the perfect partner for us to do this because of their expertise and global network. As a longtime

customer, we use their vials, ampoules, and syringes to store our vaccines including Covishield. Working even closer together is in the best interest of global health."

SCHOTT is looking forward to working with the new partner. Dr Frank Heinrich, CEO SCHOTT says, "As India has steadily established its position as a global pharmaceutical hub, we are delighted to strengthen our footprint within the Indian pharma supply chain. We are looking forward to strong impulses from this partnership. It is an excellent example of shifting towards new cooperation models, with greater synergies between pharma manufacturing and packaging production."

Josh
India WebTV



Weekly Show
(Opinion,
News Analysis
& Commentary)



Susmita Ghosh

Deputy Managing Editor

www.youtube.com/c/joshindiatv



Biden's Afghanistan disaster calls into question the president's fitness to lead

In his campaign for president, Joe Biden made big foreign policy promises to the American people. He promised to "restore dignified leadership at home and respected leadership on the world stage" and "once more place America at the head of the table."

It was all talk. Just months into his presidency, Biden's failed leadership on the world stage has damaged America's reputation and emboldened our enemies to seize this opportunity of American humiliation and weakness.

We see the latest and most horrifying example of Biden's weakness in our rapid and chaotic exit from Afghanistan that has left thousands of American citizens – and tens of thousands more Afghans who risked their lives for us for years – at the mercy of the Taliban. We need a bipartisan and bicameral investigation into how this happened – and I've called on Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to immediately launch such an inquiry. This is a job for the United States Congress and we cannot afford to wait to get answers.

Over the past two decades, American and allied forces have driven terrorism in Afghanistan to the brink of extinction. Of course, there was always going to be a time for American forces to leave – but on our terms.

"Forever Wars" and nation building are not good options. We must be singularly focused on protecting American national security and our interests abroad. But the Biden administration's incompetent and haphazard withdrawal from Afghanistan has been nothing short of a disaster that undermines American national security and our interests abroad. This catastrophe has sent a clear signal to Communist China, the Russians, the Iranian mullahs, the Venezuelan dictatorship, and the illegitimate communist Cuban regime: the United States under President Biden is willing to abandon our people, our allies, and our interests.

In scenes reminiscent of Saigon in 1975, but worse, Americans and our allies around the globe watched in horror as the world's most powerful nation was simply incompetent and overwhelmed. Having removed our air assets and all our military bases in Afghanistan before we got our people out, the Biden administration left us with no leverage, no power to defend ourselves or deter our enemies. We did not leave on our own terms. The United

States was shamefully driven out of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

A 20-year war that took the lives of more than 2,300 American service members and wounded more than 20,000 others ended with the greatest country in the world running home with our tails between our legs. President Biden allowed the Taliban back into total power in spectacular fashion. Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations now know that we have no plan and worse, no will, to resist them. We are even willing to put ourselves in the position of relying on them to safeguard our own citizens trapped in their restored Islamist caliphate.

We needed to end our involvement in Afghanistan but the way Biden chose to do it, his failed withdrawal, leaves the United States reeling from its most stunning, unforced, and humiliating defeat in decades.

Since taking office, Biden has repeatedly given the world's dictators a free pass while placing the United States in positions of incredible vulnerability. That is why Biden's Afghanistan meltdown is so dangerous. His abject failure to execute a strategic withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan has told our enemies that the U.S. under President Biden will not stand up for itself, sending a signal to our allies like Israel, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, and South Korea that we will leave them out to dry.

President Biden's carelessness has made the world a more dangerous place. His failures have endangered America and our allies. Biden says there was no way to avoid this debacle, and he says the intelligence community agrees with that. We must have a full congressional investigation into this massive failure and why Biden made the decisions he made. This investigation must start right now.

Given the events of the last week, I hope our president is ok. I hope he is strong and healthy enough, at this crucial time, for this critical job. His refusal to stand up in front of the press and take questions is deeply troubling. We must discern whether this is incompetence on the part of his administration, or something far more serious. The American people deserve answers and, frankly, to know whether this president is truly fit to still lead the United States. As I said earlier this week, if he is not, the vice president, and cabinet must consider the 25th Amendment.

By Sen. Rick Scott

PM Modi Chairs United Nations Security Council Meeting India Reaches Global Heights

By Susmita Ghosh

August 2021 - A historical moment was created for India when the country has stepped on the 75th year of its Independence.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi presided over the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) debate meeting on August 9. With this, Narendra Modi has become the first-ever Indian prime minister to chair the prestigious UNSC meeting.

What's on India's agenda in this pivotal position? At the time of the presidency in UNSC, India focuses on three major areas - maritime security, peacekeeping and counter-terrorism. The topic of the key virtual meeting was a most important issue in recent times - 'Maritime Security' while taking into account international cooperation. The security over our oceans and waters. Why it's a big deal?

In this high participation meet, Narendra Modi highlighted several key points which are integral for maritime security. It includes but is not limited to free maritime trade, free from barriers, collective management of maritime threats, responsible maritime connectivity and so on.

He also suggested a peaceful settlement of the maritime dispute by International law, while preserving the maritime environment and resources. His speech raised questions on the Chinese marine activities in the South

China Sea, which often comes in a blatant disregard of the sovereignty of other countries.

Prime Minister has discussed the importance of a smooth flow in maritime trade as it can lead to prosperity for countries around the globe. According to him, the major challenge to the free flow of maritime trade is the misuse of the routes for piracy and terrorism, which can hurt the global economy too.

UNSC is a much-coveted place to make the voice heard for India, even though they are one of the non-permanent members of UNSC. Along with Brazil, Germany and Japan, they are campaigning for a permanent seat in UNSC. In recent times, New Delhi has described the post-World War II UNSC structure as old-fashioned, which needs urgent change.

The permanent members like the US, Britain, France and Russia expressed pro-India opinions in this regard, China is against this development. As they have a close association with India's political rival Pakistan, China moves to block India's upgradation time and time again. In the meeting that was arranged on video conference, several high-profile politicians, dignitaries, bureaucrats and policymakers were present. Besides, the Indian Prime Minister, the Presidents of Russia and Kenya, the Prime Minister of Vietnam and 10 ministers were present, out of which, seven were foreign ministers.

(Contd on page 37)



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Why Afghan Forces So Quickly Laid Down Their Arms

In the winter of 1989, as a journalist for the Times of London, I accompanied a group of mujahedeen fighters in Afghanistan's Ghazni province. At one point, a fortified military post became visible on the other side of a valley. As we got closer, the flag flying above it also became visible - the flag of the Afghan Communist state, which the mujahedeen were fighting to overthrow. "Isn't that a government post?" I asked my interpreter. "Yes," he replied. "Can't they see us?" I asked. "Yes," he replied. "Shouldn't we hide?" I squeaked.

"No, no, don't worry," he replied reassuringly. "We have an arrangement." I remembered this episode three years later, when the Communist state eventually fell to the mujahedeen; six years later, as the Taliban swept across much of Afghanistan; and again this week, as the country collapses in the face of another Taliban assault. Such "arrangements" - in which opposing factions agree not to fight, or even to trade soldiers in exchange for safe passage - are critical to understanding why the Afghan army today has

collapsed so quickly (and, for the most part, without violence). The same was true when the Communist state collapsed in 1992, and the practice persisted in many places as the Taliban advanced later in the 1990s. This dense web of relationships and negotiated arrangements between forces on opposite sides is often opaque to outsiders. Over the past 20 years, U.S. military and intelligence services have generally either not understood or chosen to ignore this dynamic as they sought to paint an

optimistic picture of American efforts to build a strong, loyal Afghan army. Hence the Biden administration's expectation that there would be what during the Vietnam War was called a "decent interval" between U.S. departure and the state's collapse. While the coming months and years will reveal what the U.S. government did and didn't know about the state of Afghan security forces prior to U.S. withdrawal, the speed of the collapse was predictable. That the U.S. government could not foresee - or, perhaps, refused to

admit - that beleaguered Afghan forces would continue a long-standing practice of cutting deals with the Taliban illustrates precisely the same naivete with which America has prosecuted the Afghanistan war for years. The central feature of the past several weeks in Afghanistan has not been fighting. It has been negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan forces, sometimes brokered by local elders. On Sunday, the Washington Post reported "a breathtaking series of negotiated surrenders by government forces" that resulted from more than a year of deal-making between the Taliban and rural leaders. In Afghanistan, kinship and tribal connections often take precedence over formal political loyalties, or at least create neutral spaces where people from opposite sides can meet and talk. Over the years, I have spoken with tribal leaders from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region who have regularly presided over meetings of tribal notables, including commanders on opposite sides. One of the key things discussed at such meetings is business, and the business very often involves heroin. When I was traveling in Afghanistan in the late 1980s, it was an open secret that local mujahedeen groups and government units had deals to share the local heroin trade.

Biden owns Afghanistan mess - he wasted time, ignored advice and now blames others



As the Biden administration faces yet another self-imposed crisis, they are once again falling on their favorite talking point: blame anyone but us. It's become a common refrain from the Biden administration. And one that usually has very little truth behind it. But here, when facing one of the worst international crises in years, those words are particularly pathetic and painful. It's been almost seven months since President Biden took

office. In that time, he made quick work of reversing dozens of President Trump's policies and positions, including Remain in Mexico, the asylum cooperation agreements with Central American countries, the Paris climate deal, and the Iran nuclear deal. Yet he claimed to have no choice but to move forward with the withdrawal outlined in the U.S.-Taliban agreement despite the severely deteriorating situation on the ground. Despite the fact that the agreement was

conditions-based - for a reason - and the Taliban had completely failed to hold up their side of the bargain. His decision was clearly political and not remotely based on the situation on the ground nor our national security interests. Not only because he chose the 20th anniversary of 9/11 for the withdrawal date - a move that likely caused the terrorists that targeted us to celebrate another victory - but because he and his staff have repeatedly cited public polling as the reason behind his decision. [CLICK HERE TO GET THE OPINION NEWSLETTER](#) In response, in May I wrote an op-ed with President Obama's ambassador to Afghanistan, Ryan Crocker, where we urged President Biden to immediately take critical steps to keep our embassy safe, to evacuate our people and our partners who were in harm's way, and to replace the vital intelligence capabilities we would be losing

once we were gone. Ambassador Crocker and I were not the only people sounding the alarm. Republicans and Democrats alike joined national security experts to plead with President Biden to ensure this withdrawal did not result in another Saigon. Over the next four months, as our calls for action intensified, the situation on the ground in Afghanistan was deteriorating further. The State Department and politicals at the White House continued to paint a rosy picture based on the pipedream of peace negotiations. The State Department and President Biden himself repeatedly assured us the Afghan military was "better trained, better equipped, and more competent in terms of conducting war" than the Taliban. We were told the peace negotiations would yield results, without any proof of that claim.

Of course, the assessment by the intelligence community and those within the Defense Department were much grimmer. To them, the question of the Taliban takeover was a question of when - not if. Stories began surfacing of the more realistic intelligence assessments of the security situation and the inevitability of the Taliban takeover. As recently as last week even, reports broke that the intelligence community believed the Taliban could topple Kabul within 30 days. At the same time, the Taliban had still not severed ties with Al Qaeda and was waging offensives against major population areas. And still, President Biden failed to address the pleas for him to take action, failed to put together a strategy to ensure we could get Americans and our partners out, and failed to adequately prepare for what everyone but him seemed to know was coming.

Afghanistan fiasco flips media against Biden - this should worry Dems



For Joe Biden, bad is quickly turning to worse.

A day after the president tried to defend his decision to wave the white flag in Afghanistan and assure a jittery America his government could manage the fallout, the scope of the disaster came into sharper focus.

An outbreak of the blame game is erupting among federal agencies trying to duck responsibility. Intelligence and defense officials are leaking that they warned the White House that withdrawing all American forces could lead to the sudden collapse of the Afghan military, but were ignored.

Perhaps most worrisome for a Democrat in the White House is that the usual media handmaidens are aggressively poking holes in Biden's preposterous assurances instead of defending him.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan experienced the change of the media winds when he was peppered with a score of tough questions in the briefing room. The consistent theme was serious doubt about the ability and claims of Biden and his team. One questioner captured the spirit by saying the chaos doesn't look like the "results of a competent administration."

When another reporter asked why Biden went to Camp David and even returned there after going to the White House for his Monday speech, Sullivan was forced to defend the president's work habits and insisted Joe was "deeply engaged" in the situation. Later, Sullivan admitted Biden had not talked to any foreign heads of state, which is shocking because many allies had troops working with the U.S., and most foreign nationals are presumably also desperate to get out of Afghanistan.

To be sure, the questions did not come with the tone of personal hostility that was routine during the Trump administration. But compared to the adulation Barack Obama got for his eight years and the gentle questions Biden got on the campaign trail and the early days of his presidency, this was something new.

Finally, the media were showing signs of holding a Democrat responsible for an obvious and tragic blunder.

One thing that became clear at

the news conference is that the administration is banking on the largess of the Taliban to allow the U.S. to carry out tens of thousands of evacuations from the Kabul airport.

That includes many American citizens who are not yet at the airport, Sullivan conceded, and would have to get there by going through numerous Taliban checkpoints.

Sullivan tried to deflect skepticism by saying, "Ultimately, it's going to be up to the Taliban to show who they are," then added, "The track record is not good."

At another point, he said he hoped the Taliban "was prepared to meet its obligations" on human rights and other issues to the "international community." What nonsense. Diplomatic understatement is one thing, but to soft-pedal the savagery of the Taliban is indefensible. And to suggest that finger-wagging from the popinjays in Brussels and the United Nations would have any impact is absurd.

And yet, that's where Biden has

put America and the fate of thousands: hoping that an Islamist terrorist group will play nice.

Not incidentally, that terrorist group is now armed to the teeth with American weapons it took from the Afghan army.

As to how it all went so wrong so fast, Sullivan repeated one of Biden's whoppers by claiming the administration "planned for all contingencies."

That doesn't pass the smell test, given that the lives of so many Americans and Afghans who worked with our military now hang in the balance. If there was a plan to handle that, where is it?

As it stands, the Taliban have the firepower to rain down death and destruction on the crowded airport, and there is little America could do to stop it.

While immediate life-and-death issues play out in Kabul, there are also long-term ramifications of Biden's calamitous decision to effectively turn Afghanistan over to terrorists. The first points to the reason America invaded 20 years ago.

The Kabul Escape And Fascinating Stories Behind Evac Missions

The gut-wrenching video of Afghan nationals running alongside, and some climbing, an American C-17 aircraft as it attempts a take-off from Kabul would be the Afghanistan equivalent of the photo of a CIA Bell 205 taking on evacuees from the US Embassy rooftop in Saigon in 1975. Both are iconic images of desperate people trying to escape to safer destinations. Behind each image is a story of twists and turns and political games that nations, sometimes not on the best of terms, play. I was the Assistant Chief of Air Staff looking after transport and helicopter operations of the Indian Air Force (IAF) between 2009 and 2011; my directorate was responsible for emergency evacuations and humanitarian assistance missions ordered by the government.

On 26 February 2010, terrorists attacked a guesthouse in Kabul where, among others, Indian Army medical and education corps personnel were staying. Eighteen people, including nine

Indians, were killed and many injured. The IAF was ordered to bring back the dead and injured. An IL-76 aircraft was positioned at Delhi for getting passports for the crew made on an emergency basis (that's a story for another time), as also for taking on replacements for those deceased and injured in the missions in Kabul. The Ministry of External Affairs was working alongside to get overflight clearance from Pakistan; a circuitous route (over the Arabian Sea and then Iran) avoiding our western neighbour would be very time consuming. The overflight clearance request requires names of the crew, passengers, passport details etc. - and it was communicated to Islamabad. Then came the agonising wait, which only stretched as more and more queries came on specific passengers. The Pakistanis didn't budge an inch when it came to some of the passengers, mainly military replacement personnel. Since saving lives was more important, those people were

offloaded and the aircraft took off. Unfortunately, a similar scene played out with passengers being brought back - so much for having a "friendly" neighbour.

This time around, as the Taliban took over Kabul, our C-17s actually took the longer Arabian Sea and Iran route to bring back our diplomats and other personnel. Whether this was due to a refusal by the Pakistanis to give overflight clearance, or we avoided asking altogether because of past experiences, is not known. But it brings to focus the intricacies involved when a military aircraft has to use the airspace of another nation. What if it has to transit the airspace of five nations to deliver relief material? The rule is the same - clearance is taken from each country for a specific aircraft and for specific days. If, for whatever reason - bad weather, aircraft unserviceability - even one country's entry-exit time cannot be adhered to, fresh clearance has to be taken all over again. When ethnic riots led to a humanitarian



Screengrab from video tweeted by @TOLnews

situation in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, an IL-76 was planned to overfly five nations to deliver relief material. It was a Thursday departure and our embassy in one of the countries (no names) was crying hoarse asking for details to be expedited. Why? Because in that country the clearance was personally given by the head of state, who could not be disturbed on the weekend and would be available only after 10 am on Sunday!

Military flights are game for political shenanigans too. Once, a Union Minister was scheduled to fly to China in an Air Force aircraft for a

regional conference. Word came to me from our VIP Squadron person responsible for getting visas that the Chinese embassy was insisting on a stapled visa for the captain of the flight as he was from Jammu and Kashmir which, per them, was "disputed territory". I spoke to the Joint Secretary in the Foreign Ministry on what the Chinese were up to and their embassy was told, in no uncertain terms, that the captain of the aircraft would not be changed and the visit would be cancelled if the visa was not given to this officer.

Rahul Gandhi's Wasted Cause In Attacking Twitter

Just under a week after it locked Rahul Gandhi's account on August 8, Twitter restored the Congress leader's handle.

Let's first understand the chronology of events and then dive into the nuances.

Mr. Gandhi had tweeted an image of him meeting the parents of a nine-year-old child who was allegedly raped before being killed in Delhi. The tweet was first withheld and then, Mr Gandhi's account was locked. This was followed by the locking of the accounts of 23 senior party leaders and 7 official handles along with that of over 5,000 Congress supporters (as per the party).

From what I know, as part of the appeal process via Twitter's India Grievance Channel, Mr Gandhi submitted a copy of the formal consent/authorisation letter to use the referenced image. The tweet is now withheld in India and the account access has been restored.

This entire episode raises a few questions:

What rules did Mr Gandhi violate? Was the locking of his account justified?

What led to the en-masse blocking of 5,000 Congress workers' Twitter accounts?

Is this an attack on the

democratic structure of India? Was it really under pressure from the union government that Twitter took such steps? Is Twitter taking political sides?

Let's try and answer these questions.

Past guidelines from courts have said that print and electronic media, and people using social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter etc., while giving information/circulating information relating to offences under section 376, 376-A, 376-B, 376-C, 376-D or 376-E of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and offences under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, shall not publish/discard following information in such a manner that the victim will be identified directly or indirectly:

i) The names of the parents or relatives of the victim.

ii) Relation of the accused with the victim.

iii) Residential/occupational/work address of the accused and the victim and the village at which the victim and/ or accused live.

iv) Occupation of the parents or other relations of the victim and place of work of the victim and accused/their parents or any other relative in such a manner that the victim will be identified.

v) If the victim is a student, name

of the school or college or any other educational institution or private coaching class or classes which the victim has joined for pursuing her hobbies such as music, drawing, dance, stitching, cooking etc.

vi) Details of family background of the victim.

Over the past few years, several leaders and government officials have violated these norms and had to apologize. The most common violation has been disclosing the identity of the rape victims.

So, to answer my first question - The locking of Mr Gandhi's account was as per established rules and globally-accepted norms.

Mr. Gandhi could have chosen to simply delete the contentious tweet and then posted the same image with blurred faces and that would have prevented the issue from getting escalated. He chose otherwise, using his discretion or the advice of those around him. Coming to the second issue: the temporary locking of one account is fine - but 5,000 accounts? Did Twitter want to muzzle the voice of India's biggest opposition party?

Well, we all have read or at least heard about the usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by big



technology firms. Twitter also uses AI for detection of bot and impersonator accounts. Congress workers and leaders started to change their profile pictures and names to that of 'Rahul Gandhi' to show support for their leader. An automated AI bot identified these as potential impersonator accounts and locked them. It was not as if the entire team at Twitter headquarters was sitting and blocking accounts of people belonging to a certain political party in India.

The third and the biggest concern in this entire episode has been about whether Twitter bowed down to the central government. In the current age of real-time information dissemination, Twitter has replaced news wire services. Despite of other platforms having

more users, Twitter is what feeds the news cycle, and thus, it is very important for it to be unbiased and create a level playing field.

It needs to be kept in mind here that over the past few years, Twitter has come to loggerheads several time with the ruling establishment in India. Things hit a low when BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra tweeted screenshots of a 'Congress toolkit' which was marked by Twitter as Manipulated Media. The Congress alleged that the toolkit was fake and forged letters were used in the screenshots shared by Mr. Patra and the party raised the issue with Twitter. An FIR was also filed against some BJP leaders for retweeting the same.

A "Yes Or No" Question For Modi On Partition



By Rajmohan Gandhi

Since the mind can dream up anything, I am imagining a press conference where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is taking questions and I am present as a reporter.

I ask: "Calling for a 'Partition Horrors Remembrance Day', you tweeted, 'Millions of our sisters and brothers were displaced and many lost their lives due to mindless hate and violence.' My question is, are displaced or killed Muslims

included in our sisters and brothers?"

It will be a new day if Mr. Modi answers this question with a clear "Yes". Not that he needs a press conference to do so. He can issue a simple statement, or send another short tweet, saying, "Yes, Muslims displaced or killed because of mindless hate and violence are also to be remembered."

I don't expect him to do anything of the kind. In fact, his tweet has

already activated champions of Hindu victimhood. For them, remembrance of horrors only means underlining cruelty at Muslim hands.

Still, the tweet gives Indians believing in the sacredness of human life - of the lives of all humans - something of a chance. Teachers and parents can tell youngsters, quoting the Prime Minister, that horrors are produced by mindless hate and violence.

Going beyond this, some can remind young and old alike that in 1946-47, there were people who spoke the blunt truth to their own side. Putting their lives on the line, they championed defenceless children, women and men of every group. Thanks to such people, many lives were saved, the equal value of all lives was underlined, and our Constitution entrenched this equality. Mahatma Gandhi may be the best-known among them, but he wasn't alone. In

Bengal, and also in Punjab, where carnage reached unspeakable levels in 1947, 'ordinary' human beings protected neighbours and sent them to safety. Compassionate, courageous, and ingenious, these heroes - Hindu, Muslim and Sikh - were more than a handful. There were tens of thousands of them. Anyone who researches that period discovers that if evil stalked our soil in 1946-47, nobility too walked bravely on it.

Certainly, this was what I learnt when I researched the Partition story for my study of Punjab's history from the death of Aurangzeb to the viceroyalty of Mountbatten. Other scholars too have marked this amazing insaniyat that mercifully protected lives during the insanity of 1946-47. Any "remembrance" that excludes this insaniyat would be inadequate. And any 'remembrance' that excludes

horrors faced by the 'other' side would not only sound hollow, it would trigger fresh rage. On the other hand, a remembrance that takes an honest and complete look at the entirety of the violence of 1946-47 can move us forward. It could even become a step towards reconciliation within India and between the nations of South Asia. Truth and reconciliation go together. This is what the world learnt in the 1990s from Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and South Africa as a whole. If 'remembrance' results in a truthful study of the entire sequence of riots and killings on the subcontinent from August 16, 1946, when Jinnah's "Direct Action" call triggered violence in Kolkata, to Gandhi's assassination in Delhi on January 30, 1948, not only scholarship, but the cause of peace would gain.



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A pathbreaking ruling on equality

The Supreme Court (SC)'s interim ruling allowing women to sit for the National Defence Academy (NDA) entrance exam for entry into the Army is a game-changer in eliminating gender discrimination. Opening NDA to women is long due. Armed forces must evolve



The Supreme Court (SC)'s interim ruling allowing women to sit for the National Defence Academy (NDA) entrance exam for entry into the Army is a game-changer in eliminating gender discrimination. The court will hear the matter again on September 8 for final orders. The current landmark ruling is a logical step forward after the SC's powerful intervention in 2020 ordering the Centre to grant permanent commission to women in the Navy and Army.

Women are already being recruited through the Officers' Training Academy and Short Service Commission. Therefore, shutting off entry through the NDA is inconsistent with the often stated claim that the armed forces have evolved on gender. The apex court has been consistently critical of the discriminatory attitude when it comes to giving women equal

opportunities in the Army. On Wednesday, the SC bench acerbically observed: "Don't make (the) judiciary intervene every time. Do it yourself rather than inviting orders from the court. You must accept the broad principle of gender neutrality and structure it to your peculiar set-up." At present, there are only 0.56% women officers in the Army, 1.08% in the

Air Force and 6.5% in the Navy - in the 1.4 million-strong armed forces. Arguments to keep women out of the Army - low acceptance in leadership roles, physical constraints, vulnerability to sexual and other harassment, or lack of infrastructure - actually reflect institutional biases which need to be corrected. Women are victims of this mindset and must

not be penalised for it. Since the induction of women into the Army in 1992 as officers, there has also been little evidence of women seeking special treatment.

The very nature of warfare has changed. To be sure, physical fitness remains a prerequisite for both men and women, but technical expertise, decision-making skills and mental resilience are equally important, none of which are governed by gender constraints. If NDA needs to change the curriculum, create new infrastructure and provide for separate training standards to facilitate gender inclusion, then it must do so to ensure that the court's directive is carried out in letter and spirit. At the root of all the SC's rulings on women in the Army lies the principle of equality. This is not only important to meet a cherished constitutional value but will also make armed forces better and stronger. The court has opened yet another door to gender inclusion - the government and forces must embrace the change.

The Centre must shed its ambiguity on Pegasus

The Centre is tying itself up in knots to evade the central question in this case - did the government of India procure Pegasus, and did it authorise its use?



The Centre has adopted an opaque approach to the Pegasus revelations. In Parliament, the new information technology minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's defence rested on the fact that there has been no illegal interception. Responding to a written question, the ministry of defence said it had not procured any such software -

thus washing its hands of the affair, but this left open the question of whether other government departments and agencies had done so. Another ministry cried off a question claiming the matter was sub judice. And with the Centre avoiding a discussion on the issue as demanded by the Opposition, the entire monsoon session was disrupted. In the Supreme Court, which is hearing a bunch of petitions on the matter, the Centre denied the allegations in the petitions, saying they were based on "conjectures, surmises, unsubstantiated media reports or incomplete or uncorroborated material". It also offered to set up a committee of experts to go into all aspects of the issue. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, on behalf of the Centre, then used the national security argument, pleading that any public disclosure on whether or

not the software was used would harm the security of the State, enable terrorists to take preventive steps, and said that the government was willing to divulge details to a committee. The court has issued a notice to the Centre and will take up the matter in 10 days again. The Centre is tying itself up in knots to evade the central question in this case - did the government of India procure Pegasus, and did it authorise its use? To suggest that disclosing this will help terrorists isn't a smart argument, for they probably already operate based on the assumption that the Indian State has this technology. More importantly, the State owes an answer to citizens, who do not constitute a threat to it, about whether there has been an invasion of privacy, a fundamental right. The government must shed the ambiguity even if the answer is an

Walking the talk on climate commitments

India has approved the ratification of the Kigali Amendment to the 1989 Montreal Protocol. Ratifying the amendment signifies that India will compete for low-global warming potential refrigerants, which can spur innovation and attract international investments

The Union Cabinet, on Wednesday, approved the ratification of the Kigali Amendment to the 1989 Montreal Protocol, which aimed at protecting the earth from ozone-destroying chemicals such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). The Protocol led to the replacement of CFCs with hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), which do not destroy the ozone layer but cause global warming. The 2016 Kigali Amendment aims to phase-down HFCs, a set of 19 gases used by the air-

conditioning and refrigerant industry, by restricting their production and consumption. It is estimated that a complete phase-out of HFCs by 2050 would prevent about 0.5 degree Celsius rise in global temperatures by the end of this century. This is crucial to achieve the target of restraining the increase in global temperatures to a maximum of 2 degree Celsius from pre-industrial times. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report

says the average temperature has risen by about 1.1 degree Celsius, leading to back-to-back extreme climate events across the world. As experts have pointed out, ratifying the amendment signifies that India will compete for low-global warming potential refrigerants, which can spur innovation and attract international investments. It will help the country achieve its climate goals and cooling commitments. India already has a Cooling Action Plan, which



sets domestic targets for cooling efficiency and refrigerants. The ratification will also prevent imports that utilise highly potent HFCs. On Wednesday, environment minister Bhupender Yadav also met COP-26 president-designate Alok Sharma, and reiterated that India is committed to the UN

Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement. On Thursday, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that India is on track to meet its Paris goals. The ratification of the Kigali Amendment is yet another strong signal that India is ready to walk the talk on its climate commitments.



By focusing on a policy agenda at Red Fort, Prime Minister Narendra Modi did well. The challenge is in execution

In his 88-minute speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort, to mark India's 75th Independence Day, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi weaved in India's past, present and future. By recognising the entire spectrum of India's freedom fighters - including Jawaharlal Nehru, whose legacy the ruling party is uncomfortable with - the PM underlined that India's struggle for freedom was a collective enterprise and each citizen, known and unknown, deserved credit. By declaring

August 14 as the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day - the formal announcement was made on Saturday - the PM was right to acknowledge the suffering and grief that millions underwent at what should have been a moment of unadulterated joy. But while India needs to do more to memorialise its past, it is important that the memory of Partition serves as a reminder of the perils of the politics of hate and religious division and does not end up aggravating it. As is the right of the head of the

government, PM Modi sought to highlight the improvement in governance in the past seven years, with a focus on welfare delivery. He also dealt with the pandemic - praising India's vaccination programme and locally-manufactured vaccines, while acknowledging there were difficulties and mourning the loss of those who succumbed to the infection. He defended the government's record on agriculture when farm protests continue to rage against new legal reforms, made the small

farmer the face of Indian agriculture, and highlighted the need to focus on energy, manufacturing, infrastructure, innovation and technology as sectors that needed a boost in the next 25 years. No one can dispute the need to combine enhanced agri-productivity, leverage the new economy, and work for equity as a three-pronged road map. The challenge, of course, is translating this vision into reality - especially at a time when the government has been less than

enthusiastic about a fiscal stimulus to tide over the current crisis and has embarked on (much-needed) reforms without adequate consultation. A key theme in the PM's speech was the need to liberate citizens from the overbearing hand of the State, especially by removing administrative hurdles. This bureaucratic and legal clean-up is necessary, but the government also needs to recognise that liberty extends to the political realm. Ensuring the ease of living for citizens also requires the State to allow them to express and organise themselves, without fear. Indeed, that is the essence of freedom. A more prosperous, a more harmonious, a more equal, a more just, and a more free India must be the goal for 2047.

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A kinder, gentler Taliban?

The fall of Kabul to the Taliban is being compared, ad nauseam, to the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese in 1975. Both retreats certainly share some common features -- the botched, chaotic evacuation, the abandonment of many US allies on the ground, and the humiliation of the American superpower. But a closer analogue to what is likely to happen in Afghanistan during the coming weeks is to look at what the Taliban did the last time they swept into power in Kabul in September 1996. Then, the Taliban imposed their "Islamic Emirate" on the population. While this was not the "caliphate" that was declared by ISIS in Iraq almost two decades later, it was similar enough, not least because the leader of the Taliban, anointed himself "the Commander of the Faithful," which immodestly claimed not only the leadership of the Taliban, but of all Muslims everywhere. The Taliban imposed their ultra-purist vision of Islam on much of the country. Women had to wear the burqa and stay at home unless accompanied by a male relative.

Music, television and even kite flying were banned. There was no independent Afghan media; only Radio Shariat that blared Taliban propaganda.



In an unsettling echo of how the Nazis treated the Jews, the Taliban forced the country's miniscule Hindu population to wear distinctive clothing.

These edicts were enforced by the religious police of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.

I witnessed black-turbaned vigilantes roaming Kabul's streets like wraiths dispensing their ferocious brand of "Islamic" justice. Curfew started at 9 p.m.,

and by 8 p.m. the streets were deserted except for the young Taliban soldiers who stood at every traffic circle, carefully checking passing vehicles. Some of the Talibs wore kohl, a black eyeliner, which was particularly noteworthy since women were banned from using cosmetics.

In Kabul, one of the few diversions available were the well-attended public executions in the former soccer stadium. The victims, including women, were stoned to

death or shot in the head.

Vahid Mojdeh, a former Taliban official, noted in his memoir that, "the Taliban were ruthless torturers, their most commonly used technique was beating people with electric cables."

In interviews I conducted with Taliban leaders before 9/11, they defended keeping women at home and shrouded in the burqa by saying these were simply the cultural norms of Afghan culture. But what the Taliban didn't

acknowledge was that these were really the social norms of the Pashtun ethnic group, which made up pretty much the entire leadership of their movement.

For the other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, such as Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks, and the inhabitants of the larger cities, particularly Kabul, Taliban policies were imports from another culture.

The Taliban called it the rule of sharia, Islamic law. In their view, once sharia ruled, Afghans would become virtuous and thus the perfect society would be created. But the Taliban had no real policy to govern. They presided over the total collapse of what remained of the Afghan economy following two decades of war. A doctor I spoke to in Kabul in 1999 said he earned only six dollars a month.

When they were in power before 9/11, the Taliban were pariahs on the world stage. Only three countries recognized the movement of religious warriors, because of their treatment of women, dismal human rights record and their provision of safe haven to al Qaeda. When Osama bin Laden was forced out of his refuge in Sudan in 1996, he flew to what he hoped to be a new haven, Afghanistan.

America has abandoned the women of Afghanistan

The United States has utterly betrayed Afghan women and girls. As the Americans leave Afghanistan, Afghan forces collapse and the Taliban again grab power, the United States is looking at more than \$2 trillion spent on two decades of war that killed 47,000 Afghan civilians, 69,000 Afghan military and police, and nearly 6,300 Americans, according to the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, and asking: What was it for?

The Taliban takeover seems likely to return Afghanistan to its pre-9/11 days of fundamentalism, oppression and fanatical misogyny. But one thing is different now: Afghanistan's women tasted freedom in the last 20 years, and took it upon themselves to

rebuild their country.

Afghan women have been used as political pawns and treated more as symbols than humans by powerful people (mostly men) on all sides of the conflict -- too many of them American leaders who worked against women's rights at home but laid claim to feminism when it helped them justify a war, as well as the Afghan religious zealots who felt entitled to define "culture" so that it served their interests and wrote Afghan women out of their own stories.

Now, no one has more to lose than Afghanistan's women. And no one is owed a greater debt. They aren't going to get their deserved honor from the brutal and miserable fundamentalists taking over their country. Which is why the US and every other nation that participated in this

war must open its doors and welcome whichever women, and their families, want to leave Afghanistan and have a shot at a safe life.

After the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in the mid-1990s, feminists the world over began sounding the alarm about the group, and pointing to the US's role in arming and funding the mujahedeen, from which the Taliban sprung, in their war against the Soviet army.

A vicious dictatorship, the Taliban imposed one of the world's strictest regimes of gender apartheid, legally rendering women and girls as something less than human: banning them from leaving the house without a male guardian, closing girls' schools, barring women from work, shrouding them in long burqas with mesh cages over



their faces to make them invisible and their bodies identical, one to the next.

Women were publicly humiliated and beaten if they didn't comply. With music, television, dancing and just about every form of human pleasure banned by this barbaric regime, the Taliban offered entertainment in the form of public executions carried out in a former soccer stadium, hanging the severed limbs of accused thieves and adulterers

from the goal posts.

The objections of feminists and human rights advocates were largely ignored by American politicians, and by Americans generally -- Afghanistan wasn't exactly a top news story or topic of interest.

After George W. Bush was put in the White House via a Supreme Court decision, he launched his own kind of war on women, scaling back women's rights at home and abroad



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The buck stops with Biden

but Trump's role in Afghanistan debacle is a doozy

The collapse of the Afghan government and the blindingly fast recapture of the country by the Taliban is a calamity for the Afghan people. This is what needs to remain at the forefront, above any other consideration of what is occurring. Instead, the laying of blame and the squirming away from responsibility has quickly begun. It has swelled in tandem with the tide of the Taliban's rout of Kabul and the rush of desperate, anguished Afghans trying to flee their darkening future. There's no question that much of the fault lies with President Joe Biden. He made the final decision to withdraw. He chose to abide by a disastrous agreement crafted under the previous administration; moved the troops out with obviously poor planning for contingencies, and is the president under whose watch the two-decade war ended in a humiliating rush for exits for the US and NATO, as the previous regime took control.

But many of those suggesting it is all Biden's doing would do well to keep quiet, unless they want to also speak out to acknowledge their own responsibility -- their own guilt.

No one is surprised that former President Donald Trump was quick with hyperbole designed to deflect from his role here, as he suggested in a statement that Biden should resign. And it was easy to anticipate that Trump's boastful former secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, who had delusions about the Taliban turning into an anti-al Qaeda force, couldn't resist gloating, claiming things would be different if the former administration were still in office.

In truth, Trump and his team helped set the stage for this disaster. Again, the

events of recent days were Biden's show. He cannot shift blame on Trump. But this failure is in no small part the result of Trump and his crew's actions. Also sharing the blame are the two prior presidents. President George W. Bush launched the Afghan war after the Taliban hosted Osama bin Laden and refused to turn him over after 9/11. But Bush quickly diverted attention to the invasion of Iraq -- adding it as another front in the "war on terror." Just as the Afghan campaign shifted from seeking to uproot al Qaeda to trying to remake the country -- a much more ambitious goal -- Washington's attention waned.

Barack Obama, for his part, tried to have it both ways. He wanted out, but he didn't want to be seen to lose, so he sent more troops, while simultaneously, counterproductively, announcing the deadline (later rescinded) for their withdrawal.

But since Trump is so vocal about Biden's failing, we must look at his role in this tragedy.

And it's a doozy.

Trump came to office promising to end the war. In characteristic fashion, he acted so impulsively and with such lack of discipline, that he single-handedly undercut the so-called "peace" negotiations in Doha, Qatar, between the Taliban and the United States that concluded last year.

More on that in a moment. But, first, let's note that the man leading the current Taliban offensive, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar -- the jihadi cleric who may become the next president of Afghanistan or, formally, the Emir of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan -- was being held in Pakistani and might still

be there were it not for Trump.

In 2018, the Trump team asked Pakistan to free Baradar so he could travel to Doha for talks.

In Trump's eyes, Baradar may have looked a bit like North Korea's Kim Jong Un, the leader he could try to sweet talk and coax, showering him with praise while extracting essentially nothing from him, while drawing attention to himself and his theatrical "boldness".

In 2019, Trump wanted to bring the Taliban to Camp David, and he wanted to do it just in time for the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. His advisers persuaded him that bringing the leaders of a group responsible for killing thousands -- including thousands of Americans -- and still engaged in regular attacks against Afghan civilians, was not the best of ideas. Trump relentlessly, cluelessly sabotaged peace talks, proclaiming his determination to pull out, and unexpectedly announcing troop reductions. His tweets became a major obstacle to negotiations, as he declared he was withdrawing US forces, the only leverage of US negotiators, without obtaining any real concessions from the Taliban. In February 2020, Trump unveiled an agreement with the Taliban. The deal was an utter embarrassment, one of the worst ever negotiated by an American president. Under its terms, the United States not only agreed to withdraw by May 2021, it also committed itself to obtaining the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners, and another thousand in subsequent months, fortifying the Taliban's fighting force. The US also promised to help lift all international sanctions against the Taliban.

Is Pegasus, a scandalous rise of a surveillance state in India?

By Susmita Ghosh

The Pegasus controversy is a burning topic in the Indian political scenario of late. The top brass from the opposition is attacking the government outright, for basic human rights violations and unlawful monitoring. Simultaneously, the Government is dodging the attacks for the snooping, as the Ministry of Defense claims of having no transaction with NSO, the company that built and sold Pegasus. Pegasus, a spyware, one of the most advanced and dangerous in the line-up. It can affect devices and spies on the victim. Even more sophisticated iOS devices are not safe from these attacks. It does so, by transferring data to a master server unlawfully. The NSO Group or the Q Cyber Technologies is a veteran of Israeli intelligence agencies. They are the leaders in cyber intelligence and hence claim that they only sell their service to 'vetted foreign governments' worldwide. Amnesty International first documented the use of 'network injections' in its October 2019 report. Consequently, the attackers installed the spyware on the system without direct interaction with the end-user. Pegasus can pull off such zero-click installations in various ways. One such over-the-air (OTA) technique is to send a push message covertly that makes the target device load the spyware. This happens with the Target being unaware of the installation over which he/she has no control. The Israeli spyware has been exposed to have targeted hundreds of phones in India. According to the legal terms, the leaked data should be a matter of global inquiry. India's BJP government has been a "Holocaust denier", describing it all as "fake news". They have been blatantly lying so far that one of them has bought the Pegasus spyware from the Israeli company. PM Modi has pushed himself into a corner, assuming that some retired security official might go public someday, on India's use of Pegasus. They have been contradictory in acknowledging its use would not even break the Official Secrets Act though, as the government itself had confessed in parliament that some of the countries use the spyware legally too. BJP's Ravi Shankar Prasad just stopped himself from saying that India also had used spyware, which otherwise seems to be an open secret. There is a high probability that the ruling party in India may try to stabilise the use of Pegasus in the domestic scenario. However, the saving grace, is the global political and global pressure, mounting against both the NSO Group and Israel. There is a growing universal demand for a suspension on the use of Pegasus. The democratic credentials of PM and his government are bound to come under a cloud more, if there is no proper resolution. To reveal the truth regarding the use of Pegasus, both nationally and globally, it is only possible through a genuine investigation. In journalistic approaches, there is a limitation of the resource. It can point to a bigger offence in India as well. If the Indian Government wants to bring credibility and clarity of intent in their action, they should take up the challenge to probe further. It is a vital matter now, else it will impact the very core of democracy and human rights. Several democratic governments around the globe are making the right moves. It remains to be seen if India will follow suit or not.

Pak terror groups now

present in Kabul, finds Indian assessment



(News Agencies)-With the Taliban emerging as the dominant force in Afghanistan, including capital Kabul, according to Indian assessment Pakistan based terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have made their presence in parts of the country. According to sources, "Pakistani terror groups like LeT have built check posts in some parts of Kabul. There have been reports of looting in Afghanistan's

villages".

Sources pointed out that it's too early to say anything since "assumptions can go wrong". The state of flux in Afghanistan after the fall of the previous Ghani government and the Taliban

entering into the capital, the big question is what next in terms of the governance structure.

Sources highlighted that "Afghanistan could become the epicentre of Islamic radicalism, which could have a state which

is recognized. IS also had territory but that was geographically far". While the Indian government's priority is bringing back its nationals, the political development in Afghanistan is also dominating the Indian government's thought process on the crisis.

India has been hoping for an inclusive government in Kabul with sources saying that it is "not dominated by Pashtuns". So far, no power-sharing pact has been agreed to with leaders like Dr Abdullah Abdullah or Hamid Karzai. On Tuesday, Abdul Ghani Baradar reached Kandahar, the traditional capital of the Taliban. And while this development is taking place Amrullah Saleh, former vice president of the country declared himself as the president. Asked how does India see the Taliban as a political force, the sources said, "India's conduct depends on how other democracies deal with Taliban". While no one has recognised the Taliban, Beijing has been sending feelers and other regional countries have had contacts with the grouping. Taliban off course has been regular in Islamabad and in the past few months has been visiting Tehran, Moscow and Beijing for legitimacy.

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Biden, Johnson discuss Afghanistan on call, agree to hold G7 meeting

(News Agencies)-US President Joe Biden spoke with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday on the situation in Afghanistan and they agreed to hold a virtual G7 leaders' meeting next week to discuss a common strategy and

Democrat, to stick to the troop withdrawal deal struck by his Republican predecessor Donald Trump has stirred widespread criticism at home and among US allies.

The United States and Western allies resumed evacuating diplomats and civilians on Tuesday, the day after scenes of chaos at Kabul airport as Afghans thronged the runway. As they rush to evacuate, foreign powers are assessing how to respond to the transformed situation on the ground after Afghan forces melted away in just days, with what many had predicted as

the likely fast unraveling of women's rights.

A Downing Street spokesperson said Johnson in the call with Biden "stressed the importance of not losing the gains made in Afghanistan over the last 20 years, of protecting ourselves against any emerging threat from terrorism and of continuing to support the people of Afghanistan," a Downing Street spokesperson said.



approach, the White House said.

The two leaders "discussed the need for continued close coordination among allies and democratic partners on Afghanistan policy going forward, including ways the global community can provide further humanitarian assistance and support for refugees and other vulnerable Afghans," the White House said in a statement.

The decision by US President Joe Biden, a

Taliban stop exports, imports from India: FIEO



(News Agencies)-The Taliban have stopped the movement of cargo through the transit routes of Pakistan, thereby stopping exports, imports from the country, the FIEO Director General said

The Federation of Indian Export Organisation (FIEO) on Wednesday said the Taliban-who on Sunday seized control of Afghanistan's capital Kabul after over two decades again-have stopped all imports and exports with India.

Dr Ajay Sahai, Director General of FIEO said the Taliban have stopped the movement of cargo through the transit routes of

Pakistan, thereby stopping exports, imports from the country, news agency ANI reported.

Taliban advances test Afghan forces' morale as the US l...

"We keep a close watch on developments in Afghanistan. Imports from there come through the transit route of Pakistan. As of now, the Taliban has stopped the movement of cargo to Pakistan, so virtually imports have stopped," Sahai said.

The Director General of FIEO said India is not only one of the largest trade partners of Afghanistan but also having a sizeable investment in the country.

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Nepal govt brings ordinance that allows for split of political parties



Nepal's Sher Bahadur Deuba-led government on Wednesday passed an ordinance that allows a split in a political party with the support of just 20 percent of central committee members or parliamentary party members.

This was after President Bidya Devi Bhandari signed the ordinance by amending the Political Party Act.

The Cabinet's move came a day after the parliament was prorogued. Bhandari ended the monsoon session of the parliament, on Monday, upon the request of the ruling government.

Earlier, the Political Parties Act had provision that any group can register as a new party if it can show it has support of 40 percent members of the central committee and the parliamentary party. If both, the central committee and the parliamentary parties could not get 40 percent members, the office-bearers or MPs who separated from any party could lose their posts.

Now, with the ordinance signed, any group can form a party with the support 20 percent members. The ordinance is aimed to benefit the Madhav Kumar Nepal-Jhalanath Khanal faction of CPN-UML, whose support is deciding factor for the survival of Deuba-led government. It has been over a month, since the government was formed and the prime minister is yet to form a cabinet. One of the major reason behind the delay of the formation of the cabinet is that Deuba was trying to bring Nepal faction into the government. Since, the Nepal faction of UML currently lacks 40 per cent support in both the parliamentary party and the central committee, the government is said to have brought the ordinance to facilitate the UML's split. Now, Nepal faction can split the party without losing parliamentary seats and form a new party of their own. The faction will later extend their support to the government. The main opposition CPN-UML has now officially split, with Nepal faction deciding to register a new political party and is likely to name it 'CPN-UML Socialist'.

Death toll since Myanmar coup tops 1,000, says activist group



(News Agencies)-The death toll as a result of Myanmar's Feb. 1 coup topped 1,000 on Wednesday, according to an official of the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (AAPP) activist group, which has been recording killings by security forces.

A spokesman for the ruling junta did not respond to a call to request comment. The military authorities have previously said the AAPP figures, widely cited by international organisations, are exaggerated.

The army has also said scores of members of the security forces have been killed. The AAPP does not include them in its count.

"According to AAPP records, 1,001 innocent people have been killed," AAPP secretary Tate Naing told Reuters. "The actual number of victims is much higher."

The Southeast Asian country has sunk into chaos since the coup, with protests continuing daily, insurgencies flaring in border regions and widespread strikes that have severely

damaged the economy.

The army overthrew elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, alleging irregularities in an election swept by her National League for Democracy party in November 2020. The then electoral commission and international monitors said the army accusations were wrong.

The military authorities say their seizure of power should not be called a coup because it was in line with the constitution.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's statue vandalised in Pakistan's Lahore

(News Agencies)-A Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) worker desecrated Maharaja Ranjit Singh's monument at Pakistan's Lahore Fort.

This is the third time the Maharaja's monument has been vandalised at the high-security Lahore Fort complex. The accused could be seen screaming slogans, breaking the arm of the statue, and removing Singh's bust from the horse and tossing it on the ground before being dragged by another guy, as per the video that has gone viral. The TLP activist has been arrested by the Punjab police, the Express Tribune newspaper reported. The Lahore Fort's administration said that strict action would be taken against the accused.



Pakistan's information & Broadcasting minister tweeted the video and said "Shameful this bunch of illiterates are really dangerous for Pakistan image in the world".

"These are symptoms of a sick mindset. This is an attempt to undermine Pakistan's assessment," he was quoted as saying in the report. The nine-foot

tall statue, made of cold bronze, shows the Sikh emperor sitting on a horse with a sword in hand in complete Sikh attire. In June of this year, the statue was revealed. This isn't the first time the statue has been vandalised.

Last year, the statue's arm was shattered in Lahore. According to Geo News, it was also harmed in August 2019 by two young guys.

In Taliban's 7-day march to power, a stunning string of wins

In just seven days

Any lingering dreams of a free Afghanistan died. Here's how the takeover happened.

As last week dawned, many clung to hope that the Taliban could be held back, though key trade routes had been seized, border crossings overtaken and swaths of remote areas clutched. But then, in just a week, militants won city after city, toppled the government and grabbed the grand prize of Kabul. On its streets, ads with women in Western clothes were covered in white paint, while men in jeans and T-shirts rushed to change into traditional tunics. At the U.S. embassy, staff raced to destroy documents as helicopters shuttled away diplomats. Fingers once splashed with purple ink - residue of voting, a badge of democracy - now clenched tickets seeking exit, and frantically punched ATMs to withdraw life savings. All in seven days.

"The only thing people are thinking about is how to survive here or how to escape," said Aisha Khurram, a 22-year-old headed to class Sunday at Kabul University before being turned back, unsure whether she would ever be able to return, or if females will once again be barred from school. "The only thing we have is our God." Even for a country scarred by generations of warfare, it was an astonishing week.

MONDAY - The week dawns with news that insurgents claimed the northern cities of Aybak and Sar-e Pul. In some districts, pro-government forces surrender without a fight. In others, where firefights sprout, desperate residents are forced from their homes, trudging hundreds of kilometers on foot in exodus. "We walked with slippers, didn't have the chance to wear our shoes," says Bibi Ruqia, who left northern Takhar province for Kabul after a bomb hit her house. "We had to escape." The fall of Aybak and Sar-e Pul pleases the Taliban

fighters; afterward, they are seen on video relishing their victory outside one of the government buildings they now controlled. But Americans and the Afghan troops they spent years training had reasons to take heart: The cities were just the fourth and fifth provincial capitals to crumble. Twenty-nine more remained.

TUESDAY - In the sparkling Qatari capital of Doha, American envoy Zalmay Khalilzad arrives with a warning to the Taliban: Any gains made by force would be met with international condemnation and assure their status as global pariahs. The effectiveness of the diplomacy is diminished, though, by Taliban forces' push into the western city of Farah. They are seen in front of the provincial governor's office. As the United States' self-imposed Aug. 31 deadline to withdraw its troops nears, the Taliban steadily gains ground while hundreds of thousands are displaced. Kabul's parks swell with the newly homeless, while the United Nations releases tallies of civilian deaths and injuries they know would only grow. "The real figures," says U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet, "will be much higher."

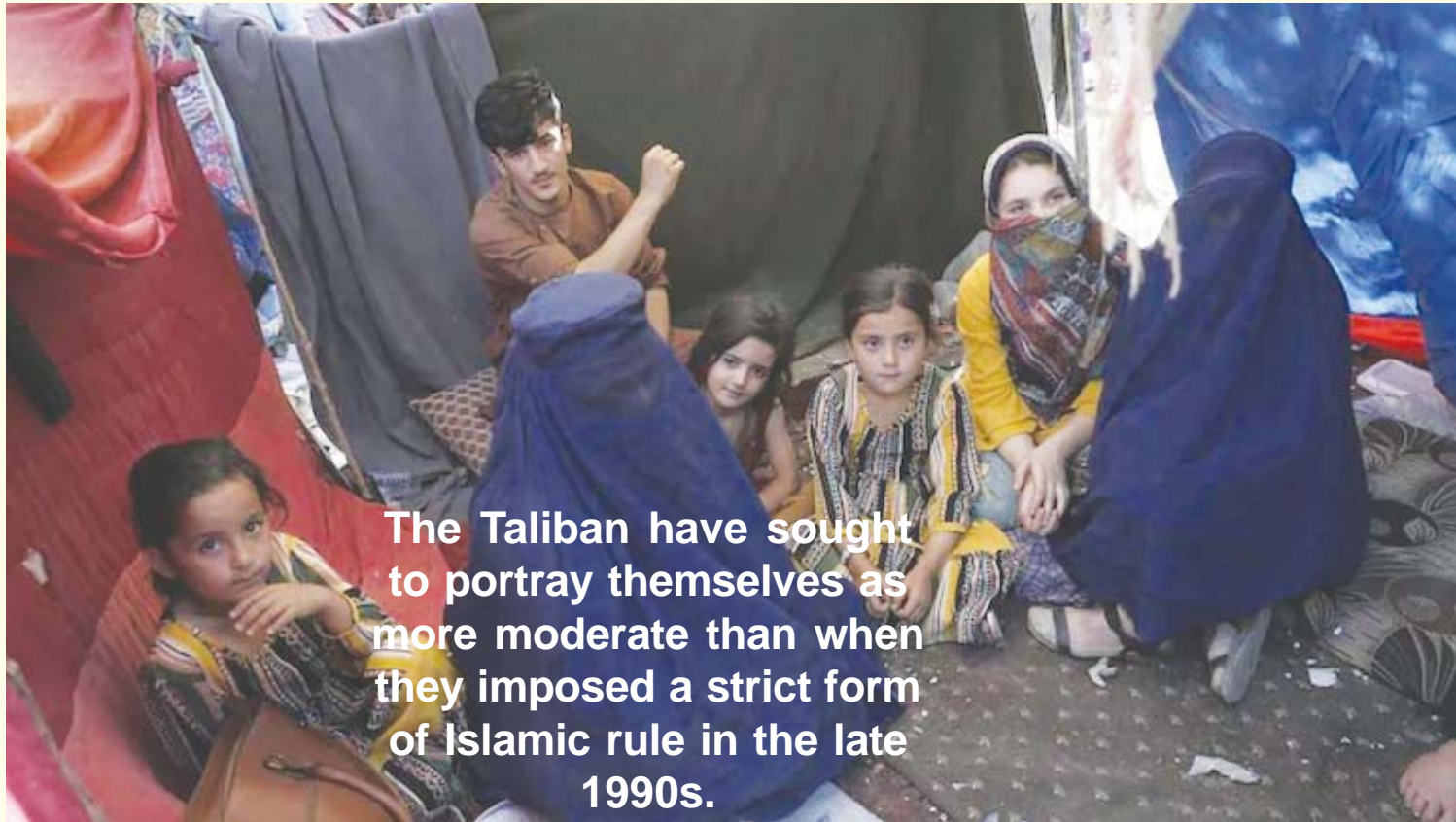
WEDNESDAY - Three more provincial capitals fall in Badakhshan, Baghlan and Farah, giving the Taliban control over two-thirds of the country. With those regions lost, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani rushes to Balkh province, already surrounded by Taliban-controlled land, to secure help from warlords linked to allegations of atrocities and corruption. But he is desperate to push back the insurgents. At the White House, President Joe Biden signs off on a plan to mount a full-scale evacuation of Afghans seeking to flee their country after a new intelligence analysis makes clear the country's government and military are unwilling or unable to mount any significant resistance. Afghan special forces, left to pick up much of the burden of defending multiple fronts, are stretched

increasingly thin. As the Taliban's drive widens, they emerge in more and parts of the country carrying M-16 rifles and driving Humvees and Ford pickup trucks, equipment paid for by American taxpayers.

THURSDAY - Any hope that the Taliban's successes might be limited to Afghanistan's more remote reaches vanish, as the country's second- and third-largest cities are captured. With Kandahar and Herat, a dozen provincial capitals are now in the group's grasp. And with security rapidly deteriorating, the U.S. reverses course, announcing 3,000 troops will be sent to help evacuate the embassy. Zahra, a 26-year-old resident of Herat, is on her way to dinner with her mother and three sisters when she sees people running and heard gunshots blast. "The Taliban are here!" people scream. She spent most of her life in an Afghanistan where girls got an education and women dared to dream of careers and she had spent the past five years working with nonprofit organizations to press for gender equality. Now, her last name is shrouded to avoid making her a target, and she hunkers down indoors with her family. "How can it be possible for me as a woman who has worked so hard and tried to learn and advance, to now have to hide myself and stay at home?" she asks. Taliban fighters finally break through at Herat after two weeks of attacks. As they move in, witnesses tell of Taliban members once detained in the city's prison are spotted moving freely in its streets.

FRIDAY - As the Taliban push ever further into the country they once again seek to rule, reports of revenge killings trickle out: A comedian. A government media chief. Others. Signs of a new day in Afghanistan proliferate. In Herat, two alleged looters are paraded through the streets with black makeup smeared on their faces, reminders of the unsparing version of Islamic law the Taliban has imposed.

Taliban vow to respect women, Despite history of oppression



The Taliban have sought to portray themselves as more moderate than when they imposed a strict form of Islamic rule in the late 1990s.

The Taliban vowed Tuesday to respect women's rights, forgive those who fought them and ensure Afghanistan does not become a haven for terrorists as part of a publicity blitz aimed at reassuring world powers and a fearful population.

Following a lightning offensive across Afghanistan that saw many cities fall to the insurgents without a fight, the Taliban have sought to portray themselves as more moderate than when they imposed a strict form of Islamic rule in the late 1990s. But many Afghans remain skeptical - and thousands have raced to the airport, desperate to flee the country.

Older generations remember the Taliban's previous rule, when they largely confined women to their homes, banned television and music, and held public executions. A U.S.-led invasion drove them from power months after the 9/11 attacks, which al-Qaida had orchestrated from Afghanistan while being sheltered by the Taliban. Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban's longtime spokesman, emerged from the shadows Tuesday in his first-ever public appearance to

address those concerns at a news conference. He promised the Taliban would honor women's rights within the norms of Islamic law, without elaborating. The Taliban have encouraged women to return to work and have allowed girls to return to school, handing out Islamic headscarves at the door. A female news anchor interviewed a Taliban official Monday in a TV studio. The treatment of women varies widely across the Muslim world and sometimes even within the same country, with rural areas tending to be far more conservative. Some Muslim countries, including neighboring Pakistan, have had female prime ministers, while ultraconservative Saudi Arabia only recently allowed women to drive.

Mujahid also said the Taliban would not allow Afghanistan to be used as a base for attacking other countries, as it was in the years before 9/11. That assurance was part of a 2020 peace deal reached between the Taliban and the Trump administration that paved the way for the American withdrawal. The Pentagon said U.S. commanders are communicating with the Taliban as they work to evacuate thousands of people through Kabul's international

airport. It said the Taliban have taken no hostile actions there. Mujahid reiterated that the Taliban have offered full amnesty to Afghans who worked for the U.S. and the Western-backed government, saying "nobody will go to their doors to ask why they helped." He said private media should "remain independent" but that journalists "should not work against national values." Kabul, the capital, has remained calm as the Taliban patrol its streets. But many remain fearful after prisons and armories emptied out during the insurgents' sweep across the country.

Kabul residents say groups of armed men have been going door-to-door seeking out individuals who worked with the ousted government and security forces, but it was unclear if the gunmen were Taliban or criminals posing as militants. Mujahid blamed the security breakdown on the former government, saying the Taliban only entered Kabul in order to restore law and order after the police melted away. Abroadcaster in Afghanistan said she was hiding at a relative's house, too frightened to return home, much less go to work. She said she and other women

do not believe the Taliban have changed their ways. She spoke on condition of anonymity because she feared for her safety.

A group of women wearing Islamic headscarves demonstrated briefly in Kabul, holding signs demanding the Taliban not "eliminate women" from public life.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the U.S. and other governments will not simply take the Taliban at their word when it comes to women's rights.

"Like I've said all along, this is not about trust. This is about verify," Sullivan said at a White House briefing. "And we'll see what the Taliban end up doing in the days and weeks ahead, and when I say we, I mean the entire international community." Whatever their true intentions, the Taliban have an interest in projecting moderation to prevent the international community from isolating their government, as it did in the 1990s. The European Union said it was suspending development assistance to Afghanistan until the political situation is more clear but that it would consider boosting humanitarian aid.

Human remains found on wheels of US jet that took off from Kabul with Afghans clinging on

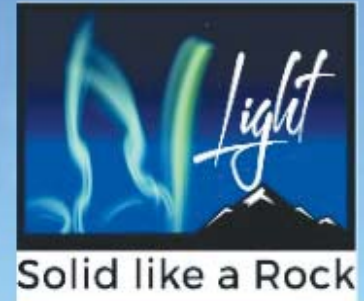


A day after the tragic visuals from Kabul airport surfaced showing several Afghans sitting on the wheels of the US aircraft in a desperate bid to escape Afghanistan, the Air Force has said it has found human remains on the wheels of the military aircraft upon its landing.

After taking off from the chaotic Kabul airport on Monday, the US Air Force C-17 jet landed in Qatar, where they found human remains on the wheel well of the aircraft. A day earlier, scores of desperate Afghans, trying to flee the Taliban regime, were seen holding on to the wings and wheels of the flight as it took off from Kabul.

In another horrific video, at least two people were seen falling from the skies after the US jet took off and they continued sitting on the wheels. The fate of most of these men who latched onto the jet remain unknown. Satellite images have shown swarms of crowds moving on the tarmac of Kabul airport as other countries tried to evacuate their nationals. The evacuation had to be halted on Monday after the chaos at Kabul airport. The US Air Force has said it is investigating the circumstances under which human remains were found on the wheel well of the C-17 aircraft that flew out of Kabul on Monday. In a statement, the Air Force has said that a C-17 aircraft landed at Kabul's airport on Monday and was surrounded by hundreds of Afghan civilians as the airport premises slipped into chaos. Thousands of Afghans rushed to the Kabul airport on Monday after the Taliban captured the Afghanistan capital.

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Amrullah Saleh claims he is caretaker president of Afghanistan in Ashraf Ghani's absence

Former first vice-president Amrullah Saleh has claimed that he is the caretaker president of Afghanistan in Ashraf Ghani's absence.

(News Agencies)- Former first vice-president Amrullah Saleh has claimed that he is the caretaker president of Afghanistan in Ashraf Ghani's absence.

Amrullah Saleh made the comment on Twitter on Tuesday. He said the Afghan constitution was empowering him to declare this. He wrote that he was "reaching out to all leaders to secure their support and consensus."

Taking to Twitter, he said, "As

per the constitution of Afghanistan in absence, "I will never, ever & under no escape, resignation or death of the President, the FVP becomes the caretaker President. I am currently inside my country and am the legitimate caretaker President. Am reaching out to all leaders to secure their support and consensus."

On Sunday, Amrullah Saleh had said that he will not bow in front of the Taliban under any circumstances.

Saleh took to Twitter and said: "I will never, ever & under no circumstances bow to d Talib terrorists. I will never betray d soul & legacy of my hero Ahmad Shah Masoud, the commander, the legend & the guide. I won't dis-appoint millions who listened to me. I will never be under one ceiling with Taliban. NEVER."

Left to avoid bloodshed: Ashraf Ghani

Former president of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, left



the country after the Taliban disclose his current location. narrowed in and took over Former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani added that had

On Monday, he took to social media to say that he left the result would have been a big country to avoid bloodshed. human disaster in this 6 Ashraf Ghani, however, did not million city.

Salima Mazari, who took up arms to fight Taliban in Balkh Province, captured in Afghanistan



(News Agencies)-One of the first women governors in Afghanistan, Salima Mazari, who took up arms to fight the Taliban has reportedly been captured. However, there are no words on her current status. At a time when many Afghan political leaders had fled the country, Salima Mazari stayed on till the surrender of Balkh province, when her district of Chahar Kint fell to the Taliban. Reports say the woman leader has been captured by the Taliban after the insurgents gained control over the entire nation and the Afghan leadership, including President Ashraf Ghani, fled the country. A few years ago, Salima Mazari became one of only three women governors Afghanistan ever saw. While a lot of the Afghan provinces crumbled without much of a fight, Salima tried everything to keep Chahar Kint in Balkh Province unscathed. The Chahar Kint district, with Salima Mazari as its leader, put up a major fight against the Taliban.

Nearly 2,000 dead,



Haiti earthquake survivors cry for help as storm disrupts rescue efforts

(News Agencies)-Survivors of the earthquake that killed at least 1,941 people in Haiti clamoured for food, shelter and medical care on Tuesday as search and rescue efforts resumed after a tropical storm lashed the Caribbean nation with rain, causing dangerous flooding.

Quake damage to several major hospitals hampered humanitarian efforts, and doctors in makeshift tents outside battled to save the lives of the many injured, including young children and the elderly. But they could not help them all.

"There weren't enough doctors and now she's dead," said Lanette Nuel, sitting listlessly next to her daughter's body outside the main hospital of Les Cayes, one of the towns worst hit by both the tremor and the storm's heavy rains and winds. The 26-year-old deceased woman,

herself a mother of two, had been crushed by debris during the magnitude 7.2 quake. Now she lay under a white sheet on the floor.

"We came in yesterday afternoon, she died this morning. I can't do anything," her mother said.

Saturday's quake knocked down tens of thousands of buildings in the poorest country in the Americas, which is still recovering from a temblor 11 years ago that killed over 200,000 people. Aside from the dead, the latest quake also injured at least 9,915, with many people still missing or under the rubble, the civil protection service said on Tuesday afternoon.

Relief efforts were already complicated due to political turmoil and difficult road access from the capital to the south due to gang control of key points. Flash flooding and

landslides in the wake of Tropical Storm Grace, which by Tuesday afternoon had continued on past Jamaica, exacerbated the situation. "Countless Haitian families who have lost everything due to the earthquake are now living literally with their feet in the water due to the flooding," said Bruno Maes, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative in the country.

"Right now, about half a million Haitian children have limited or no access to shelter, safe water, healthcare and nutrition." The United Nations said it had allocated \$8 million in emergency funds to provide relief for affected people.

Latin America countries including Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Colombia and the neighbouring Dominican Republic sent food, medicine and supplies.



Afghan Sikhs in Delhi welcome Centre's decision to give emergency visas, seek safe passage for Hindus, Sikhs

Afghan Sikhs living in Delhi have welcomed the Indian government's announcement on providing emergency visas to Afghan nationals fleeing the country after the Taliban took over Kabul. The community also hailed the government's move to prioritise the evacuation of minority Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan.

"We are happy with the government's statement that they are in touch with Hindu, Sikh Afghan nationals and are willing to provide help. It would be great if the government could find a way for their safe passage," said Waryam Singh, an Afghan Sikh living in Delhi. On Tuesday, the Ministry of External Affairs said, "As regards to Afghan nationals, our visa services will continue through an e-Emergency visa facility, which has been extended to Afghan nationals. This can be accessed through our e-visa portal at indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/Registration. We have already received requests from Afghan Sikh and Hindu community

Afghan Sikhs living in Delhi have welcomed the announcement by the Centre on providing emergency visas to Afghan nationals, including Hindus and Sikhs. They hoped that all assistance would be initiated for their safe passage to India.



leaders, and are in touch with them."

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also tweeted, "We are in constant touch with the Sikh and Hindu community leaders in Kabul. Their welfare will get our priority attention."

AFGHAN SIKHS IN DELHI

Approximately 15,000 Afghan Sikhs live in Delhi after having fled religious persecution in Afghanistan. Their arrival began decades ago and continues to date. A batch was specifically flown in 2020, after threats escalated against Sikh minority. At the Kabuli Gurudwara in

Delhi's Tilak Nagar, Afghan Sikhs congregate every day to discuss the situation of the Taliban taking control in Afghanistan. The mood is solemn.

"We meet every day and are tense about Sikhs still living in Afghanistan. Everyone has been talking about the fate of those

still living there. We are watching the developments and hope that they remain safe," said Partap Singh, originally from Jalalabad. At Partap Singh's office, a team of young men is coordinating a database of Sikhs in Afghanistan and those in desperate need.

While work progressed, a video pinged on their mobile phones. The video was from Kabul. Holed up in a gurdwara in Afghanistan, Sikhs and Hindus were asking for help. The mood at the gurudwara turned serious, and with a solemn resolve, the office-bearers returned to work.

WAITING FOR INDIAN CITIZENSHIP

Harbas Kaur sat in silence at the Kabuli Gurudwara office, seeking help. Her husband was killed in a terror attack at a gurdwara in Kabul on March 25, 2020. She now lives in Delhi and is dependent on community 'sangat' for assistance.

Young Afghan Sikh men growing up in India are now expecting their citizenship to be formally accepted.

Taliban risk military strikes if they host terrorists again in Afghanistan, warns Nato



At the same time, he were unable to secure the expressed frustration with the country, because ultimately Afghan leadership, blaming it the Afghan political leadership for the Taliban's easy success. failed to stand up to the Taliban "Part of the Afghan security and to achieve the peaceful forces fought bravely," solution that Afghans desperately Stoltenberg said. "But they wanted."

(News Agencies)-The Taliban must not let Afghanistan become a breeding ground for terrorism again, Nato said on Tuesday, warning that the alliance after its withdrawal still has the military power to strike any terrorist group from a distance.

"Those now taking power have the responsibility to ensure that international terrorists do not regain a foothold," Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters in his first news conference since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban.

"We have the capabilities to strike terrorist groups from a distance if we see that terrorist groups again try to establish themselves and plan, organise attacks against Nato allies and their countries," he added. The fight against al Qaeda, the militant organisation responsible for the 9/11 attacks whose leadership was hosted by the Taliban, was the main reason for the West's intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 in what was to become Nato's first major operation beyond Europe.

But as the alliance wrapped up military operations this summer after almost two decades, the Taliban rapidly advanced, capturing the biggest cities in days.

The sudden takeover of the capital, Kabul, caused thousands of people to flee to the city's airport, which is still being held by the US military, desperate to get on evacuation flights. In Brussels, a female Afghan journalist on the verge of tears asked Stoltenberg what the West would do for all those vulnerable back in her country, leaving the Nato chief visibly moved.

Stoltenberg called on the Taliban to facilitate the departure of all those who want to leave the country, and said that Western defence allies had agreed to send more evacuation planes to Kabul.

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Space part of a grand strategy for India, China: Report warns of its growing militarisation

examines space power capabilities of major regional powers amid growing domination by India and China. The report assesses the prospects of proliferation of space warfare capabilities, the institutional and legal regimes and constraints on space weaponisation, worst-case militarisation scenarios, and pathways for demilitarising space. "China, India, and Japan in particular are major space-faring nations with independent capacities to launch into space, and ambitions for space settlement and space resource utilisation," the report stated.

India's space might Highlighting the anti-satellite ASAT test, the report marks India's growing space capability putting it directly in competition with China in the Asia Pacific. The ASAT test was critical to boosting Indian capacity as it made India the fourth country in the world to acquire such a deterrent and modern ability, and the entire effort was indigenous. "India stands tall as a space power. It will make the country stronger, even more secure," it said. "India's military space sector took off after it had to reckon with 'intelligence failure' during the

Kargil War of 1999 against Pakistan, when Indian agencies failed to pick up intelligence on infiltrators crossing the Himalayan border," the report added. China consolidates position in space race With a \$8 billion budget, China has an ambitious space programme and is on par to establish a permanent space station by 2022, a lunar research outpost by 2036, a Solar Power Satellite (SPS) transmission capacity from geostationary orbit (GEO) by 2050, and a world leader in space by 2050. Beijing has been working to advance its military might

beyond Earth with testing the anti-satellite system as back as 2007. It can independently guide missiles and bombs onto fixed targets without fear that the United States would turn off navigation services. "China has institutionalised a separate space service with the establishment of the People's Liberation Army Space Force (PLASSF). The PLASSF, for the first time, brings together China's growing military space assets into a single unit, aimed at dominance across the spectrum of air, space, and cyber," the report stated. Meanwhile, countries like

Australia, Japan and South Korea are also arming themselves with new technology amid growing geopolitical developments. While South Korea has developed jamming capacities which can be used to paralyze reconnaissance or communications satellites, Japan has been developing advanced radar systems, space situational awareness satellites and satellite interceptors amid tensions in the East China Sea. Pakistan on the other hand is likely to "utilise its relationship with China to develop its space capacity to deter and threaten its rival, India."

Amid Taliban Crisis, PM Modi Says "Empires Of Terror" Temporary At Somnath Event

PM Modi was speaking while virtually inaugurating a few projects of the famous Somnath temple situated in Gir-Somnath district of Gujarat. "This temple was demolished numerous times over several centuries in the past. Idols of deities were also desecrated. Attempts were made to erase its existence. But it came up again in its full glory every time it was demolished," PM Modi said. This temple gave a message to the entire world that "truth cannot be defeated by falsehood, and faith cannot be crushed under the feet of terror",

he added. "Somnath temple is a symbol of trust and assurance for the entire world. Forces that strive for destruction and those who follow the ideology of creating empires out of terror can dominate for some time, but their existence is never permanent as they cannot suppress humanity forever," the Prime Minister said. This was true when some tyrants were demolishing the Somnath temple, and it is true even today when the world has apprehensions because of some people following such ideology, he said. As the chairman of the Shree Somnath Trust, the

Prime Minister inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for four projects, worth ₹ 83 crore, of the Somnath temple. It included the ground-breaking ceremony for the Parvati Temple that is coming up near the main temple for ₹ 30 crore.

The three projects that he inaugurated were a 1.4-km long 'Samudra Darshan' walkway or promenade built at a cost of ₹ 49 crore on the seashore behind the temple, a newly-built museum housing ancient artefacts constructed near the temple at ₹ 75 lakh, and the renovated 'Ahilyabai Holkar Temple' or the old Somnath temple, renovated at a cost of ₹ 3.5 crore. Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani and other dignitaries attended the programme at a temple

auditorium. On the occasion, PM Modi also said that India, which was at 65th position in 2013 in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, jumped to 34th position in 2019.

PM Modi said it was Indian people's spiritual bent of mind that kept the country united for centuries, and called for the need to develop the "spiritual tourism" sector for the progress of different regions and creation of new job opportunities for the local residents. He remembered the contribution of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in building the present Somnath temple. He also paid tributes to India's first President Dr Rajendra Prasad and freedom fighter from Gujarat KM Munshi, who played a key role in the construction of the

temple. The Prime Minister said that out of the total 40 pilgrimage places covered under the Centre's PRASAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spiritual Augmentation Drive) scheme, the work on 15 projects was already over "We are now planning to connect Somnath with other tourist spots and cities of the state, so that people who visit one place are encouraged to visit other places too," he said, adding that the Centre has identified 19 iconic tourist destinations across the country for further development. Thanks to such initiatives and other policy decisions for the tourism sector, India, which was on 65 position in the world Travel and Tourism Competitive Index in 2013, jumped to 34th position in 2019," he said.

28,000-years-old lion cub found in Siberian permafrost may still have traces of its mother's milk

according to a study published in the Quaternary journal. The cubs were found 15 metres apart but are not only from different litters but were also born thousands of years apart. Boris, a male cub, lived around 43,448 years ago, the study said. Also Read: Lion wanders on Cambodia streets, pics go viral The two cubs aged 1-2 months were found by mammoth tusk collectors. Two other lion cubs named Uyan and Dina have also been found in the region in recent years. Cave lions have been extinct for thousands of years. Valery Plotnikov, one of the study's authors, told Reuters in the

regional capital Yakutsk that Sparta was so well preserved that it still had its fur, internal organs and skeleton. "The find itself is unique; there was no any other such find in Yakutia," he said. "Maybe, we hope, some disintegrated parts of the mother's milk (remain intact). Because if we have that, we can understand what its mother's diet was," he said. Similar finds in Russia's vast Siberian region have happened with increasing regularity. Climate change is warming the Arctic at a faster pace than the rest of the world and has thawed the ground in some areas long locked in permafrost.

"Rise Above Compulsions...": Opposition Talks Unity at Sonia Gandhi's Meet

New Delhi: Opposition parties must rise above their political compulsions and set aside personal interests to united against the BJP, various leaders said at a meeting called by Sonia Gandhi today. The Congress president urged the opposition to "plan systematically" for the 2024 national election and work together, stressing that there was no other option. "We all have our compulsions, but clearly, a time has come when the interests of our nation demand that we rise above them," she said at the 19-party meet. The 2024 polls is "the ultimate goal", said Sonia Gandhi, adding: "This is a challenge, but together we can and must rise to it because there is simply no alternative to working cohesively together." She called upon opposition parties to

begin to plan "with the single-minded objective of giving to our country a government that believes in the values of the Freedom Movement and in the principles and provisions of our Constitution." Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, NCP leader Sharad Pawar, RJD's Tejashwi Yadav and Left leader Sitaram Yechury were among those who joined the virtual meet. The parties later put out a joint statement with demands ranging from restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir to a Supreme Court-monitored inquiry into the Pegasus snooping allegations and changes to the vaccination strategy.

India Quietly Readies an Amazon Slayer - Open E-Commerce

In China, homegrown stores like Taobao, Tmall and JD.com have an unshakable dominance in online retail. But now, the only other billion-people-plus opportunity open to American capital is also slipping away from its grasp.

It's unclear how exactly India's open e-commerce network will work - or if it will work at all. The template, according to the press statement, is the country's highly successful Unified Payments Interface, a public utility that allows any entity to process real-time payments over smartphones provided a set of common protocols is followed. The UPI network has in a short time eclipsed proprietary card-based payments.

Fashioning a similar open network for online commerce will be a lot trickier. It's easy to make a set of rules where there's a simple, single-point objective of satisfying the central bank that the same funds aren't being spent twice. Commerce, by

contrast, involves far fuzzier outcomes. Did the consumer get the product she paid for? Did it arrive in one piece? Was the article genuine or a counterfeit? Was the returns policy enforceable? Additionally, brands selling online have to worry about resellers' creditworthiness and their ability to manage complicated distribution logistics in a country with poor physical infrastructure.

The ministry says that merchants will be able to save their data under the open network to build credit history and reach consumers, breaking silos imposed by platforms "to drive innovation and scale." Several questions arise: Are Amazon and Walmart-Flipkart, which aren't directing even 10% of India's \$800 billion annual retail sales between them, stifling innovation to a point where the harm exceeds their positive influence from aggregating demand? Should they, therefore, be mandated to

operate their merchant-onboarding processes according to some preset rules, eroding much of their power to determine what goes on over platforms in which they have invested billions of dollars? Like everywhere else, the danger with dominant marketplaces in India is that they will copy the bestselling ideas of merchants and introduce them as private labels. But is this threat currently so large as to require a systematic downgrading of platforms?

Not allowed to own inventory, the two dominant foreign-owned marketplaces have solved many of the underlying problems of trust by using a handful of large sellers they can control. This practice, challenged by some traders' groups as discriminatory, is now in the crosshairs of India's competition regulator. So intense is the scrutiny that Amazon's joint venture with Indian software tycoon Narayana Murthy has decided to fold up by the middle of next year. The seven-year-old JV

owns Cloudtail, the largest seller on Amazon's India website. As the news website Morning Context notes, Cloudtail helped relatively smaller manufacturers - such as a saree brand from Rajasthan - acquire national reach on Amazon, something they may not have achieved on their own. Consumers are getting more choice than before. Once large platform-aligned buyers like Cloudtail are chased out, Amazon's customer satisfaction scores could be hard to sustain.

As India deliberately de-emphasizes the platform model, even the conglomerate Tata Group, which is planning a marketplace extending from fashion and lifestyle to electronics, may be handicapped if it's unable to sell a cup of Starbucks coffee on its website. That's because Starbucks Corp.'s joint venture in India with Tata makes it a connected party, which can't act as a seller on the super-app, according to draft e-commerce rules. Ditto for Walmart Inc.'s separate wholesale unit. As an affiliated entity of Flipkart, it may not be allowed to hawk a shirt on the retail website.

The winner may be someone pursuing a different business model for aggregating supplies. Mukesh Ambani, India's richest man, controls both the largest chain of physical stores and the biggest telco. Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd. could carry its own inventory, using its \$180 billion balance sheet to buy and stock third-party

merchandise and sell it online or offline - or in a hybrid online-offline setup.

A deliberate assault on the economics of digital platforms will possibly rank among the most far-reaching separations of platforms and commerce seen anywhere in recent years - save China's recent forced restructuring of Ant Group Co.'s operations. America's historic moves to segregate coal from railroads, commercial enterprises from banking, and television networks from programming took place in a very different era that ended with breaking up AT&T Inc.'s lock on communications in 1982. But the pendulum is swinging again. Lina Khan, chosen by President Joe Biden to chair the Federal Trade Commission, is a keen proponent of a more muscular approach to reining in tech platforms. This shifting zeitgeist gives New Delhi the perfect cover to prepare its Amazon slayer, even though digital commerce in India is at present just a sideshow. Far bigger anticompetitive forces are at play in sectors ranging from telecoms and ports to airports.

But then, politicians like to invent challenges that don't exist, rather than tackle those that do. An open digital commerce network is one such solution searching for a problem. Emasculating the economics of platforms will give a big advantage to retailers who are allowed to own inventory. It could turn out to be more efficient, but not necessarily more competitive.

PM Modi Chairs United Nations Security Council Meeting

India Reaches Global Heights

In recent times, India is making rapid progress in the field of international relationships and taking a leading position among global policymakers. When Narendra Modi chaired this UNSC meet, it added new laurels to India. It is also a testimony to the successful Indian bureaucracy, that too, during the month of the Indian Independence day.

This strong vibe from the Indian side is again to be resonated when S. Jaishankar, the Indian foreign minister heads for the

UNSC with a focus on terrorism as the main topic of discussion. His meeting topics will cover the impact of the rising reign of the Taliban in Afghanistan and its global consequences.

These points are integral to the security and sovereignty of India. Standing at the 75th year of Independence, the importance of this UNSC presidency will go a long way, with a positive impact on the whole world and that's for sure.

By Susmita Ghosh

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The fall of Afghanistan

Twenty years after the United States (US) militarily invaded Afghanistan and ousted the Taliban from power, the Taliban is back in Kabul as the US fled in scenes reminiscent of its exit from Vietnam. Notwithstanding the spin from Washington, this is a strategic defeat. The US exit was understandable. But the way it was managed is unpardonable. The US misread the Taliban's intentions and capabilities, didn't act against Pakistan enough to deter support for the

Taliban, and carried out a farcical peace process where the Taliban walked away with international legitimacy without giving up on its ideological agenda and coercive machinery. Taliban is much stronger than it was in the 1990s, and the US has left democratic Afghans, women, and minorities at peril. This is also Pakistan's win. Notwithstanding the differences that exist between Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Taliban, ISI's strategy of

waiting for the US exit while supporting the Taliban has paid off for now. Pakistan's aim of securing "strategic depth" is close to being met. Its objective of eroding Indian presence in Afghanistan is in motion. And it will be the centre of a new arrangement where China, Russia, and others will use Islamabad's good offices to deal with Afghanistan. At some point, Pakistan will have to deal with resurgent Afghan nationalism - but that's in the future. India, like the US,

overestimated the power of the Afghan government. It delayed contact with the Taliban till it was too late. There is no Northern Alliance to support, and cobbling together an anti-Taliban coalition will not be free of costs. India's connectivity projects across the region will be hit. The ability to covertly hurt Pakistan will diminish. And jihadi attention may well shift to Kashmir. An under-appreciated trigger for India's decision to revoke Kashmir's constitutional status

The United States has lost. The US exit was understandable. But the way it was managed is unpardonable. The Inter-Services Intelligence has won. India stares at a crisis

was the calculation that a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan could lead to a repeat of the early 1990s in the Valley. But whether this move has cemented Indian control in Kashmir or created an even more fertile ground for the resumption of terror is to be seen. Delhi must first evolve a short-term policy to deal with the rescue of Indians still in Afghanistan; refuge to Afghans seeking exile; terms of engagement with the Taliban; and enhanced security threats. It must also have a medium-term policy on whether to lie low and recognise the Taliban regime or invest in weakening the Taliban and instruments that can be used for the purpose. What is certain is that August 15, 2021, will have a profound impact on geopolitics across South, West, and Central Asia.

Afghanistan will shape international norms

After the end of the Soviet Union, during the unipolar moment - of United States (US) hegemony - the doctrine of humanitarian intervention picked up. This was based on the notion that sovereignty was not sacred, and that if a regime was involved in human rights violations, the international community was within its rights to intervene in a particular country. This principle was picked up by two different streams of thought. The first were the neo-conservatives who, during George W Bush's era, argued that promoting democracy and enabling regime change was a legitimate extension of humanitarian intervention. The second were liberal internationalists who extended the principle to evolve a doctrine of the responsibility to protect (R2P) - if a State failed to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes



against humanity, then other states could take timely, collective and decisive action. To be sure, as many states including India had suspected, this principle - either under the pretext of humanitarian interventions, counterterrorism, R2P, or democracy-promotion - was used for strategic

purposes by Western states. Interventions were often a function of the power balance that existed at the time; they were also driven by the military-industrial complex, and served ideological and commercial interests. But in itself, the idea that no regime could use sovereignty as an excuse to

harm its own population marked an evolution in norms.

The fall of Afghanistan may well have eroded the entire architecture of Western interventions. If the US, as Joe Biden's speech defending the withdrawal on Monday indicated yet again, is not willing to step up to protect minority, women

and human rights, and can leave Afghans at the mercy of a brutal regime which has a record of rights violations, it will be hard for Washington to justify its intervention elsewhere in the future on these principles. The rise of China has already added a protective buffer to authoritarian regimes. This does not mean that interventions won't happen in the future - they will, dictated by narrow State interests, as has always happened. But the abrupt end of an invasion meant to counter terror, create a democratic political order and protect human rights may have ended up eroding the political, moral and legal argument for such interventions itself. The possible dilution of global military interventions is positive. But if it emboldens despotic regimes, like the one taking over Kabul, the world is headed for more turbulent times.

One Of These Men Is Likely To Be Afghanistan's Next Ruler

The biographies of top Taliban leaders are vague for a reason: secrecy has often been the key to survival.

Take the one-eyed cleric who founded the movement, Mullah Mohammad Omar. After a U.S.-led invasion toppled his government, he was on the run for years, hunted relentlessly by American forces. Omar reportedly died in 2013 in either Afghanistan or in neighboring Pakistan, but his death was not even publicly confirmed for another two years.

Omar's successor as the Taliban supreme commander, Mullah Mohammad Mansour, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in 2016. And, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the movement's current second-in-command, spent eight years in a Pakistani prison. Following the Taliban victory over Afghan security forces that culminated earlier this week with the fall of Kabul, Baradar, and Mansour's successor, Haibatullah Akhundzada, are poised to become the country's new rulers.

Here's what we know about them:

Supreme Commander Haibatullah Akhundzada

Although as the top Taliban leader, Haibatullah's sway in the



organization is without question, he's unlikely to emerge as the public face of the new government in Kabul. Instead, he will probably leave the day-to-day governing to Baradar and others and remain more or less in the shadows, most experts agree.

"Typically, the supreme leaders of the Taliban are purposefully elusive," Michael Kugelman, deputy director and senior associate for South Asia at the Wilson Center, tells NPR. "You rarely hear from them."

In fact, Haibatullah hasn't been seen in public for years, leading some to speculate that he might not even be alive.

Haibatullah, believed to be around 60, hails from Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban. He's a member of the Noorzai, one of Afghanistan's largest and most influential tribes, according to Patrick Quirk, a nonresident fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution, who says his religious credentials strengthen his claim to leadership.

But not everyone expects Haibatullah to take a back seat in government.

Speaking with NPR's All Things Considered earlier this week, Carter Malkasian, a historian and author of *The American War*



in Afghanistan: *A History*, said he thinks "that the Taliban would be more inclined, given their history, to have Haibatullah become the leader, if Haibatullah is indeed alive."

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Relative to Haibatullah, Baradar, who most experts assume will be the de facto leader of the Taliban, is much better known. At 52 or 53 years of age, he's the Taliban's top political leader and has taken on a particularly high profile internationally in recent years. He's originally from Uruzgan province, north of Kandahar, and a member of the Sadozai tribe, a clan of the

Popalzai tribe, the same as former Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Decades of battlefield experience, first against the Soviets after their 1979 invasion and later against U.S. forces, have given him considerable stature within the organization. "I guess it's fair to say if you have managed to defeat two superpowers, it gives you a great deal of self-confidence," observes Mehrzad Boroujerdi, director of the school of public and international affairs at Virginia Tech.

Baradar is a co-founder of the Taliban and was very close to Mullah Omar. Rumors suggest he may even be married to Omar's sister.

In the years that Omar was in hiding, he took refuge in Pakistan and became "in effect like the CEO of the movement," Malkasian says. "Baradar was the guy actually running things." Inside and to some degree outside the movement, Baradar is "perceived as thoughtful, independent and measured," according to Ashley Jackson, the co-director of the Centre for the Study of Armed Groups at the Overseas Development Institute.

"But, we really don't know very much about him," she tells NPR in an email.

In 2010, Baradar was arrested by Pakistan officials in the southern port city of Karachi, "apparently because they thought that he was trying to secretly negotiate with Hamid Karzai," Kugelman says.

He remained in jail until 2018, when the Trump White House asked Islamabad to release him so that he could lead peace negotiations in Doha.

In the weeks and months leading up last weekend's Taliban victory, Baradar led a series of delegations to a number of regional powers, including China, Russia, Iran and Turkey. He sought to drum up support - or at least acceptance - of a new Taliban regime after the movement's previous stint in government left it isolated and a virtual pariah state.

"Given the Taliban's apparent interest in maintaining its legitimacy and recognition within the international community,

A new Afghan war

Afghanistan's civil war is having a tangible impact on India. After drawing down its diplomatic presence from consulates in Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar, India evacuated personnel from its consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif on Wednesday. It also issued an advisory to all Indian citizens to return home, and Indian companies to withdraw their employees from project sites. India's move comes in the wake of the Taliban's capture of key provincial capitals and border posts. The Afghan government is putting up a resistance and has no intention of letting Kabul fall - but is constrained by depleted international support and a sham of a United States (US)-engineered peace process, which legitimised the Taliban without the group giving up violence. There are many moving parts to the fluid situation in



Afghanistan. While there is little domestic appetite in the US to stay on militarily, the Taliban's relative success has generated criticism against US special envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, for appeasing the militant group. A forcible Taliban takeover will force the US to make some hard choices. Iran is talking

to the Taliban but is uncomfortable with its aggression in the north, and has more in common with India than publicly perceived. There are voices in Pakistan which point to how the obsession with the idea of gaining "strategic depth" in Afghanistan through the Taliban could well lead to further instability. But

despite this, with Pakistan, China and Russia broadly on board, and the US in exit mode, the Taliban believes that it can change the facts on the ground enough to be able to exercise political dominance. India was acutely aware of the Taliban's intentions, capabilities and how it would use the peace process. It was also aware of Pakistan's game of pretending to be a responsible peacemaker while sponsoring terror. But India's leverage was limited and Delhi could not really tell Washington to continue fighting - even though there is a legitimate debate on whether India could have reached out to the Taliban early enough to secure its own interests. India's preference is for a stable, democratic and inclusive Afghan government which has a balanced foreign policy. But this is unlikely to happen.



Taliban face pockets of resistance on Afghanistan's I-Day; IMF cuts access to funds

The Taliban on Thursday celebrated Afghanistan's Independence Day, marking 102 years of the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919. Celebrations in parts of the country were marred by violence as the Taliban continued to face challenges to their rule.

A member of the Taliban leadership, Wahidullah Hashemi, hinted at the possibility of Afghanistan being led by a council governed under the authority of Taliban's top leader - Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada.

Multiple reports confirmed that rising food prices and many ATMs running out of cash have added to the troubles of 38 million Afghans who are struggling to cope with drastic changes in the country's political reality.

READ: Day 4 of Taliban regime in Afghanistan | All you need to know

In an interview with ABC News, US President Joe Biden said the Afghan Taliban must decide whether they want international recognition. Biden also said that the deadline for withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan may extend beyond August 31 if evacuations are not complete by that time.

Meanwhile, External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar told reporters in New York on Thursday that Indians share a historical relationship with the Afghan people and that will continue to guide India's thoughts and outlook.

"Events unfolding in Afghanistan have naturally

enhanced global concerns about their implications for both regional and international security," Jaishankar said during a briefing at the UN Security Council. Taliban tighten grip on Afghanistan | Top 10 Developments

1. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has suspended Afghanistan's access to IMF resources, including \$440 million in new monetary reserves, citing political turmoil in the country. Even the US has declared that Taliban will not be allowed access to Afghan government reserves held in US bank accounts.

2. Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai and ousted Ghani government's peace envoy, Abdullah Abdullah, met Mansoor Ahmed Khan,

Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan. Later in the day, Abdullah Abdullah also met a group of Taliban leaders led by Khalil Al-Rahman Haqqani. 3. A day after Taliban fighters opened fire at a crowd of protesters for hoisting the Afghan flag in Jalalabad, a similar incident was reported from Asadabad, capital of the eastern province of Kunar, on Thursday. Reports suggest that several people were killed when the Taliban fired at a crowd for waving the Afghan flag at an Independence Day rally, triggering a stampede. Amrullah Saleh, the country's first vice president, lauded his countrymen who raised Afghan flags in the face of Taliban aggression. 4. On Thursday, the US Federal Aviation

Administration (FAA) allowed domestic air carriers and civilian pilots to fly into Kabul with prior approval from the Department of Defence. The Pentagon said that the US military has managed to evacuate 7,000 civilians from Afghanistan since August 14. US Army Major General Hank Taylor said 5,200 US troops are currently stationed at the Hamid Karzai International airport in Kabul. The Taliban have asked Afghans to avoid crowding at the airport. 5. Samira Asghari, a member of Afghanistan's International Olympic Committee (IOC), has appealed to the UN to help evacuate the country's female athletes and coaching staff before "it is too late". 6. US President Joe Biden and Vice

President Kamala Harris received a briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. Soon after, the US suspended all arms sales to Afghanistan by issuing a notice to defence contractors. 7. Taliban have halted all exports and imports from India days after seizing control of Afghanistan. However, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said on Thursday that the "Islamic Emirate" wants "good diplomatic and trade relations" with all countries. "We have not talked about doing business with any country. We reject any rumours that are not true," he claimed. 8. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told reporters at a press conference in Moscow the Taliban does not control all of Afghanistan. "There are reports of the situation in the Panjshir Valley where the resistance of Afghanistan's vice president Mr Saleh and Ahmad Massoud is concentrated," he added. "We have maintained contacts with the Taliban for the last seven years, discussing many issues," Kremlin envoy on Afghanistan - Zamir Kabulov - had said earlier this week. 9. Appealing for an "objective judgement" on the Taliban's actions, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said on Thursday that the Afghan Taliban will not repeat past mistakes and are "clear-eyed and rational" compared to the last time they were in power. 10. Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen, in an interview with China's state-owned CGTN television, said China could "contribute to the development of Afghanistan" in the future.



Top 10 Developments

Biden Campaigned as a Truth Teller.

Afghanistan Undermined His Credibility.

Joe Biden did to himself what his opponents couldn't - shredded his own credibility in a high-profile, hugely consequential matter that won't be forgotten.

No memos from the desk of Donald J. Trump, no RNC talking points, no right-wing Twitter memes or excoriating floor speeches by Republican senators possibly could have had the effect on Biden of Biden himself selling and defending his Afghanistan policy in terms instantly discredited by unforgettable and horrifying

images on the ground this week. The fate of Biden's presidency might now depend on whether Taliban commanders decide to transform an ongoing evacuation crisis in Kabul into an explicit hostage crisis.

Even if the United States and the president escape that scenario, Biden has done himself long-lasting harm - not for the first time in his career - with his own spectacularly ill-considered words.

Every president needs credibility, which is absolutely essential to the public trust

necessary for political leadership. Biden has gone further, though, and made the telling of inconvenient truths a signature part of his political brand.

A hallmark of his 2020 campaign was his promise to always be a straight-shooter. At the outset of the pandemic, candidate Biden said, "I'll always tell you the truth. This is the responsibility of a president. That's what is owed the American people."

In his inaugural address, he

pointedly said that "there is truth and there are lies," and promised to hew unalterably to the former. "I will always," he said, "level with you."

The backdrop, of course, was President Trump, who, in the best of circumstances, was given to boosterish overstatements and, in the post-election period, scattered the political landscape with outlandish falsehoods.

Trump badly crimped his reelection campaign and undermined his coronavirus response with his continuous

assurances that the end of the virus was always magically lurking around the corner.

The idea was the Biden would be too experienced, too grounded in reality, too committed to the truth out of principle, too respectful of the American public to paint rosy scenarios to try to gull Americans into an unwarranted optimism.

Then came July 8.

In that now-infamous press conference defending his decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, Biden said a Taliban takeover wasn't inevitable.

He said there were "zero" parallels with Vietnam.

He said "there's going to be no circumstance where you see people lifted off the roof of an embassy."

He said the Taliban wasn't "remotely comparable in terms of capability" with the Afghan army.

He said of the Afghan army that we weren't going to "just walk away and not sustain their ability to maintain that force."

He said, "There's not a conclusion that, in fact, they cannot defeat the Taliban."

He disputed a question citing intelligence predicting a rapid collapse of the Afghan government - "that is not true." And it was all, as Biden put it in his bullying 2012 vice presidential debate with Paul Ryan, malarkey.

It was a farrago of wishful thinking, happy talk, half-truths and blatant deceptions.

Today's Taliban uses sophisticated social media practices that rarely violate the rules

For a group that espouses ancient moral codes, the Afghan Taliban has used strikingly sophisticated social media tactics to build political momentum and, now that they're in power, to make a public case that they're ready to lead a modern nation state after nearly 20 years of war.

In accounts swelling across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram - and in group chats on apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram - the messaging from Taliban supporters typically challenges the West's dominant image of the group as intolerant, vicious and bent on revenge, while staying within the evolving boundaries of

taste and content that tech companies use to police user behavior.

The tactics overall show such a high degree of skill that analysts believe at least one public relations firm is advising the Taliban on how to push key themes, amplify messages across platforms and create potentially viral images and video snippets - much like corporate and political campaigns do across the world.

One image from a video circulated online in Afghanistan shows Taliban fighters dressed in camouflage and brandishing machine guns while posing

unmolested in an eastern province, not far from Kabul, under a gorgeous pink and blue sky. The text below, in Pashto and English, reads, "INAN ATMOSPHERE OF



FREEDOM." Wide distribution of such propaganda imagery would have been almost impossible for an insurgent movement there a generation ago, before the arrival

of smartphones, Internet connections and free social media services brought unprecedented online reach to Afghanistan. The nation lags the world in Internet connectivity but it has grown sharply over the past decade amid a gush of international investment.

But the audience for much - and perhaps most - of what Taliban supporters push on social media is clearly international. That includes Afghans living in other countries, potential supporters abroad and even the profoundly skeptical Western powers that have poured trillions of dollars into attempting to create a durable,

Western-style democracy in Afghanistan since a U.S.-led invasion ousted the Taliban in 2001. The official Afghan Taliban website offers versions in Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Urdu and English. Only the first two are widely spoken in most of Afghanistan.

Recent months have seen an uptick in online messages offering a gentler, more reassuring face of the Taliban, whose brutality during its previous reign over the nation was notorious, featuring mass executions, repressive moral codes and the exclusion of women from schools and workplaces.



The Taliban are sitting on \$1 trillion worth of minerals the world desperately needs

The swift fall of Afghanistan to Taliban fighters has triggered a humanitarian crisis, with thousands trying to flee the country. It's also brought renewed focus on Afghanistan's vast untapped mineral wealth, resources that could transform its economic prospects if ever developed.

Afghanistan is one of the poorest nations in the world. But in 2010, US military officials and geologists revealed that the country, which lies at the crossroads of Central and South Asia, was sitting on mineral deposits worth nearly \$1 trillion.

Supplies of minerals such as iron, copper and gold are scattered across provinces. There are also rare earth minerals and, perhaps most importantly, what could be one of the world's biggest deposits of lithium - an essential but scarce component in rechargeable batteries and other technologies vital to tackling the climate crisis.

"Afghanistan is certainly one of the regions richest in traditional precious metals, but also the metals [needed] for the emerging economy of the 21st century," said Rod Schoonover, a scientist and security expert who founded the Ecological Futures Group.

Security challenges, a lack of infrastructure and severe droughts have prevented the extraction of most valuable minerals in the past. That's unlikely to change soon under Taliban control. Still, there's interest from countries including China, Pakistan and India, which may try to engage despite the chaos.

"It's a big question mark," Schoonover said.

Huge potential

Even before President Joe Biden announced that he would withdraw US troops from Afghanistan earlier this year, setting the stage for the return of Taliban control, the country's economic prospects were dim.

As of 2020, an estimated 90% of Afghans were living below the government-determined poverty level of \$2 per day, according to a report from the US Congressional Research Service published in June. In its latest country profile, the World Bank said that the economy remains "shaped by fragility and aid dependence."

"Private sector development and diversification is constrained by insecurity, political instability, weak institutions, inadequate infrastructure, widespread corruption, and a difficult business environment," it said in March.

Many countries with weak governments suffer from what's known as the "resource curse," in which efforts to exploit natural resources fail to provide benefits to local people and the domestic economy. Even so, revelations about Afghanistan's mineral wealth, which built on earlier surveys conducted by the Soviet Union, have offered huge promise.

Demand for metals like lithium and cobalt, as well as rare earth elements such as neodymium, is soaring as countries try to switch to electric cars and other clean technologies to

slash carbon emissions.

The International Energy Agency said in May that global supplies of lithium, copper, nickel, cobalt and rare earth elements needed to increase sharply or the world would fail in its attempt to tackle the climate crisis. Three countries - China, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Australia - currently account for 75% of the global output of lithium, cobalt and rare earths.

The average electric car requires six times more minerals than a conventional car, according to the IEA. Lithium, nickel and cobalt are crucial to batteries. Electricity networks also require huge amounts of copper and aluminum, while rare earth elements are used in the magnets needed to make wind turbines work.

The US government has reportedly estimated that lithium deposits in Afghanistan could rival those in Bolivia, home to the world's largest known reserves. "If Afghanistan has a few years of calm, allowing the development of its mineral resources, it could become one of the richest countries in the area within a decade," Said Mirzad of the US Geological Survey told Science magazine in 2010. He led the Afghanistan Geological Survey until 1979.

Even more obstacles

That calm never arrived, and most of Afghanistan's mineral wealth has remained in the ground, said Mosin Khan, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and former Middle East and central Asia director at the International Monetary Fund.

Taliban urge Afghan unity as protests spread to Kabul



The Taliban called on Afghanistan's imams to urge unity when they hold their first Friday prayers since the Islamist group seized control of the country, as protests against the takeover spread to more cities on Thursday, including the capital, Kabul.

Several people were killed when Taliban militants fired on a crowd in the eastern city of Asadabad, a witness said. Another witness reported gunshots near a rally in Kabul, but they appeared to be Taliban firing into the air.

On the day Afghanistan celebrates its independence from British control in 1919, a social media video showed a crowd of men and women in Kabul waving black, red and green national flags. "Our flag, our identity," they shouted.

At some protests elsewhere, media reported people tearing down the Taliban's white flag.

A Taliban spokesman was not immediately available for comment.

Some demonstrations were small, but combined with the desperate scramble of thousands of people seeking to flee the country they underline the challenge the Taliban face in governing.

Kabul has been largely calm, but 12 people have been killed in and around the airport, NATO and Taliban officials said.

The U.S. military said more than 5,200 American troops were guarding Kabul airport, where multiple gates to the facility are now open, while U.S. fighter jets were flying over the city to ensure security for the evacuation operation for diplomats and civilians including some Afghan citizens.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said 6,000 "fully processed" people were currently at the Kabul airport and would soon be boarding planes. A source told Reuters that White House officials told a congressional briefing that the United States already had evacuated 6,741 people, including 1,792 American citizens and legal permanent residents. The Taliban swiftly conquered Afghanistan as U.S. and other foreign troops withdrew, surprising even their own leaders and leaving power vacuums in many places.

The Taliban urged unity ahead of Friday prayers, calling on imams to persuade people not to leave Afghanistan.

Since seizing Kabul on Sunday, the Taliban have presented a more moderate face, saying they want peace, will not take revenge against old enemies and will respect the rights of women within the framework of Islamic law.

When in power from 1996-2001, they severely restricted women's rights, staged public executions and blew up ancient Buddhist statues. They were ousted in a 2001 U.S.-led invasion.

Afghan in Kolkata fears for safety of kin back home



seeks help from India

An Afghan national in Kolkata said he fears for the safety of his family back home. He also appealed to the Indian government to help reinstate Ashraf Ghani as its president.

(Insider Bureau)-An Afghan national in Kolkata said he fears for the safety of his family back home, and sought help from the Indian government.

India Today TV caught up with the Afghan national living in Kolkata for the past six months. He requested not to be identified for the safety of his family stranded in Afghanistan. "I spoke to my family and they are in trouble. I cannot do anything for my family as airports are closed and they are stranded," he said.

He has his business in Afghanistan and is currently in Kolkata to sell clothes. He will monitor the situation in his country before deciding the

next step.

"There have been network issues in the last one month. They managed to message me saying markets are closed and nothing is available. There is no chance of getting out of the airport," the businessman said. The Afghan national wants to go back home, once the situation is better.

"I want India to help them in getting visas as soon as possible. I don't have much work here. Once the situation is better, I will go back. I have my house, business, and family there. What will I do here? Everyone is running away, which is why I want them to get visas," he added.

The Afghan national also talked about former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who left the country after the Taliban took over Kabul. He said the ex-president did a lot for the nation and people were happy with him.

"After the Ashraf Ghani government was formed, we were very happy. He was doing something constructive for us. He created a place for himself too; he did a lot for us. Roads were open and people were very happy with him. Now people are crying, why he left, he left without a fight as he didn't want any bloodshed," he added.

However, he added that nobody likes the government now as

everyone wants to leave Afghanistan.

"When Ghani was there, no one was running away, everything was under control. Now people are afraid and leaving Afghanistan," he said.

He also said the Kabul airport tragedy, which killed five, could have been averted with timely help.

At least five people were killed on Monday amid reports of heavy gunfire at the Kabul airport as thousands of Afghan citizens thronged the tarmac to board the last few flights leaving Afghanistan.

"If help had been extended, those five people would not have died; a child also died.

There was no security at the airport yesterday, people were running everywhere. If India had helped, then everyone would have been saved," he said.

He also appealed to the Indian government to help reinstate Ashraf Ghani as its president. "Ashraf Ghani always said India is a friend. India did not take action for its neighbouring country. I hope others get visas and get saved. I appeal to the Narendra Modi government which had good relations with Afghanistan to help reinstate Ashraf Ghani who has always believed in India. India and Afghanistan's flags would stand together side by side," he added.

The Return of the Taliban

Their comeback has taken twenty years, but it is a classic example of a successful guerrilla war of attrition.



Watching Afghanistan's cities fall to the Taliban in rapid succession, as the United States completes a hasty withdrawal from the country, is a surreal experience, laced with a sense of déjà vu. Twenty years ago, I reported from Afghanistan as the Taliban's enemies took these same cities from them, in the short but decisive U.S.-backed military offensive that followed the 9/11 attacks. The war on terror had just been declared, and the unfolding American military action was cloaked in purposeful determinism in the name of freedom and against tyranny. For a brief moment, the war was blessed by that rare thing: public support, both at home and abroad.

In the wake of the horror of Al Qaeda's attacks on the United States, most Americans polled believed that the country was doing the "right thing" in going to war in Afghanistan. That level of support didn't last long, but the war on terror did, and so did the military expedition to Afghanistan, which stretched on inconclusively for two decades and now ends in ignominy. Donald Trump set this fiasco in motion, by announcing his

intention to pull out the remaining American troops in Afghanistan and begin negotiations with the Taliban. In February, 2020, an agreement was signed that promised to withdraw all U.S. military forces in return for, among other things, peace talks with the U.S.-backed Afghan government. The American troops were duly



drawn down, but, instead of engaging in real discussions, the Taliban stepped up their attacks. In April, President Joe Biden announced his intention to carry on with the withdrawal, and pull out forces by September 11th. However much he says that he does "not regret" his decision, his Presidency will be held responsible for whatever happens in Afghanistan now, and the key words that will

forever be associated with the long American sojourn there will include hubris, ignorance, inevitability, betrayal, and failure.

In that regard, the United States joins a line of notable predecessors, including Great Britain, in the nineteenth century, and the Soviet Union, in the twentieth. Those historic precedents don't make the

American experience any more palatable. In Afghanistan-and, for that matter, in Iraq, as well-the Americans did not merely not learn from the mistakes of others; they did not learn from their own mistakes, committed a generation earlier, in Vietnam. The main errors were, first, to underestimate the adversaries and to presume that American technological superiority necessarily

translated into mastery of the battlefield, and, second, to be culturally disdainful, rarely learning the languages or the customs of the local people. By the end of the first American decade in Afghanistan, it seemed evident that the Western counterinsurgency enterprise was doomed to fail, and not only because of the return of the Taliban in many rural parts of the country: the Americans and their NATO allies closed themselves off from Afghans in large regional bases, from which they operated in smaller units out of combat outposts, and distrust reined between them and their putative Afghan comrades. "Green-on-blue attacks," in which Afghan security forces opened fire on their American and European counterparts, became alarmingly frequent. The Taliban, meanwhile, grew inexorably stronger.

During a visit to the tense, embattled, eastern province of Khost, in the winter of 2010, a senior American military commander there, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Lutsky, acknowledged to me the lack of trust with his

Afghan counterparts, several of whom he suspected of working with the Taliban. "The cultural complexity of the environment is just so huge that it's hard for us to understand it," he said. "For Americans, it's black or white-it's either good guys or bad guys. For Afghans, it's not. There are good Taliban and bad Taliban, and some of them are willing to do deals with each other. It's just beyond us."

Ten years on, as Afghanistan's provincial capitals are falling to the Taliban and Kabul itself becomes encircled, the litany of exotic place names-Sheberghan, Taloqan, Kunduz, Kandahar, Herat-must mean little to most Americans, except for those who were once deployed in them. But a generation ago, as Afghan mujahideen, or holy warriors, of the so-called Northern Alliance, an anti-Taliban coalition commanded by warlords, battled alongside American Special Forces to free these same towns from the Taliban, they were in the news constantly, as commonplace to Americans then as Benghazi or Raqqa became in later years.



Taliban is not what it was 20 years ago

M K Bhadrakumar writes: It has transformed into an incredibly diverse movement that made inroads into all communities and ethnic groups, has diversified external relations in the West and East alike, and is hankering for legitimacy.

Regime changes are capricious events, since there are many variables in play. It explains their mystique. The latest one in Afghanistan, third in the past two decades, is no exception. The Mujahideen takeover in 1992 was a preordained event choreographed by the United Nations, which slipped out of its hands. The 1996 Taliban takeover was like a slow-motion talkie with Ahmad Shah Massoud simply disappearing from Kabul without a fight. Last Sunday's dramatic developments lead to a sense of déjà vu.

However, there are major differences, too - three, in particular. Unlike previous occasions, the Afghan state structures are largely intact, which was highlighted by the Taliban's dramatic press conference in a grand setting, with chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, within 48 hours of their march into Kabul.

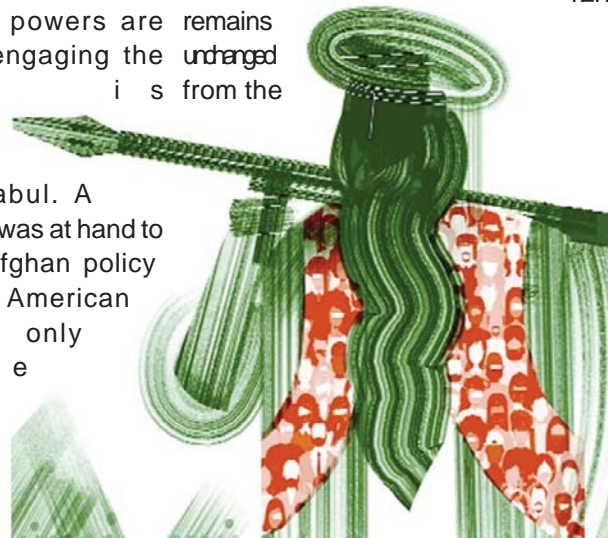
Second, the regime change is still playing out sedately and it may take days or even weeks before its final contours emerge in the form of a transitional government. There are signs that the victor is amenable to persuasion to accept a consensual outcome.

Third, and most important, unlike the previous two

occasions, the international community, especially regional states, is midwifing the transition. Again, the victor is willing to take help from the world community to assist in a sweeping national reconciliation that accommodates the widest possible swathe of opinion in that hopelessly fragmented country. Setting aside great-game impulses in new Cold War conditions, big powers are constructively engaging the Taliban. Truly, it is incomprehensible why India shut its embassy in Kabul. A great opportunity was at hand to plough a new Afghan policy independent of American tutelage. The only plausible explanation for such unseemly hurry to retrench could be that the government takes a zero-sum view that if Pakistan has a sense of triumphalism, then India must be the "loser". But we were never really such one-dimensional people previously. We had a profound understanding of the Afghan nation's ethos, traditions and culture and their enduring affection toward India.

Then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao didn't have an iota of doubt that India shouldn't lose time to

launch a conversation with the Mujahideen groups ("Peshawar Seven") notwithstanding their close association with Pakistan. Suffice to say, the Indian narrative is deeply flawed. We are riveted on archaic notions of "strategic depth" and regard the Taliban as a plaything of the Pakistani establishment. Our perspective on the Taliban movement remains unchanged from the



brief period it held power in Kabul. And, alas, our erroneous assumptions leave no scope to accommodate the compelling ground reality that Taliban today is largely an indigenous movement with roots running extensively in Afghan society. Indeed, through the past two decades in political wilderness, Taliban has transformed into an incredibly diverse movement that made inroads into all

communities and ethnic groups. Equally, the Indian establishment refuses to acknowledge what even the Western world, leave alone regional states, accepts: Pakistan's political economy is undergoing a profound transfiguration and it increasingly regards geo-economics as the leitmotif of its regional strategy. Why and how

makes an / of change. e doggedly te of it lest respond to responsible Political apparently at it is s to be stuck e and keep rning.

the 1990s, today is ble. The vacation of their Kabul embassies by Saudi Arabia and the UAE bears eloquent testimony to it. The Sheikhs held the Taliban in a pernicious grip in the 1990s, but the latter holds Saudis and Emiratis at arm's length now.

None other than Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwa, a close associate of Mullah Omar and one of the original Taliban members who launched the movement in 1994 (interior

minister, governor of Herat, etc. during their regime), stated in front of TV cameras a fortnight ago that Wahhabism is a deviant belief and "there has never been such a belief" among Afghans and "we (Taliban) do not have the same connection (with Saudi Arabia) as before". There have been no Taliban visits to Saudi Arabia for years now. The Taliban is asserting its traditional Islam and Shariah.

The Saudi and Emirati intelligence funded the Taliban and manipulated it to settle scores with Iran in the 1990s. Remember the disappearance of 11 Iranian diplomats from the consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998 in an intelligence operation for which the Taliban was blamed? Talibs are wiser now about the ways of the world, exposed to the metropolis and have diversified external relations in the West and East alike, and are hankering for legitimacy. This is in sync with Pakistan's priorities too and is of momentous significance as a pointer toward what to expect in Afghanistan. This needs explaining. All evidence shows Pakistan is persuading the erstwhile Northern Alliance to join a broad-based, inclusive transitional set-up with the Taliban as the immediate priority.

Indonesia's most active volcano erupts, blasts hot ash over 2,000 feet in air

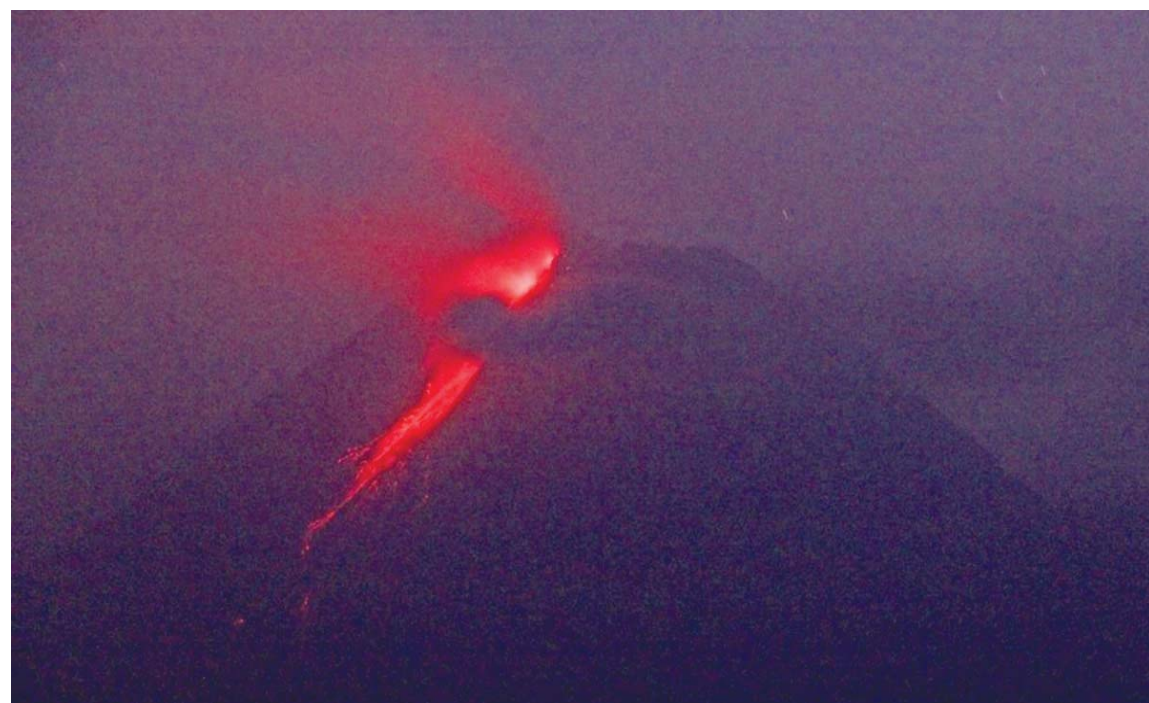
Ash blanketed nearby towns, but long-established evacuation orders are in place near the volcano.

Indonesia's most active volcano erupted Monday with its biggest lava flow in months, sending a river of lava and searing gas clouds flowing 3.5 kilometers (more than 2 miles) down its slopes on the densely populated island of Java.

The rumbling sound could be heard several kilometers (miles) away as Mount Merapi erupted, sending hot ash 600 meters (nearly 2,000 feet) into the sky. Ash blanketed nearby towns, but long-established evacuation orders are in place near the volcano, and no casualties were reported.

It was Merapi's biggest lava flow since authorities raised its danger level last November, said Hanik Humaida, the head of Yogyakarta's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center.

She said the lava dome just below Merapi's southwest rim and the lava dome in the crater both have been active since the end of July. The



southwest rim dome volume was estimated at 1.8 million cubic meters (66.9 million cubic feet) and about 3 meter (9.8 feet) tall before partially collapsing Monday morning, sending pyroclastic flows traveled fast down the southwest flank at least twice. Smaller pyroclastic flows of searing gas and lava traveled up to 1.5 kilometers (a mile)

southwest at least twice more during the day.

The 2,968-meter (9,737-foot) peak is near Yogyakarta, an ancient city of several hundred thousand people embedded in a large metro area on the island of Java. The city is a center of Javanese culture and a seat of royal dynasties going back centuries. Merapi's alert status has been at the second

highest of four levels since it began erupting last November, and Indonesia's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center has not raised it despite the past week's increased volcanic activity. The four levels describe eruption activity as normal, minor, moderate or major. People are advised to stay 5 kilometers (3.1 miles)

from the crater's mouth and to beware of the peril of lava, the agency said.

Ash from the eruption blanketed several villages and nearby towns, Humaida said. Cloudy weather obscured views of the peak.

Mount Merapi is the most active of more than 120 active volcanoes in Indonesia and has repeatedly erupted with lava and gas clouds recently. Authorities in November had evacuated nearly 2,000 people living on the fertile slopes of the mountain in Magelang and Sleman districts and about 550 more people in January, but most have since returned. Merapi's last major eruption in 2010 killed 347 people and caused the evacuation of 20,000 villagers.

Indonesia, an archipelago of 270 million people, is prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity because it sits along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe-shaped series of seismic fault lines around the ocean.

European satellite can map Earth multiple times a day, set to boost defence monitoring capability

The satellites were launched onboard the Vega rocket developed by the European Space Agency (ESA) from the spaceport in French Guiana.



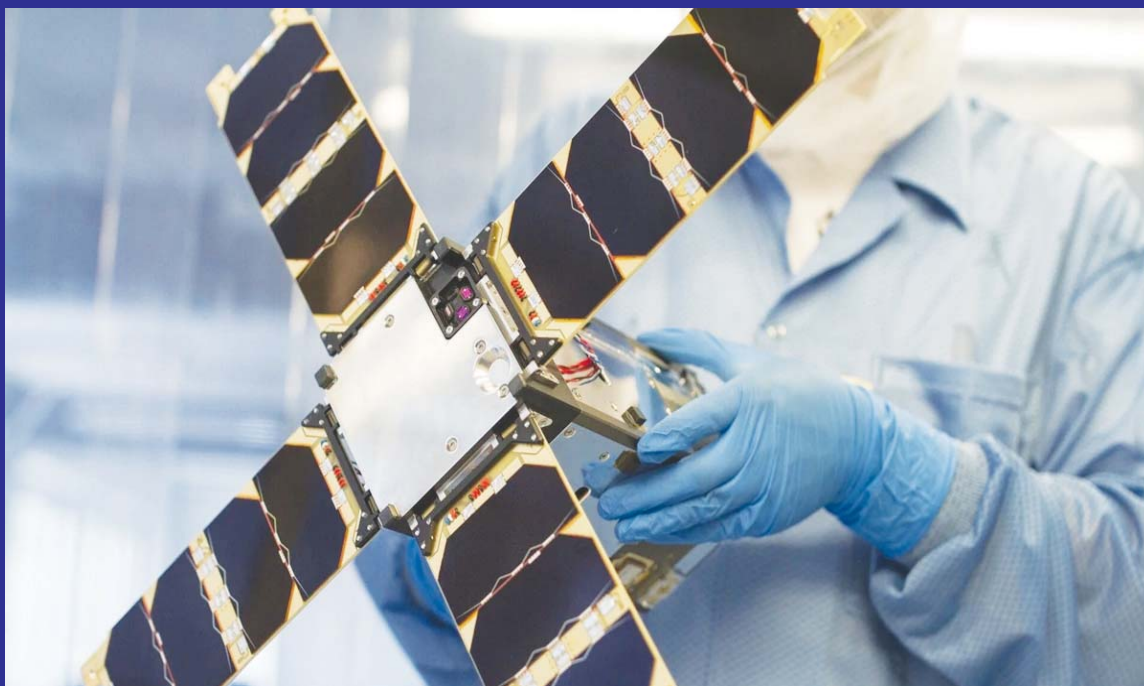
Europe successfully delivered its Earth Observation Satellite into orbit along with four auxiliary payloads including SunStorm, RadCube and BRO-4. The primary payload Pléiades Neo-4 was the first to be released into a Sun-synchronous orbit about 55 minutes after launch.

The satellites were launched onboard the Vega rocket developed by the European Space Agency (ESA) from the spaceport in French Guiana. The flight lasted for 105 minutes during which all payloads were deployed successfully in their intended orbits.

In a bid to comply with new regulations of keeping the space free from the junk, "The upper stage burned a final time to deorbit itself to ensure direct reentry and burn up high in the atmosphere over the ocean," ESA said in a statement.

What is Europe's Earth Observation Satellite?

The Earth observation satellite, Pléiades Neo-4 has



been developed by Airbus Defence and Space, which is second in the constellation of four satellites to provide high-resolution images of Earth's surface. The satellite will image the planet several times every day to a 30 cm per-pixel resolution and the data will be used to monitor the effects of climate change, for mapping and in defence.

"The data will be used to boost

near-real-time emergency service response capabilities over the next 10 years," ESA said adding that Pléiades Neo-4 joins Pléiades Neo-3, which was launched on Vega's first launch earlier this year. Apart from Pléiades Neo-4, Vega also deployed miniaturised space weather instruments, SunStorm RadCube into orbit. SunStorm is a two-unit CubeSat built and

operated by Reaktor Space Lab in Finland, which hosts a new solar X-ray flux monitor which will detect coronal mass ejections from the Sun. The small satellite will help in predicting the solar eruptions that threaten satellites and terrestrial power and communications networks. "The SunStorm demonstrates a novel ant-sized silicon drift detector planned to be used on

the ESA Lagrange space weather mission," ESA said. Meanwhile, the RadCube is a three-unit CubeSat that houses a new space weather in-situ monitoring instrument. The instrument consists of a radiation telescope and a magnetometer to show how radiation in space damages electronics, which will lead to safer components and spacecraft.

What is the Vega rocket system?

The Vega rockets have been in use since 2012, efficiently launching light payloads to low Earth orbits. The space agency is also developing another version of the rocket as Vega-C, which is likely to begin operation by 2022.

The 3 metre-diameter single-body vehicle comprises four stages and stands 30 metres tall with a liftoff mass of 137 tonnes. The total payload mass for the launch was about 1029 kilograms.



Overcoming the partition of the minds

Three major partitions happened in the world in the second half of the 1940s. Germany was partitioned into the Eastern and Western blocs in 1945, followed by India into Hindustan and Pakistan in 1947. Finally, Israel was created by partitioning Palestine in 1948. Germany's partition was temporary. The Berlin Wall, constructed in the early 1960s to accord permanence to it, was dismantled by the Germans in less than three decades. The country was reunified in 1989.

But in India and Palestine, partition was a terrible affair, leading to a full-scale war in Israel and mass migration accompanied by mind-numbing violence in India. The Arab-Israeli war at the time of the partition of Palestine in 1947-49 caused the death of over 30,000 people. But the death and destruction caused at the time of India's Partition were horrifying. More than a million were murdered, while many millions more had to endure a treacherous migration across the hastily created border, often on foot. Hundreds of thousands could not make it, as they were waylaid and butchered.

Those horrors are difficult to forget. Historian William

Partition-time memories should help mitigate the wounds that communities nurture and end the mental and emotional divide, not exacerbate it further

Dalrymple, in an article in New Yorker, quotes from a book by Nisid Hajari, *Midnight's Furies*, about the brutality of the period: "Gangs of killers set whole villages aflame, hacking to death men and children and the aged while carrying off young women to be raped. Some British soldiers and journalists who witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed Partition's brutalities were worse: pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits."

The Partition of India was a meaningless and reckless act. Mahatma Gandhi opposed it saying: "Vivisection me before vivisectioning the nation". Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel vowed to fight till the end to reject it. Rajendra Prasad conclusively proved its irrationality in a thoroughly argued 1946-book, *India Divided*.

Across the border, for Saadat Hasan Manto, the famed author, it was all sheer madness. Those women raped, with bulged stomachs, distressed him. "Where should those bellies belong to - Hindustan or Pakistan?" Manto

questioned in innocent grief. His dark satire on Partition-time madness, *Toba Tek Singh*, ends with his eponymous hero Tek Singh seen stranded on no-man's land between the newly created India and Pakistan. "On one side, behind barbed wire, stood together the lunatics of India and on the other side, behind more barbed wire, stood the lunatics of Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh", Manto provocatively demurs.

Partition was not inevitable even until the early 1940s. But then, the British were in a hurry to leave. Louis Mountbatten arrived in India in March 1947 with the mandate to free the country before June 1948. After meeting Mohammad Ali Jinnah, "a psychopathic case", Mountbatten decided not to wait for that long. In June, he unilaterally declared that the British would partition India and leave in less than three months. Gandhi could not reconcile to the fact that a "maniac" and "an evil genius" like Jinnah could have his way, and retreated to Bengal to attend to the victims of the bigotry and brutality of its

rabid communalist premier, Hussain Suhrawardy. Jawaharlal Nehru, who once called Partition "fantastic nonsense", reconciled quickly and declared in April 1947, "I want that those who stand as an obstacle in our way should go their own way."

In India, Rajendra-babu became the first president of partitioned India, and Nehru its first Prime Minister (PM). In Pakistan, Manto was branded a traitor and thrown into jail, and died a broken man in 1955 at the age of 42.

For Hindus, Partition was not merely a loss of territory; it was the vivisection of their revered motherland. The urge for undoing it and reclaiming that lost territory, Akhand Bharat, remains a fervent dream for many of them, as Israel remained for the Jews for over two millennia.

The partition of Germany was rejected by people on both sides of the Wall. They pulled it down and ended the colonial game. Both the last PM of East Germany, Lothar de Maizière, and the leader of Opposition, Richard Schröder stood by their people. Despite domestic

opposition in the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev demonstrated statesmanship by not interfering.

Unfortunately, the Partition of India was not just about land, but about minds. The premise was that Hindus and Muslims cannot live together. Jinnah, who was once hailed as "the Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity" and had disparagingly dismissed the propaganda about Hindu domination as just "a bogey, put before you (Muslims) by your enemies to frighten you", turned the tables by the 1940s and maniacally argued that they could never live together. He won.

The first step to Akhand Bharat would be to bottle the Jinnah genie. Partition-time memories should help mitigate the wounds that communities nurture and end the mental and emotional divide, not exacerbate it further. "This day will not only inspire us to eliminate the poison of discrimination, animosity and ill will, but it will also strengthen unity, social harmony and human sensibilities," PM Narendra Modi fervently hoped when he recently called for the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day to be observed every August 14. May the day be marked with this spirit.

Fast fashion spurs bleach-like pollution of Africa's rivers: Report

It identified some 50 international brands that source or have sourced their clothes from African nations.



Global fast fashion brands are helping drive pollution that has dyed African rivers blue or turned their waters as alkaline as bleach, according to a report published on Tuesday.

Water Witness International's (WWI) report featured the polluted rivers in Lesotho in southern Africa and Tanzania to highlight the risks posed as global brands increasingly source garments from contractors in Africa, attracted by cheap labour and tax incentives.

Global brands could force better practices, but so far their presence in Africa has done little to stem rife pollution, water hoarding by contracting factories or even ensure adequate water and sanitation for factory staff, Nick Hepworth, director of WWI and author of the report, said.

"The flipside is that (fast

fashion) could be a force for change," he continued, but brands and investors needed to take the lead.

In Lesotho, researchers found a river visibly polluted with blue dye for denim jeans. Samples taken from Tanzania's Msimbazi river in Dar es Salaam meanwhile tested a pH of 12 - the same as bleach - near a textiles factory, the report said, adding local communities use the Msimbazi for washing, irrigation and more. It identified some 50 international brands that source or have sourced their clothes from African nations, including Inditex's Zara, ASOS (ASOS.L) and H&M (HMB.ST), but didn't tie the pollution to any company's supply chain. Zara did not provide a comment. ASOS and H&M confirmed they source from Africa but pointed to initiatives to ensure sustainability or address water risks. Brands can and do make environmentally



sustainable clothing, and consumer pressure was key to encouraging more, said Katrina Charles, an expert on water security and quality at the University of Oxford who has

worked with governments in Africa and Asia.

The textiles sector offered opportunities for African nations, including growth and jobs, but these would not pay off if pollution

management and adequate working conditions weren't ensured, she said.

"Making the textile industry a force for good in Africa is a very delicate balance," she said.

Cryptocurrency prices today: Bitcoin

Ether down as virtual coin see minor consolidation

Popular cryptocurrency prices fell marginally on Tuesday due to minor consolidation in the virtual coin market. Check the latest cryptocurrency prices and trends.

Cryptocurrency prices have fallen over the past 24 hours as the virtual coin market saw minor consolidation. Almost all cryptocurrencies have seen a fall in prices as the ongoing rally seems to be fading.

Bitcoin, the world's most popular cryptocurrency, was hovering around \$46,000, down over 1.2 per cent at 4:30 pm. Bitcoin's market capitalisation also fell marginally to \$880 billion. Ether price also fell over 1.4 per cent to \$3,244. The second

most popular cryptocurrency's market capitalisation fell to \$379 billion.

The value of most other altcoins fell including XRP, Cardano, Dogecoin, Stellar, Uniswap, Chainlink and Litecoin. Only Solana performed well, rising approximately 14 per cent. Commenting on the consolidation, Edul Patel, CEO and Co-founder of Mudrex, a global algorithm based crypto trading platform, said, "The past 24 hours witnessed Bitcoin and Ether toying

with their crucial support and resistance levels. BTC hovered around the \$46,000 level, and Ether fell below \$3200 before settling."

"Following this, we saw the crypto markets facing a minor consolidation. Among the Altcoins, the star performer of the day was Solana which shot up another 14 per cent," he added. "As the top cryptos are losing the steam and consolidating, we might witness another season for the Altcoins after the rally earlier this year."

Taliban takeover in Afghanistan to impact trade with India, says CAIT



The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan will impact bilateral trade relations with India, said Praveen Khandelwal, secretary general of the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT).

Afghan exports to India include dried raisins, walnuts, almonds, figs, pine nuts, pistachios, dried apricot and fresh fruits such as apricot, cherry, watermelon, and a few medicinal herbs. On the other hand, India's exports to Afghanistan include tea, coffee, pepper and cotton, toys, footwear and various other consumable items, according to BC Bhartia, CAIT national president.

The bilateral trade between India and Afghanistan was \$1.4 billion in 2020-21, compared to \$1.52 billion in 2019-20. Exports from India were valued at \$826 million while imports amounted to \$510 million in 2020-21.

The top CAIT representatives said prices of some commodities imported from Afghanistan may go up in the Indian markets due to uncertainty over bilateral relations and trade. In fact, import and export shipments have also been stranded in the wake of the Taliban takeover. The CAIT representatives advised domestic exporters to remain alert and keep an eye on the developments. They noted that huge amount of payments are likely to be blocked, putting traders in a vulnerable situation. The government must recognise the situation and help the traders in the event of facing a financial crisis, said CAIT's top members.

Vodafone Idea crisis

Govt wants promoters to infuse capital before relief package

The government is expected to come out with a relief package as it plans to offer some breathing space to the ailing telecom sector, especially cash-strapped Vodafone Idea, which is on the brink of a financial collapse.

While no specific date has been announced by the government for announcing the telecom relief package, several officials have confirmed that work is underway to provide relief to all stressed telecom companies, especially Vodafone Idea Limited (VIL). Even as the government readies the relief package for the telecom sector, it wants promoters of Vodafone Idea - the Vodafone Group Plc and Aditya Birla Group (ABG) - to show their commitment to telecom operations by infusing capital, reported The Economic Times.

The report highlighted that Department of Telecommunication (DoT) officials are planning to



reach out to the ailing telco's promoters to understand the future court of action and whether the promoters are committed to saving the stressed telco. This is because the government wants to avoid a situation where VIL goes under despite a relief package.

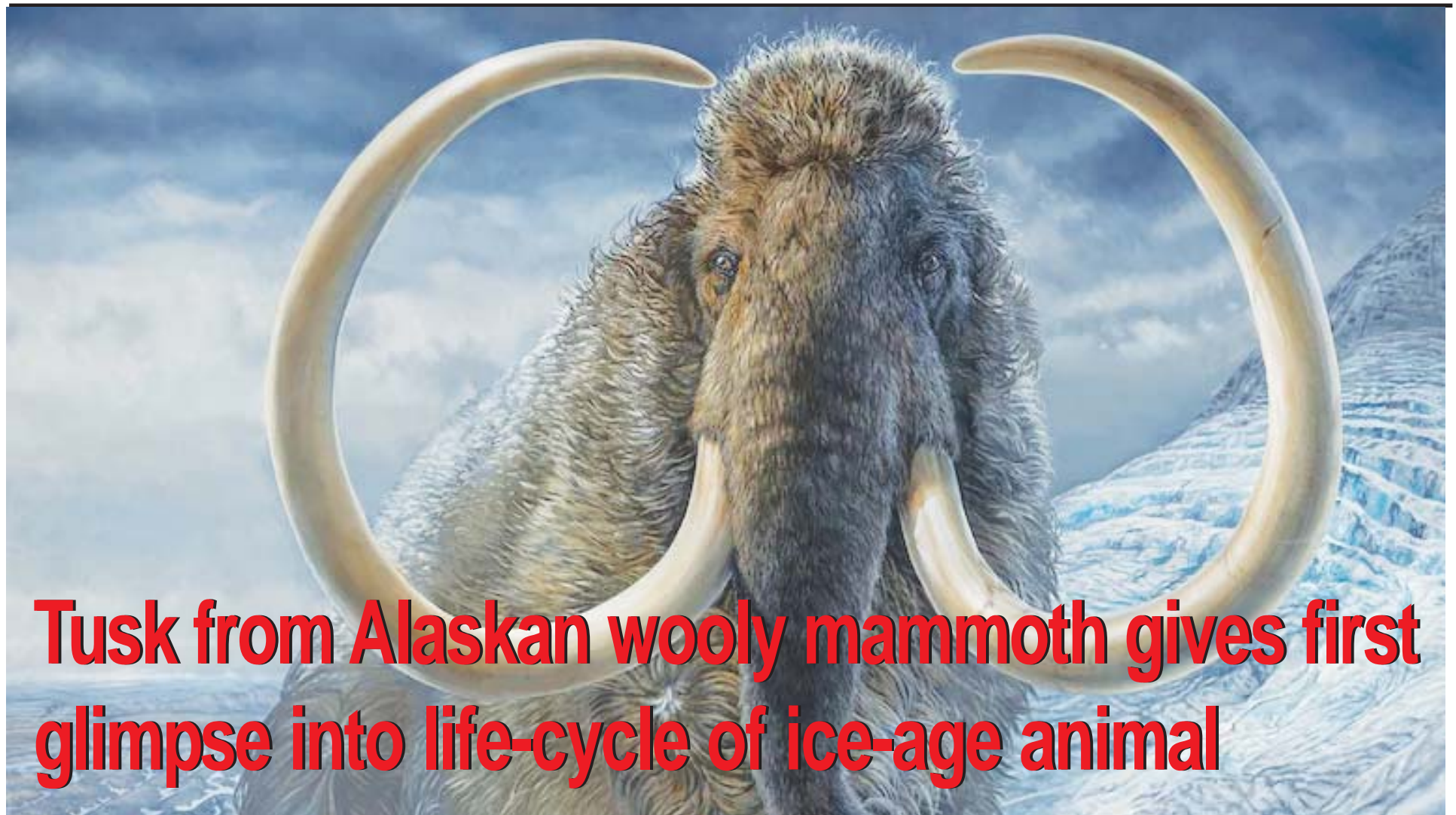
A senior government official quoted in the publication said all efforts are being made to retail a three-

player telecom market. However, the official suggested that it is important for the two promoters to infuse capital into the company and chalk out a strategy for the next few years. VIL'S DETERIORATING SITUATION

The current situation does not look good for Vodafone Idea, which saw its first-quarter loss jump to Rs 7,319 crore from Rs 6,985 crore in the previous quarter.

On the contrary, Vodafone Idea's total debt has increased to Rs 1.92 lakh crore. To make matters worse, the company has lost a significant chunk of its telecom business during the pandemic and needs fresh investments to recover from the current situation and repay dues.

The company has even failed to raise Rs 25,000 crore almost a year after its board approved fundraising plans.



Tusk from Alaskan woolly mammoth gives first glimpse into life-cycle of ice-age animal

The mammoth's movements were traced through analysis of isotopes in one of its well-preserved tusks

A woolly mammoth that roamed Alaska 17,000 years ago covered enough ground in its 28-year lifetime to nearly circle the globe twice, an analysis of one of its tusks suggests.

The findings, detailed in a study published Thursday in the journal *Science*, show how the male mammoth went through infancy and youth as part of a herd, but died alone from starvation in Alaska's northernmost mountains.

"This really is one of the very first insights into the life history of an Arctic woolly mammoth,"

said Matthew Wooller of the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, co-lead author of the study of the now-extinct ancestor of the modern elephant.

The mammoth's movements were traced through analysis of isotopes in one of its well-preserved tusks. To generate more than 400,000 data points for the study, the scientists sliced open the tusk, exposing the layers that were added as the animal grew. Those layers, Wooller said, are like "sugar ice cream cones stacked one inside

of each other."

In its early years, the mammoth - named Kik by researchers after the river where its remains were found - moved around the area that is now the Lower Yukon River region, Wooller said. Though glaciers extended far south at the time, much of Alaska, including that region, was glacier-free. Alaska areas that are now boreal forest were grassy steppe-like terrain, ideal for grazers such as woolly mammoths, he said. "It was probably hanging out with

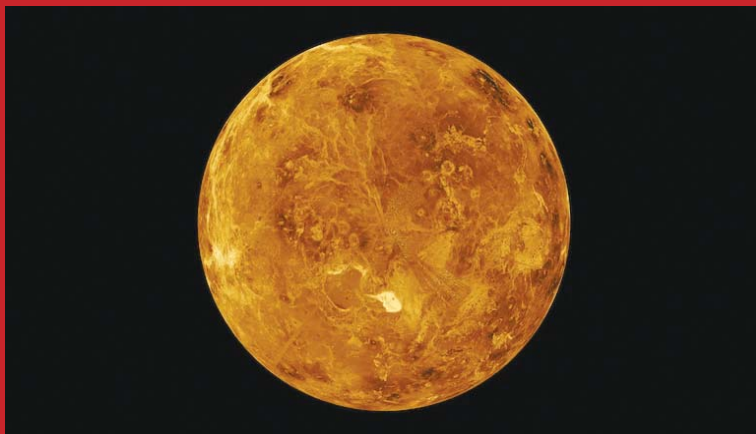
the herd, with its mother and other members of the herd," Wooller said. In its later years, the mammoth roamed some routes that caribou use today, Wooller said. It is possible that the mammoth, as it traveled seasonally to find food, shared migration paths with ancient caribou, he said. Its demise likely came at the Arctic gravel bar where its remains were found in 2010. The combination of two tusks and a partial skull there "gives us pretty good confidence that that's where it died," Wooller said. At the end,

it endured nutritional stress, the tusk analysis showed. "It looks like in its last year of life it slowed down to not much moving around," Wooller said. "We have kind of a smoking gun of what killed it." The study does more than just satisfy curiosity about extinct Ice Age creatures. It is relevant to species living in today's rapidly changing Arctic, Wooller said. "Our work helps shed a light on environmental concerns we have about modern animals like polar bears and caribou that live in the Arctic today," he said.

This is how Venus sounds: Listen to first audio recordings from Earth's mysterious twin

Days after the European Space Agency (ESA) released the first pictures of its historic dual flyby of Venus, the space agency has now recorded sounds emerging from the planet as the Solar Orbiter and the BepiColombo spacecraft crossed the mysterious planet.

The ESA-NASA Solar Orbiter spacecraft flew past Venus on August 9 at a distance of 7,995 km, while the ESA-JAXA BepiColombo mission skimmed past at just 552 km from the planet's surface a day



later. The two spacecraft used Venus to slingshot their way to the centre of the Solar System. While the Solar Orbiter is headed to the Sun, the BepiColombo spacecraft is on its way to study the innermost planet of the solar system - Mercury,

where it is expected to make the first of six flybys on October 1-2 before entering orbit in 2025. Meanwhile, the solar orbiter will make a close Earth flyby on November 27, "before further Venus slingshots will tilt its inclination in order to get the first-ever views of the Sun's poles," ESA said.

Sounds of Venus
During their gravity assist, the spacecraft recorded the sounds of Earth's mysterious twin as they headed towards their destinations. The sounds have been generated from the planet's

gravity acting on the spacecraft structure and its response to the rapid temperature changes.

The Italian Spring Accelerometer (ISA) onboard the BepiColombo spacecraft recorded the accelerations measured by the spacecraft, which was then translated into the frequency to make them audible. ESA said that the accelerometer also felt the tidal effects acting on the spacecraft as it flew at different distances past Venus.



Bezos takes US govt to court!

Blue Origin sues Nasa over lunar lander contract to SpaceX

The contract awarded to SpaceX pertains to designing a Human Landing System (HLS) to land the next astronauts on the Moon.

Nearly a month after Blue Origin blasted off and returned its boss Jeff Bezos from space, the company is making ripples again as it sued the US government over a contract awarded to SpaceX. The litigation is against NASA's decision to award a \$2.9 billion lunar lander contract to Elon Musk-led SpaceX. The lawsuit "challenges Nasa's unlawful and improper evaluation of proposals submitted under the HLS Option A BAA," Blue Origin said in the motion to seal filings. It added that it is "an attempt to remedy the flaws in the acquisition process found in NASA's Human Landing System."

"The issues identified in this procurement and its outcomes must be addressed to restore fairness, create competition, and ensure a safe return to the Moon for America," the aerospace company added.

The decision to sue the US government comes after the Government Accountability Office (GAO) stood with Nasa over its decision to pick a single lunar lander provider, while rejecting Blue Origin's protest. Nasa now has to file a response to the lawsuit by October 12.

"Nasa officials are currently reviewing

details of the case. With our partners, we will go to the Moon and stay to enable science investigations, develop new technology, and create high-paying jobs for the greater good and in preparation to send astronauts to Mars," Nasa said on the development.

What is the Lunar Lander contract? The contract pertains to Nasa's request for a bid to design a Human Landing System (HLS) to land the next astronauts on the moon as part of the Artemis 3 mission. The mission is scheduled to take off in 2024. Nasa awarded the contract to SpaceX for its \$2.9 billion bid to use a version of the company's Starship spacecraft, which is in development. The decision to award the contract entirely to SpaceX was a step away from set norms, where at least two companies are selected. While one designs the module another is chosen to design a backup to be used in case of an emergency. The two other companies in the fray, apart from SpaceX, were Blue Origin and Dynetics. The decision to award the contract to just one company was met with a strong protest from Blue Origin and Dynetics, who noted a formal complaint with the GAO. As

the matter went under the hammer, SpaceX was asked to not begin work on the contract. The US Senate had approved a fraction of the funding that NASA requested for its planned lunar landing in 2020. Bezos' big gamble In a bid to smooth proceedings, Bezos offered to cover up to \$2 billion in NASA costs if the US space agency awards his company Blue Origin the contract. Blue Origin had initially partnered with Lockheed Martin Corp, Northrop Grumman Corp, and Draper in the bid. In an open letter to Nasa administrator, Bezos offered that Blue Origin would waive payments in the government's current fiscal year and the next ones after that up to \$2 billion, and pay for an orbital mission to vet its technology. In exchange, Blue Origin would accept a firm, fixed-priced contract, and cover any system development cost overruns. "NASA veered from its original dual-source acquisition strategy due to perceived near-term budgetary issues, and this offer removes that obstacle," Bezos wrote.

As the matter goes into court all eyes are now on Nasa, as to how they respond to the suit and what will be the fate of the lunar lander.

Reduction in methane emission could help keep global temperature change under 2 degrees Celcius



The latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) identified greenhouse gases as one of the primary drivers of climatic changes on the planet that may soon become irreversible. Among these greenhouse gases, methane could be the worst with nearly 60 per cent being generated by human sources alone.

Researchers are now saying that if methane emissions decline, its atmospheric concentration could be reduced in just ten years. This could have a major impact on climate change and keep the global temperature change below 2 degrees celsius. The IPCC also stated that sustained methane mitigation could reduce surface temperatures in the long term.

According to a recent study by Nasa, nearly a quarter of methane emissions can be attributed to agriculture, much of which is from raising livestock. Amid other sources, the burning of fossil fuels and decomposition in landfills also drive the methane concentration in the atmosphere, raising global temperatures.

The IPCC findings

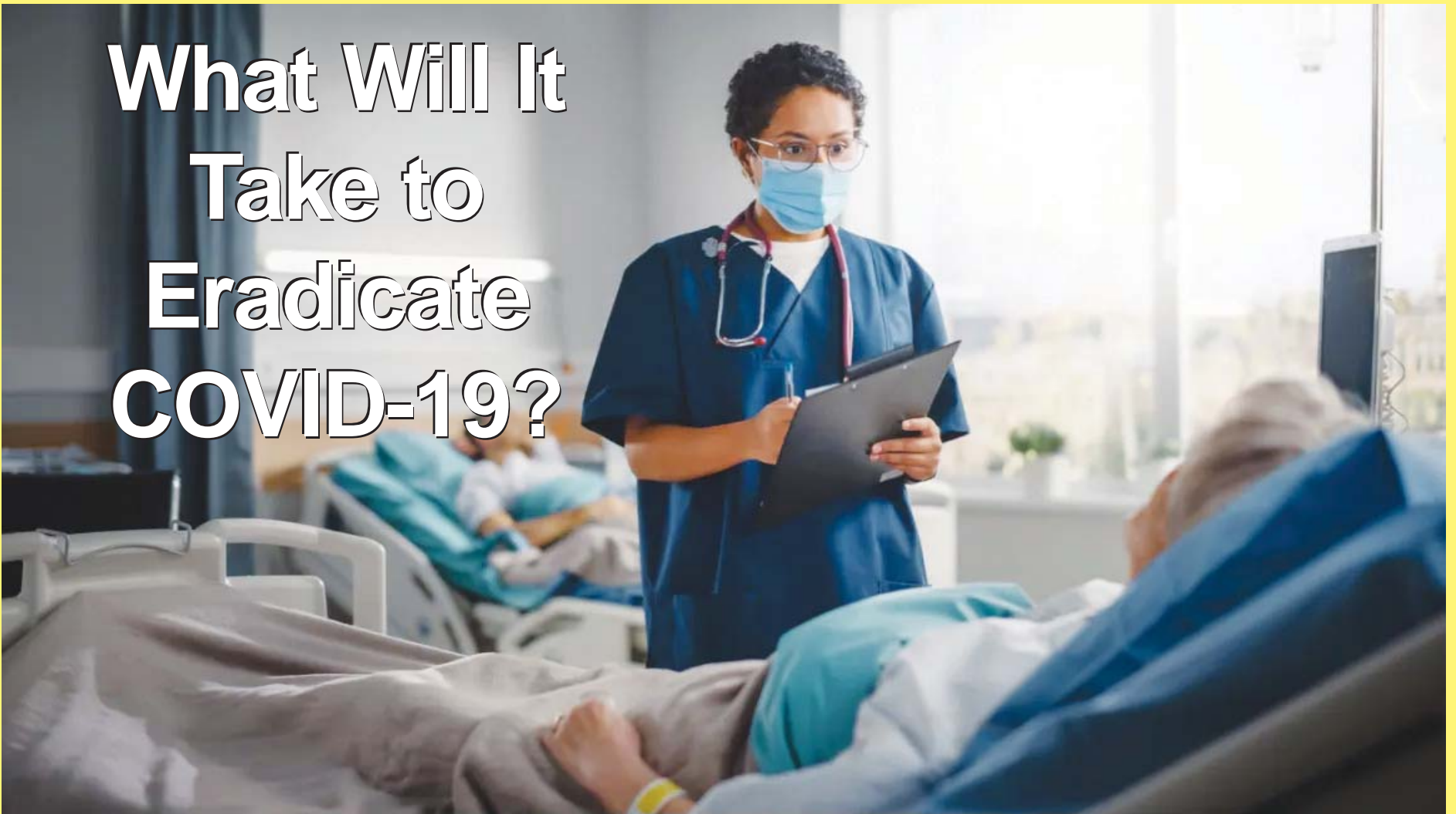
The panel has been identifying methane as one of the villains in the study of climate change for decades. In the 2007 assessment, the body had called it an unequivocal contributor to global warming.

"It is unequivocal that the increase of CO₂, methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) in the atmosphere over the industrial era is the result of human activities and that human influence is the principal driver of many changes observed across the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere."

The 2021 IPCC report stated sustained methane mitigation could help in reducing global surface temperatures in the long term. "Sustained methane mitigation reduces global surface ozone, contributing to air quality improvements and also reduces the surface temperature in the longer term, but only sustained CO₂ emission reductions allow long-term climate stabilisation," the report said. Sources of Methane emission

While human sources are at the core of methane emissions, there are other factors at play. "The greatest natural source of methane is wetlands, which contribute 30 per cent of global methane emissions. Other natural sources of methane emissions include the oceans, termites, permafrost, vegetation and wildfires," Nasa said.

What Will It Take to Eradicate COVID-19?



Many experts caution that, even after we roll out COVID-19 vaccines to much of the world's population, the coronavirus that causes this disease - SARS-CoV-2 - will likely be with us for the foreseeable future.

But a group of New Zealand researchers say we shouldn't rule out the "possibility of eradicating" COVID-19 from the world.

While this seems like a tall order - especially with the United States once again approaching 200,000 coronavirus cases a day - the researchers estimate that it would be slightly easier than eradicating polio.

However, they estimate that eradicating COVID-19 would be much harder than doing the

same for smallpox.

"While our analysis is a preliminary effort with various subjective components, it does seem to put COVID-19 eradicability into the realms of being possible, especially in terms of technical feasibility," they wrote in BMJ Global Health. The researchers are not talking about the elimination of COVID-19 - in which a country or region gets case rates to zero, and reacts quickly to squash the occasional outbreak after that. Eradication means reducing global cases to zero and keeping them there until intervention measures - such as vaccines - are no longer needed.

The global health community has achieved this with smallpox, which the World Health Organization declared

eradicated Trusted Source in 1980.

It is attempting to do the same for polio and measles.

Eradicating COVID-19 within the realm of possibility

The New Zealand researchers' assessment of the "eradicability" of COVID-19 is based on seven major factors.

One of these is the availability of a highly effective and safe vaccine, particularly one that is cheap and stable.

The smallpox vaccine was a "great success" in the eradication of smallpox, the researchers wrote.

They add that while there are several effective COVID-19 vaccines, it's uncertain how long the protection gained from these will last.

But they say the mRNA vaccines

will likely be improved further, with the potential for the development of intranasal COVID-19 vaccines.

Some scientists think intranasal vaccines may help block transmission of the coronavirus, but more research is needed. No vaccine of this type is currently approved.

Another factor the researchers looked at is whether lifelong immunity occurs after recovering from infection.

People who had smallpox are immune from the virus for the rest of their life. People who had polio are "probably" immune, the authors wrote.

With COVID-19, the duration of the immunity that occurs after natural infection is unknown, although estimates range from months to years.

The researchers also considered whether people can be long-term carriers of the virus, if the disease state is easily recognized, and if there's an easy way to diagnose infection.

There's no evidence that people can be long-term carriers of the coronavirus, poliovirus, or smallpox virus. As for diagnosing COVID-19, this usually requires laboratory testing - or a reliable on-the-go test kit - because certain symptoms are similar to other respiratory illnesses and some people don't have any symptoms.

In addition, the researchers looked at whether there is an animal reservoir of the virus and whether the virus' genetic material is stable.

Andhra: Efforts on to start pneumonia vaccination for infants, says CM Jagan Mohan Reddy

Efforts are underway to start the pneumococcal conjugate vaccination of children in the state, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy said on Tuesday.

"Steps are in progress to include the PCV (pneumococcal conjugate vaccination) vaccine to be included as the 10th type of universal immunisation programme to be administered to children," Andhra CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy said.

"Pneumococcal disease is most

commonly found in children under 2 years (including infants). So far, the government has been providing nine types of vaccines to children. The newly administered PC vaccine should be administered at the village and ward clinics," CM Jagan Mohan Reddy said.

Pneumococcal conjugate vaccination is mainly carried out to prevent pneumococcal disease caused by bacteria. These bacteria can cause many types of illnesses, including

pneumonia, which is an infection of the lungs.

The development comes as Andhra Pradesh reported 909 Covid-19 cases and 13 fatalities due to the viral infection on Monday. SARS-CoV-2 is the coronavirus that has caused the Covid-19 pandemic.

Andhra CM Jagan Mohan Reddy directed health officials to ensure a thorough implementation of Covid protocols in the state.

Meanwhile, the Andhra Pradesh



government launched two of efficacious and quality drugs websites to ensure the availability at affordable prices.

Build Your Immunity to Fight Covid: Vegetable pancake

It's not long when the third wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic will hit India. During such uncertain times, a nutritious diet and an optimally functioning immune system can never go wrong. If you have a healthy immune system, rest assured, you can safeguard your body from any diseases, including Covid-19.

Vegetable pancake made with immunity boosting ingredients like carrots, onions, etc, is not only healthy for your body, but also tastes delicious. For today's segment of Build Your Immunity to Fight Covid, we got in touch with dietician, Neeta Thapa Saikia. She suggests the vegetable pancake along with chutney to help strengthen our immune system to fight Covid-19. As the name suggests, the recipe requires vegetables.

INGREDIENTS (Serves:1)

Carrot - 1/4 cup
Spinach - 1/4 cup
Cabbage - 1/4 cup
Onion - 1/4 cup
Coriander leaves - 1/4 cup
Green chillies - 2
Ginger - 1 inch
Whole grain flour - 75g
Roasted Gram flour (besan) - 25g
Sattu - 25g
Oats - 25g
Milk - 1 cup
Egg - 1
Refined oil - 2 tbsp
Baking soda - 1/2 tsp
Turmeric - 1/2 tsp
Black pepper powder - 1/2 tsp
Jeera powder - 1/2 tsp

Blood clotting may be root cause of long Covid syndrome, says study

Blood clotting may be the main cause of patients facing symptoms of long Covid syndrome, a study has found.

Patients with long Covid syndrome continue to have higher measures of blood clotting, which may explain their persistent symptoms such as reduced physical fitness and fatigue, according to a study.

The symptoms of long Covid syndrome, including breathlessness, fatigue and decreased exercise tolerance, can last weeks to months after the initial infection has resolved, and is estimated to affect millions of people worldwide.

The researchers from RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences in Ireland examined 50 patients with

symptoms of long Covid syndrome to better understand if abnormal blood clotting is involved.

Their study, published in the Journal of Thrombosis and Haemostasis, found that clotting markers were significantly elevated in the blood of patients with long Covid syndrome compared with healthy controls. These clotting markers were higher in patients who required hospitalisation with their initial Covid-19 infection.

However, the researchers also found that even those who were able to manage their illness at home still had persistently high clotting markers.

They observed that higher clotting was directly related to other symptoms of long Covid syndrome, such as reduced physical fitness and fatigue.

Even though markers of inflammation had all returned to normal levels, increased clotting potential was still present in long Covid patients. "Because clotting markers were elevated while inflammation markers had returned to normal, our results suggest that the clotting system may be involved in the root cause of long Covid syndrome," said Helen Fogarty, the study's lead author, and PhD student at RCSI School of

Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences.

Professor James O'Donnell, Director of the Irish Centre for Vascular Biology, RCSI noted that understanding the root cause of a disease is the first step towards developing effective treatments.

"Millions of people are already dealing with the symptoms of long Covid syndrome, and more people will develop long Covid as the infections among the unvaccinated continue to occur," O'Donnell said.

"It is imperative that we continue to study this condition and develop effective treatments," he added.

Boost Your Immunity

In today's segment of Boost Your Immunity, we bring to you a tasty and healthy recipe of Black-eyed bean salad. It is easy to make and has high nutritional value.

Health has taken precedence over everything else in today's world. It's of utmost importance to boost our immunity in order to safeguard ourselves from diseases and also build the strength to fight them. Today, in our Boost Your Immunity segment, we bring you a protein-rich recipe made with black-eyed beans, also known as black-eyed peas or lobia. Manisha Aggarwal, a Delhi-

based nutritionist, shares a recipe of Black-eyed bean salad with IndiaToday.in and also informs us about the great nutritional value of these pulses. The dish overall benefits health, builds immunity and can be enjoyed as a snack anytime.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup dry Lobia or black-eyed beans
1 medium tomato finely-chopped
1 cucumber finely-chopped
1 ripe mango
50g chopped cottage cheese
1/4 cup roasted and coarsely chopped peanuts
Chopped coriander leaves for garnishing

Seasonings:

Juice of 1 lemon
1/4 tsp cinnamon powder
1/4 tsp black pepper powder
1/4 tsp roasted cumin powder
1/4 tsp chaat masala
1 tsp honey
Black salt as per taste
HOW TO MAKE

Soak lobia overnight or for 4-6 hours. Pressure-cook it along with salt for 2-3 whistles. Keep a check on the amount of water used, it shouldn't be more than 1-1/2 cups. Take a large mixing bowl and add the drained and cooled lobia followed by chopped, tomato, cucumber, mango and cottage cheese. Add all the

Black-eyed bean salad



seasonings and mix well. The main ingredient, lobia/ Sprinkle coarsely grounded peanuts and fresh coriander. cowpea/black-eyed pea, is high on protein, zinc, folate, magnesium and potassium.

BENEFITS

Shershaah Vikram Batra's twin reveals Dimple Cheema's last words to him: 'You'll dance at our wedding na?'

Kiara Advani plays Dimple Cheema in the recently released movie Shershaah. Dimple was the girlfriend of Vikram Batra, the Param Vir Chakra awardee who died during the Kargil War of 1999. In a new interview, Vikram's

brother Vishal Batra has spoken about Dimple's last words to him before Vikram's death. He said that Dimple had asked him if he would dance at her wedding. Speaking to a leading daily, Vishal said, "I remember Dimple and I were having lunch together, six days before the ill-fated day. She had



them married. He further said that after Vikram's death, both he and his parents asked Dimple to find love again but she decided never to marry anyone else.

About Kiara's work in the movie, Vishal said that she was 'very convincing'. Vikram Batra was played by Sidharth Malhotra in the movie. He also played Vishal's role. Talking about

playing a double role, the actor told ANI, "Vikram and Vishal are twin brothers so it was quite exciting to portray both of them on screen." He further added, "What I really loved was while they were twins, they have very distinct personalities and I had to understand both of them emotionally to be able to show the difference in them. Even though the film follows Vikram Batra's life, there are small parts of Vishal Batra that I got to play."

come to see me off; I was headed to Delhi for some work. She told me: 'Jab Vikram vapas aa jayega toh aap hamari shaadi mein nachoge na (After Vikram comes back, you'll dance at our wedding)?' I said, 'Of course, nachunga (I will definitely dance)'." Vishal added that in the movie it was shown that Dimple was Vikram's fiancée but in real life, they never got engaged. However, his parents were thinking about getting

sidharth malhotra

Mountaineer conquers Mount Kilimanjaro and dedicates victory to Sonu Sood, actor says: 'Feel so moved by his gesture'



Actor Sonu Sood, who has won praise for his philanthropic work amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, recently received a heartfelt tribute from mountaineer and

cyclist Uma Singh. Uma Singh reportedly conquered Africa's tallest peak Mount Kilimanjaro on a cycle and dedicated his win to the actor. "For the first time in my life I have met a real-life hero and I want to do something for him. He stood up for our country in difficult circumstances, regardless of

his own life. You are the real hero of our country, Sonu Sood sir, and the elder brother to everyone in India," Uma said in a statement.

Sonu was touched by the mountaineer's gesture. "I feel so proud of Uma that he went ahead to achieve something so difficult."

Feel extremely blessed to make such a phenomenal comeback: Celina Jaitley Haag

Celina Jaitley Haag's comeback project, Season's Greetings, has been winning multiple awards at film festivals across the globe. Recently, she also won an award for best actor. Post the big success, the actor says that she has been receiving a plethora of offers. She shares, "I feel extremely blessed to make such a phenomenal comeback. I never left the film industry; it's just that it was time to take a pause and rethink the direction that I wanted to take both as a woman and as an actor. I have lots of amazing offers as well as plans." Haag reveals that she will soon be

seen in a comedy project, a genre she loves. "Covid travel restrictions and fears are leading me to take a decision to refrain from travelling. But I am working on something fascinating and hilarious as I truly believe comedy is one of my highest plus points," she says.

The actor, who last seen in feature films, Thank You and Shrimathi (both 2011), admits that now is the time to explore her creativity as showbiz has undergone a major transformation over the years: "I was very young, a teenager, when I started cinema. I was more a

beauty queen than an actor in eyes of all directors and I too was learning along the way. I had the talent within me but I did not know how to channel it."

But Haag is quick to add that she has no plans to shift base to India in the near future. "We live in an era of globalisation and it shouldn't matter where I live. I find great peace and positivity in my Alpine life in Austria and my Austrian heritage helps me be more grounded and a better actor," she ends.



Richa Chadha talks about Bollywood's 'Dark Side'

narrates how struggling actors are misled

Actor Richa Chadha, known for her outspoken personality, recently penned down the reality of the "imaginary" Bollywood. The Madam Chief Minister actor on Tuesday took to her Instagram Story and posted a write-up, exposing the detrimental things in the film industry one can be fooled into doing.

Without taking names, Richa described her experience when she was naive and people would take advantage of that.

"'Bollywood', an imaginary address between Bandra and Goregaon. Here when people need you to do something that's detrimental to you/your health/your career, they'll tell you how good it is for you and be confident that you'll believe them. I used to believe them when I was naive," she wrote.

Richa also called out the hypocrisy of some "press peeps" in their approach towards nepotism in the industry.

Richa Chadha posted a note on Instagram, which spoke about how struggling actors are misled into doing things that are 'detrimental' for them.

"Some press peeps will write long pieces about how nepotism ruins the industry while creepily following every pre-pubescent with a famous last name, and dissing any self-made professional in their mediocre writing, on the pretext of 'freedom of expression'," she added.

Richa ended her post with a statement, much more in the form of a warning.

"Must reform faster, if it has to survive the onslaught of OTT, VR and everything

in the future. Plz smell the coffee," she signed off.

On the work front, in March 2021, Richa and her rumoured beau Ali Fazal announced the launch of their production house Pushing Buttons Studios. Their first film as producers, *Girls Will Be Girls*, is all set to be directed by Suchi Talati. The upcoming movie is set in an elite boarding school in a small Himalayan hill town in northern India and will follow the story of a 16-year-old girl, whose rebellious coming-of-age is hijacked by her mother who never got to come of age. *Crawling Angel*'s Sanjay Gulati and Pooja Chauhan and *Dolce Vita*'s Claire Chassagne will produce alongside Richa and Ali. On the acting front, Richa and Ali will once again share screen space in *Fukrey 3*.



Shilpa Shetty returns to Super Dancer 4 sets gets emotional as she receives a warm welcome

After keeping a low profile since husband Raj Kundra's arrest in the adult films case, Shilpa Shetty is set to make her comeback on *Super Dancer 4*. The Bollywood star is shooting for the episode on Tuesday, which will air on Sony TV this weekend. Producer Ranjeet Thakur, while not

divulging many details, confirmed Shilpa's presence on set to indianexpress.com, adding, "She is our judge and she is here to stay."

A source from the set further shared that the team had always been keen to get the actor back but she

wanted to take her own time. "The makers had been in constant touch with her and only recently she decided that she was ready to make a comeback. Shilpa wants to get back to work not just for her kids and family but also for her own sanity. She was welcomed warmly by the *Super Dancer* team, which made her quite emotional in the morning," the source added.

In an earlier interview, co-judge Anurag Basu spoke about Shilpa's absence and said that

the team misses her dearly. "We miss Shilpa a lot on set. There's a bonding between all of us, who're a part of the show, and which also includes people behind the scene and the choreographers. We're a small family and when one person isn't around,

then bahut mushkil hota hai. Shilpa is dear to us," the filmmaker told Hindustan Times. Shilpa Shetty's absence from the show saw a rally of special guests joining in to fill her place. From Karisma Kapoor,

Sonali Bendre to Riteish Deshmukh and Genelia Dsouza, the Bollywood celebrities graced the show in the last few weeks.

Coming to the upcoming episode marking Shilpa's comeback, *Indian Idol 12* winner Pawandeep Rajan and other finalists - Arunita Kanjilal, Sayli Kamble, Mohd Danish, Nihal Tauro and Shanmukhapriya will also be a part of it.



Rakhi Sawant transforms into desi spider-woman, Aly Goni says make her Bigg Boss



Trust Rakhi Sawant to have one quirky antic or the other up her sleeve. This time, she transformed into a desi spider-woman and left paparazzi clicking furiously. Yes, Rakhi decked up in blue and red and roamed the streets of Mumbai asking 'Bigg Boss' to invite her on the show. *Bigg Boss* OTT is currently streaming on VOOT, and Rakhi Sawant seems to be missing the show a bit too much. Speaking to photographers, Rakhi said that she wanted to be on the show again and wanted *Bigg Boss* to call her back. As usual, her audience couldn't stop commenting about her.

Disney Theatrical Productions Announces New and Returning Cast Members for The Lion King and Aladdin on Broadway



- **The Lion King Resumes Performances on September 14, 2021 at the Minskoff Theatre**
- **Aladdin Resumes Performances on September 28, 2021 at the New Amsterdam Theatre**
- **Casting Announced for Tours of The Lion King and Frozen**

New York, NY – Disney Theatrical Productions, under the direction of Thomas Schumacher, is pleased to announce casting for The Lion King and Aladdin, returning to Broadway this fall. Both companies will welcome back nearly all of the cast members who were performing when Broadway shut down last March, along with exciting fresh faces, including new actors in the starring roles of Simba in The Lion King and Aladdin and Jasmine in Aladdin. The Lion King begins performances on Tuesday, September 14 at the Minskoff Theatre. Aladdin resumes performances on Tuesday, September 28 at the New Amsterdam Theatre.

Returning to the Broadway cast of the The Lion King are Stephen Carlile as Scar, L. Steven Taylor as Mufasa, Tshidi Manye as

Rafiki, Cameron Pow as Zazu, Ben Jeffrey as Pumbaa, Fred Berman as Timon, Adrienne Walker as Nala, James Brown-Orleans as Banzai, Bonita J. Hamilton as Shenzi and Robb Sapp as Ed.

New to the cast is Brandon A. McCall in the role of Simba. McCall makes his Broadway debut in the role, having previously starred in the North American tour. Additionally, newcomers Vince Ermita and Corey J. will alternate as Young Simba, and Alayna Martus and Sydney Elise Russell will alternate as Young Nala.

The Broadway company of The Lion King also features Lawrence Keith Alexander, Cameron Amandus, Leanne Antonio, Andrew Arrington, India Bolds Browne, Lindiwe Dlamini, Zinhle Dube, Bongsi Duma, Angelica Edwards, Jim Ferris,

Rosie Lani Feldman, Daniel Gaymon, Pia Hamilton, Daniel Harder, Michael Alexander Henry, Michael Hollick, Pearl Khwezi, Lindsey Jackson, Lisa Lewis, Mduduzi Madela, Jaysin McCollum, Ray Mercer, S'bu Ngema, Nhlanhla Ngobeni, Nteliseng Nkhela, Jacqueline René, Kaylin Seckel, Kellen Stencil, Housso Semon, Derrick Spear, Michael Stiggers Jr., Jamie J. Thompson, Bravita Threatt, Natalie Turner, Donna Michelle Vaughan, Nicholas Ward and Stephen Scott Wormley.

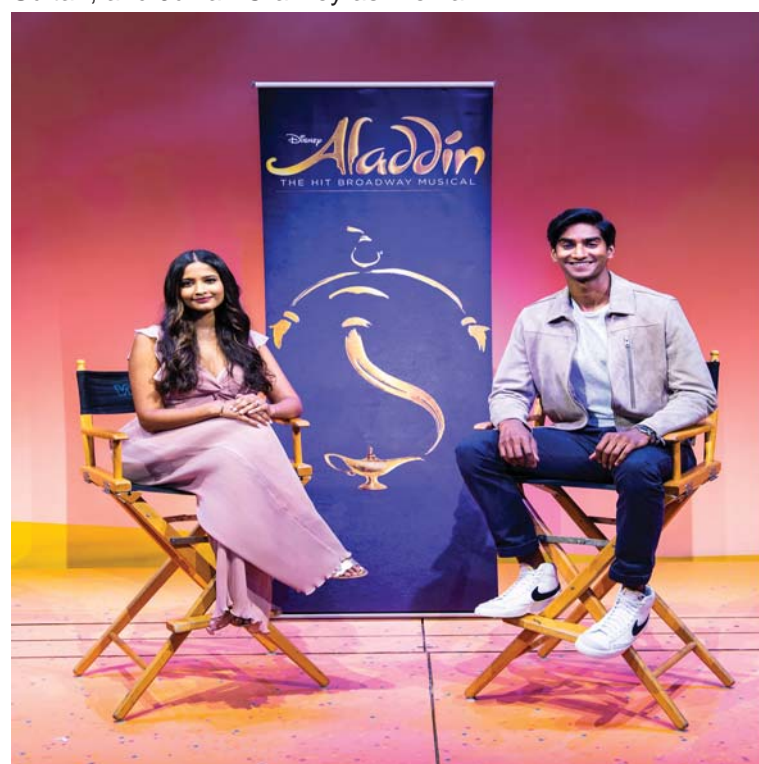
New to the Broadway company of Aladdin are Michael Maliakel and Shoba Narayan as Aladdin and Jasmine. Maliakel makes his Broadway debut, having recently toured the country in the 25th anniversary production of The Phantom of the Opera. Narayan's previous Broadway credits include Natasha in Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812 and Nessarose in Wicked, as well as Eliza in the North American tour of Hamilton. Aladdin is also pleased to welcome Zach Bencal as Babkak and Frank Viveros as a Genie/Sultan/Babkak standby, both joining the Broadway cast after performing the roles in the North American

tour.

The returning cast of Aladdin features four original company members in principal roles: Michael James Scott as Genie, Tony Award® nominee Jonathan Freeman as Jafar, bringing to the stage the role he indelibly created in the animated film, Don Darryl Rivera as Iago, and Dennis Stowe as the Jafar/Sultan standby. Also returning to the company are Milo Alosi as Kassim, Brad Weinstock as Omar, JC Montgomery as Sultan, and Juwan Crawley as

a Genie/Sultan standby.

Aladdin also features Tia Altinay, Mary Antonini, Netanel Bellaishe, Michael Callahan, Mike Cannon, Matthew deGuzman, Jacob Dickey, Mark DiConzo, Olivia Donalson, Josh Drake, Samantha Farrow, Jacob Gutierrez, Heather Makalani, Stanley Martin, Paul Heesang Miller, April Holloway, Amber Owens, Jamie Kasey Patterson, Bobby Pestka, Ariel Reid, Tyler Roberts, Jaz Sealey, Charles South, Angelo Soriano and Katie Terza.



Space part of a grand strategy for India, China: Report warns of its growing militarisation

(SAI Bureau)- There is a growing trend in the development of space-based weapons and capabilities of countries in the Asia Pacific, warned a new report from the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (APLN). The report highlighted the growing push by India, China, and Japan into the frontiers of space "laying the groundwork for future conflict beyond Earth." Prepared by Dr. Namrata Goswami, an independent space expert, the report



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India Quietly Readies an Amazon Slayer - Open E-Commerce

(SAI Bureau)-The investing world is enthralled by a determined Beijing as it cuts China's private sector down to size by relentless regulatory action. That's good news for New Delhi: Its more subtle maneuvers in the same direction are going largely unnoticed. Amazon.com Inc. and Walmart Inc.'s Flipkart, however, would surely have felt the rising temperatures. Even as they weigh draft e-commerce rules that seek to restrict online marketplaces - not just theirs, but also the planned super-app by India's Tata Group - a new existential threat lurks around the corner: a state-sponsored open network for digital commerce. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has set up a committee, chaired by him, to "democratize digital commerce" and "provide alternatives to proprietary e-commerce sites," according to a ministry press release.

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28,000-years-old lion cub found in Siberian permafrost may still have traces of its mother's milk

(SAI Bureau)-Scientists have said that an astonishingly well-preserved cave lion cub found in Siberia's permafrost lived 28,000 years ago and may even still have traces of its mother's milk in it. The female cub, named Sparta, was found at the Semyuelyakh River in Russia's Yakutia region in 2018 and a second lion cub called Boris was found the year before,

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The Opposition: Unable to make a dent

(SAI Bureau)-During the monsoon session of Parliament, there were at least three joint meetings of the floor leaders of Opposition parties-including a breakfast hosted by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi-to chalk out a common strategy to corner the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led NDA government on the alleged state-backed Pegasus snooping scandal and farmers' protests. A general sense of despair among the people, triggered by the Covid pandemic and its impact on the economy, seems to have given Modi's rivals fresh hope of piercing the cloak of electoral invincibility around the BJP. What fuelled this is also the drubbing the saffron party got at the hands of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress in the West Bengal assembly election earlier this year.

Amid Taliban Crisis, PM Modi Says "Empires Of Terror" Temporary At Somnath Event



(SAI Bureau)- New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi today said that destructive forces and people who follow the ideology of creating empires through terror can dominate for some time, but their existence is not permanent as they cannot suppress humanity forever. The Prime Minister's remarks come in the wake of Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

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"Rise Above Compulsions...": Opposition Talks Unity at Sonia Gandhi's Meet



(SAI Bureau)- The 2024 polls are "the ultimate goal", the Congress president Sonia Gandhi said, adding: "This is a challenge, but together we can and must rise to it because there is simply no alternative to working cohesively together."

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