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## Chaos turns to Carnage

### The darkest day of Joe Biden's presidency

For all that it had been warned of, was perhaps even half-expected, Thursday's terrorist attack on Kabul's Hamid Karzai airport was a deeply shocking event. The setting for the final unravelling of the west's failure was already frightening. Thousands of people had struggled for days to gain access to the buildings and officials that

they hoped would offer them a passport to safety. With Islamic State's attack, which began not far from the Baron Hotel where British personnel were based, and is so far known to have killed 200 civilians and 13 US service people, what had been a worst-case scenario became reality.

Islamic State's Afghan affiliate, known as Islamic State Khorasan Province and also as

Isis-K, detonated a bomb that not only ripped apart lives, but also served as a bloodcurdling warning of what it may be capable of. Joe Biden, unsurprisingly, responded with a threat of his own: "We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay," he said, following the carnage, addressing the terrorists directly for the benefit of an appalled domestic audience.



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# IALI Celebrated the 75th anniversary of India's Independence Day



(Press Release by Munish Byala) Hicksville, New York: NYC suburban Long Island, the house of hundred thousand Indo-Americans, witnessed joy and celebration on the faces of many who were chanting 'Vande Mataram' and 'Bharat Mata ki Jai', on Sunday while the Indian national flag was unfurled along with American Flag to mark the 75th anniversary of India's

Independence Day at India House of India Association of Long Island (IALI) Hicksville, New York.

The Leading diaspora organization in Long Island, India Association of Long Island (IALI) hosted a special ceremony at India House, attended by many Indo-Americans along with Chief Guest Joseph Saladino, the Supervisor of the Town of Oyster Bay in Nassau County, New York.

The IALI had hoisted India's National Flag on the country's Independence Day last year, the first time the Indian tri-color was unfurled outside the IALI building, known as India House.

IALI President, Shashi Malik, congratulated and extended Independence Day greetings to everyone. She said, "We want to continue on this tradition year to year, Every Indo-American feels

proud when they saw hoisting American and Indian National flags together". Supervisor of the Town of Oyster Bay, Joseph Saladino, said that "I am feeling proud the attend this special ceremony of 75th anniversary of India's Independence Day". He further said, "The Indian-American community is one of the proud immigrant communities, which help to make America Great, and

I am proud to represent you all". Indo-American community leader and founder chairman of International Organization Friends for Good Health, Dr. Bobby Kumar Kalotee, also congratulated all the gathered personalities. He said that "I am proud to see this third permanent Indian flag hoisting under New York's open sky after the Indian Consulate and United Nations".

## Indian-Origin Tech Executive Gets 2 Years Jail For Covid Loan Fraud

**Mukund Mohan of Clyde Hill in Washington state pleaded guilty to charges of wire fraud and money laundering on March 15, the US Department of Justice said.**

Washington: A 48-year-old Indian-origin tech executive in the US has been sentenced to two years in prison for fraudulently obtaining nearly USD 1.8 million in federal COVID-19 disaster relief loans.

Mukund Mohan of Clyde Hill in Washington state pleaded guilty to charges of wire fraud and money laundering on March 15, the US Department of Justice said. Mohan, who had past gigs at Microsoft and Amazon, falsified employment documents to



fraudulently receive the loans through the government's Paycheck Protection Programme for companies that he purportedly ran.

He applied for USD 5.5 million in loans with falsely altered documents and received about USD 1.8 million before he was arrested in July 2020. Mohan was sentenced on Tuesday in the Western District of Washington to two years in prison. According to court documents, Mohan sought more than USD 5.5 million through eight fraudulent disaster loan applications. In support of the fraudulent loan

applications, Mohan submitted fake and altered documents, including fake federal tax filings and altered incorporation documents. Mohan misrepresented to a lender that, in 2019, his company Mahenjo Inc had dozens of employees and paid millions of dollars in employee wages and payroll taxes, the Justice Department said. In support of Mahenjo's loan application, Mohan submitted false incorporation documents and tax forms suggesting that the company had been in business

before 2020, it said. In truth, Mohan purchased Mahenjo in May 2020. At the time he purchased the company, it had no employees and no business activity. The incorporation documents that he submitted to the lender were altered and the federal tax filings he submitted were fake. Five of Mohan's eight fraudulent loan applications were approved, and he fraudulently obtained nearly USD 1.8 million in COVID-19 relief funds. In addition to the prison sentence, Mohan was ordered to pay a fine of USD 100,000 and USD 1,786,357 in restitution.



**Flag Hoisting ceremony at Indian consulate:  
Shatrughan Sinha Dy Consul  
General, Jagdish Sewhani President The  
American India Public Affairs Committee,  
Assembly Woman Jenifer Rajkumar and  
Randhir Jaiswal Consul General of New York**



NetIP (The Network of Indian Professionals of North America); a non-profit organization for South Asian professionals, recently organized a meet and greet for South Asian professionals in Manhattan, New York. Event was organized by New York chapter president Taranbir Kaur, a banking professional with Citibank. Event was successfully attended by professionals with varied backgrounds, few coming from as far as Pennsylvania. Here are exclusive few pictures from the event. By our staff reporter. (Pictures by Munish Byala)



Annual Punjabi American Night was recently organized successfully under the leadership of noted community leader Mohinder Singh Taneja, popularly referred as Mayor of Sikhs. Punjabi night was organized in Eisenhower Park in east Meadow of Long Island. Chief guest of the night was Laura Curran, Nassau County Executive, who gave County citations to awardees of the night. Among awardees were Shashi Mallik, President of India Association of Long Island, Ashish Kumar, CEO of Nlight Financial, Pinky Jaggi of LILC, Attorney Gary Pasricha and many others. Nassau County Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder, Human Rights Commissioner Zahid Syed, Sharanjit Singh Thind, Editor and Publisher of The South Asian Insider Weekly and Josh India WebTV, Munish Byala of 5Aab Now TV were among the prominent guests who attended the event. By our staff reporter (Pictures by Munish Byala)







## Indian naval ship with 100 tonnes of oxygen reaches Sri Lanka amidst rapid increase in Covid-19 cases

**Extending aid to Sri Lanka which is struggling with rising Covid-19 cases, Indian naval ship Shakti carrying 100 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen reached the southern neighbour country on Sunday.**

Indian naval ship Shakti carrying 100 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen reached Sri Lanka on Sunday to help the island nation combat the Covid-19 pandemic. The country's ports minister Rohitha Abeygunawardena was at the port here to receive the cargo and hailed India's assistance to curb the

coronavirus pandemic. The deployment of the Indian naval vessel for the delivery of oxygen was in response to a personal request for assistance by Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa for an urgent supply of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO), the Indian High Commission here said. "Camaraderie and coordination between Navies and various

other stakeholders in India and Sri Lanka were on display as Sri Lankan Naval Vessel Shakti with 40 tonnes of LMO on board also commenced its journey from Chennai to Colombo around the same time as INS Shakti. India's assistance to Sri Lanka during the pandemic has been varied and need-based in nature. Close to 26 tonnes of

essential medical supplies were gifted in April-May 2020. Currency swap of USD 400 million was provided in July 2020. The first consignment of vaccines, which was donated by India in January 2021, enabled Sri Lanka to roll out their vaccination programme ahead of the schedule, the Indian High Commission said. Sri Lanka is currently

experiencing a rapid rise in infections. The death toll exceeded 7,000 with nearly 200 fatalities, the health authorities said on Sunday. There has been a 30 per cent increase in the demand of oxygen to handle the rapid rise in the number of fresh patients, according to officials.

## Puri Police sets up feedback centre for devotees as Odisha's Jagannath temple reopens

*The Puri Police has set up a feedback centre to facilitate smooth darshan for devotees coming at the Jagannath temple in Odisha. The famous temple reopens to devotees from Monday.*

(News Agencies)-As the famous Jagannath temple in Odisha's Puri reopens to devotees from Monday, the district police have set up a feedback system to facilitate a smooth darshan for devotees coming from far and wide. Puri's Superintendent of Police Kanwal Vishal Singh told India Today, "Puri Police is committed to provide the best possible services to all citizens and especially devotees of Lord Jagannath. "Special arrangements are ensured for safety and security

of devotees at the Jagannath temple and prime focus of deployed police personnel remains hassle-free darshan of all devotees. Daily briefing of force and officers is done during the morning to be courteous and polite to devotees and yet remain firm, professional and disciplined in performing their duty," he added. The feedback system used a QR code. It was initiated last year as well, SP Kanwal Vishal Singh said. "All devotees are requested to use this opportunity to the

maximum. This would surely help Puri Police further in providing even better services to the devotees," he said. COVID PROTOCOLS IN PLACE Meanwhile, ahead of the reopening of the temple, sanitisation work was carried out at the Jagannath temple premises on Sunday. The temple closed down on May 24 after Covid-19 cases started surging in Odisha. Beginning from Monday, all devotees can have darshan from 7 am to 7 pm on five days of the week.



The temple will remain closed for public darshan on Saturday and Sunday when it will be sanitised. The Puri Police have deployed 10 platoons of force, one additional SP and 20 officers ahead of the opening of the temple for devotees.



# Talks between Taliban



## Panjshir resistance break down as Afghans await formation of new government

***The Taliban declared on Sunday that a new Afghan government would be announced soon, while the resistance in Panjshir intensified. Read to know the most important developments of the day from Afghanistan.***

Even as the Taliban declared that Afghanistan will get a new government soon, talks between the militant group and leaders of the resistance in Panjshir Valley broke down on Sunday.

The country's Defence Minister in exile, General Bismillah Mohammadi, vowed to defend Panjshir - the only province to have escaped the Taliban blitz that has led to a regime change in Afghanistan.

General Bismillah Mohammadi announced that he will continue to protect Panjshir, located a little over 100 kilometres north-east of Kabul. Panjshir Valley will continue to oppose Taliban forces and the war would continue, General Mohammadi said.

Meanwhile, evacuations from Kabul continued in full swing. With US troops in-charge of the Hamid Karzai International airport, countries are scrambling to get their citizens out of Afghanistan.

Over 300 Indian citizens were flown home from Kabul in three separate flights on Sunday. Another flight with more than 150 passengers is expected to

land in New Delhi on Monday morning.

Taliban regime in Afghanistan | Top 10 Developments

1. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid informed the media that a new Afghan government will be announced soon. According to a report by TOLOnews, talks are underway about the formation of the new government after the arrival of senior Taliban leaders, including Mullah Baradar, in Kabul.

2. Ahmad Massoud, the son of one of the main leaders of Afghanistan's anti-Soviet resistance in the 1980s, said he will not hand over Panjshir Valley to the Taliban. Massoud has joined hands with Afghanistan's ousted first vice president Amrullah Saleh to resist the Taliban rule. "We confronted the Soviet Union, and we will be able to confront the Taliban," Massoud told Dubai-based al-Arabiya TV channel.

3. The Taliban said "hundreds" of fighters are heading to the Panjshir valley after talks with leaders of the resistance broke down on Sunday. "Hundreds of Mujahideen of the Islamic

Emirate are heading towards the state of Panjshir to control it, after local state officials refused to hand it over peacefully," the group wrote on its Arabic Twitter account.

4. Afghan political leaders urged the Taliban to form an inclusive government to reflect the aspirations of all Afghans, reported TOLOnews. However, political leaders also expressed disappointment, saying that the Taliban did not hold any serious discussion despite meeting several political leaders. 5. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he would convene a meeting of leaders from the G-7 nations on Tuesday for "urgent talks on the situation in Afghanistan". He said, "It is vital that the international community works together to ensure safe evacuations, prevent a humanitarian crisis and support the Afghan people to secure the gains of the last 20 years." US President Joe Biden is scheduled to virtually meet other leaders of the G-7 countries on August 24 to discuss close coordination on Afghanistan policy, White

House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Sunday. 6. Prices of burqa, hijab and turban soared in Kabul with the return of the Taliban. According to a report from Pajhwok Afghan News, hijabs and turbans are selling more since the last week despite the increased price. "In the past, I could sell four or five hijabs a day, but now I sell 15 to 17 of them after the return of Taliban," the report quoted a shopkeeper as saying. 7. Bahrain said its national carrier will fly American citizens to the United States as part of its efforts to evacuate them from Afghanistan a week after the Taliban takeover. The US-allied kingdom said on Sunday that a Gulf Air flight will transport people from its Isa Air Base to Dulles International Airport south of Washington, DC.

8. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken described the situation in Kabul airport as "incredibly volatile". "Crowds have massed at the gates outside the airport. It's an incredibly volatile situation, it's an incredibly fluid situation.

We've seen wrenching images of people hurt, even killed that hit you in the gut," he said.

9. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told that the US military is considering "creative ways" to get Americans and others into the Kabul airport to evacuate them from Afghanistan. He told ABC's "This Week" that as President Joe Biden's August 31 deadline for ending the evacuation operation approaches, he will recommend whether to give it more time. The British military said that seven Afghan citizens were killed at the overcrowded Kabul airport. There have been stampedes and crushing injuries in the crowds, especially as Taliban fighters fire into the air to drive away those desperate to get on any flight out of the country.

10. Pakistan temporarily suspended flight operations to Afghanistan and is not evacuating anyone at the moment, reported news agency PTI. The state-run Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) was the sole commercial airline operating to and from Kabul during the past few days.



# Mizo bridge on Assamese soil, alleges Assam; Mizoram books Assam Police on charges of theft

*Mizoram filed a case against Assam Police for "stealing" materials from its territory. Assam, on the other hand, alleged that Mizoram was building a bridge on its land, leading to fresh tension between the two states.*

(News Agencies)-Mizoram filed a case against personnel of Assam Police for allegedly "stealing" construction materials from a project site near the border between the two Northeastern states. Assam, on the other hand, argued that Mizoram tried to construct a bridge in its territory.

The incidents, which happened on Friday, have created fresh tension between the two states that are at loggerheads since the last month's violence along the Assam-Mizoram border.

"Personnel of the Assam Police entered Mizoram territory at Zophai near Bairabi town in Kolasib district and stole some construction materials, including iron rods, from a bridge construction site," the

deputy commissioner of Kolasib district, H Lalthlangliana, told news agency PTI.

In Assam, Hailakandi's Superintendent of Police, Gaurav Upadhyay, said that few workers from Mizoram were allegedly trying to construct a bridge at Assam's Kachurthal on Friday. What Mizoram says

According to H Lalthlangliana, work was underway to construct a bridge to connect the main road with the paddy field, belonging to Mizoram's first Chief Minister C Chhunga, when Assam Police personnel crossed the inter-state border and stole materials.

"A police case over theft of construction materials was filed against them (Assam Police) at Bairabi police station in connection with the incident," he

said. The Mizoram government said that it has filed a case against personnel of the Assam Police for "stealing" materials from its area.

H Lalthlangliana also wrote to his Hailakandi deputy commissioner on Saturday over the incident, urging him to take necessary action.

Assam argues Gaurav Upadhyay alleged that around 40-50 security personnel from Mizoram reached the bridge site on Saturday and few of them crossed to the Assam side "in complete violation of the joint statement issued by both states on August 5 to maintain peace in the border area".

He further alleged that despite Assam Police's appeal to leave, the security personnel from



Mizoram refused.

The Superintendent of Police said, "In order to assert the position of Assam and to ask Mizoram forces to retreat from the Assam side of the bridge, a party of around 200 Assam Police personnel and commandos under my leadership and other senior officials reached

Kachurthal on Sunday morning."

Meanwhile, Mizoram said the incident or bridge construction should not be linked to the boundary issue as it was undertaken by the government just to connect an existing road within Mizoram's territory.



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Road leading to Ram temple in Ayodhya to be named Kalyan Singh Marg: UP Deputy CM



(News Agencies)-The road leading to the Ram Janmabhoomi complex in Ayodhya will be named 'Kalyan Singh Marg' to pay tribute to the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister and veteran BJP leader, said Deputy Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Keshav Prasad Maurya.

Keshav Prasad Maurya said a proposal to name one road each in Lucknow, Prayagraj, Bulandshahr and Aligarh after Kalyan Singh would be submitted. "Along with Ayodhya, there will be one road each in Lucknow, Prayagraj, Bulandshahr and Aligarh in the name of Ram Bhakt Kalyan Singh. The proposal for this will soon be submitted," Keshav Prasad Maurya said in an announcement on Monday.

The development comes after several BJP leaders called for naming the Aligarh airport after Kalyan Singh. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said a Cabinet meeting would soon be held to discuss the matter. Kalyan Singh passed away on Saturday night in Lucknow after a prolonged illness. He was 89. On Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Yogi Adityanath and other top BJP leaders paid their last respects to Kalyan Singh in Lucknow.

# 392 Indians return home

## recall horrors in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan

**As countries scramble to evacuate their citizens out following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, nearly 400 Indians were flown out of Kabul on Sunday.**

**A**s Kabul airport is now open for evacuation flights, more Indians are being rescued and evacuated from turmoil-hit Afghanistan.

India on Sunday brought back home 392 people including two Afghan lawmakers in three different flights as part of its mission to evacuate Indians and Afghan partners from Kabul. A total of 168 individuals, including 107 Indians and 23 Afghan Sikhs and Hindus, were airlifted from Kabul to Hindon airport near Delhi on a C-17 military transport plane.

Another batch of 87 Indians and

two Nepalese citizens were repatriated on a special Air India flight from Dushanbe a day after being evacuated to Tajikistan's capital onboard an IAF 130J transport aircraft.

Meanwhile, 146 Indian citizens who were evacuated from Afghanistan to Doha will be repatriated to India on Sunday night. This comes in the backdrop of increasing Taliban hostility and deteriorating security situation in the city after it fell to the militant outfit a week back.

With Sunday's evacuation, the number of people brought back by India from Kabul reached around 590 since last Monday.

Evacuees recall their horrific experience. Yogendra Singh, a resident of Uttarakhand who

served in an embassy, spoke to India Today about his harrowing journey to Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport, recounting his experience of returning to India amid confusion and mayhem. "We worked as security guards there, and it took us six days to get to Kabul airport. We were assisted by US and Danish security troops. The Danish military, in particular, guaranteed safe passage for us, allowing us to return to our homeland," said Yogendra Singh. "It's a terrifying scenario, and we don't know how many Indians are still stranded in Afghanistan," he added.

'Left everything behind' Another Darjeeling resident, also rescued from Kabul, arrived in

Delhi via civil flight at Delhi Terminal 3 airport.

Recounting the catastrophe, Kaushal said, "We were five factory workers who had travelled for eight days to get to the airport. It was almost a nightmare for all of us. We left everything behind in Kabul, only brought a small backpack with us." "The situation is pretty awful there, and we're not sure if we'll be returning to Afghanistan for work or not," Kaushal added.

Meanwhile, for the next few days, almost all nations, including India, will continue their evacuation and massive airlift operations to secure the safe evacuation of their citizens operating in Afghanistan's various regions.

## 10 held in Ujjain for raising pro-Pakistan slogans, NSA invoked against 4

(News Agencies)-Police on Sunday invoked the stringent National Security Act (NSA) against four persons out of ten arrested so far for allegedly raising pro-Pakistan slogans during a Muharram event in Ujjain of Madhya Pradesh, a senior police officer said. The development comes a day after some right-wing organisations and religious leaders clad in saffron staged demonstrations, torched effigies

of Pakistan, and demanded tough action by the police against those people who had raised pro-Pakistan slogans in the Geeta Colony area on the night of August 19. Ujjain superintendent of police Satyendra Shukla confirmed to PTI that the NSA has been invoked on four persons who among others had allegedly

shouted the slogans. He refused to give names of the accused.

The district collector invoked the NSA on four accused on the



recommendation of the police, police sources said. Shukla said

police have arrested ten people for sloganeering so far. Reacting to the incident on Friday, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had said his government would not tolerate a 'Taliban-like' mindset. When asked if the sloganeering was a reaction to the district administration's decision to ban all public processions because of the coronavirus

pandemic, Ujjain police had denied any such link. Police had booked over a dozen people under sections 124 (a) (sedition) and 153 (provocation which can cause riot) of the Indian Penal Code. "We have identified 16 persons who raised the slogans. Efforts are on to identify others," Shukla said. CM Chouhan had also said the government has taken a tough stand vis-a-vis the Ujjain incident.



# Cane prices



## Farmers' stir continues as meeting with ministers remains inconclusive

(News Agencies)-Farmers seeking a hike in sugarcane prices continued to block rail tracks and a national highway in Punjab's Jalandhar as a meeting between their representatives and state ministers here remained inconclusive with another round now scheduled with agriculture experts on Monday.

Scores of farmers had on Friday launched an agitation for an indefinite period to press the Punjab government to accept their demands related to pending dues of sugarcane and hike in cane prices.

After the meeting here on Sunday, senior farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal told reporters, "Not much was achieved from today's meeting. It remained inconclusive."

He, however, said the government has assured that outstanding arrears of private mills will be cleared within next 15 days and those of cooperative be settled by September first week.

Another senior farmer leader,

**Farmers seeking a hike in sugarcane prices continued to block rail tracks and roads in Punjab as a meeting between their representatives and state ministers here remained**

Balbir Singh Rajewal, told reporters that the blockade will continue till their demand of hike in cane prices is met.

The blockade by farmers has been affecting movement of trains and vehicular traffic. Emergency vehicles are, however, being allowed to ply. Giving more details of the meeting, Dallewal said, "On cost of production issue, the government admitted that the officials had not given them correct feedback and now in the meeting in Jalandhar these things will be discussed threadbare."

Cooperation Minister Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa said agriculture experts, officers of cooperation and agriculture departments will hold a meeting in Jalandhar with farmers'

representatives and all calculations regarding cost of production will be worked out.

When asked that cane growers are demanding Rs 400 per quintal, he said the government's job is to watch interests of farmers as well as the industry. Asked if a meeting between farmers' representatives and chief minister will also be held, Randhawa said, "This will be decided after tomorrow's meeting."

Earlier, the opposition party Shiromani Akali Dal had demanded from the Congress government to increase the state assured price (SAP) of sugarcane to a minimum of Rs 380 per quintal.

Protesting farmers are demanding that the Punjab government raise the SAP of

sugarcane and clear payment of arrears to the tune of Rs 200-250 crore.

They have already rejected the hike of Rs 15 per quintal announced by the Punjab government a few days back. The state government had revised sugarcane rates to Rs 325 for the early variety, Rs 315 for mid variety and Rs 310 per quintal for the late maturing variety.

Railway officials of Ferozepur division had earlier said a total of 89 trains were cancelled because of the farmers' protest. Rail passengers travelling for the festival of Raksha Bandhan festival on Sunday bore the maximum brunt of the blockade. Protesters have blocked the Jalandhar-Phagwara stretch of the Delhi-Amritsar national highway near Dhanowali village of Jalandhar district.

The blockade affected vehicular movement to and from Jalandhar, Amritsar and Pathankot, though the administration diverted the traffic through some alternative routes.

**Two held for trying to smuggle foreign currency worth Rs 1.68 crores across Indo-Bangla border**



(News Agencies)-The Border Security Force (BSF) on Sunday apprehended two persons for allegedly trying to smuggle 8,50,000 Riyal (Rs 1,68,38,500) from Bangladesh to India through the ICP (international border) Petrapole area of West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district.

Acting on a tip-off, troops of ICP Petrapole, 179 Battalion Sector Kolkata, carried out a vehicle checking operation near the international boundary on Sunday.

At around 1.20 pm, the BSF troops noticed a suspicious truck coming from the Bangladesh side, which was returning after emptying the goods of export. When the BSF troops closely searched the vehicle, nine packets hiding 17 bundles of 500 currency notes of Riyal were found inside from under the driver's seat.

The truck driver and his cleaner were taken into custody. They have been identified as Baqi Billa Sah ji (20) and Sahin Hussain Mandal (18), residents of Bangaon and Jayantipur in West Bengal respectively. Both have been handed over to the local police.

During questioning, Baqi Billa Sah ji revealed that he works as a union truck driver and regularly travels to Bangladesh carrying export goods of 'Inland & Facto' transport. He further revealed that he went to Bangladesh on August 12 with export goods and on Sunday, he went to the Benapole parking in Bangladesh from the cargo gate of ICP to pick up the empty truck.

At Benapole parking area, Baqi Billa Sah ji was given the suspicious packets by one Abdul who asked him to hand them over to a man in India named Naimuddin Mandal. In return, he was to get Rs 300 per packet, the BSF said.



# Partially opened highways after talks with farmers: UP, Haryana govts tell SC



***In response to a plea seeking removal of farmers blocking roads between Noida and Delhi, the governments of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana told the Supreme Court that they have partially opened the highways from their sides after holding discussion with the agitating farmers.***

(News Agencies)-The governments of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana told the Supreme Court that they partially opened the highways, which are blocked by farmers protesting against the three farm laws, after holding negotiations with the protesters.

In the affidavits filed before the Supreme Court, both the governments claimed that the traffic situation on the highway

was because the Delhi Police had blocked the road from its side to prevent farmer protesters from entering the national capital.

The state governments filed a response against a public interest litigation (PIL) filed in court by a resident of Noida seeking removal of road-blocks created by the protesting farmers. The Supreme Court will hear the PIL on Monday.

In its affidavit, the UP

government said most of the protesters were aged and old farmers and efforts were underway to make them understand the "grossly illegal act of blocking roads".

The UP government said diversions have been created to facilitate smooth movement of traffic between Ghaziabad and Delhi via Maharajpur and Hindon roads as National Highway-24 is still blocked. NH-24 was repeatedly blocked by the farmer

protesters in January, March and again in April. The Haryana government in its affidavit told the Supreme Court that it opened one lane of the highway at the Singhu-Kundli border. Farmers are occupying only one lane of NH 44 now, the affidavit said.

The affidavit said that at the Tikri border, the Jharoda-Bahadurgarh road was opened on one side. The Dhansa border-Badli route has been blocked by the Delhi Police, it said.

Multiple rounds of negotiations took place to resolve the issue and restore law and order without resorting to the use of force on the agitating farmers, the affidavit said. Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping around three border points of Delhi -- Singhu, Tikri, and Ghazipur since November 2020, demanding a repeal of the three controversial farm laws.

## Small group of Indian officials coordinating evacuation mission at Kabul airport

(News Agencies)- A small group of Indian officials is coordinating the country's evacuation mission at the Kabul international airport amid continuing chaos and a challenging ground situation, people familiar with the matter said on Sunday. The multi-agency group has been coordinating with the American officials handling security at the airport as well as other relevant authorities, they said.

India evacuated 200 people, including the Indian envoy and other staffers of its embassy in Kabul, in two C-17 heavy-lift transport aircraft of the IAF on Tuesday in view of the



deteriorating security situation in the Afghan capital city. Kabul fell to the Taliban last Sunday.

It is not immediately clear

when the multi-agency team was deployed at the Kabul airport.

On Monday last, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) set

up a special Afghanistan cell to coordinate repatriation of Indians and handle related matters.

Sources said the cell received more than 2,000 phone calls and answered over 6,000 WhatsApp queries during the first five days of its operation. It replied to more than 1,200 e-mails during the period. The India on Sunday brought back 392 people, including two Afghan lawmakers, on three different flights as part of its mission to evacuate Indians and Afghan partners from Kabul.

A total of 168 people, including 107 Indians and 23 Afghan Sikhs and Hindus, were flown

from Kabul to the Hindon airbase near Delhi in a C-17 heavy-lift military transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Another group of 87 Indians and two Nepalese nationals was brought back on a special Air India flight from Dushanbe, a day after they were evacuated to the Tajikistan capital in an IAF 130J transport aircraft, officials said.

Separately, 135 Indians, who were earlier evacuated from Kabul to Doha in the last few days by US and NATO aircraft, were flown back from the Qatari capital city to Delhi on a special flight, they said.





## Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh to attend Kalyan Singh's final rites today

**U**nion Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh

on Monday will be attending the final rites of former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalyan Singh, who breathed his last on Saturday evening.

Speaking to Aaj Tak/India Today TV, Kalyan Singh's son and BJP MP Rajveer Singh said besides the two union ministers, UP governor Anandi Ben Patel, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and former MP CM Uma Bharti will also be present for the BJP stalwart's final rites. Rajveer Singh said the remains

will be taken out of the stadium around 9 am and are expected to reach Bulandshahr at 3 pm. Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath will also be present during the 'yatra'.

The last rites will be performed on the banks of the Ganges in Narora on Monday evening.

Meanwhile, the BJP has cancelled all its programs for the next three days till August 24 to condole the demise of Kalyan Singh.

BJP National President JP Nadda was to address booth workers in UP on Monday.

PM Modi in Lucknow for 'antim darshan' of Kalyan Singh

On Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Lucknow to pay his last respects to Kalyan Singh. He was received

by chief minister Yogi Adityanath at the Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport. The CM had visited Kalyan Singh's residence earlier in the day.

PM Modi reached Kalyan Singh's residence at Mall Avenue in Lucknow around 11.30 am for 'antim darshan' of former UP CM's mortal remains.

"We lost a capable leader. We should make maximum efforts by taking his values and resolutions to compensate for him; we should leave no stone unturned in fulfilling his dreams," PM Modi said after paying homage to Kalyan Singh at his residence.

Senior BJP leaders and top functionaries in the UP government, including deputy chief minister KP Maurya, were

also present at Kalyan Singh's residence on Sunday morning. Rajnath Singh and JP Nadda also paid homage to the former UP CM at his residence.

Kalyan Singh's body taken to Aligarh

Later in the day, mortal remains of Kalyan Singh were shifted to the BJP office in Lucknow so that other people could pay their last respects. The body was brought wrapped in the party's flag, in keeping with the BJP stalwart's wishes. Subsequently, the body was then taken to Aligarh. After reaching Aligarh airport at around 5:15 pm, his mortal remains were then taken to Aligarh Stadium for the last glimpse.

## Uttarakhand's 'Bagwal' stone-pelting festival held in low-key manner



(News Agencies)-The 'Bagwal' festival, in which devotees traditionally pelt stones at each other, was held in a low-key affair at the Devidhura temple in Uttarakhand's Champawat district on Sunday due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The festival sees devotees divided into four clans, hurling stones at each other to please the deity. It was held for just seven minutes, Khim Singh Lamharia, chairperson of the Devidhura temple committee said.

But even in that short span of time, 77 out of a total of 300 devotees sustained injuries, he said.

The festival is held every year as a ritual to please the goddess.

As a precaution due to Covid-19, nobody from the administration took part in the festival, and no guests were invited from outside, Lamharia said.

"Bagwal was played with flowers and local fruits. A total of 1,250 local people witnessed it," he added.

## Karnataka to provide free post-treatment for black fungus patients

(News Agencies)-Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai announced that the state government will provide free treatment to individuals suffering from black fungus disease even after getting discharged from hospitals.

"The post-treatment for black fungus is expensive. It costs between Rs 10,000 and Rs 12,000 per injection. The patients have to take injections for four weeks at their homes after being discharged," he said.

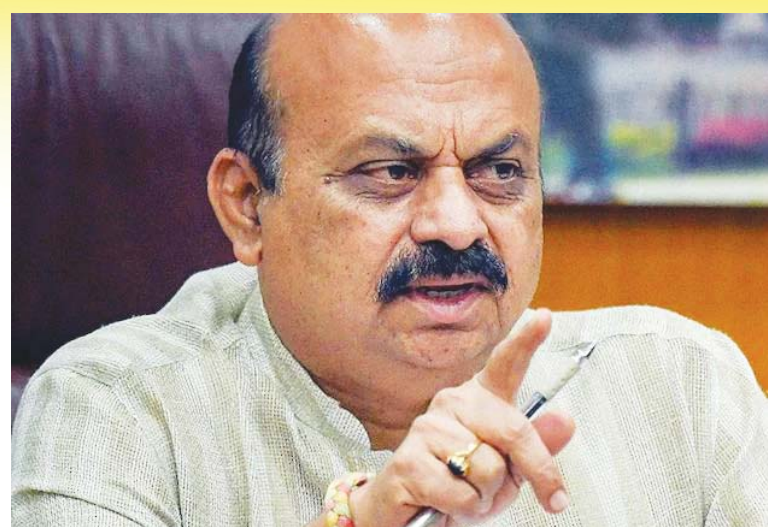
"Considering this economic burden on families, the government has decided to take up all expenditures for black fungus patients. The government will provide all expenditures until they have fully recovered," CM Basavaraj Bommai said.

**HEALTH CAMPS FOR CHILDREN**

Speaking of the possible Covid-19 third wave affecting children, Basavaraj Bommai said, "As per recommendations made by experts on the third wave, camps

for children to monitor their health will be set up."

"The Women and Child Welfare Department will provide malnourished children with food kits. Children who are sick will be shifted to district hospitals," he said. The Karnataka government has directed district hospitals to prepare ICUs for children. The state government will also release Rs 22 crore for the completion of a 120-bed super speciality hospital in Vijayapur with 40 ventilators.





# Decision lies with PM Modi, says Nitish Kumar after Bihar leaders meet PM over caste Census demand: 10 points

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar met Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss the issue of a caste Census where he led a team of 11 political leaders from the state, including RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, who made a strong pitch for the exercise.

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar said, "People in Bihar and the entire country are of the same opinion on this issue. We are grateful to the PM for listening to us. Now, he has to take a decision on it." Coming out of the meeting, Tejashwi Yadav said, "In the interest of the nation, it will be a historical step, all the poor will benefit." He added, "When animals and trees are counted, then why not castes. When the government has no scientific data on the population, how can it make welfare policies?"

"When states will have caste



data, then only it will be able to include castes in the state OBC list. If caste Census will lead to unrest, then the same logic applies to religion as well," said Tejashwi.

Bihar leaders Nitish Kumar, Mukesh Sahani, Tejashwi Yadav, Jitan Ram Manjhi and others arrived at South Block to meet PM Narendra Modi over the demand of caste-based Census. Bihar leaders' meeting with PM

Modi on caste Census:

1. Apart from Tejashwi Yadav, former chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi and education minister Vijay Kumar Chowdhry also accompanied Nitish Kumar for the meeting with PM Modi. "To hold a caste-based Census has been a long-standing demand of Bihar. In this regard, we are meeting the PM today," said HAM president and former Bihar CM Jitan Ram Manjhi ahead of the meeting.

2. The issue of a caste-based Census has been a longstanding matter for the people of Bihar. The issue has once again started to heat up in Bihar after a statement by the Centre in Parliament last month that populations of only SCs and STs were proposed to be enumerated.

3. The remarks were not welcome in Bihar where OBCs have dominated politics since the Mandal era, triggering a growing demand of caste-based Census that includes a headcount of the backward classes as well.

4. Opposition leader Tejashwi Yadav has appealed to all opposition parties to put pressure on the Modi government for a caste-based Census in the country.

"It is an important issue. The BJP government did not make public even the findings of the socio-economic survey conducted in

2011 when the Congress-led UPA was in power," said Tejashwi Yadav.

5. Nitish Kumar has said that "there is a countrywide sentiment in favour of a caste Census being conducted at least once. There should be no misgivings as such an exercise will be beneficial for all social groups".

6. Nitish Kumar had sought an appointment with PM Modi after a request to the effect was made by leaders of the Bihar Grand Alliance, who pointed out that the state legislature has twice passed unanimous resolutions in favour of a caste Census.

7. In both the instances, all BJP MLAs had also voted in favour of a caste Census. However, Bihar BJP seems to be in a spot with the party's top leadership.

## UAV sighted near IB in Jammu-Kashmir's Arnia sector, search ops underway



(News Agencies)-An unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) was spotted near the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir's Arnia sector in the wee hours of Monday morning. Alert jawans fired at the drone to neutralize it, at which it flew off towards the Pakistan side of the border.

Security forces are conducting search operations in the area to locate the UAV.

"Today morning at about 0530 hrs, a blinking red and yellow light in the sky observed by our forward troops in Arnia sector near to the IB. Our troops immediately fired 25 LMG rounds on the flying object due to which it gained some height and went towards Pak side. Area being searched with help

of police," the BSF said. Drone sightings along the international border in Jammu and Kashmir have increased in the wake of the drone attack on Air Force Station Jammu in June. Two explosions had rocked the high security technical area of the station on the intervening night of June 26-27. Two Indian Air Force personnel sustained minor injuries.

In the wake of frequent UAV sightings, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has ordered stricter adherence to the Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) that was framed to handle threats from Sub-Conventional Aerial Platforms like drones, paragliders, microlight aircraft, hot-air balloons.

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**Weekly Show**  
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& Commentary)



**Susmita Ghosh**

Deputy Managing Editor

[www.youtube.com/c/joshindiattv](http://www.youtube.com/c/joshindiattv)





# The pandemic-induced global slump is just part of a 20-year financial crisis

Every year since 1978 the world's central bankers have gathered to chew the fat at Jackson Hole in the Grand Tetons. This year's star attraction is the most influential central banker of them all – Jerome Powell – and financial markets will hang on every word from the chairman of the US Federal Reserve.

Powell won't reveal much and for good reason: he doesn't have all that much to say. He is worried about inflation but there are also signs the US economy is slowing as coronavirus infection rates rise. The pace of recovery is moderating in the UK, Germany, China and pretty much everywhere else as well. There are shortages of materials and labour. In a world of lockdowns, quarantines and travel restrictions, it is proving harder to sustain a model built around frictionless movement of people, parts and finance. Global supply chains are under pressure.

It is too easy to dismiss these problems as temporary headwinds that will blow themselves out given time. A more sober assessment would be that the global economy is in the middle of a long crisis – as it was when the first Jackson Hole symposium was held – and there's not a lot Powell et al can do about it.

Central banks have been chucking copious amounts of cheap money at the global economy for the past 12 years, and in one sense they have succeeded because there has been no repeat of the Great Depression of the 1930s. But nor has there been a full recovery to match that generated by the New Deal and military spending in the second world war. And that's because the problems are deep-seated and structural rather than temporary and cyclical.

The strategy of central banks is not new but is now played out. They have been making it easy to borrow not just for the past 18 months but for the past 20 years. Many words have been written in the past couple of weeks about how the US's long war in Afghanistan has ended in disaster and what initially looked like success was actually failure. Actually, the same assessment could be made of developments in the global economy, where the financial crash of 2008 and the pandemic-induced slump of 2020 are part of one long crisis stretching back two decades. In both cases, the cracks only really became apparent with time. There were not even faint

hints of what was to come when Alan Greenspan, then Fed chairman, delivered the opening address at Jackson Hole in August 2001. It was the high point of liberal technocracy, the end of a strong decade for the US economy. Under Bill Clinton's presidency, unemployment was low, the budget deficit was eliminated, and the US took the lead in the new digital technologies. The country saw China as little threat, which was why the White House was happy to accede to Beijing's application to join the World Trade Organization in that year. The sense that all the big problems had been solved was reflected in the theme of Jackson Hole: economic policy for the information economy. Less than two weeks later, 9/11 happened.

The terrorist attacks on the US led to a hasty reassessment of the assumptions made after the end of the cold war. Talk of how liberal democracy was the only game in town, and that the benefits of market economics would spread western prosperity and values to every corner of the globe, now rang a little hollow. Even so, the willingness to deploy state power only applied to the military sphere. After 9/11 the White House was a lot keener on sending troops into Afghanistan or Iraq than it was on toughening up regulations on Wall Street. What remained of the New Deal attempts to curb excessive financial speculation had been removed by Clinton in the late 1990s. Low interest rates, inadequate supervision, a messianic belief that markets were never wrong and greed proved to be a toxic combination. Greenspan's tenure at the Fed was essentially the story of one bubble after another, and it was left to others to clear up the mess when the biggest bubble of the lot popped in 2007.

That was the start of the economic equivalent of long Covid: not a full-on collapse but rather a debilitating and prolonged malaise that has prevented full recovery. The closest parallel from history is not the Great Depression of the 1930s but the long depression of the late 19th century, where more than two decades of mediocre economic performance began with a severe financial crisis in 1873. There was no great collapse in the global economy then either but, as today, productivity growth was weak, wages stagnated and there was a backlash against an earlier manifestation of globalisation. It is no coincidence that US populism had its origins in the 1890s.

# Afghanistan massacre and the trajectory of US

By Susmita Ghosh

Afghanistan has been falling into crumbles as the Taliban have taken over the country. Since the insurgency, the Afghan locals have been seen eloping from the country anxiously, trying their luck for a flight to anywhere. The top brass of the Afghan administration and the recent decisions from the USA government is being blamed for letting the last 20 years' progress go to waste. Thousands of desperate Afghans flocking together at Kabul's international airport's runway. They didn't receive any help from the central government. The president of the country, Ashraf Ghani, escaped in advance, leaving the country to fall apart without any fight back. The Taliban have been paving their way for a few months now. The country wasn't bombarded all on a sudden. Now the torture of the Taliban is prevailing in each and every state. The Afghan army were demoralized enough to offer little or no resistance. Sources reveal that it is not the Taliban who are enormously strong, rather the government is in dismay. Conversely, the ultra-Islamic Taliban's leaders have been singing in a different tone. They have promised peace, political pluralism and women's and minority rights, of which the Afghans have been very skeptical about in general. They have urged the world to look past their history of violence and repression. They've called Afghanistan's imams and showed a desire to gather together during their first Friday prayers. Their actions speak otherwise as they've been seen taking control of the people though, trying to flee. Sometimes they would beat people with rifle butts and clubs to force back the crowds trying to

get in. In the crisis situation, more than 13000 people have been evacuated. Joe Biden has said that it sets records in the history of airlifts. The critiques are in full force as the president pledged to bring back all the Americans from the clutches of the Taliban. "We're going to do everything, that we can, to provide safe evacuation for our Afghan allies, partners and Afghans who might be targeted because of their association with the United States," said Biden. The protesting locals have been running rallies, questioning the safety and security of the ones who are not allies of the US troops or associated with the US organizations. They feel more vulnerable than ever as US President Biden denied the guarantee of the 'final outcome' of the risky Kabul evacuation in a speech at the White House. To quote him: "This evacuation mission is dangerous, it involves risks to the forces and is being conducted under difficult circumstances. I can't promise what the final outcome will be". Afghanistan has been in its own weird challenge for a long time now. The infrastructure and the economy of the country have been in disasters. The defenders of Human Rights along with the administrations of Biden, had sent warnings prior regarding the atrocities of the Taliban. They had assumed how it would turn to war crimes and cursed fate for the women and girls of Kabul, Herat and other states of Afghanistan. It is a misfortune to see countless Afghans who were once in US troops, aids organizations or worked as journalists or in civil society ending up abruptly in mortal danger. This catastrophe cannot be laid alone at President Biden's feet.



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Massoud says he has been joined by highly-trained Afghan special forces and other soldiers "disgusted by the surrender of their commanders," but neither proved to be any match for the Taliban elsewhere in the country.

Torek Farhadi, an Afghan analyst and former government adviser, said the group poses little threat to the Taliban, and he cast doubt on Saleh's claims that he could lead a resistance, calling him a "social media person."

"If he was a real threat he should have stayed the day Ghani fled and defended the palace. He was the vice president and soldiers were under his order," said Farhadi.

But even the specter of such a standoff, he said, risks plunging the country into another period of violence and turmoil, with dire consequences for ordinary Afghans.

The Associated Press contacted several people close to both Massoud and Saleh in order to seek comment, but was unable to reach them. Many Afghans with ties to the ousted government have fled the country or gone into hiding.

The ousted leaders holed up in Panjshir may end up joining the negotiations that the Taliban are holding with other former Afghan officials. The Taliban have said they want an "inclusive, Islamic government" but will hold off on forming one until the U.S. completes its withdrawal.

"We must use our weight with the international community to get guarantees from the Taliban for an all-encompassing government that includes women and non-Taliban," said Farhadi.

Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, a senior Taliban official, said their forces have surrounded Panjshir.

In a mountain valley north of Kabul, the last remnants of Afghanistan's shattered security forces have vowed to resist the Taliban in a remote region that has defied conquerors before. But any attempt to reenact that history could end in tragedy - or farce. Nestled in the towering Hindu Kush, the Panjshir Valley has a single narrow entrance and is the last region not under Taliban control following their stunning blitz across Afghanistan. Local fighters held off the Soviets in the 1980s and the Taliban a decade later under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Massoud, a guerrilla fighter who attained near-mythic status before he was killed in a suicide bombing.

His 32-year-old foreign-educated son, Ahmad Massoud, and several top officials from the ousted Western-backed government have gathered in the valley. They include Vice President Amrullah Saleh, who claims to be the caretaker leader after President Ashraf Ghani fled the country. They have vowed to resist the Taliban and are calling for Western aid to help roll them back.

"I write from the Panjshir Valley today, ready to follow in my father's footsteps, with mujahideen fighters who are prepared to once again take on the Taliban," Massoud wrote in an op-ed for the Washington Post. "We have stores of ammunition and arms that we

have patiently collected since my father's time, because we knew this day might come."

But experts say a successful resistance is highly unlikely - and could potentially aggravate Afghanistan's already considerable problems.

While the Panjshir Valley

groups, in keeping with his vision of an independent, multi-ethnic Afghanistan under a moderate form of Islamic rule.

But as the country slid into war in the early 1990s, he found himself battling rival warlords and eventually the Taliban, who seized power in 1996. During

its allies would spend the next two decades arming and training, at a cost of billions of dollars.

Those forces, which from the beginning were rife with corruption, collapsed in a matter of days earlier this month, as the Taliban captured most of the country less than three weeks before the U.S. was set to withdraw its last troops.

The younger Massoud, who was just 12 when his father was killed, trained at the British military academy at Sandhurst and also earned a master's degree in international politics from the City University of London.

He has little, if any, combat experience. Sandy Gall, a veteran foreign correspondent who wrote "Afghan Napoleon: The Life of Ahmad Shah Massoud," described his son as "a very personable young man with political ambitions."



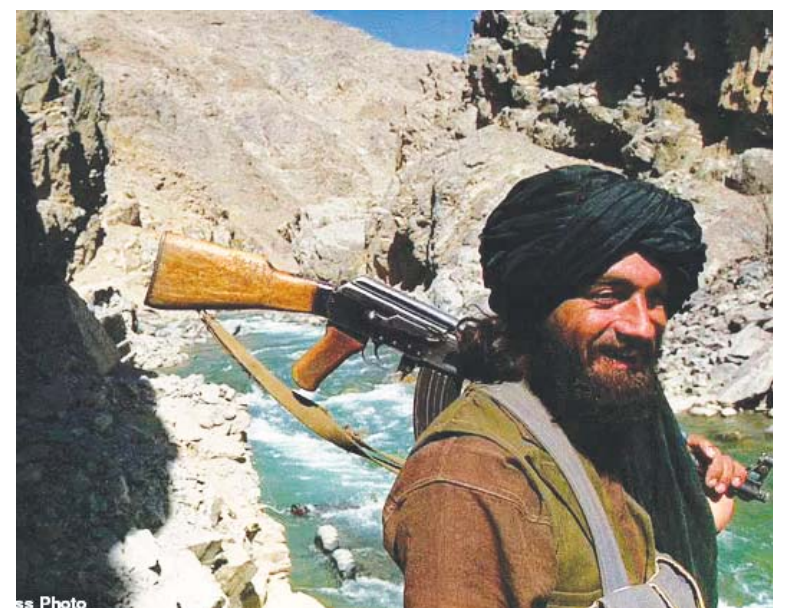
remains as impregnable as ever, it's unclear how long its residents can hold out if the Taliban besiege the area or attack it using the U.S.-supplied armaments they have seized in recent weeks. Western countries, stunned by the collapse of a costly, two-decade attempt at remaking Afghanistan, are unlikely to invest in another proxy war.

Ahmad Shah Massoud, nicknamed the "Lion of Panjshir," was one of the main leaders of the Afghan mujahideen, self-styled holy warriors who defeated the Soviets in 1989. His Northern Alliance included fellow Tajiks as well as fighters from other ethnic

groups, in keeping with his vision of an independent, multi-ethnic Afghanistan under a moderate form of Islamic rule.

Two days before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, al-Qaida militants disguised as Arab journalists who had come to interview Massoud killed the commander in a suicide bombing.

His forces remained intact, however, and partnered with the U.S. when it invaded Afghanistan weeks later, scattering al-Qaida, which orchestrated the 9/11 attacks, and driving the Taliban from power. Along with other former warlords, they went on to form the core of the government and security forces that the U.S. and





## Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley: last holdout against Taliban



Among the pockets of resistance against the Taliban following their takeover of Afghanistan, the biggest is in the Panjshir Valley. Comprising anti-Taliban militia fighters and former Afghan security forces, they vowed to resist as the Islamist group sends fighters to surround the area. Both sides have said they want to resolve the standoff through talks but there has been no breakthrough on the fate of the strategic area. - Why is the Panjshir Valley important? -

Panjshir is a narrow valley deep in the Hindu Kush mountains, with its southern tip around 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of the capital Kabul. The valley has limited entry points and its geography offers a natural military advantage -- defending units can use high positions to effectively target attacking forces.

It also has immense symbolic value in Afghanistan as the area that has resisted occupation by invaders for more than a century. Resistance from the valley -- mainly inhabited by ethnic Tajik people -- heavily shaped the political and security landscape of Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s. - Who cemented this reputation? - The most revered figure in Panjshir is Ahmad Shah Massoud, a guerrilla commander whose face is on murals across not only the valley but far beyond in many cities of Afghanistan. Known as the "Lion of Panjshir", Massoud made his name leading mujahideen fighters against the Soviet military in the 1980s. The Soviet Union launched multiple campaigns with thousands of troops, attack helicopters and tanks, but were unable to defeat Massoud after some of the bloodiest battles of the conflict.

# The Rahul Gandhi roadmap

**While Rahul Gandhi remains the top-most Opposition face against the PM, it is the regional satraps like Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who have gained at the expense of the Congress. So what should Rahul Gandhi do now?**

Often when we discuss politics, one of the frequently asked questions is 'but where is the Opposition?' While I do believe that this question is per se not accurate, because in any democracy the Opposition can only remain relevant when they have support from institutions such as the media that give them a fair chance, nevertheless it is an important concern raised by people from all sections of society.

Despite the system being prejudiced against the Opposition, they have not just managed to stay afloat but even raise critical questions and pin the present union government on the mat. The results are now starting to show. In recent India Today Mood of The Nation survey, PM Modi saw the biggest drop in his popularity. From an approval rating of 38 per cent in January 2021, the PM is now down to 24 per cent. A drop of a massive 14 per cent. However, Rahul Gandhi, with an approval rating of 10 per cent has gained just 3 per cent in the Best Choice for PM

survey. While he remains the top-most Opposition face against the PM, it is the regional satraps like Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who have gained at the expense of the Congress.

So what should be the steps from here that Rahul Gandhi needs to take?

**ASSUME CHARGE:** Rahul Gandhi must take up the presidential post of the Indian National Congress immediately. In any case, most supporters of the party would overwhelmingly want someone from the Gandhi-Nehru family as the president. He cannot delay this further. Sure, the BJP will attack the Congress and make a false argument about dynasty, but the Congress can easily counter this by stating that only RSS members are presidents of the BJP and the BJP has no moral right to speak with all the dynasts in their fold and, in fact, accommodate dynasts from Congress who the BJP once were critical of.

**BECOME THE LEADER OF THE PARTY IN THE LOK SABHA:** Voters want to see

candidates in a leadership role. While the BJP has not given the Congress the post of Leader Of Opposition, with Rahul taking over the post of the leader of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, he will gain a lot more legitimacy in the eyes of the people. As leader of the party, he will be the first to speak and will be allotted the most time. He can also assume a larger leadership role by summoning secretaries of various ministries to brief him. For example, Rahul Gandhi, as president of the Congress and leader of the largest Opposition party in the House, can ask the health secretary to brief him on the Covid-19 handling and ask tough questions of the bureaucrat. If they do not turn up, it makes the Union government look bad.

**SPEAK SLOWLY and SMILE MORE:** Rahul Gandhi is not afraid to face the press. That's a huge advantage over PM Modi. However, Rahul Gandhi must now start to look like a statesman-like while addressing the media. Speak slowly, calmly, smile a lot and anticipate the tricky questions they will throw at him. Counter them smiling with data. He must have the data at the back of his head. Remember it is not what you say but how you say it.

**JANTA DURBAR:** Just like his grandmother the late Indira Gandhi ji would meet citizens on the lawns of her house at Safdarjung, Rahul Gandhi must start to interact with the common people directly on a dedicated day. Meeting the thousands who will turn up will give Rahul first-hand insights into what is happening in different states and the problems faced by the people there. It will also activate and motivate that particular unit of the Congress to work. If the work requires help from the administration, then Rahul Gandhi can directly call the concerned officer in a state where Congress is not in government. This will once again show Rahul Gandhi as a leader who can perform and who commands authority.



## Govt explores ways to extend AGR dues repayment timeline for ailing telcos



The government is working on a relief package for the telecom sector, aimed at helping telecom firms like Vodafone Idea Limited (VIL) and Bharti Airtel. In addition to the relief package, the government is also discussing the possibility of increasing the timeline for the repayment of adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues.

The government is discussing the prospect of extending the timeline for the repayment of AGR dues to 20 years, reported The Economic Times after speaking with government officials. A legal opinion to come up with a possible mechanism for the deadline extension is likely to be sought. This is in addition to the relief package for the entire telecom sector.

### CAN GOVT EXTEND AGR DUES REPAYMENT DEADLINE?

While the government is reportedly working out a way to extend the timeline for AGR dues repayment, the Supreme Court had earlier ruled that the telcos would have to clear dues by March 31, 2021 - a 10-year deadline. The court's ruling came despite a cabinet recommendation for a 20-year timeline for the repayment of AGR dues, as per the ET report. Although the government would typically not overrule a judgement passed by the Supreme Court, it could negotiate in this case as the health of the nation's telecom sector - involving thousands of employees, bank and government dues and an entire ecosystem - is on the line. Vodafone Idea MD Ravinder Takkar said recently that the government does have the power to give more time to the company to clear AGR dues.



# Supreme Court rejects Biden's bid to block return of 'Remain in Mexico' policy

The Supreme Court has refused to block a court ruling ordering Joe Biden's administration to reinstate a Donald Trump-era policy that forces people to wait in Mexico while seeking asylum in the US. With the three liberal justices in dissent, the court said the administration likely violated federal law in its efforts to rescind the programme informally known as "Remain in Mexico".

It was not immediately clear how many people will be affected and how quickly. Under the lower court ruling, the administration must make a "good faith effort" to restart the initiative.

A federal judge in Texas had previously ordered that the programme, formally called Migrant Protection Protocols, be reinstated last week.

Both he and the 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals refused the administration's request to put the ruling on hold.

Justice Samuel Alito ordered a brief delay to allow the full court time to consider the administration's appeal to keep the ruling on hold while the case continues to make its way through the courts.

The 5th Circuit ordered expedited consideration of the administration's appeal.

The court offered little explanation for its action, although it cited its



opinion from last year rejecting the Trump administration's effort to end another immigration programme, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

In that case, the court held that the decision to end DACA was "arbitrary and capricious", in violation of federal law.

The administration has "failed to show a likelihood of success on the claim that the memorandum rescinding the Migrant Protection Protocols was not arbitrary and capricious", the court wrote on Tuesday in an unsigned order.

The three dissenting justices did not write an opinion expressing their views of the case.

During Mr Trump's presidency, the policy required tens of thousands of migrants seeking asylum in the US to turn back to Mexico.

It was meant to discourage

asylum seekers but critics said it denied people the legal right to seek protection in the US and forced them to wait in dangerous Mexican border cities.

The judge, US District Judge Matthew J Kacsmaryk, ordered that the programme be reinstated in response to a lawsuit filed by the states of Texas and Missouri, whose governors have been seeking to restore some of the hard-line anti-immigration policies of the Trump administration.

The Biden administration argued in briefs that the president has "clear authority to determine immigration policy" and that Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas had discretion in deciding whether to return asylum seekers to Mexico.

In its brief to the Supreme Court

on Friday, the administration argued that the policy had been dormant for more than a year and that abruptly reinstating it "would prejudice the United States' relations with vital regional partners, severely disrupt its operations at the southern border, and threaten to create a diplomatic and humanitarian crisis".

The Trump administration largely stopped using the "Remain in Mexico" policy at the start of the pandemic, at which point it began turning back virtually everyone crossing the Southwest border under a different protocol - a public health order that remains in effect.

The Biden administration said the pre-pandemic policy had been "largely dormant" for months even before the outbreak of Covid-19.

Mr Biden suspended the programme on his first day of office and the Homeland Security Department ended it in June.

Mr Kacsmaryk was nominated to the federal bench by Mr Trump.

The 5th Circuit panel that ruled on Thursday night included two of Mr Trump's appointees, Andrew Oldham and Cory Wilson, along with Jennifer Walker Elrod, nominated to the appeals court by President George W Bush.



# Has Pakistan bitten more than it can chew in Afghanistan?



Where is Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, the amir ul momineen, or commander of the faithful, chief of the Taliban? As Taliban fighters occupy the Presidential Palace in Afghanistan and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar & Co hold talks over taking full control of running Afghanistan, Haibatullah Akhundzada, the head of Taliban is conspicuous by his absence. This has led to chatter in the intelligence and diplomatic circles that he may be in Pakistan Army and its Inter-Services Intelligence's (ISI) custody to give Pakistan unhindered power to call the shots over government formation in the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

On India First, Vishnu Prakash, a seasoned diplomat who has served in Pakistan spoke of speculation that Haibatullah Akhundzada was being held captive by the Pakistan Army. It is a known fact that Mullah Baradar, tipped to play a key role in the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was held in a Pakistani prison for eight long years and released in 2018 only to facilitate talks between the United States and the Taliban. Pakistan controls the Haqqani



Network and may push its case through Pakistan-based factions of the Taliban but for full control of the process of installation of the Islamic Emirate government in Afghanistan, Pakistan's ISI wants total control of all the factions of the Taliban and the speculation is that it after having invested so much in nurturing and sponsoring Taliban wants to leave nothing to chance. In fact, experts argue the real reason Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar spent eight years in a Pakistani jail was that he was trying to negotiate both with the US and India independently and the ISI was very unhappy being kept out of the loop.

Lt Gen Ravi Sawhney, former Director General of Military Intelligence (DGMI) spoke of jockeying for power by various factions of the Taliban in

Afghanistan. Competing factions of the Taliban have occupied the Presidential Palace, the offices of the vice-president, ministries of interior and defence and have taken control of other government buildings.

The factions were all together in the quest for taking over Kabul. But once that aim was achieved, factional feuds and jockeying for power was expected to intensify. Now when it has, Pakistan's ISI wants to be in control of the process. The Taliban's cold shoulder to Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Pakistan's foreign minister shows just how irrelevant and unimportant Pakistan's civilian leadership really is. The Pakistan Army controls the Taliban but wants to maintain its vice-like grip not through coaxing and cajoling the Taliban but by keeping its spiritual leader and

chief qazi in their custody till the situation in Afghanistan is in Pakistan Army's full c+s the potential to fire the imagination of Afghans demoralised by the lack of resistance by the Afghan national security forces and the nation's President Ashraf Ghani quietly slipping out of Afghanistan, perhaps, when he was needed the most by the people.

Amrullah Saleh, the vice-president of Afghanistan did not run away from Afghanistan. He rushed to Panjshir barely 150 km from Kabul and along with Ahmad Massoud, son of the legendary Tajik warlord Ahmed Shah Massoud announced the 'Resistance' against the Taliban. Soon from different parts of Afghanistan the remnants of the Afghan National Army rushed to Panjshir with their weapons and armoured fighting vehicles. There

are reports that indicate apart from 8,000 to 10,000 Tajik fighters loyal to Ahmad Massoud, there are another at least 3000 or so Afghan soldiers with weapons en route Panjshir.

**HAS PAK BITTEN MORE THAN IT CAN CHEW?**

There is an old saying about Pakistan Army generals that their plans are tactically brilliant, succeed in achieving the element of surprise but strategically very ill thought out and do not see the fallout of the situation. That is as true of the Kargil conflict of 1999 and the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. Here in Afghanistan, Pakistan may have ensured a Taliban government in Kabul but in the long run will the 'Bhasmasur' devour its master? **5,000 FIGHTERS RELEASED FROM PRISON**

The Pashtuns of Afghanistan have for long eyed a separate Pashtun homeland. That cry for the 'Pashtunistan' has been gaining ground in Pakistan too. Pakistan Army has tried to put down Pashtun freedom fighters with brute force but will the Taliban at the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan be content being the ISI's puppets or will the cry for Pashtunistan gain ground.



# Narayan Rane arrest



## Why the Union minister's rivalry with Uddhav Thackeray is at its peak

**The two leaders have not seen eye to eye since their days in the Shiv Sena. The latest tussle appears to be over the BJP's attempts to snatch control of the BMC from the Sena**

On August 24, the Maharashtra police arrested Union minister for micro, small and medium enterprises, Narayan Rane, for allegedly making derogatory remarks against Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray. This is the first time a Union minister has faced such stringent action in Maharashtra.

The case pertains to a statement made by Rane on August 23 at Mahad in Raigad district. While interacting with the media, Rane had claimed that Uddhav was not aware which Independence Day he was celebrating. "He did not know it was the 75th Independence Day. During his speech, he turned to a secretary and asked which Independence Day it was. If I were present there, I would have given him a tight slap," Rane reportedly said.

Rane was in Sangameshwar in Ratnagiri district during the third leg of his 'Jan Ashirwad Yatra' (launched on August 18 from Mumbai) when the local police first detained and later arrested him. He was scheduled to make a night halt at Ratnagiri and proceed for the final leg of the yatra to his home district of Sindhudurg on August 25. The Ratnagiri police handed him over to the Raigad police, who took him to Mahad. Siddhesh Patekar, a worker of

the Yuva Sena, the youth wing of the Shiv Sena, had filed a police complaint against Rane on August 23, accusing him of spreading enmity and harming a public representative. Yuva Sena workers filed similar complaints in Nashik and Thane. Rane's lawyer Aniket Nikam filed a petition in the Bombay High Court on August 24, demanding the quashing of all FIRs against the minister. The court, however, refused to hear the petition on an urgent basis. The petition is likely to come up for hearing on August 25.

### TARGET THACKERAY

Rivalry between Rane and Uddhav dates back to 2003 when Thackeray was made executive president of the Shiv Sena against the wishes of his cousin Raj Thackeray and Rane. Soon, Rane, who was the second chief minister in the Shiv Sena-BJP government in 1998-99, started complaining that Uddhav was not giving due consideration to his opinion while running the party. Shiv Sena patriarch Bal Thackeray had, by then, handed over the party's affairs to Uddhav.

In 2005, Rane dropped a bombshell at a Shiv Sena meeting in Mumbai, alleging that posts were being sold in the party. Though he did not name

anyone, the perceived target was Uddhav. In a couple of weeks, Bal Thackeray sacked Rane from the Shiv Sena. He joined the Congress, cementing his enmity with Uddhav. Since then, Rane has not spared any opportunity to portray Uddhav in bad light. He holds Uddhav responsible for the downfall of the Shiv Sena.

### THE NEW TRIGGER

Rane joined the BJP in 2020 after the party nominated him to the Rajya Sabha. He was inducted into the Narendra Modi cabinet. The BJP has assigned him the herculean task of securing a win for the BJP in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections. The BMC is being run by the Shiv Sena since 1997. When Rane embarked on the Jan Ashirwad Yatra, he fired a fresh salvo at Uddhav. "What has the Shiv Sena done for the Marathi mannos in Mumbai?" he asked, questioning Thackeray's leadership. He also paid respects at the memorial of Bal Thackeray in Dadar, Mumbai. With BMC elections due in February 2022, the BJP wants Rane to play a big role in election management. The party believes Rane can help make a big dent in the Sena base-the Marathi-speaking lower middle class in Mumbai.

## Why India needs an NHS-like healthcare model



Early this month, the Uttar Pradesh government informed the Allahabad High Court that the order for a re-inquiry against Dr Kafeel Khan had been withdrawn. But the doctor remains under suspension due to disciplinary proceedings in another case instituted by the state health department. On the night of the tragedy in August 2017, the good doctor had moved mountains to procure oxygen cylinders for his encephalitis patients, whose lives hung by a thread. But 63 innocent toddlers suffocated when the government hospital in Gorakhpur ran out of oxygen. If only the government had carefully listened to, instead of arresting, Dr Khan, maybe, the chronic oxygen crisis plaguing Indian hospitals would have been resolved before the pandemic.

Now the health ministry has claimed in Parliament that only Punjab has reported four "suspected" deaths during the second Covid-19 wave due to lack of oxygen. This contradicts every news report. Patients gasping for breath on stretchers, testimonies of relatives running from pillar to post for oxygen refills, gurdwaras installing oxygen langars, televised SOS pleas of hospitals, appeals from state governments, overcrowded crematoriums and bodies floating on the Ganges. But in Delhi, the Lieutenant Governor has twice rejected proposals by the state government to commission committees to investigate oxygen deaths. Instead, the volunteer-run "Oxygen Shortage Deaths" group has documented at least 629 oxygen-related deaths since May 2021 nationwide.

Even before the pandemic, similarly horrific healthcare tragedies occurred every single year. In 2017, 800 children died in Jharkhand of suspected encephalitis. In 2015, 18 patients died in a Chennai hospital, due to power failure after the floods. In 2014, 13 women died after illegal sterilisation at an overcrowded government health camp in Chhattisgarh. These tragedies recur, but the sorry state of healthcare persists.

On a personal note, across the oceans, my sister has been battling encephalitis for the last two years. But though she is on a delicate road to recovery, there is no doubt that Britain's National Health Service (NHS) government hospitals have saved her life repeatedly.





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# On India's population, let the data speak

**Mohd Shahid, Manoj Kumar Jha write: Fertility rates are reflective of the progress in respective states on schooling, income levels, decline in neonatal and infant mortality rates and increase in the contraceptive prevalence rate.**

The old slogan, "Hum do hamare do, woh panch unke pachchees (We are two, we have two; they are five and have 25)" is probably still potent enough to appeal to popular perceptions of "uncontrolled" Muslim population growth - despite scientific evidence to the contrary.

At a critical juncture, when the states and Union territories in India are experiencing a sharp decline in fertility rates, population laws are back in the conversation. Though there is nothing on "record" that these are specifically for Muslims, the writing on the wall is clear. And it is a travesty, given the facts and figures available from government agencies.

The recently released empirical data from the National Family Health Survey 2019-20 (NFHS-5) for 22 states and Union territories provides that except for three states - Bihar, Manipur and Meghalaya - the fertility rates have gone below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman.

The total fertility rates (TFR) in the Union territories of Lakshwadeep and Jammu & Kashmir, which have sizeable

Muslim populations, have gone substantially below the replacement level with 1.4 children per woman. In Jammu & Kashmir, this is on account of a modest percentage of women with 10 or more years of schooling (51.3 per cent), fewer women marrying before the age of 18 years (4.5 per cent), declining infant mortality (20 per 1,000 live births) and more current users of family planning methods (59.8 per cent).

In all the seven Northeastern states, the fertility rates range from 1.1 in Sikkim to 1.9 in Assam, except Manipur (2.2) and Meghalaya (2.9). In nine out of 10 states, fertility rates range from as low as 1.3 in Goa to as high as 1.9 in Gujarat. Among populous states, the TFR has gone down to 1.6 children in West Bengal. It is only 1.7 each in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. In Telangana and Kerala, the fertility rate is getting stabilised at 1.8 children per woman. Even in Bihar, where the TFR is 3, there is a relative decline in fertility from 3.4 in NFHS-4 (2015-16). In NFHS-4 itself, as many as 23 states and

Union Territories, including all the states in the south region, showed fertility below the replacement level. In Uttar Pradesh, too, there is a declining trend in TFR from 3.8 in NFHS-3 (2005-06) to 2.7 in NFHS-4 (2015-16).

In West Bengal, the figures for women with 10 or more years of schooling (32.9 per cent) and women marrying before age 18 years (41.6 per cent) are almost similar to Bihar and worse than Uttar Pradesh. But it seems that West Bengal reached a TFR of 1.6 on account of sharply declining neonatal mortality rate (15.5 per cent), infant mortality rate (22.0 per cent) and high contraceptive prevalence rate (74.4 per cent). In brief, the probable fruit of better health facilities and wider contraceptive choices.

If an alarm bell is to be pressed, then it is not for population laws but for declining fertility. Replacement level fertility demands heavy investment in education, health and employment opportunities so that the "limited working population" in the near future is robust and skilled enough. What is needed is a comprehensive

policy ensuring dignified living - easy access to quality education, better health services and sound livelihood opportunities.

Let the data speak on the "need" for population laws. The NFHS-4 (2015-16) shows interesting linkages of fertility with education and economic well-being. For example, women with no schooling have an average of 3.1 children, compared with 1.7 children for women with 12 or more years of schooling. Among Hindus, TFR was 2.1 and among Muslims it was 2.6, that is a difference of 0.5 children. For the same period, the most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, had a TFR of 2.7; in the case of Muslims, it was 0.6 points more than that of Hindus. In some states with high Muslim populations, the TFR of Muslims was little more than that of Hindus - 0.6 in West Bengal, 0.8 in Assam and 1.0 in Bihar (NFHS-5). For sure, this difference in TFR does not support the charade that Muslim population will overtake Hindus.

Lest there be any doubt left, one must understand that there is a

steep decline in the fertility of Muslims from NFHS-1 (1992-93) to NFHS-4 (2015-16) (by 1.78 in comparison to 1.17 for Hindus). There is also a continuous decline in the population growth rate over decades. The decline in decadal growth rate was sharp in Census 2011 and sharper for Muslims. The decadal growth rate (2001-2011) for Muslims was 24.6 per cent in Census 2011. Though high, it marked a sharp decline from 29.5 per cent, which was registered in Census 2001. This decline of 4.9 per cent among the Muslims is higher than the corresponding 3.1 per cent decline for the Hindu community, whose decadal growth percentage declined from 19.9 (1991-2001) to 16.8 (2001-2011).

Before we forget the propaganda of Muslims "having more wives", last available figures from Census 1971 provide that the incidence of polygyny (two or more wives) is highest among Adivasis (15.25 per cent) followed by Buddhists (7.9 per cent), Jains (6.27 per cent), Hindus (5.80 per cent) and Muslims (5.70 per cent).





## Taliban, tech and the fight for Afghanistan's future

**The Taliban now run websites with political cartoons, host podcast-like internet radio channels, and cultivate a network of WhatsApp groups that are hard to detect. Publicly, its representatives on Twitter take care to steer clear of the company's rules against hate content**

When the United States (US) and its allies launched the war in Afghanistan in 2001, internet was banned in the country. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube did not exist. Soon after US President George W Bush announced Operation Enduring Freedom with the news of the first airstrikes in Afghanistan on October 7 that year, the Taliban began their information operation via radio. The message stressed on the "invasion of the outsiders" and sought to rally unity in a country controlled by various tribes in different regions. The Western campaign fought back with a message not entirely different - the Taliban were collaborators of Osama Bin Laden, an Arab, and his group of foreign fighters. As the Western militaries pulled out in the last few months, the Taliban swept back across the country. Their resurgence, shocking as it was to strategists who failed to foresee its speed and scale, is backed by a robust propaganda machinery. The Taliban now run websites with political cartoons, host podcast-like internet radio channels, and cultivate a network of WhatsApp groups that are hard to detect. Publicly, its representatives on Twitter take care to steer clear of the company's rules against hate content to quietly gather more followers.

To borrow a now ubiquitous business process jargon, Taliban's digital transformation holds the key to

understanding how it gained strength while out of power and what it could indicate about the future that awaits Afghanistan.

The early days of the narrative war To understand the evolution of the information warfare in Afghanistan, it is important to look at the information itself - or at least the core of it. In 2001, the Taliban painted the US and its allies as foreign invaders.

The focus of the western narrative was not far removed: According to a Brookings research paper from 2001, the US and its allies too sought to leverage sentiments of nationalism. They recast the Taliban as a collaborator of Osama Bin Laden, an Arab whose group of foreign fighters were bringing misery to the country, laying the foundation for support for a civilian government.

Taliban's embracing of tech In his 2018 book, Taliban Narratives, conflict researcher Thomas H Johnson unpacks the message and the method that lay at the heart of the Taliban's information operation. In it, he charts the evolution from night letters (these would be delivered to villages overnight to be read out at the town square), to DVDs. As the internet revolution took place, the Taliban launched their website, Alemarah in 2005.

"Wars today cannot be won without media. Media aims at the heart rather than the body, [and] if the heart is defeated, the battle is won." In

December 2010, Alemarah's editor Abdul Satar Maiwandi gave this quote as part of an interview, Johnson writes, noting it as the first time the Taliban revealed the extent of their information operations. For a group that had banned the internet when it controlled Afghanistan, it now set out to leverage email, texting, tweets, blogs, YouTube, and Facebook, Maiwandi indicated. How has this played out?

Johnson writes digital technologies have improved the speed of Taliban's messaging. Among the examples he cites are posts on news, battle reports, interviews, commentaries, and even video clips of rocket attacks on Western forces being hosted on the websites. One of the websites also had a significant portion of warrior poetry. This, Johnson says, is evidence that the Taliban and other militants were utilising and exploiting cultural norms.

But cultural norms have been only one part of the sentiments being exploited. The other is fear.

Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) researchers Atlantic Council's DFR Labs found evidence in 2019 of a Taliban influence operation on Twitter amplifying the group's voter intimidation tactics. At least 67 Taliban-associated accounts pushed hashtags that highlighted Taliban's attacks, electoral disruptions and murders, the assessment found.

## What kind of PM would Rajiv Gandhi have made in second term?



**By Vir Sanghvi** It is one of the great 'what ifs' of Indian history and last week, as we marked Rajiv Gandhi's birth anniversary, I was reminded of it again. What would India have been like if Rajiv Gandhi had not been assassinated in 1991?

Well, first of all, there is the question of whether he would have become Prime Minister again. You can argue, as some do, that the only reason that the Congress came close to a majority when the results were declared was because there was a sympathy vote in the later rounds of polling after Rajiv was killed. There is no way to settle this. The case for a sympathy vote depends on the difference in the Congress vote in the early pre-assassination rounds versus the vote in the later rounds. For every person who makes the case for a sympathy vote, there are Congressmen who argue that the party was always expected to do badly in the early rounds because these were seats where the Congress was weak. Thirty years later, we are not going to be able to settle that argument but I believe that the balance of probability is on Rajiv's side. Even if the Congress had won fewer seats, Rajiv had already sewn up the support of the Left and would have had no difficulty in forming a government. Assuming he had become prime minister, would he have liberalised the economy as completely as Narasimha Rao did? The tendency within the Congress is to say that Rajiv had become a liberaliser and would have implemented the reforms. While it is certainly true that he had grown weary of state control of the economy, he was not, as far as I could tell, a full-fledged free-marketer. For instance, his Finance Minister would have been Pranab Mukherjee, a man who never quite fully embraced the market. (P Chidambaram was closer to Rajiv than Pranab during the Congress's period in opposition but Pranab was the senior figure and would have got the job.) On the other hand, ask yourself this: was Narasimha Rao a great liberaliser before the Congress took office in 1991? And what about Manmohan Singh who had spent most of his life serving the license-quota-permit raj? The truth is that the Indian economy was in such bad shape that any Prime Minister would have had to accept the IMF's terms and liberalise. There simply was no choice. You could argue that once the IMF's conditions had been met, the Rajiv-Pranab duo would not have shown much enthusiasm for further big-ticket reforms. But then, did Narasimha Rao? Once the reforms the IMF had demanded had been implemented, Rao refused to take the liberalisation process much further. So yes, the reforms would have taken place if Rajiv was PM though we can argue about how far Pranab Mukherjee would have taken the process once the IMF's pistol had been removed from his temple.





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# Firefight involving Western forces erupts amid Kabul airport evacuation chaos



(News Agencies)-A firefight involving Western forces erupted at Kabul airport on Monday (Aug 23) when Afghan guards exchanged fire with unidentified gunmen, Germany's military said, adding to the evacuation chaos as Washington faces pressure to extend its deadline to withdraw. Thousands of Afghans and foreigners have thronged the airport for days, hoping to catch a flight out after Taliban fighters captured Kabul on Aug 15 and as US-led forces aim to complete their pullout by the end of the month.

Twenty people have been killed in the chaos at the airport, most in shootings and stampedes in the heat and dust, penned in by concrete blast walls, as US and international forces try to evacuate their citizens and vulnerable Afghans. One person was killed in Monday's clash, the German military said. CNN said a sniper outside the airport fired at Afghan guards - some 600 former government soldiers are helping US forces at the airport - near its north gate. US and German forces were involved in the clash, Germany's military said. Three wounded Afghan guards were being treated at a field hospital in the airport, it said.

Two Nato officials at the airport said the situation was under control after the firing.

The Taliban have deployed fighters outside the airport, where they have tried to help enforce

some kind of order.

On Sunday, Taliban fighters beat back crowds at the airport a day after seven Afghans were killed in a crush at the gates as the deadline for the withdrawal of foreign troops approaches.

The Taliban seized power just over a week ago as the United States and its allies withdraw troops after a 20-year war launched in the weeks after the Sept 11, 2001, attacks as US forces hunted al Qaeda leaders and sought to punish their Taliban hosts.

The administration of Biden's

predecessor, Donald Trump, struck a deal with the Taliban last year allowing the United States to withdraw its forces in exchange for Taliban security guarantees.

'Hours, not weeks'

President Joe Biden said on Sunday the security situation in Afghanistan was changing rapidly and remained dangerous. "Let me be clear, the evacuation of thousands from Kabul is going to be hard and painful" and would have been "no matter when it began", Biden said in a briefing at the White House.

Afghan

"We have a long way to go and a lot could still go wrong."

Biden said US troops might stay beyond their Aug 31 deadline to oversee the evacuation. But a Taliban leadership official said foreign forces had not sought an extension and it would not be granted if they had.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will urge Biden this week to extend the deadline. Defence Minister Ben Wallace said Britain was "down to hours now, not weeks" in its evacuation plan and forces on the ground

needed to use every moment they had to get people out.

Johnson's spokesperson said Britain still wanted to fly out thousands of people and had not set a hard deadline for when evacuations end.

"We will continue to run our evacuation process as long as the security situation allows... We need to be flexible in our approach," the spokesperson said, adding that it would not be possible for British evacuations to continue once US troops leave.

Panicked Afghans have clamoured to board flights out of Kabul, fearing reprisals and a return to a harsh version of Islamic law that the Sunni Muslim group enforced when it held power from 1996 to 2001.

The chaos at the airport is also disrupting shipments of aid going in to Afghanistan. The World Health Organisation said 500 tonnes of medical supplies due to be delivered this week were stuck because Kabul airport was closed to commercial flights, Richard Brennan, WHO regional emergency director for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, told Reuters. He said the WHO was calling for empty planes to divert to its storage hub in Dubai to collect the supplies on their way to pick up evacuees in Afghanistan. Opposition Leaders of the Taliban, who have sought to show a more moderate face since capturing Kabul, have begun talks on forming a government, while their forces focus on the last pockets of opposition.

## UK says Russia, China needed for 'moderating influence' over Taliban

(News Agencies)- Britain would have to turn to Russia and China to exercise a "moderating influence" over the Taliban, despite a mistrust between the UK and those governments, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has said.

We're going to have to bring in countries with a potentially moderating influence like Russia and China, however uncomfortable that is," Mr Raab told The Sunday Telegraph newspaper.

The Taliban seized power last weekend from a US-backed government, sending thousands fleeing and



potentially heralding a return to the militants' austere and autocratic rule of two decades ago.

Britain and China have recently

been at odds over various issues, including Hong Kong and alleged human rights abuses against China's Uighur ethnic group.

Ties between London and Moscow also have been on ice since the 2018 poisoning with a Soviet-developed nerve agent known as Novichok of ex-double agent Sergei Skripal, a mole who betrayed hundreds of Russian agents to Britain's MI6 foreign spy service.

Relations between Britain and Russia deteriorated further after a BBC journalist working in Moscow was told to leave the country.

British forces have evacuated 3,821 people from Kabul since Aug 13, according to Britain's Ministry of Defence, including 1,323 who have made it to the UK.



# Britain to push for sanctions on Taliban at G7 meeting

**Britain believes the G7 should consider economic sanctions if the Taliban commits human rights abuses and allows its territory to be used as a haven for militants.**

(News Agencies)- Britain plans to push world leaders to consider new sanctions on the Taliban when the G7 group of advanced economies meet on Tuesday to discuss the crisis in Afghanistan, sources told Reuters.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who currently leads the group that includes the United States, Italy, France, Germany, Japan and Canada, called on Sunday for the virtual meeting, in the wake of the Taliban's swift takeover of Afghanistan.

Britain believes the G7 should consider economic sanctions and withhold aid if the Taliban commits human rights abuses and allows its territory to be used as a haven for militants, according to a British

government official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, and a second Western diplomat.

US President Joe Biden told reporters on Sunday that the Taliban had not taken any action against US forces controlling Kabul airport, and had largely followed through on their pledge to let Americans reach the airport safely.

Asked whether he would support Britain's push for sanctions if the Taliban committed abuses, Biden said, "The answer is yes. It depends on the conduct."

Taliban militants seized control of Kabul last weekend in an upheaval that sent civilians and Afghan military allies fleeing for safety. Many fear a return to the austere interpretation of Islamic law imposed during the previous Taliban rule that ended 20 years ago.

"It is vital that the international community works together to ensure safe evacuations, prevent a humanitarian crisis and support the Afghan people to secure the gains of the last 20 years," Johnson said on Twitter on Sunday.

Sanctions against the Taliban are unlikely to be adopted immediately, one Western diplomat said. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab first raised the possibility of sanctions to pressure the Taliban last week. Biden, under fire at home and abroad for his handling of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, last week said G7 leaders would work out a joint approach to the Taliban, and has already held bilateral talks with Johnson, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian



Prime Minister Mario Draghi.

Johnson plans to push Biden to extend his August 31 deadline for withdrawing US forces from Afghanistan so that more people can be evacuated, British media reported.

On Sunday, Biden said the US military was discussing potentially extending the deadline, but hoped that would not be necessary.

He said Washington would consider an extension if asked to do so by G7 allies, but was working closely with those countries and others to help

evacuate their citizens.

The US military earlier on Sunday said it had ordered commercial aircraft to help transport people who have already been evacuated from Afghanistan.

Biden told reporters on Friday that he and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken would work with other countries to set "harsh conditions" for any cooperation with or recognition of the Taliban, based on their treatment of women and girls and overall human rights record.

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Afghans". However, the massive humanitarian needs facing the majority of the population should not - and cannot be neglected, the UN agencies said. "In the first few days of the recent hostilities, both WHO and Unicef - like all other UN agencies - prioritized the safety and security of our staff. But our

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# Austria opposes taking in more Afghans; EU says no recognition for Taliban

(News Agencies)-Austria's conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz opposes taking in any more people fleeing Afghanistan now that the Taliban have seized power, he said in remarks published on Sunday.

Austria took in more than one per cent of its population in asylum seekers during Europe's migration crisis in 2015 and 2016, and Kurz has built his career on taking a hard line on immigration, winning every parliamentary election since 2017. While the European Union grapples with what to do with Afghans who assisted it over the past 20 years, Kurz said coming to Austria was not an option. "I am clearly opposed to us now voluntarily taking in more people and that will not happen during my chancellorship," Kurz said in an interview with TV channel Puls 24. Excerpts of the interview were released before it was broadcast later on Sunday. Austria has more than 40,000 Afghan refugees, the second-biggest number in Europe after Germany, which has 148,000, according to data from the UN refugee agency UNHCR for 2020. The European Union has not recognised the



Taliban, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Saturday, nor is it holding political talks with the militants, a week after they seized control of Afghanistan.

The Taliban completed a lightning takeover of Afghanistan on Sunday, walking into the capital Kabul without firing a shot.

The head of the EU executive spoke after visiting a reception centre in Madrid for Afghan employees of EU institutions evacuated from Kabul.

Von der Leyen said she would propose an increase of \$67 million in humanitarian aid which the Commission had allocated this year for Afghanistan.

She said EU development aid is tied to respect of human rights, good treatment of minorities and respect for the rights of women and girls.

"We may well hear the Taliban's words but we will measure them above all by their deeds and actions," von der Leyen told a news conference.

She said the Commission was ready to provide funding to EU countries which help resettle refugees, and she planned to raise the resettlement issue at a G7 meeting next week.

## Taliban releases propaganda video showing fighters in army uniform, gear



(News Agencies)- Equipping its fighters with army uniform and gear, Taliban have released a propaganda video on social media platforms.

The video appears to show Taliban's 'Badri 313' soldiers with special forces military helmets along with mounts for night vision goggles.

In the tweet, the group says the 'Badri 313' units have been deployed in Kabul for "security". The fighters are being portrayed to be world-class.

Earlier, Taliban media Manba al-Jihad Studio seems to

have released a whole new photoset of new graduates from its Salahuddin Ayubi military training camp in Afghanistan.

As per the group, these new graduates were to be a part of Badri 313 battalion.

Meanwhile, the Taliban has banned co-education in government and private universities in Herat, reports said.

Khaama Press news agency reported the decision was taken after a meeting between professors, owners of private institutions and Taliban leaders.

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## Ashraf Ghani's brother pledges allegiance to Taliban: Report



(News Agencies)-Reports said former Afghanistan president Ashraf Ghani's brother Hashmat Ghani has decided to support the Taliban.

Ghani reportedly pledged his allegiance to the Taliban in the presence of Khalil al-Rahman Haqqani who is the leader of the Taliban-backed Haqqani Network.

Taliban leaders have been involved in negotiations with leaders in Afghanistan over government formation in the country after taking control of the capital last Sunday.

In a tweet earlier, Hashmat Ghani had said: "While we have to accept Taliban, it should not be used as the only reason to abandon people of Afghanistan by the West." "Half of our population are dependent on daily wages. Freezing their money at the time of need could spell disaster, not just in Afghanistan but also for the region," the former president's brother added.

Hashmat Ghani had said he was in "nonstop meetings" with Taliban leadership in order to ensure physical and mental security for Afghans as thousands gathered at Kabul airport in the past week trying to flee the Taliban rule.

The former president's brother had added earlier that, "Taliban are well capable of bringing security", however, he added that running a functional government requires the collaboration of "younger educated Afghans". "The so-called expired politicians should be sidelined completely so failed experience of coalition government is not repeated," he added. Former president Ashraf Ghani had fled to UAE after the Taliban entered Kabul last Sunday saying he had left in order to spare the country more bloodshed.

However, Ghani said he was "in talks" to return home even as US deputy secretary of state Wendy Sherman said, "he is no longer a figure in Afghanistan".

"I was expelled from Afghanistan in such a way that I didn't even get the chance to take my slippers off my feet and pull on my boots," Ghani said as he explained that he arrived in the UAE empty-handed.



## Malaysia's new PM Ismail Sabri Yaakob faces tall task in uniting polarised society

(News Agencies)-Malaysia's new Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob was sworn in Saturday, bringing back the rule of the country's longest-governing political party, but he faces a tall task in uniting a polarised society and reviving a slumping economy amid a worsening pandemic.

Ismail was the deputy prime minister under the government of Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, who resigned Monday after less than 18 months in office as infighting in his coalition cost him majority support.

Ismail obtained the backing of 114 lawmakers for a slender majority that brought Muhyiddin's alliance back to power. It also returned the premiership to Ismail's United Malays National Organization, which had led Malaysia since independence from Britain in 1957 but was ousted in 2018 elections amid a multibillion-dollar financial scandal.

"Malaysia has a new PM, with essentially the old politics and players. It's back to the past: UMNO is now in PM seat, returning to power to though elite bargains despite being booted out for corruption in 2018," said Bridget Welsh, a Southeast Asian expert with Malaysia's Nottingham University.

Ismail took the oath of office before King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah during a brief ceremony at the national palace witnessed by leaders in the prime minister's alliance, including Muhyiddin. Ismail, 61, faces

**Malaysia's new Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob was sworn in on Saturday. He faces a distrustful public, amid popular anger over the previous government's inconsistent policies and perceived failure in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic.**

a distrustful public, amid popular anger over the previous government's inconsistent policies and perceived failure in tackling the pandemic. Malaysia has one of the world's highest infection rates and deaths per capita, despite a seven-month state of emergency and a lockdown since June. Daily new infections have more than doubled since June to hit a record 23,564 on Friday, bringing the country's total to over 1.5 million cases. Deaths have surged to above 13,000. The central bank has cut its estimated growth forecast this year to between 3% and 4% due to the lockdown.

"He is the lucky PM at an unlucky time without strong legitimacy and standing domestically and internationally. He comes in as the least popular PM at the worst time in history for Malaysia," Welsh said. Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim has urged supporters to accept the outcome after losing out to Ismail. He said his three-party alliance, which ousted UMNO in 2018 polls, will work harder to win back the people's mandate

in the next general election.

Anwar was due to succeed then-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad before their reformist alliance collapsed in February 2020, sparked by the withdrawal of Muhyiddin's party. Muhyiddin then formed a new government with UMNO and several other parties.

Ismail was named defense minister when Muhyiddin took power in March 2020, and became the government's public face through daily briefings on security issues related to the pandemic. He was promoted to deputy prime minister in July as Muhyiddin sought to appease UMNO, which was unhappy at playing second fiddle to Muhyiddin's smaller party. In the end, 15 UMNO lawmakers pulled support for Muhyiddin, causing his government to collapse. Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, a political science professor at Malaysia's University of Science, said Ismail's key challenge is to bring about national unity in a highly polarized society. "You can imagine the feelings of close to half of Malaysia's population who voted against UMNO in the 2018 elections, only to see an UMNO PM returning to helm the country just three years later," he said. Ismail has to be more conciliatory by bringing some opposition members into substantive policy-making roles, he said. All eyes will be on Ismail as he assembles his Cabinet. Previously Muhyiddin's Cabinet had been slammed as bloated as he sought to reward allies with government posts.



# Anthony Fauci's cohort, "cover up artist" Peter Daszak et al sued in New York

**Lawsuit filed for funding the lab-creation of SARS-CoV2, covering up the Lab Leak in Wuhan China, and delaying WHO from sounding a timely alarm in 2019 of a global public health emergency caused by COVID19.**

**\*The Lawsuit demands Amend the UN Charter to create the UN Pandemic Council, modeled on the Security Council. Embrace Desmond Tutu's "Truth & Reconciliation Commission" paradigm to get China's President Xi Jinping to fully cooperate with Truth and Honor so the out-of-control Delta Variant, and it's more lethal & virulent progeny, can be disarmed and humanity saved. Job No. 1 is to Disarm the Virus, and Save Humanity.**

(By our staff reporter) New York - Noted Attorney and Covid19-survivor Ravi Batra sues "cover up artist" Peter Daszak, EcoHealth Alliance Inc., and his immunologist wife Janet Cottingham in NYS Supreme Court, New York County, Index #157709/2021, for funding People's Liberation Army-controlled and operated "Wuhan Institute of Virology" as it weaponized SARS-CoV2 with gain-of-function by transplanting cold-blooded Heterothermic Bats' Spike Glycoprotein(s) to make it highly transmissible and virulent, and inter alia, with NIAID Anthony Fauci's thanked-for-help, covering up the Wuhan lab-leak in Summer and Fall 2019 to delay WHO's timely alarm of a pandemic and demand every nation to impose "travel bans" in 2019, which would have prevented most people from being infected by SARS-CoV2,

including, Batra, and China not to engage in its charade on December 30, 2019 at the Wuhan Wet Market.

The 80-plus page Verified Complaint explains the science, including, why "Bats are special," that bat-bites or snake-bites are naturally not transmissible, and that:

1. Batra "cracked the case" on April 14, 2020 and wrote to POTUS Trump, via Deputy NSA Matt Pottinger, of why SARS-CoV2 is a "Trojan Horse" infection, as it has (the heterothermic) Bat's "Spike"/"master key" to enter and infect a person's body while fooling his/her immune system that "all is well," so "T" soldier-cells stay sleeping instead of fighting the intruder-infection; asked CCP China to be held liable (per inter alia, International Health Regulations of 2005), and if we were deliberately "Pearl

Harbored" with a biowarfare agent, to seek war reparations; and proposed amending the UN Charter to create a new UN Pandemic Council (UNPC), modeled on the UN Security Council (UNSC), but with 12 Permanent and 9/13 Rotating members from the 5 Regional Groups, and "the Veto" circumscribed to only be valid if supported by at least 1 Permanent Member from each Regional Group;

2. Next day, April 15, 2020, POTUS launched America's preliminary investigation of China's PLA-controlled and operated Wuhan Lab for COVID19 Origins;

3. Batra's Letter, on April 13, 2021, to POTUS Biden seeking enforcement and updates;

4. After out-of-control Delta-variant ravaging nations, including, India and China, Batra

evolved on holding China liable, and on May 6, 2021, wrote to PM Modi to embrace Archbishop Desmond Tutu's "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" paradigm, in place of Tort and Crime & Punishment principles, so as to get President Xi Jinping to fully cooperate with Truth and Honor and help disarm this out-of-control biowarfare agent, an ICBM of a Virus; and inter alia

5. On May 26, 2021 POTUS Biden ordered our Intelligence Community to report back by August 24, 2021 on Covid19 Origins. This Complaint helps the "Intel Community," including DNI Avril Haines, better understand the actual scientific facts hiding in "plain sight" as "mumbo jumbo." The Complaint's attached "Schedule of Exhibits" lists 43 exhibits, including, Ralph Baric's and Anthony Fauci's damning self-inculpatory emails with

Daszak, and inter alia, HFAC's Ranker McCall's recent Addendum on Covid19 origins.

The Verified Complaint details the gross negligence and negligence of defendants, serious life-long injuries secondary to being infected with Covid19, an opportunistic disease, such as diabetes and painful skin-ruptures, and seeks nominal, compensatory and punitive damages from defendants. who betrayed Americans and the world, to put them out of business. Courtesy Copies of this complaint are being sent to DNI Avril Haines, key Congress committee chairs, rankers and members, the distinguished Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and inter alia, NYS Attorney General Tish James, given her critical jurisdiction over the defendants' "defrocking" misconduct: "Benedict Arnold" & 200+ "Pearl Harbor" combined.

## US military conducts airstrike against ISIS-K planner

**The US has conducted an airstrike against an ISIS-K planner, US Central Command said in a statement Friday.**

"U.S. military forces conducted an over-the-horizon counterterrorism operation today against an ISIS-K planner. The unmanned airstrike occurred in the Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan," spokesman Capt. Bill Urban said.

"Initial indications are that we killed the target. We know of no civilian casualties," Urban continued.

The announcement of the strike came a day after President Joe Biden vowed to retaliate for a terrorist attack that killed 13 US service members and at least 170 others outside Kabul's international airport even as he said the frantic mission to airlift Americans from Afghanistan would continue. Biden approved the strike on the ISIS-K planner, according to an official familiar with the matter.

"We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay," the President said in remarks from the White House on Thursday.

ISIS in Khorasan, known as ISIS-K, has claimed that an ISIS militant carried out Thursday's suicide attack, but provided

no evidence to support the claim. US had been warned by their national



officials have said the group was likely behind the bombing. "We will respond with force and precision at our time, at the place we choose and the moment of our choosing," Biden said on Thursday. "Here's what you need to know: These ISIS terrorists will not win."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement earlier Friday that Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris

security team that "another terror attack in Kabul is likely."

Biden and his team are now bracing for the possibility of another terrorist attack in the final days of the evacuation operation. "The threat is still out there," a senior White House official said. "It's still heightened." The US Embassy in Kabul again on Friday advised US citizens at a number of gates at the

airport to "leave immediately," citing security threats.

"Because of security threats at the Kabul airport, we continue to advise U.S. citizens to avoid traveling to the airport and to avoid airport gates," the alert said. The US has evacuated and facilitated the evacuation of approximately 109,200 people since August 14, according to the White House. About 4,200 people were evacuated from Kabul from 3 a.m. to 3 p.m. ET on Friday, according to the White House. The evacuations were carried out by 12 US military flights that carried approximately 2,100 evacuees and 29 coalition flights that also evacuated about 2,100 people. Approximately 7,500 people had been evacuated from Kabul in the same 12-hour period the day before. State Department spokesperson Ned Price said earlier Friday that "there are approximately 500 American citizens we are currently working with who want to leave and with whom we are communicating directly to facilitate their evacuations."



# Logical, rational

*US President Joe Biden defended his decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan as the crisis deepens in the country following Taliban takeover.*

## US President Joe Biden defends troops withdrawal from Afghanistan

Amid deepening crisis in Afghanistan, United States President Joe Biden defended his move to withdraw troops from the country, saying history will record this as a "logical, rational, and right decision". The Biden administration has come under criticism from some quarters for the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan as the Taliban captured power, resulting in chaos and deaths. However, he stood by his decision.

"I think that history is going to record this was the logical, rational, and right decision to make," he told reporters in an interaction at the White House. Indian-American politician and former US envoy to the United

Nations Nikki Haley said earlier in the day, "They (the US administration) have surrendered the American people and actually withdrew our troops before they withdrew the American people. They have abandoned our Afghan allies who kept people like my husband safe while they were overseas deploying. So, no, there was no negotiating. This was a complete and total surrender and an embarrassing failure." Biden said the Taliban has to make a fundamental decision. "Is the Taliban going to attempt to be able to unite and provide for the wellbeing of the people of Afghanistan, which no one group has ever done?" he asked. "And if it does, it's going to need everything from additional help, in terms of economic assistance,

trades, and a whole range of things," he said. "The Taliban has said -- we will see whether they mean it or not -- they're seeking legitimacy. They're seeking legitimacy to determine whether or not they will be recognized by other countries. They have told other countries, as well as us, they don't want us to move our diplomatic presence completely. All of this is all just talk now, said the US president.

He said that so far the Taliban has not taken action against US forces, by and large following through what they said in terms of allowing Americans to pass through, and the like.

"I'm sure they don't control all of their forces. It's a ragtag force. And so, we'll see. We'll see whether or not what they say

turns out to be true," Biden said. He said that in a 36-hour span, the US has lifted about 11,000 people out of Kabul. "In a little over 30 hours this weekend, we've evacuated an extraordinary number of people, as I will detail in a minute: about 11,000 individuals. That number will change day to day as the air and ground operations in Kabul vary," he said. The first priority is getting American citizens out of the country as quickly and as safely as possible, he said. "At my direction, the State Department continues to reach out to the remaining Americans we have identified by phone, e-mail, and other means to ascertain their whereabouts and their plans," he added.

**At least 21 dead, 50 missing in flooding in US state of Tennessee**



At least 21 people have died and 50 others are reported missing after heavy flooding hit parts of Tennessee, authorities said on Sunday.

A dispatcher at the Humphreys County Sheriff's Office confirmed the number of those killed and missing and said authorities were working to conduct house-to-house searches of the area.

Record rainfall of up to 17 inches (43 cm) in some areas sparked massive flooding on Saturday afternoon and evening. Especially hard hit was the town of Waverly, about 55 miles (88 km) west of Nashville. Hundreds of homes were left uninhabitable. Waverly Mayor Wallace Frazier told the Tennessean newspaper that those killed in flooding ranged in age from babies to the elderly. The Washington Post, citing family members, reported that 7-month-old twins died after they were swept away from their parents' arms.

The flooding uprooted massive trees, tore through homes and tossed cars and pickup trucks into ditches and atop sheds and other structures.

Cindy Dunn, 48, told the Tennessean that she and her husband had been stranded in their attic for several hours after floodwaters rose to 6 feet (1.8 m) high in their home. The pair were saved by a rescue crew that raised the bucket of a bulldozer up to a window they could get through. "Hell. That's what we had to go through," Dunn told the newspaper.

## Tragic, dangerous, unnecessary:

## Former British PM on US departure from Afghanistan

(News Agencies)-Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair called the US decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan "tragic, dangerous, unnecessary."

Tony Blair, the British prime minister who deployed troops to Afghanistan 20 years ago after the 9/11 attacks, says the US decision to leave has "every Jihadist group round the world cheering".



In a lengthy essay posted on his website late Saturday, Blair said the decision to withdraw troops was "tragic, dangerous, unnecessary".

He added that Britain has a "moral obligation" to stay until "all those who need to be are evacuated".

He said the exit was not in the West or Afghanistan's interest, with the Taliban reasserting itself

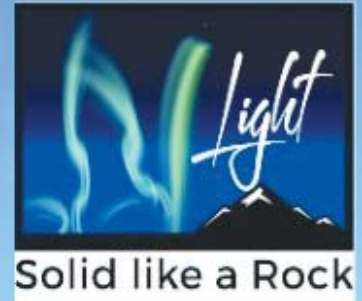
across most of the country.

He also warned that the decision by the US to keep Britain largely in the dark about the withdrawal risks relegating the country to "the second division of global powers".

Blair accused US President Joe Biden of making the decision on the back of "an imbecilic political slogan about ending the forever wars."



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Trump slams Biden on Afghanistan issue, says 'thousands of terrorists' airlifted out of Kabul



(News Agencies)-Former US President Donald Trump has slammed his successor Joe Biden on his Afghan policy and expressed concerns that thousands of terrorists might have been flown out of Afghanistan as part of the evacuation process. "Biden surrendered Afghanistan to terrorists and left thousands of Americans for dead by pulling out the military before our citizens," Trump said in a statement on Tuesday. "Now we are learning that out of the 26,000 people who have been evacuated, only 4,000 are Americans. You can be sure, the Taliban, who are now in complete control, didn't allow the best and brightest to board these evacuation flights." Instead, we can only imagine how many thousands of terrorists have been airlifted out of Afghanistan and into neighbourhoods around the world. What a terrible failure. NO VETTING. How many terrorists will Joe Biden bring to America? We don't know!" he said. Meanwhile, Republican Congressman Mike Waltz, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives, condemning Biden's failure to heed the advice of military and intelligence advisors about the speed and nature of the Taliban offensive, failure to present a coherent counter-terrorism or evacuation plan to the American people, and the damage done to the US credibility as a result of the president's abandonment of America's Afghan allies.

# Afghanistan crisis



US President Joe Biden said he hopes to complete evacuation from Afghanistan by August 31 as he warned of threat of potential terrorist attack.

## US President Biden warns of IS threat, aims to end evacuation by August 31

US President Joe Biden said he hopes to complete evacuation from Afghanistan by the end of the month but warned of threat of terrorist attacks against the crowded Kabul airport. Speaking in the White House, Joe Biden said his "hope is we will not have to extend [the deadline]", and complete the task by August 31, the date agreed with the Taliban.

Underlining why US officials are keen to complete the mission as soon as possible, Biden warned that Islamic State extremists known as ISIS-K pose a constant threat.

"We know that terrorists may seek to exploit the situation," he said. "It's still a dangerous operation." When asked by reporters what his reply was to foreign

leaders asking for more time, Joe Biden added, "We'll see what we can do."

The White House said late Sunday that the US has evacuated and facilitated the evacuation of approximately 30,300 people on military and coalition flights from Afghanistan since the Taliban seized control of the nation last weekend.

With the number of evacuees steadily rising, scenes outside the Kabul airport have turning increasingly chaotic with Afghans and foreign nations scrambling to flee the Taliban rule. Joe Biden acknowledged the searing scenes of Afghans crowding the airport in desperation to escape the militants but said this had to be accepted, given the situation.

"There is no way to evacuate this many

people without pain and loss and heartbreaking images you see," he said. Biden orders airlines' help

In an effort to ramp up the evacuation plan from Afghanistan, the US government ordered six airlines -- American Airlines, Atlas, Delta, Omni, Hawaiian and United - to provide 18 passenger planes, supplementing an armada of Air Force cargo planes. The rarely invoked Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) order will increase the flow of people once they get out of Afghanistan to US bases in Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates and are then flown on to third countries in a rapidly expanding global operation. The civilian airliners will not be required to fly to Kabul itself.

## I don't trust anybody: Joe Biden's response when asked if he believes Taliban

(News Agencies)- Assailed by brickbats at home and abroad for his handling of the crisis in Afghanistan, US President Joe Biden has said "I don't trust anybody" when asked by reporters if he believes in the Taliban. During an interaction with mediapersons at the White House on Sunday, Joe Biden defended his decision to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan and said the onus was now on the Taliban to look

after the people of the war-torn country.

When asked by a journalist if he trusts the Taliban now, Biden responded, "I don't trust anybody. Taliban has to make a fundamental decision. Is the Taliban going to attempt to be able to unite and provide for the well-being of the people of Afghanistan, which no one group has ever done for 100 years?"

If it does, it would need additional help in terms of economic



assistance, trade and a whole range of things, the US president said. "The Taliban has said -- we

will see whether they mean it or not -- they're seeking legitimacy. They're seeking legitimacy to determine whether or not they will be recognized by other countries. They have told other countries, as well as us, they don't want us to move our diplomatic presence completely. All of this is all just talk now," Biden said.

He went on to add that the US has been in discussions with the Taliban, who have been

cooperative in extending the perimeter around Kabul international airport to facilitate evacuations. Staving off further criticism over evacuation operations, which has seen his popularity plunge among US voters, Biden said groups of Americans in Kabul are being moved more efficiently and safely to the airport. On Saturday, 3,900 Americans were flown out of Kabul on 23 US military flights.



# Covid



## Japan set to expand state of emergency as Delta variant spreads

(News Agencies)- Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura said the expansion, which would cover almost half the country's 47 prefectures, was approved by a panel of external experts. It is expected to be formally approved at a government task force meeting later on Wednesday.

Japan is set to expand a state of emergency to eight more prefectures, taking the total to 21, the minister in charge of coronavirus countermeasures said on Wednesday, as a surge

in Covid-19 cases overwhelms its hospitals. Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura said the expansion, which would cover almost half the country's 47 prefectures, was approved by a panel of external experts. It is expected to be formally approved at a government task force meeting later on Wednesday.

"The most important task is to beef up the medical system," Nishimura said, adding that securing oxygen stations and nurses was among the priorities. With the Delta variant spreading

fast, the government has struggled to bring infections under control as citizens grow weary of life under restrictions and many companies ignore repeated requests to promote work-from-home.

Public broadcaster NHK reported 21,570 new cases and 42 deaths on Tuesday. Japan's case fatality rate stands at about 1.2%, compared with 1.7% in the United States and 2.0% in Britain. Months of emergency curbs in the capital, Tokyo, and surrounding areas have failed to

reverse a surge in infections and about 90% of the city's critical care beds are occupied.

"The working-age demographic is the driving force (behind the rise in infections)," Nishimura said. "We need to halve the movement of people."

With hospital beds filled to or nearing capacity, many people have been forced to convalesce at home - some dying before they are able to get treatment.

The latest state-of-emergency expansion will add Hokkaido, Aichi, Hiroshima and five other

prefectures spanning the Japanese archipelago from Friday through Sept. 12.

Another four prefectures are expected to be added to the more limited "quasi-emergency" measures, bringing the regions under those curbs to a total of 12. Restrictions in Japan have been looser than lockdowns seen in some countries and have centred on mandates for restaurants to close by 8 p.m. and stop serving alcohol, and requests for companies to have 70% of staff working from home.

## UN raises alarm over reports of executions in Afghanistan

(News Agencies)-The UN human rights chief said on Tuesday that she had received credible reports of serious violations committed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, including "summary executions" of civilians and Afghan security forces who have surrendered. Michelle Bachelet gave no details of the killings in her speech to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), but urged the Geneva forum to set up a mechanism to closely monitor Taliban actions.

The Taliban group's treatment of

women and girls would be "a fundamental red line", she told the council's emergency session, held at the request of Pakistan and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Afghanistan's diverse ethnic and religious minorities were also at risk of violence and repression, she said, citing reports of killings and targeted attacks in recent months. Nasir Ahmad Andisha, a senior Afghan diplomat from the deposed government, called for accountability for Taliban actions, describing an "uncertain and dire" situation where millions of people

fear for their lives.

Independent UN human rights experts, in a joint statement, said that many people were in hiding as "the Taliban continues to search homes door-to-door" and that seizures of property and reprisals were being reported. But China's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Chen Xu, said that the US army and the militaries of other coalition partners, including Britain and Australia, should be held accountable for alleged rights violations their forces committed in Afghanistan. The United



States condemned attacks that it said were being carried out against civilians, journalists, activists and minority groups, but did not name the Taliban. In a separate development, prominent Afghan women's rights activist

Zarifa Ghafari arrived in Germany together with her family members. Ghafari landed at the Cologne-Bonn airport late on Monday after fleeing Afghanistan to Pakistan last week.



# Chinese prez's 'thoughts' to be taught from primary schools to varsities

(News Agencies)-China will include "Xi Jinping Thought", a collection of the Chinese president's policies and opinions, in its national curriculum, to be taught from primary schools all the way to university, the education ministry has said.

The integration of Xi's ideas into the curriculum will help establish "Marxist beliefs" among the country's youth, the ministry said in a set of new guidelines issued on Tuesday.

"The 'Guide' clearly requires that Xi Jinping's thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era be fully integrated into the curriculum and teaching materials. It should cover basic education, vocational education, and higher education," the ministry said.

While some universities in China have already included Xi's thoughts and analysis on political thought and diplomacy in its curriculum, it's the first time that the president's ideas and ideals are being included for all students of all ages in the national curriculum.

Formally known as "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era", it is headlined by the central principle of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) leadership over all aspects of Chinese life.

"Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" was added to the country's constitution in 2018. Inclusion in the national curriculum is an indication of how Xi's personal power has also been strengthened - not least by the abolition of presidential term limits - since he became the general secretary of the CPC and the president 2012.

In a speech to mark CPC's 100 years, on July 1, Xi vowed to "enhance" the party's leadership, uphold his own "core" leadership, and strengthen the unity of the Chinese people.

Xi's opinions will now likely be the guiding principle of China's academic curriculum.

Broadly, primary schools will focus on loving the CPC and country; middle and high schools will promote forming of basic political opinion and judgements while in university, emphasis will be on theoretical thinking, propagating socialist ideas and on researching new ideas.

The ministry is now preparing the "Student Reading Book of Xi Jinping's New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" and "The Handbook of Xi Jinping's Important Education Discourses" to be distributed in schools and

colleges.

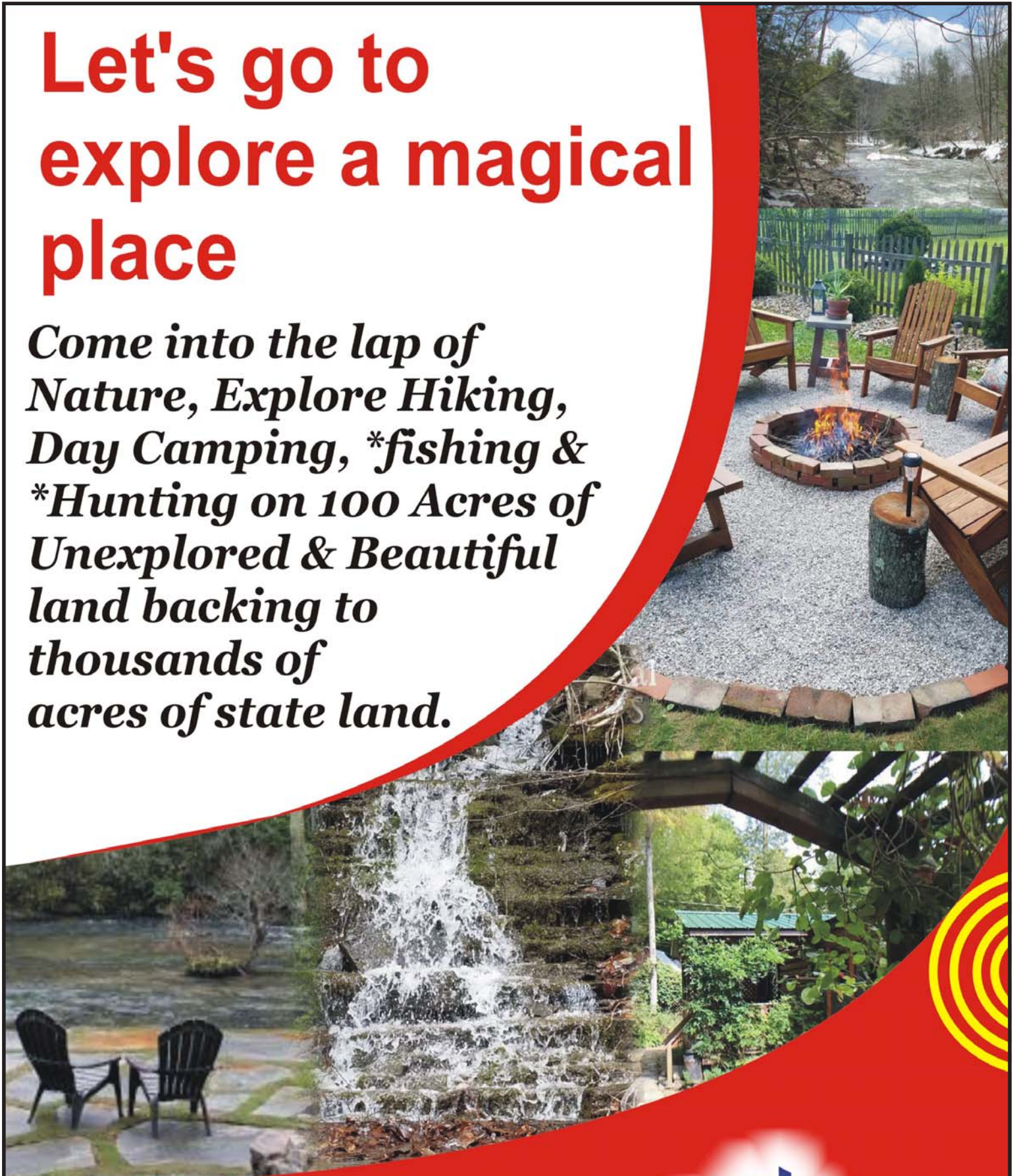
Han Zhen, a member of the National Textbook Committee, the 'Guide' fully integrates Xi Jinping's thoughts into the curriculum and textbooks. It has been systematically arranged

and overall designed, and has made detailed regulations on the spread of subjects and the promotion of sub-subjects. The guide also says that abstract concepts and theories should be explained

with "vivid examples" so that students can understand the theories and relate them to the realities of their lives; theoretical examples should be converted to relatable teaching material, it says.

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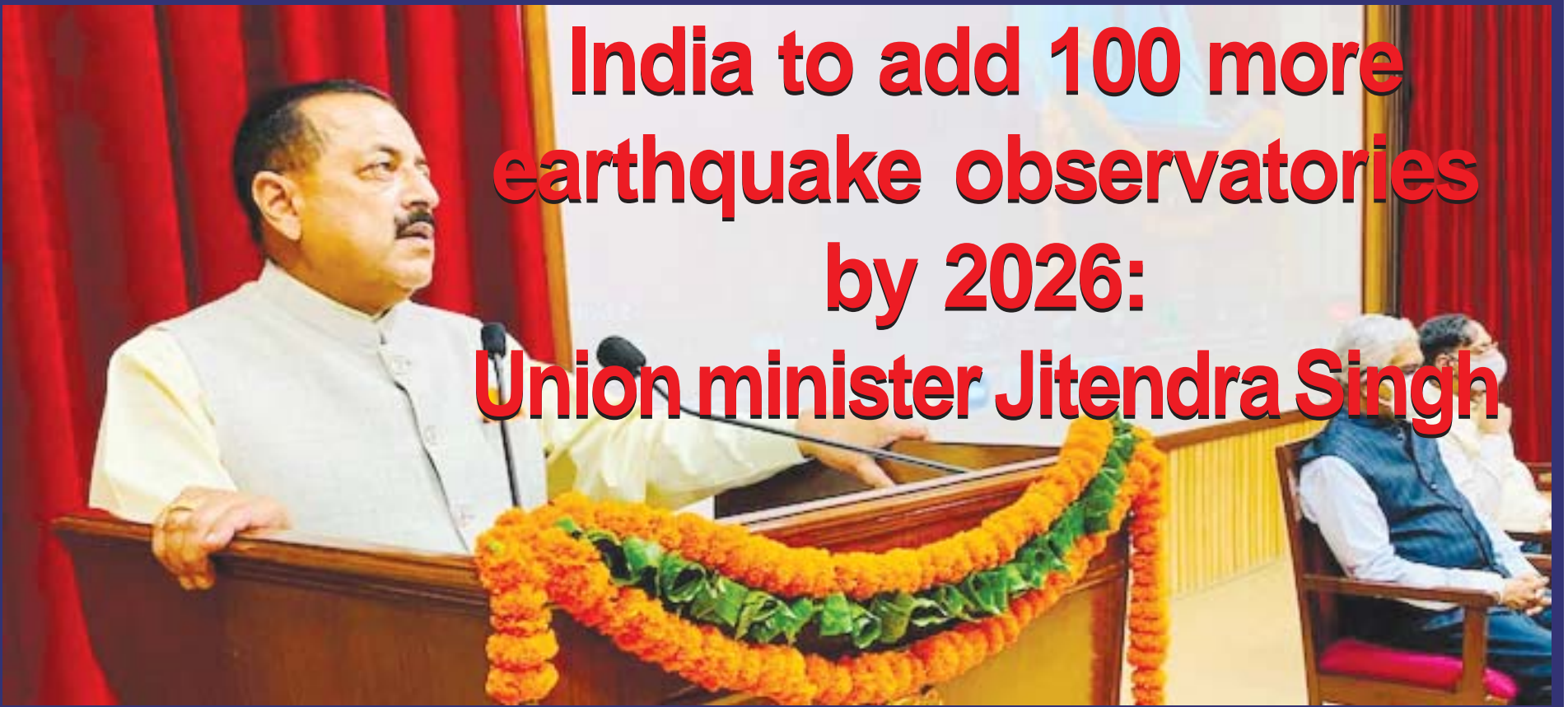
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# India to add 100 more earthquake observatories by 2026: Union minister Jitendra Singh



Assembly of International Association of Geomagnetism and Aeronomy (IAGA) - International Association of Seismology and Physics of the Earth's Interior (IASPEI), Jitendra Singh said the Indian subcontinent is considered as one of the world's most disaster-prone areas in terms of earthquakes, landslides, cyclones, floods, and tsunamis. The government is taking all necessary steps to

meet these challenges, he said. "India is going to have 35 more earthquake observatories by the end of this year and 100 more such observatories in the next five years," news agency PTI quoted Jitendra Singh as saying. Jitendra Singh claimed that in the last six-and-a-half decades since Independence, India had only 115 earthquake observatories. But under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there is going to be a quantum leap in the

number of earthquake observatories in the country, he said. Jitendra Singh said the importance of geology as a recognised science has probably reached its zenith today as human society grapples with challenges at multiple levels of interactions with the Mother Earth. He expressed hope that the Joint Scientific Assembly of IAGA-IASPEI will act as a platform in bringing on

board a greater number of researchers and practitioners from a global community to work on issues related to rendering science to society. Jitendra Singh said it is a fitting environment for the two scientific communities to come together to forward research in their niche as well as pursue new avenues of cross-disciplinary investigations. The IAGA and IASPEI have come together to

hold a joint assembly in 2021, which is being hosted by the CSIR-NGRI with the support of the Ministry of Earth Sciences. Jitendra Singh impressed upon India's commitment to support various projects of earth system science to quantify the seismic hazard for better land use and urban planning and creating disaster-resilient infrastructures for reducing risks.

## Scientists discover some baby bats babble like human infants

careful control over the vocal apparatus necessary for speech.

The study published in the journal *Science* indicates the same is true for the greater sac-winged bat, or *Saccopteryx bilineata*, native to Central America.

Mirjam Knornschild, a behavioral ecologist at the Museum of Natural History in Berlin and the study's co-author, "Human infants seem to babble on the one hand to interact with their caregivers, but they also do that when they're completely alone, seemingly happily just exploring their voice, and that's the same what our bats are doing."

Bats communicate by ultrasound, sound waves at frequencies above human hearing, but they can also make sounds audible to people.

"It sounds like a high pitched twittering to our ears... it's melodic," said Knornschild, who has worked with bats since 2003.



*Saccopteryx bilineata* don't hide away in gloomy caves, but prefer to live in trees, making them easier to observe.

The babbling of 20 baby bats was recorded in Costa Rica and Panama between 2015 and 2016 by researcher Ahana Fernandez, also affiliated with the Museum of Natural History in Berlin, who spent hours with the bats in the forest.

The mammals, like us, have a larynx, and start babbling about three weeks after birth, for about 7 to 10 weeks — until they are

weaned.

During this period, the bats spend around 30 percent of their days babbling, with sessions lasting on average about seven minutes, the researchers calculated.

But one bat babbled for a full 43 minutes, a long stretch considering adult communication generally lasts but a few seconds.

"That's something really, really peculiar that the other bat species that have been studied to date simply don't do," said

Knornschild.

"They're very chatty."

The vocalisations were converted into images, called spectrograms.

"Each syllable has a very specific shape, so to say, and they are easy to distinguish by eye," Knornschild added.

The researchers analysed more than 55,000 produced syllables, finding universal

characteristics of babbling in human infants in the bats, such as repetition, lack of meaning, but also that the sounds followed a certain rhythm.

On top of that, like with humans, the learning curve is not linear. Out of 25 syllables in the adult repertoire, young bats have not yet mastered all of them by the time they are weaned, suggesting that they continue to learn.

The researchers were able to show that the young bats learned fairly early on a six-

syllable song used by males to mark their territory and attract females.

"The pups listen to adult males singing and then imitate that song," Knornschild said.

Baby females also learn the song, even though they won't reproduce it as adults. But the study suggests learning it may help them judge the performance of their potential future partners.

Very few other species babble, only some birds, two species of marmosets, and perhaps some dolphins or beluga whales.

Why would certain animals need to develop in this way and others not? "Navigating and communicating in a dark, 3d environment, seems to be a huge selective pressure for vocal learning," Knornschild said. But no matter the reason, the researchers underscore that developing a complex vocal system opens a world of possibilities, as demonstrated in humans, and now also in bats.



# The Quantum Supremacy?

The devices that perform quantum computations are known as quantum computers. They are believed to be able to solve certain computational problems, such as breaking of a bank's encryption, substantially faster than classical computers. It would take a classical computer, billions of years to break a bank's encryption but a quantum computer with a 4099 Qubit (quantum bits), could break the encryption in 10 seconds. Therein lies the power of quantum computing. Quantum computing is now expected to become mainstream in the next few years as the field shifts toward real-world use in pharmaceutical, data security and other applications.

And that is the reason that the Indian government promised Rs 8,000 crore in the Union Budget announced in February 2020, for setting up of a National Mission on Quantum Technologies & Applications (NM-QTA). And that is also the

reason that I have brought focus to this technology, after covering Supersonic Transport Aircrafts and Artificial meat in the previous articles, as technologies that India can ill-afford to miss.

To be clear, quantum computing still has a long way to go and has many technological challenges. Many had predicted an early ushering of mainstream quantum computing, only to be left red-faced. Among them, Google was the first to announce in 2017 that it expected quantum supremacy to happen by the end of that year. It did not happen. In 2018, IBM said that the best classical computers will be beaten on some practical task, within about five years. It did not happen.

There are a number of technical challenges in building a large-scale quantum computer. In addition, sourcing parts for quantum computers is challenging. Many quantum computers, like the ones made by IBM and Google require Helium-3, which industrially can

be made only through nuclear reactions. Also, the special superconducting cables are made only by a Japanese company, Coax Co, thus creating severe vendor dependency and perhaps vendor lock-in.

In October 2019, a Sycamore processor (a Google quantum processor) created in conjunction with Google AI Quantum was reported to have achieved quantum supremacy, with calculations more than 3,000,000 times as fast as those of Summit, an IBM supercomputer that is currently one of the fastest supercomputers in the world. By December 2020, even Chinese universities were reportedly having success in quantum computing.

But that still does not imply that it will lead to a multi-billion dollar industry and lead to new jobs getting created, unlike Supersonic Transport Aircrafts and Artificial meat. So why should India spend its scarce

resources in quantum computing? It is because, quantum computing will have an extremely profound impact on the world, on how we live and interact and do business and banking and communication. It would make all current banking encryption useless, the day it achieves demonstrable quantum supremacy. It would entail reworking of our cybersecurity systems and frameworks. It would have a deep impact on the cybersecurity of not just banks but of entire nations. Nations that do not possess quantum computing technology, will become extremely vulnerable. India cannot be caught in such a situation.

The economic upsides of quantum computing are also very significant. India already has small pockets of expertise that are developing algorithms for quantum computing. And as India gets around to spend the Rs 8,000 crore of its budgeted money, it must have clear achievable goals so that the money is not frittered away without any outcomes. Also, to be clear, as I have written many

times before, technology is not a patent created or bought, neither is it a set of techniques written down in a book. It is a team of humans who are actually working on the technology and improving on it on a daily basis. And hence, a significant amount from that Rs 8,000 crore needs to be spent to create the human resources that can absorb and develop quantum computing. No wonder the Japanese had the yardstick of spending USD 10 dollars on technology assimilation for every dollar of technology procured. India needs to change its mechanisms for technology acquisition. It brings us back to what I have been harping in almost all my articles

— India desperately needs an empowered body for Technology Acquisition from a national perspective. Otherwise, our efforts will be splintered into multiple bodies and groups, which may even work at cross-purposes, to the detriment of the nation. To achieve supremacy in quantum computing and other technologies, India must develop the required institutional structures.

## China and Taliban hold their first dialogue in Kabul

Beijing: China has established its first diplomatic contact with the Taliban in Kabul after the militant group took control of Afghanistan and the two sides now have “unimpeded and effective communication”, a Chinese official said on Wednesday. The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan on August 15, two weeks before the US was set to complete its troop withdrawal after a costly two-decade war. China and the Afghan Taliban have unimpeded and effective communication and consultation,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here when asked about the talks between the deputy head of the Taliban's political office Abdul Salam Hanafi and Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan Wang Yu in Kabul. “Kabul is naturally an important platform and channel for us to discuss key issues,” Wang said, without disclosing the details.

“China respects the Afghan people's independent decision on their own future and destiny, supports the implementation of the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned principle, and stands ready to continue to develop good-neighbourly relations of friendship and cooperation with Afghanistan and play a constructive role in the peace and reconstruction of the country,” he said. China along with Pakistan and Russia kept its embassy open in Kabul while

India, the US and other countries closed down their diplomatic missions after the Taliban took control of Kabul on August 15. Since the Taliban entry into Kabul which had caught the world by surprise resulting in large scale evacuations by the US and its allies, China which had hosted a Taliban delegation headed by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar last month remained calm and called for an inclusive government in Kabul. In his talks with Baradar, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had asked the militant group to sever its links with terror groups especially the Uygur Muslim militant group from Xinjiang, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM).

Baradar reportedly assured Wang that the Taliban will not permit the ETIM from operating from Afghanistan and called for Chinese investments in the war-torn country.

After the Taliban took control of Kabul, China called for the formation of an open, inclusive, and broadly representative government adopting moderate and prudent domestic and foreign policies and conform to the aspiration of its people and the common expectation of the international community. Last month, China had replaced its special envoy to Afghanistan Liu Jian with its former Ambassador to Qatar, Jordan and Ireland, Yue Xiao Yong.-

## China's Wuhan story unravels as world's finest, including from India, nail Covid lab-leak proof

Change came rapidly once Trump was gone. Gone with him also was his influence so toxic and polarising it had also infected that last bastion of rationality and fact-based argument: Bio-sciences. His departure brought sanity and healthy scepticism back into bio-sciences. The same top scientists who wouldn't be willing to even engage in a debate on where the virus came from, were now asking some obvious questions. If it came from an animal, how come no animal has yet been traced as a primary or intermediary reservoir in 18 months?

Why had China's Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) sealed all its data in December 2019? Why didn't the Americans or indeed the world know that the Chinese scientists were carrying out 'Gain of Function' (GoF) research, which involves genetically altering already-deadly viruses, in partnership and on funding by US scientific bodies? Why did the Chinese reject all the names of scientists the US suggested as its members on the WHO's fact-finding committee but hand-pick just one, Peter Daszak of New York-based EcoHealth Alliance (EHA), who had funded the Wuhan lab's gain of function research? A pattern of careful and selective sharing of the truth by Shi Zhengli, the famous “bat lady” of WIV, was emerging too. What did the Chinese have to hide?

The governments and the scientific establishment were still wary of touching that can of worms. If it has now been kicked loose, we have to be grateful

to a large, diverse, multinational ‘army’ of scientists, mathematicians, data analysts, even sci-fi authors and journalists, who've come together to collaborate with one objective: To discover where the virus came from. The source of the stink.

Most of them are now part of a loosely structured organisation called DRASTIC. Short for Decentralised Radical Autonomous Search Team Investigating Covid-19. It was launched by Gilles Demaneuf, a curiouser-than-cat data scientist at the Bank of New Zealand. He was soon joined by sci-fi author and noted scholar Jamie Metzl, and then the ‘gang’ grew as sharp, curious men and women across the world got together.

The group also includes some remarkable Indians, the most significant being an anonymous science teacher who tweets @TheSeeker268. We don't know him/her. But we do know Drs Monali Rahalkar and Rahul Bahulikar, the Pune-based scientist couple from the Department of Biotechnology's Agharkar Research Institute and the BAIF Development Research Foundation, respectively, who played a key role too in establishing the most important fact that led to this reversal: That a virus refrigerated in her lab that Shi Zhengli said had a 96.2 per cent resemblance to Covid-19, was the same as the one that in 2012 sickened six labourers who had gone in to clear bat guano (faeces) in a copper mine at Mojiang, part of Yunnan province.



# Like them or not, Taliban are a reality.

## India can deal with them if BJP resets its politics



Befriending the Taliban is possible, and pragmatic. It's just that it calls for a big reset in the BJP's domestic politics — a formula that goes beyond polarisation. There is a flurry of activity between New Delhi and Kabul. The writing on the Hindukush wall is clear. The Taliban are on the ascendant. Where does it leave India?

Should India be heart-broken, jilted that new US President Joe Biden has made such a clinical retreat? Or, are there opportunities in the new turn? Is a relationship of hostility with the Taliban an inevitability? Similarly, do we take it for granted that they will continue to be an Islamic militia controlled by Pakistan?

After George W. Bush invaded Afghanistan and co-opted Musharraf's Pakistan, Washington gifted us that description for the region: Af-Pak. Does India now accept this as a given? Can we de-hyphenate our strategic thinking here? In 2011, I had written this National Interest listing the reasons India should leave 'Af' to 'Pak'. How have we moved on from there?

First, is there evidence that the Taliban, out of dependence or gratitude, will remain a vassal of the Pakistanis forever? An inseparable ally, linked to Pakistan through a friendship "higher than mountains, deeper than the ocean", to borrow that description often used in the rhetoric

of Pakistan-China summits?

Your question could be, why not? Weren't the Taliban like that with Pakistan in their first innings? But, as statutory warnings with mutual funds advertisements say: Past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance. Would that also work with geostrategic interests?

Nations, societies, whatever their ideological driving force, ultimately work in their self-interest. Is there anything to indicate that the Taliban could be different? Their way of life, interpretation of Islam, view on women, education and civil liberties may be abhorrent to modern societies. But does that necessarily make them enemies of India? Are they likely to launch war on India, or join Pakistan in its war against us? What will there be in it for them? To convert India into an Islamic nation and make it a part of some Caliphate? Obscurantist, brutal, medieval, anti-women, untrustworthy, the Taliban may be all of these or worse. One thing they are not is stupid or suicidal. Or they would not have survived the fight for two decades and defeated the US.

Unlike the mujahideen of the past, they did not even have the benefit of major powers backing them with arms. Pakistan was the only other power helping them, mostly by stealth.

There is a downside to a

strategic vision that looks at India's west through Pakistanised blinkers. We feel jilted that the Americans are going away, giving the Pakistanis a famous victory. That the Pakistanis now have something they always wanted: Strategic depth. To understand how pyrrhic this victory might be, check out this fine piece by Hussain Haqqani in Foreign Affairs.

One look at the map of the region, the terrain, and you know that it is such a fantasy that only the geniuses in GHQ at Rawalpindi, whose brains are acknowledged to nestle in some part of their anatomy other than the head, began hallucinating on that 1986-87 onwards. Why then? Because General Krishnaswamy Sundarji's Operation Brasstacks produced the nightmare of thousands of Indian tanks cutting through the narrower parts of Pakistani mainland in blitzkrieg or Warsaw Pact style. Hence the need for strategic depth.

Thirty-five years hence, the world has changed. So has the strategic and tactical military picture. Besides, there are nuclear weapons. If some Pakistani generals still think they can retreat across the Hindukush into Afghanistan or shift any vital strategic assets there, they must be nuts.

They aren't that bad. Over 75 years, there is one thing the world has learnt about the Pakistani army.

It is actually quite brilliant tactically, but equally delusional and reckless strategically. But would it move its nukes, or even two squadrons of precious F-16s, to an Afghan air base under the brotherly Taliban?

With an uncoloured vision, we can make a fairer assessment of who won and who lost in Afghanistan. The Taliban won for sure, and the Americans and their allies lost. But Pakistan? If the Taliban have proved one thing over these two decades, it is that they are way smarter than their big brother. Pakistan has fantasised about using their nation for strategic depth. All these years, they've reversed the equation. They've used Pakistan for their own strategic depth.

Using that depth, they've defeated the United States of America, which checked into our region two decades ago. Biden's claims of victory, "having achieved our objectives", are as hollow as George W. Bush's criticism of this hasty departure. Biden has only accepted a humiliating reality Bush won't. That Afghanistan isn't quite Hotel California of the rock band Eagles' conception, where you can check out but not leave. He is leaving for sure. To be sure, he has also declared that rebuilding a new nation in Afghanistan was never the US objective. In simpler English, that is called use-and-throw.





# The darkest day of Joe Biden's presidency

**A frantic, somber day in the West Wing as attacks in Kabul resulted in the death of at least 12 U.S. service members.**

An already perilous withdrawal of U.S. personnel and allies from Afghanistan turned into something much darker on Thursday as the kind of catastrophe President Joe Biden had been warning about took place outside Kabul's main airport.

A series of terrorist attacks left at least 12 U.S. service people dead and 15 wounded — the deadliest U.S. casualty event in Afghanistan since 2011.

It was the most devastating moment in Biden's young presidency.

In its wake, U.S. officials remained steadfast that they would conclude the evacuation mission from the 20-year war, raising additional questions about Biden's handling of the end of America's longest war. For those in the White House, Thursday was one of the most emotionally trying and frenetic days since taking office. As the first reports came in about explosions around Kabul, officials were confronted with a deluge of information, prompting senior officials to remind staffers to ferret out facts from the speculation and chatter. During one staff meeting, sniffles could be heard as various staffers fought back tears when they learned of the U.S. deaths, according to a person close to the situation. One White House official described the pace of the day's events as overwhelming.

Biden himself hunkered down for hours with his national security team in the Situation Room and the Oval Office. He was in the latter, getting briefed around 2 p.m., as the phrase "Where is Joe Biden?" began trending on Twitter.

Along with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Mark Milley, the president received continuous updates on the situation throughout the day.

Vice President Kamala Harris, who is traveling through Asia, was streamed into the Situation Room for the president's morning meeting with his national security team. Later, one of her top aides announced that she'd be scuttling plans to make a campaign-related stop in California and instead return directly to D.C.

The White House was also in constant contact with Afghan commanders on the ground, according to an official, as it gamed out how the deadly attacks would impact the president's Aug. 31 deadline for withdrawal.

On Thursday evening, Biden delivered an address in the East Room that was at times somber and tearful and, at others, calm and reflective. He honored the U.S. service people killed in action and conveyed two main goals: finishing the mission to evacuate all the Americans who want to leave and as many allies as possible within the time constraints and retaliating against those responsible for the attacks.

"We will not forgive. We will not forget," Biden proclaimed. "We will hunt you down and make you pay."

The day had initially been geared around other priorities. Biden was supposed to meet

with newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. He was slated to hold a conference call with governors to talk about refugee resettlements. The Covid-19 task force was scheduled to brief reporters about the status of the pandemic fight.

But any attempt to look as if the White House was operating on multiple issues at the same time was overtaken by events on the other side of the globe. New guidance was sent to the press corp saying that the meeting with Bennett had been delayed. Then additional guidance said it was postponed until Friday. Outside the White House, roads were still blocked for Bennett's arrival and a family of three waved a tiny Israeli flag, even as the prime minister remained in his hotel room.

Press secretary Jen Psaki and other press officials, who had been scheduled to brief the press, pushed off her briefing too, concluding that the best way to communicate the unfolding crisis was through frontline agencies and experts. The Pentagon was given the task of communicating an updated casualty count, with Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., the commander of U.S. Central Command, directly addressing reporters in the early afternoon. Biden spoke after him, at

roughly 5:30 p.m. He clutched a black briefing book as he took questions, looking flushed at some points, battling tears at others and as he took the final press question, resting his chin on microphones. At one point he told members of the press — who were jumping out of their seats to ask him questions — that he had "another meeting, for real."

Throughout the day, efforts had been unfolding to try and identify and evacuate those Americans left behind in Kabul. Psaki's assistant, Amanda Finney, managed an expansive spreadsheet of people they were still trying to help evacuate. A green checkmark was flagged for those who got out.

Those evacuation numbers had provided a bit of optimism in the White House against the backdrop of the somber news coming out of Kabul. They'd helped airlift more than 100,000 people out of Afghanistan since the end of July — an historic operation that aides believed they deserved more credit for. After Thursday's attacks, officials said, the evacuation efforts would continue.

"We will not let them stop our mission," Biden said on Thursday, "we will continue the evacuation."

Losing U.S. service people had

been the exact scenario Biden had been desperate to avoid as he sought to end the Afghanistan war. The administration had warned for days of the looming threat of terrorist attacks. Lawmakers earlier this week were briefed in detail about the possibility of an ISIS-K attack. On Wednesday, the U.S. embassy issued a warning to Americans to avoid traveling to the airport or gathering near the airport gates. As the news of service members killed in action came in, longtime Biden confidantes said they believed the president was feeling the impact on a personal level. As vice president, Biden had worked closely with military families.

The president has repeatedly brought up his kinship to the families of servicemen after his late son, Beau's, service in Iraq. On Thursday, Biden brought up Beau again, telling the families who lost someone in combat today that he understood their intense grief.

"I have some sense like many of you do, what the families of these brave heroes are feeling today," Biden said. "You get this feeling like you've been sucked into a black hole, the middle of your chest."

The president keeps a card in his pocket with the precise number of troops who have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last 12 years — numbers that would now jump substantially under his watch. "The fact that his son served in Iraq means a great deal to him; I think he relates on a different level than people who have not had that experience," said Biden's longtime friend and former Sen. Chris Dodd, who said the pain of Beau's death from cancer in 2015 was still "raw."

"In Joe's case," Dodd said, "it adds another emotional dimension because of his personal experience."







# Will Afghanistan Take Biden Down? Not Likely.

**Democrats are wringing their hands. Republicans are sharpening their knives. But recent history says the Afghanistan pullout likely won't hurt them in the next election.**

President Joe Biden's critics seem to smell blood in the water over the catastrophic situation in Afghanistan. Donald Trump wants Biden to resign over the issue; Florida Sen. Rick Scott has suggested Biden's removal via the 25th amendment. It's not just Republicans: a fair number of prominent Democrats are worried that the Taliban takeover is the kind of overseas disaster that will hurt their party in upcoming elections.

How worried should Biden be? Not very. The situation on the ground in Afghanistan is a humanitarian crisis and, in some corners, a strategic embarrassment. But politically, for a number of reasons, it's not likely to substantially harm Biden or other Democrats at the ballot booth. For one thing, it's rare that voters hold a president accountable for a foreign policy decision. It's more than a truism that the economy drives elections: It's a long-held finding in political science. Voters reward the party in power when the economy is growing and punish it during recessions.

This isn't to say foreign policy doesn't matter at all. Political scientist Doug Hibbs' "bread and peace" model shows that unusually bloody foreign engagements could hurt the president's party. Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson probably could have

won reelection instead of retiring in 1952 and 1968, respectively, if not for unpopular and bloody troop deployments in Korea and Vietnam. The Iraq war didn't stop George W. Bush from winning a second term, though it undoubtedly hurt his later polling numbers. But beyond such extreme cases, it's difficult to find much influence of foreign policy in elections.

The case of the Vietnam War is similarly instructive. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon substantially escalated the troop presence there to avoid being seen as the one who "lost" southeast Asia. Yet when Saigon finally fell, it had little impact on the incumbent, President Ford, and the war was and remains largely perceived as a massive policy failure belonging to both parties. Similarly, when 241 U.S. Marines were killed in a barracks bombing in Beirut in 1983, President Reagan withdrew the military mission there. He took some heat for it initially, and went on to win reelection in a landslide a year later.

If Biden had gotten the withdrawal exactly right, it wouldn't have helped him much. President Bush got a modest bounce from Saddam Hussein's capture, and President Obama got one from the killing of Osama bin Laden, but those had evaporated long

before their next elections (both of which were much shorter intervals than remains until Biden's reelection bid). The first President Bush was wildly popular after the Gulf War, but that was hardly enough to save his presidency when the economy turned sour. There's something undoubtedly perverse about all this. Presidents and their aides can make catastrophic errors overseas and rarely pay much of a price for them. They can also do something very right—end a war, prevent a famine, etc.—and not get much credit for it. There are a number of areas within American politics where accountability is built into the system and incumbents are incentivized to perform well. Foreign policy, except in very dire circumstances, is generally not one of those. But what about partisan flamethrowing? If anything characterizes modern politics, is the savvy use of even minor issues to tarnish incumbents.

Again, though, when it comes to Afghanistan, this isn't likely to hurt Biden. This is simply not a topic that lends itself well to a partisan framework, in large part because the war has been bipartisan from its inception. The response to the 9/11 attacks—the original trigger for the U.S. to take out the Taliban—was probably the

most bipartisan moment in American politics in the last three decades. The Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), passed just days after the 9/11 attacks, encountered only one no vote—that of Democratic Rep. Barbara Lee of California. While its application to Iraq in 2003 would have a more partisan response, officeholders of both parties were in broad support of invading Afghanistan and have largely remained so.

To the extent there's been opposition to the occupation in recent years, that has largely come from the relative extremes of both parties—progressives on the left and isolationists on the right. Former President Donald Trump's commitment to "getting out of these ridiculous endless wars" saw overlap with Sen. Bernie Sanders' desire to end the "forever war" in Afghanistan and Sen. Elizabeth Warren's urging for a withdrawal and a peace deal with the Taliban.

In terms of public opinion, while large majorities of both parties were broadly supportive of the invasion early on, divisions have grown over time. The most recent surveys saw 56 percent of Democrats and 29 percent of Republicans viewing the occupation as a mistake. But perhaps more importantly, this Gallup report

found that Americans were mostly disinterested in military issues, were not paying attention to Afghanistan and would be fine with a military withdrawal.

The Republican Party has been attempting some swift partisan messaging on the issue recently. Just months ago, when Biden seemed to be wavering on Trump's military withdrawal timeline, conservative voices hammered Biden for apparently wanting war to continue. The RNC had a page on its website praising Trump's plans for Afghanistan withdrawal just up until last week, but they've now pivoted to attacking Biden for following that same plan. Until very recently, Trump was criticizing Biden for not withdrawing fast enough.

Now none of this means that this can't become a partisan issue. One of the things that helped President Ford when Saigon fell was that the country just wasn't very partisan at the time and there wasn't clear messaging from Democratic leaders blaming him. That's obviously different today.

But for all the horrors happening in Afghanistan today, it just won't remain on the front pages for very long, and it's unlikely to be central to elections next year, never mind three years from now.



# U.S. officials provided Taliban with names of Americans, Afghan allies to evacuate

**The White House contends that limited information sharing with the Taliban is saving lives; critics argue it's putting Afghan allies in harm's way.**

U.S. officials in Kabul gave the Taliban a list of names of American citizens, green card holders and Afghan allies to grant entry into the militant-controlled outer perimeter of the city's airport, a choice that's prompted outrage behind the scenes from lawmakers and military officials.

The move, detailed to POLITICO by three U.S. and congressional officials, was designed to expedite the evacuation of tens of thousands of people from Afghanistan as chaos erupted in Afghanistan's capital city last week after the Taliban seized control of the country. It also came as the Biden administration has been relying on the Taliban for security outside the airport.

Since the fall of Kabul in mid-August, nearly 100,000 people have been evacuated, most of whom had to pass through the Taliban's many checkpoints. But the decision to provide specific names to the Taliban, which has a history of brutally murdering Afghans who collaborated with the U.S. and other coalition forces during the conflict, has angered lawmakers and military officials.

"Basically, they just put all those Afghans on a kill list," said one defense official, who like others spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive topic. "It's just appalling and shocking and makes you feel unclean."

Asked about POLITICO's reporting during a Thursday news conference, President Joe Biden said he wasn't sure there were such lists, but also didn't deny that sometimes the U.S. hands over names to the Taliban.

"There have been occasions when our military has contacted their military counterparts in the Taliban and said this, for example, this bus is coming through with X number of people on it, made up of the following group of people. We want you to let that bus or that group through," he said. "So, yes there have been occasions like that. To the best of my



knowledge, in those cases, the bulk of that has occurred and they have been let through.

"I can't tell you with any certitude that there's actually been a list of names," he added. "There may have been. But I know of no circumstance. It doesn't mean that it doesn't exist, that here's the names of 12 people, they're coming, let them through. It could very well have happened."

NSC spokesperson Emily Horne added: "It is unfortunate that the White House was not asked for comment or explanation on such a serious issue. Had Politico asked us we would have given the same answer the President shared with the nation today: that in limited cases we have shared information with the Taliban that has successfully facilitated evacuations from Kabul."

A spokesperson for U.S. Central Command declined to comment. "Basically, they just put all those Afghans on a kill list," said one defense official, who like others spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive topic. "It's just appalling and shocking and makes you feel unclean."

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The list issue came up during a classified briefing on Capitol Hill this week, which turned contentious after top Biden administration officials defended their close coordination with the Taliban. Biden officials contended that it was the best way to keep



Americans and Afghans safe and prevent a shooting war between Taliban fighters and the thousands of U.S. troops stationed at the airport. After the fall of Kabul, in the earliest days of the evacuation, the joint U.S. military and diplomatic coordination team at the airport provided the Taliban with a list of people the U.S. aimed to evacuate. Those names included Afghans who served alongside the U.S. during the 20-year war and sought special immigrant visas to America. U.S. citizens, dual nationals and lawful permanent residents were also listed. They had to do that because of the security situation the White House created by allowing the Taliban to control everything outside the airport," one U.S. official said.

But after thousands of visa applicants arrived at the airport, overwhelming the capacity of the U.S. to process them, the State Department changed course — asking the applicants not to come to the airport and instead requesting they wait until they were cleared for entry. From then on, the list fed to the Taliban didn't include those Afghan names.

As of Aug. 25, only U.S. passport and green card holders were being accepted as eligible for evacuation, the defense official said. Still, that U.S. officials handed over a list of Afghan allies and American citizens and residents shows the extent to which they

outsourced security of the airport's outer perimeter to the Taliban. The Taliban has gone door-to-door in search of Afghan interpreters and others who helped U.S. and Western forces.

In written and verbal communications, Gen. Frank McKenzie, commander of U.S. Central Command, and Rear Adm. Peter Vasely, head of U.S. forces on the ground in Afghanistan, have referred to the Taliban as "our Afghan partners," according to two defense officials.

The Biden administration has been coordinating the evacuation effort and airport security with the Taliban, which is running the checkpoints outside the airport's outer perimeter. Officials have been "in daily communication" with Taliban commanders about who to let in, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby told reporters this week. The news comes just hours after two Islamic State terrorist attacks rocked the area just outside the airport, killing at least four U.S. Marines and wounding dozens more. A number of Afghans were also killed in the bombings.

After the attacks, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) appeared to criticize the Biden administration's strategy of coordinating with the Taliban, writing in a statement: "As we wait for more details to come in, one thing is clear: We can't trust the Taliban with Americans' security."



# Deadlines burn Biden

**The White House's withdrawal date for troops in Afghanistan is the second high-profile deadline the administration has missed this summer.**

If Joe Biden's withdrawal plan from Afghanistan has appeared chaotically rushed, it's a product of his own making. The White House has been clear for weeks that there wouldn't be a "mission accomplished moment" to end America's longest war. But after initially pushing back the timeline to pull out of the country, the president had been adamant about marking the war's end by a date certain: Aug. 31. And it quickly became the latest example of how the White House's devotion to deadlines can backfire. "Deadlines serve a purpose. They are motivational. They bring focus," said David Axelrod, a senior strategist for former President Barack Obama. "They also can be treacherous and hard to keep, especially in complex situations. And that can come back to bite you."

Until last week, Biden's Afghanistan policy had been defined as a rigid adherence to his withdrawal deadline. And that insistence opened him up to a wave of criticism for being both shortsighted and politically motivated — the withdrawal was timed to mark the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks that effectively triggered the war. Biden's resolve seemed to recede a bit on Sunday night when, in response to two consecutive questions about his Aug. 31 deadline, he said his "hope" was to "not have to extend" it. "But," he added, "there are going to be discussions, I suspect about how far along we are in the process." Administration officials point to the thousands of evacuations that have taken place in the past few days as an example of their agility.

It wouldn't be the first time in recent months that the White House has blown through a major deadline of its own creation: the administration missed its July 4 benchmark to vaccinate 70 percent of American adults against Covid-19 with at least one shot. That miss has since come to symbolize the larger problems the administration has faced in containing Covid. The president's setbacks in Afghanistan and in corralling the coronavirus were due, in part, to intelligence failures and

unanticipated variables. The rapid pace with which the Taliban took control of Afghanistan defied many of the predictions from top Biden officials. And the surging cases of the Delta variant — alongside entrenched vaccine hesitancy of a large swath of the public — similarly took hold much faster, and with more force, than officials anticipated.

Yet in close succession, they represent threats to Biden's reputation as a steady hand with institutional wisdom that helps him to see around corners. And they have complicated his carefully planned agenda and forced him to answer for having come up short. For days, the White House sought to contain the fallout over Afghanistan, with administration officials saying that they are intensely focused on extracting Americans and vulnerable Afghans from the country. On Sunday, Biden said the U.S. military has extended access around the international airport in Kabul, and took a somewhat softer tone as he acknowledged the humanitarian consequences of the U.S. pullout. "There is no way to evacuate this many people without pain and loss, of heartbreaking images you see on television," he said. "It's just a fact. My heart aches for those people you see."

Biden's aides have complained the news media is sensationalizing the problems in Afghanistan and too focused on the process — including fixating on dates. They have said some of the coverage is out-of-step with most Americans, who support a pullout from the 20-year-long war. A new NBC poll, however, complicates that argument. In the survey, the majority of those asked did say they supported leaving Afghanistan. But only 25 percent approved of Biden's handling of the withdrawal. It's yet another ominous sign politically for the president, whose approval had slipped below 50 percent before the Afghanistan turmoil erupted.

Biden's deadlines have become a hallmark of his tenure in office and his campaign. Having spent more than three decades on Capitol Hill, where

deadlines — more than any other motivator — determine the action, an explicit emphasis on the calendar is ingrained in nearly everything the president does. A White House official said the July timeframe was used to speed vaccinations, helping achieve a marked increase in the number of shots in arms. The official added that Biden had previously articulated the need for the Afghanistan timeframe. The thinking was that if the U.S. had not set that deadline, the Taliban would have begun another offensive, necessitating a surge of thousands of more American troops into harm's way.

In the end, the United States had to surge troops anyway, to help provide security for a rushed evacuation the administration had not envisioned. And they may still be there for an undetermined amount of time after Aug. 31.

The Biden White House had a much different experience with the first major deadline of his presidency, which Biden set even before he was sworn in — promising that under his administration 100 million vaccinations would be administered in his first 100 days in office. He met that and then some, by March announcing a new benchmark — doubling it to 200 million — which the administration again met before they even reached the 100-day mark.

Today, we hit 200 million shots on the 92nd day in office," a triumphant Biden declared on April 21. "Two hundred million shots in 100 days — in under 100 days, actually. It's an incredible achievement for the nation."

That bravado set expectations for his next major deadline — getting at least one shot in the arms of 70 percent of adults 18 and older by the Fourth of July. As the date loomed, it was clear the pace of vaccinations would not keep up and he'd fall short of the goal. While the administration made significant progress — reaching 67 percent of adults — their inability to hit their own goal portended a dark turn for the pandemic and gave critics an opening.

This administration's



attitude was, 'We've got this. We'll have the vaccinations done by July 4. Everything's going to be normal,'" said Karl Rove, the veteran Republican strategist who worked for George W. Bush. "That was a grave mistake. In reality, nobody knows whether or not that could happen, but the fact he said it would caused people to raise their expectations." Indeed, Biden just last month had trumpeted the country "emerging from one of the darkest years in our nation's history into a summer of hope and joy." But then he added, "Hopefully," allowing that his words were more reflective of his optimism than hard fact. Now the delta variant's rapid spread is throwing into doubt another of his big goals: Having schools open for 100 percent in-person instruction this fall. Blown deadlines aren't always so harmful, particularly when the stakes are less severe. During the vice presidential sweepstakes, Biden breezed past at least two major deadlines before choosing his running mate. He allowed so much time to pass that close allies of several of the women were able to circulate negative tidbits designed to dent the image of their rivals, creating the precise public pageant that Biden had been trying to avoid.

Biden urged Congress to pass police reform by May 25, the anniversary of George Floyd's murder by police in Minnesota. That deadline came and went. He missed the deadline to impose requisite sanctions on Russia for the poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny. There also were lapsed deadlines on climate, commissions and mask standards. And he reset the May 1 target to pull out of Afghanistan to Sept. 11, before ultimately moving it to Aug. 31, acknowledging in July 8 remarks on the planned drawdown of U.S. forces that the Taliban was at its strongest since 2001. "The worst deadline you can set is 'as soon as possible,'" said Christopher Cox, the author of "The Deadline Effect," a new book on the power of deadlines.

"Because that is the one that gets pushed the most. It sounds very urgent, but actually has the effect of making things so abstract that you don't make concrete progress towards your goals."

Cox, who has been tracking Biden's biggest deadlines, said it's far wiser for the president to "keep setting goals and deadlines that they miss then to keep things more open-ended and fall even further behind." White House deadlines designed to spur progress on Capitol Hill on infrastructure negotiations ultimately helped forge a breakthrough on a massive bipartisan package. The urgent push called for Biden pivoting from the first group of Republican senators to a second to secure the deal. In other areas, Biden's own deadlines have run up against other branches of government or his own bureaucracy, impeding his ability to meet them. Indeed, administration officials in areas involving the Department of Justice and public health point to his promises to let subject-matter experts determine the best course of action as the reason for slower action. The president's desire to issue public expiration dates is a contrast to his predecessor, President Donald Trump, who didn't so much set deadlines as offer arbitrary dates and then bluster his way straight through them. Trump's "Infrastructure Week" quickly became a running joke; he repeatedly promised a Republican health care plan to replace Obamacare and a GOP middle-class tax cut ahead of the 2018 midterm elections that never materialized. Even when he did give a timeline, such as for decisions on the Paris climate accord, infrastructure, and a plan to confront ISIS, Trump resorted to a throwaway line: "I would say over the next two or three weeks." And, as Biden's advisers repeatedly note, it was Trump's own deadline on Afghanistan that set in motion the rocky pullout that's now occurring under Biden's watch.





## Don't want war but ready to fight Taliban: Leader of Panjshir resistance

**Ahmad Massoud, leader of the Panjshir resistance, says he hopes to hold peaceful talks with the Taliban but made it clear that his supporters are ready to fight if the insurgents try to invade the valley.**

Ahmad Massoud, leader of Afghanistan's last major outpost of anti-Taliban resistance, said on Sunday he hoped to hold peaceful talks with the Islamist movement that seized power in Kabul a week ago but that his forces were ready to fight.

"We want to make the Taliban realise that the only way forward is through negotiation," he told Reuters by telephone from his stronghold in the Panjshir valley northwest of Kabul, where he has gathered forces made up of remnants of regular army units and special forces as well as local militia fighters.

"We do not want a war to break out."

The comments came as a statement on the Taliban's Alemarah Twitter feed said hundreds of fighters were heading towards Panjshir "after local state officials refused to hand it over peacefully". A short video showed a column of captured trucks with the white Taliban flag but still bearing their government

markings moving along a highway. Massoud, son of Ahmad Shah Massoud, one of the main leaders of Afghanistan's anti-Soviet resistance in the 1980s, said his supporters were ready to fight if Taliban forces tried to invade the valley. However, there was some uncertainty about whether the operation by Taliban forces had begun or not. A Taliban official said an offensive had been launched on Panjshir. But an aide to Massoud said there were no signs that the column had actually entered the narrow pass into the valley and there had been no reports of fighting.

In the only confirmed fighting since the fall of Kabul on Sunday, anti-Taliban forces took back three districts in the northern province of Baghlan, bordering Panjshir last week. However, Massoud he said he had not organised the operation which he said had been carried out by local militia groups reacting to "brutality" in the area.

Massoud called for an inclusive,

broad-based government in Kabul representing all of Afghanistan's different ethnic groups and said a "totalitarian regime" should not be recognised by the international community.

The wreckage of Soviet armoured vehicles that still dot the valley show how hard Panjshir has been to defeat in the past. But many outside observers have questioned whether Massoud's forces will be able to resist for long without outside support.

He said his forces, which one aide said numbered more than 6,000, would need international support if it came to fighting. But he said they did not just come from Panjshir, a region of Persian-speaking Tajiks long at odds with the Pashtuns who form the core of the Taliban movement.

"There are many other people from many other provinces who are seeking refuge in the Panjshir valley who are standing with us and who do not want to accept another identity for Afghanistan," he said.

## Bezos vs Musk: NASA halts SpaceX work on lunar lander after Blue Origin lawsuit



The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has halted its work on a \$2.9 billion lunar lander contract awarded to Elon Musk's SpaceX after rival billionaire businessman Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin sued the US government. Blue Origin had filed a lawsuit claiming that it was "an attempt to remedy the flaws in the acquisition process found in NASA's Human Landing System."

A judge has set the hearing on the case on October 14 as per the US Court of Federal Claims. NASA said in a statement it paused work with SpaceX on the human landing system through November 1.

"In exchange for this temporary stay of work, all parties agreed to an expedited litigation schedule that concludes on Nov. 1," the US space agency said.

"NASA officials are continuing to work with the Department of Justice to review the details of the case and look forward to a timely resolution of this matter."

The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) last month sided with NASA over its decision to pick a single lunar lander provider, rejecting Blue Origin's protest.

SpaceX, headed by Tesla Inc's CEO Musk, this week intervened in the lawsuit to ensure that the court "has a complete and accurate picture of the facts and circumstances surrounding this protest, including the substantial harm that SpaceX will suffer if the court grants the relief sought" by Blue Origin.

Blue Origin, the rocket company founded by Amazon.com Inc's founder Bezos, has said it remains convinced there were "fundamental issues" with NASA's decision and that the GAO was not able to address them "due to their limited jurisdiction." NASA had sought proposals for a spacecraft that would carry astronauts to the lunar surface under its Artemis program to return humans to the moon for the first time since 1972.

The space agency said on Thursday it "is committed to Artemis and to maintaining the nation's global leadership in space exploration. 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."

In April, NASA awarded SpaceX a contract to build such a spacecraft as early as 2024.



# Oceans and glaciers bearing 'unprecedented' impact of climate change: IPCC

***The "Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate" by IPCC has projected that global glacier mass loss in the next few decades till 2050 will increase river runoff and related hazards like landslides, avalanches and floods.***

In a wake-up call to world leaders, an intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) report has said since 1993 the rate of ocean warming has more than doubled, intense marine heat waves have also doubled in frequency since 1982, receding glaciers and ice sheets have increased the rate of sea level rise-rising twice as fast compared to the 20th century. Underlining the urgency to act, the "Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate" by IPCC which has assessed research on the state of glaciers, oceans and marine ecosystems has projected that global glacier mass loss in the next few decades till 2050 will increase river runoff and related hazards like landslides, avalanches and floods. Marine heat waves and extreme El Nino (when sea surface temperatures in the tropical Pacific Ocean rise to above normal levels) and La Nina (when sea surface temperatures in central Pacific Ocean drop to below normal) will become frequent. Extreme sea level events that are historically rare occurring once per century in the recent past are projected to occur at least once a year at many locations, particularly the



tropical region by 2050. Till now the oceans have absorbed about 20 to 30% of human induced carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions and 90% of excess heat in the climate system since the 1980s causing ocean acidification. Ocean heat and acidification has led to shifts in the distribution of fish populations and has already reduced the global catch potential. "In the future, some regions, notably tropical oceans, will see further decreases, but there will be increases in others, such as the Arctic. Communities that depend highly on seafood may face risks to nutritional health

and food security," the report states. The extent of Arctic sea ice is declining in every month of the year. If global warming is stabilized at 1.5 degree C above pre-industrial levels, the Arctic ocean would only be ice-free in September once in every hundred years. For global warming of 2 degree C, this would occur up to one year in three, the report warns. About 670 million people in high mountain regions, 680 million people in low-lying coastal areas, four million people in the Arctic region, 65 million people in small islands are exposed to these extreme events. Without

shows.

Some island nations are likely to become uninhabitable due to climate change but habitability thresholds remain extremely difficult to assess say authors. "We will only be able to keep global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels if we effect unprecedented transitions in all aspects of society, including energy, land and ecosystems, urban and infrastructure as well as industry. The ambitious climate policies and emissions reductions required to deliver the Paris Agreement will also protect the ocean and cryosphere and ultimately sustain all life on earth," said Debra Roberts, Co-Chair of IPCC Working Group II.

major investments in adaptation, they would be further exposed to escalating flood risks, the report





# Children in India



## 3 other South Asian nations at extremely high risk of climate crisis impacts: UNICEF

**According to a new UNICEF report, India is one of four South Asian nations where children are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which jeopardise their health, education, and protection.**

India is among four South Asian countries where children are most at risk of the impacts of climate change threatening their health, education, and protection, according to a new UNICEF report.

'The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index' (CCRI) is UNICEF's first focussed on children. It ranks countries based on children's exposure to climate and environmental shocks such as cyclones and heatwaves, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks based on their access to essential services. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and India are among four South Asian countries where children are at

extremely high risk of the impacts of the climate crisis, with a ranking of 14th, 15th, 25th and 26th respectively.

CCRI has placed India as one of the 33 extremely high-risk countries with flooding and air pollution being the repeated environmental shocks leading to socio-economic adverse consequences for women and children.

Approximately 1 billion children live in one of the 33 countries classified as "extremely high-risk", including the four South Asian countries.

It is estimated that more than 600 million Indians will face 'acute water shortages' in the coming years, while at the same time flash flooding is to increase

significantly in the majority of India's urban areas once the global temperature increase rises above 2° Celsius. Twenty-one of the world's 30 cities with the most

to the serious deprivations faced by children due to the intensifying effect that climate and environmental shocks have on existing inadequate access

to essential services such as water and sanitation, healthcare and education."

"Understanding where and how children are uniquely vulnerable to this crisis is crucial to building our resilience and effectively addressing climate change. UNICEF

hopes the findings of the report will help prioritise action to protect those most at risk and to ensure that children inherit a liveable planet."

India's neighbours Nepal is ranked 51st and Sri Lanka 61st.

Bhutan is ranked 111th, with children at relatively lower risk.

"For the first time, we have clear evidence of the impact of climate change on millions of children in South Asia. Droughts, floods, air pollution and river erosion across the region have left millions of children homeless and hungry, and without any healthcare and water," said George Laryea-Adjei, UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia. "Together, climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic have created an alarming crisis for South Asian children. The time to act is now - if we invest in water, healthcare and education, we can protect their futures from the impacts of a changing climate and degrading environment," Laryea-Adjei said.



polluted air in 2020 were in India. Dr Yasmin Ali Haque, UNICEF India Representative, said, "Climate change is a child rights crisis. The Children's Climate Change Index data has pointed





# Pakistan aided Taliban, played key role in Afghanistan takeover, says US lawmaker



**A top US lawmaker has claimed that Pakistan and its intelligence agency had played a key role in safeguarding the Taliban and its takeover of Afghanistan.**

Atop US lawmaker has claimed that Pakistan and its intelligence agency had played a key role in safeguarding the Taliban and its takeover of Afghanistan.

The Republican lawmaker, Steve Chabot further said that it is disgusting to watch Islamabad

celebrate Taliban's victory in Afghanistan that will bring "untold brutality" to the Afghans.

Steve Chabot, who is the Co-Chair of the India Caucus, said in an address on Sunday that he applauds India for welcoming the Afghan religious minorities who have a good reason to fear

persecution at the hands of the Taliban and their evil rule, reported PTI.

"In contrast, we all know that Pakistan and particularly its intelligence services played a key role fostering the Taliban and allowing them to eventually take over. It's just disgusting to watch

Pakistani officials celebrate the victory of this group that will bring untold brutality to the Afghan people," Chabot said.

The Taliban entered Kabul on August 15 evening and soon President Ashraf Ghani fled the country as the capital broke into chaos. Thousands of Afghans started rushing to the Kabul airport in hope of being evacuated from the country. Every day over the past week, Afghans have been flocking the Kabul airport from where several countries, including India and the US, are operating evacuation flights. However, the chaos at Kabul airport has led to many deaths in the past week. On persecution of minorities

"Pakistan's own persecution of religious minorities, however, gets a lot less attention here in America than it deserves. We would do well to educate our fellow

citizens about these abuses. Persecution is particularly manifested in the heinous practice of the kidnapping, force conversion to Islam and forced marriage of underage Hindu girls to older Muslim men," he said. India has announced a special visa category called 'e-Emergency X-Misc Visa' to facilitate the grant of visas to Afghan nationals seeking refuge. All Afghans, irrespective of their religion, can apply for the 'e-Emergency X-Misc Visa' online and the applications will be processed in New Delhi.

Moreover, in line with its historical ties with Afghan people, reports have said India will prioritise granting visas to civil society members, opinion makers, women activists, students and NGO workers from Afghanistan in view of the current situation in the country.



# Climate change triggering intense drought in Iraq, Syria:

## Over 12 mn people to lose access to water, food

*The region has been witnessing a major spike in temperatures amid record low levels of rainfall, and drought due to climate change.*

Iraq and Syria, which have been battered by humanitarian crises, are on the brink of another catastrophe as they face critical water shortage. 13 aid groups working in the region warned that over 12 million people in Syria and Iraq are losing access to water, food and electricity calling for quick action to tackle the imminent water crisis emerging from climate change.

The region has been witnessing a

organisation

What's happening in the Middle East? According to the report, more than five million people in Syria directly depend on rivers for water needs, while in Iraq, the loss of access to water from the river, and drought, threaten at least seven million people. Around 400 square kilometers of agricultural land risk total drought as two dams in northern Syria, serving three million people with electricity, and irrigation

drought, while in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq production is expected to decrease by half, the groups said. According to the United Nations, Syria is currently facing the worst drought in 70 years while Iraq is facing the second driest season in 40 years due to record low rainfall.

Swift action needed

"This year we have witnessed a wave of intense drought and as a result our lands did not produce any crops and we don't have any sources of

drinkable water either for us or for our animals," said Abdallah, a tribal leader from Al Sebat adding that it is infuriating to think that the "current conditions will force us to leave the rural areas and that our lands will be left as ruins." The groups urged for quick action to tackle the imminent crisis as CARE's Regional Director in the Middle East and North Africa, Nirvana Shawky said, "The situation demands that authorities in the region and donor governments act swiftly to save

lives in this latest crisis, that comes on top of conflict, Covid-19 and severe economic decline. In the longer term, beyond emergency food and water, they need to invest in sustainable solutions to the water crisis."

Thousands of scientists had warned that a climate tipping point was imminent and called for action to tackle the emergency. Researchers part of a group of over 14,000 scientists signed on to an initiative declaring a worldwide climate emergency stating that there has been an unprecedented surge in climate-related disasters since 2019



major spike in temperatures amid record low levels of rainfall, and drought, which is depriving people from access to clean drinking water. Meanwhile, essential services like healthcare are also on the verge due to decline in power levels as dams run out of water.

The 13 aid groups in a report published in Reliefweb said, "Higher temperatures caused by climate change increase the risks and severity of droughts in the region." The aid groups include the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Danish Refugee Council, CARE, Action Against Hunger, Mercy Corps, among others international

water face imminent closure.

"The total collapse of water and food production for millions of Syrians and Iraqis is imminent," said Carsten Hansen, Regional Director for the Norwegian Refugee Council. "With hundreds of thousands of Iraqis still displaced and many more still fleeing for their lives in Syria, the unfolding water crisis will soon become an unprecedented catastrophe pushing more into displacement." In Iraq, large swathes of farmland, fisheries, power production and drinking water sources have already been depleted of water. Wheat production is expected to go down by 70 per cent because of the

## Science behind Pfizer vaccine: Teaching cells to fight Covid-19 via genetic instruction



The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Monday granted full approval to the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer-BioNTech. The vaccine will be known in the US by the brand name Comirnaty. The Pfizer vaccine was already authorised for emergency use by the FDA for individuals 12 years of age and above in December 2020.

The decision comes at a time when FDA has allowed emergency use of a booster dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine for people with severely weakened immune systems.

"The full approval by the FDA underlines the vaccine's high efficacy and favourable safety profile," said Ugur Sahin, MD, CEO and Co-founder of BioNTech. "Our companies have shipped more than one billion doses worldwide, and we will continue to work tirelessly to broaden the access to our vaccine and to be prepared for potential emerging escape variants," he said in a statement.

Science behind the vaccine

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine works by carrying the genetic instructions of the spike proteins that are responsible for Covid-19. Using messenger RNA (mRNA), the genetic material that our cells read to make proteins, the vaccine fuses into cells once injected into the body. The mRNA molecules are fragile; therefore they are wrapped in oily bubbles made of lipid nanoparticles.

As the mRNA is released, the cell reads the genetic material and starts building spike proteins. The molecules are destroyed by cells that rip them apart as it builds protruding proteins on the surface and starts recognising the spike proteins. The body identifies these protein particles as foreign agents kickstarting antibody production to counter the invading virus.

These antibodies will be activated once the real virus tries to invade the body.

The vaccine takes 60 days to be produced and requires special containers with dry ice, thermal sensors and GPS trackers to ensure they remain viable.

Efficacy of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine

The vaccine displayed an efficacy rate of over 90 per cent. The longer-term follow-up data from the Phase 3 trial showed that the vaccine's high efficacy and favourable safety profile were observed up to six months after the second dose.



# Explained:

## Why it takes months to subdue some wildfires



**More than 20,000 wildland firefighters are battling some 100 large wildfires in the US West. Their goal is "containment".**

At nearly every community meeting on firefighting efforts in the U.S. West, residents want to know why crews don't simply put out the flames to save their homes and the valuable forests surrounding them. It's not that simple, wildfire managers say, and the reasons are many, some of them decades in the making and tied to climate change. The cumulative result has been an increase in gigantic wildfires with extreme and unpredictable behavior threatening communities that in some instances didn't exist a few decades ago.

"How do we balance that risk to allow firefighters to be successful without transferring too much of that risk to the public?" said Evans Kuo, a "Type 1" incident commander assigned to the nation's biggest and most dangerous wildfires. "I wish it wasn't the case, but it's a zero-sum game."

More than 20,000 wildland firefighters are battling some 100 large wildfires in the US West. Their goal is "containment," meaning a fuel break has been

built around the entire fire using natural barriers or manmade lines, often created with bulldozers or ground crews with hand tools.

Estimated containment dates for some wildfires now burning aren't until October or November.

**WHY SO LONG?**

A big concern is safety. Kuo said residents sometimes plead with him to send firefighters into areas where he knows they could get killed.

"That's a deal-breaker," he said on a day off after 18 straight days of 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. shifts on a wildfire in Washington state. "I'm not putting people at risk." Actually putting out these large fires, or labeling them "controlled," will require cold weather combined with rain or snow, weeks away for many states.

"I'd say pray for rain because that's the only thing that's going to get us out of this fire season," Idaho's state forester, Craig Foss, told Republican Gov. Brad Little and other state officials this week during a discussion of the wildfire season.

**HAVE WILDFIRES CHANGED?**

Kuo has been fighting wildfires for 30 years with the U.S. Forest Service, spending the first part of his career as a frontline firefighter with groundcrews, the backbone of any effort to stop a wildfire. At the time, wildfires of 150 square miles (390 square kilometers) were uncommon. Now blazes reach five times that size and more, getting large enough to create their own weather.

"That's kind of redefining what the new normal is," said Kuo. "We get these megafires."

**IS WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION IN THE PAST PLAYING A ROLE NOW?**

For much of the last century, firefighters had been mostly successful at suppressing wildfires in ecosystems that evolved to rely on wildfire. Early on, firefighters benefitted from forests that had already been periodically cleared of brush and debris by wildfires that could move through every couple decades. But with fire suppression, experts say, that brush and debris accumulated to where now, wildfires can ladder up into the branches and

into the crowns of large trees, creating the giant wildfires that kill entire swatches of a forest. **HOW HAS DROUGHT IMPACTED WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION?**

On top of fire suppression have been several decades of drought that studies link to human-caused climate change. That's exacerbated by this year's hot and dry weather, leading to historically low moisture contents in forests that have become tinder-dry.

"Our protection districts are seeing far warmer and dryer than normal conditions creating historically dry fuels," said Dustin Miller, director of the Idaho Department of Lands. Those dry fuels allow wildfires to spread more quickly. On big fires, embers can shoot out to start spot fires on the other sides of natural barriers such as rivers. Sometimes spot fires can put firefighters at risk of being trapped by flames in front and behind them.

Miller said the state is likely facing \$100 million in costs to fight fires this year on land the state is responsible for

protecting, which is mostly state forests but also includes some federal and private forests. **WHAT ABOUT DISEASE AND INSECT INFESTATION?**

Disease and bug infestations in trees whose defenses have been weakened by drought have led to forest-wide epidemics that have killed millions of trees in the U.S. West. Those dead trees, called snags, become fuel for wildfires while at the same time posing increased danger to firefighters who can be hit by falling branches or the unstable trees themselves.

**ARE MORE HOMES IN WILD AREAS AN ISSUE?**

Homes built in what firefighters call the wildland-urban interface pose special problems for firefighters, typically tying up many firefighters on structure protection rather than have them actively engaging a wildfire.

"We base our strategy and tactics on protecting values at risk," Kuo said. "Homes, subdivisions, communications towers, gas pipelines, railways and roadways, transmission lines."





# Are Artificial Food Additives Harmful to Your Health?

As their name suggests, artificial food additives are synthetic ingredients added to food to enhance its color or flavor, extend its shelf life, or improve it in some way.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ensures that all food additives on the market are safe for use. Still, you may wonder whether you're better off limiting your intake of these ingredients. This article explains all you need to know about artificial food additives, including their safety, uses, and potential health risks, as well as helpful tips to reduce your intake if that's important to you.

What are artificial food additives? Artificial food additives are synthetic ingredients, meaning they are not naturally derived, added to food to enhance its appearance, texture, taste, and freshness (1Trusted Source).

Types of food additives

The FDA uses the following two categories of food additives (1Trusted Source):

" Direct. These are added for a specific purpose, such as texture, leavening, binding, or color. For example, aspartame is a popular artificial sweetener used to improve the taste of sodas and low calorie or sugar-free foods.

" Indirect. These may become part of food in trace amounts due to packaging, storage, or other handling practices. In this case, manufacturers must ensure all

packaging materials are safe for use.

For the most part, direct food additives are the focus of concern for consumers. These can be further categorized into the following two categories (1Trusted Source):

" Natural. Natural additives are derived from a natural food

which is produced in a lab.

Both natural and artificial food additives must meet strict regulatory and safety guidelines to be approved for use in food (1Trusted Source).

Types of food they're commonly found in

Artificial food additives are found in many popular foods, such as

colorings (1Trusted Source, 2Trusted Source).

Unless a food is completely unprocessed, such as an apple, be sure to read the label if you're concerned about any food additives.

Why they're added to foods

Many food products contain emulsifiers, stabilizers, or

C) and folic acid (a synthetic form of folate) are commonly added to foods because they're more stable than their natural counterparts (1Trusted Source, 3Trusted Source, 4Trusted Source).

Finally, food manufacturers may choose to use artificial food additives, as they are usually lower in cost than natural food additives (1Trusted Source).

Potential effects of eating artificial ingredients

Despite the strict safety protocols that artificial food additives undergo, consumers may worry about these ingredients' long-term health effects.

Gut health

To date, there's little evidence that artificial food additives approved for use by the FDA harm your gut health or digestion (5Trusted Source).

That said, the increase in gut disorders, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), Crohn's disease, and gut dysbiosis, along with the rise of highly processed foods, has led many to wonder whether there is a connection between gut health and artificial food additives (6Trusted Source).

Some preliminary research in mice suggests that the consumption of artificial sweeteners may lower gut bacteria diversity and theoretically lead to digestive issues - though no research directly ties artificial food additives to poor gut health in humans (6Trusted Source, 7, 8Trusted Source).



source. For example, red beets are used to produce natural red food coloring, while soybeans and corn are used to make lecithin - a type of emulsifier - to bind ingredients.

" Artificial. Artificial additives are not derived from nature. For example, most vanilla extracts are made from vanillin,

yogurts, breads, salad dressings, sodas, baked goods, chips, protein bars, and other processed foods.

In fact, many foods on grocery store shelves contain either natural or artificial food additives in some form. Some foods may contain emulsifiers, while others may contain sweeteners or food

thickeners to improve the quality of the product. These additives help bind ingredients, such as oil and water, to produce a more uniform texture and appearance (3Trusted Source).

A food may also have artificial additives to improve its nutritional composition. For example, synthetic ascorbic acid (vitamin



# What Does the Delta Variant Look Like in Kids?

Unlike the earlier versions of the coronavirus, which, for the most part, left children alone, the new Delta variant is taking a considerable toll on kids - especially as children under 12 have not been vaccinated yet.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, for the week ending Aug. 5, nearly 94,000 child COVID-19 cases were reported.

"The Delta variant is more contagious. That's why you're seeing it more in children," said Dr. Paul Offit, the director of the Vaccine Education Center and an attending physician in the division of infectious diseases at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Delta variant is more than twice as contagious as previous variants. Trusted Source, and there's data that suggests it might cause more severe illness in unvaccinated people. Since the majority of children are unvaccinated, this puts them in a higher risk category of contracting the virus.

What does the Delta variant look like in kids, and how can we keep our families safe? We tapped experts to find out. What are the top symptoms of the Delta variant in children?

It's still too early to tell if there are significant differences in symptoms of the Delta variant versus the previous variants.

Yale Medicine reported that cough and loss of smell are less common with the Delta variant, while headache, sore

throat, runny nose, and fever are among the top symptoms.

"It's a little too soon to see high quality studies in the pediatric literature reflecting the current rise in the Delta variant," said Dr. Michael Grosso, the chief medical officer and chair of pediatrics at Northwell Health's Huntington Hospital.

"The most common symptoms in children and teens seem to be fever and cough, with nasal symptoms, gastrointestinal symptoms, and rash happening much less often," Grosso added.

Prior to this, most children with COVID-

serious complication of primary COVID-19, has its onset several weeks after initial infection," Grosso said.

Symptoms of MIS-C include:

- " abdominal (gut) pain
- " bloodshot eyes
- " chest tightness or pain
- " diarrhea
- " exhaustion
- " headache
- " low blood pressure
- " neck pain
- " rash
- " vomiting

When should I test my child for COVID-19?

"Get your child tested if they have upper respiratory symptoms," Offit said. Children with any of the symptoms mentioned above need to be tested and seen by a pediatrician. This is especially true before children go back to school and as they return home from camp.

According to Offit, if your child tests positive for COVID-19, they should be isolated and quarantined until they no longer have symptoms.

Grosso added, "If they test positive but are well enough not to need a hospital stay, parents should monitor for breathing problems, fluid intake, and, maybe most important, general appearance." A parent's sense that their child seems "off" is a good reason for reevaluation.

19 didn't have symptoms. The Delta variant may be creating more symptoms in more children than we were seeing earlier in the pandemic.

"Whatever the [variant], parents need to remain aware of the other illnesses caused by COVID-19 in young people," Grosso said.

One serious disease to be on the lookout for is multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C). Trusted Source.

"[MIS-C], which is an uncommon,

## 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.





# Alaya F joins Kartik Aaryan in Ekta Kapoor's Freddy, team welcomes her with a cake



Alaya F took to Instagram and posted a picture with a clapboard, announcing the news. Freddy, which also stars Kartik Aaryan, will be directed by Shashanka Ghosh.

Actor Alaya F has come on board to star in the upcoming romantic-thriller Freddy, headlined by Kartik Aaryan. Directed by Shashanka Ghosh of Veere Di Wedding fame, the film is

produced by Ekta Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms and Jay Shewakramani's banner Northern Lights Films.

The 23-year-old actor took to Instagram late Saturday evening and posted a picture with a clapboard, announcing the news.

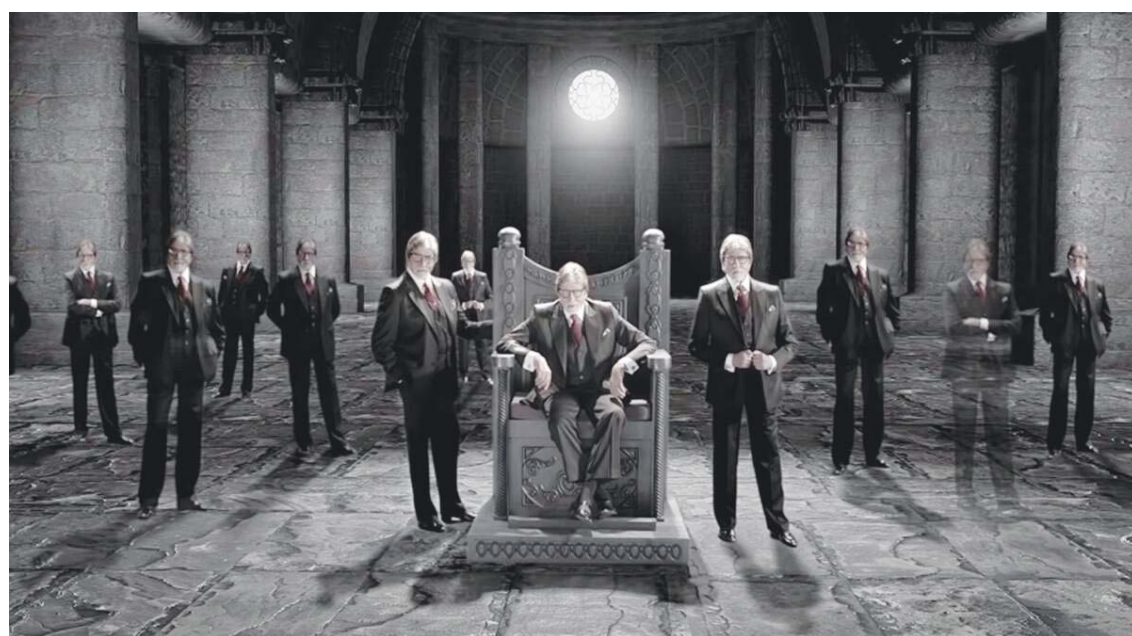
"Ready for 'Freddy!' So happy to be on board with the most wonderful team!" she captioned the post. Kartik, 30, also shared a picture of Alaya cutting a cake and wrote, "Welcome @AlayaF\_\_ From Freddy." Alaya F had made her debut with the

2020 comedy Jawaani Jaaneman, co-starring Saif Ali Khan. Last month, the actor started shooting for the Hindi remake of Kannada thriller U-Turn, also backed by Ekta Kapoor.

Besides Freddy, which went on floors earlier this month, Kartik will be seen in Ram Madhvani-directed action-thriller Dhamaka, Anees Bazmee's horror comedy Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2, action-drama Captain India, to be helmed by Hansal Mehta and a romantic-musical with producer Sajid Nadiadwala.

## Chehre title track

### Amitabh Bachchan recites a poem about different faces of people



The makers of Amitabh Bachchan starrer Chehre are pulling out all stops to regenerate the buzz around the upcoming thriller. On Monday, the team released the title track featuring Big B's baritone, as he recites a poem about different faces of people. Chehre has been produced by Anand Pandit and also stars Emraan Hashmi, Rhea Chakraborty, Krystle D'Souza, Raghubir Yadav.

From reflections, shadows to multiple images of Bachchan, the title track is suggestive of the theme of the movie. Bachchan even enacts various emotions hinting at how the film might show all of its characters in

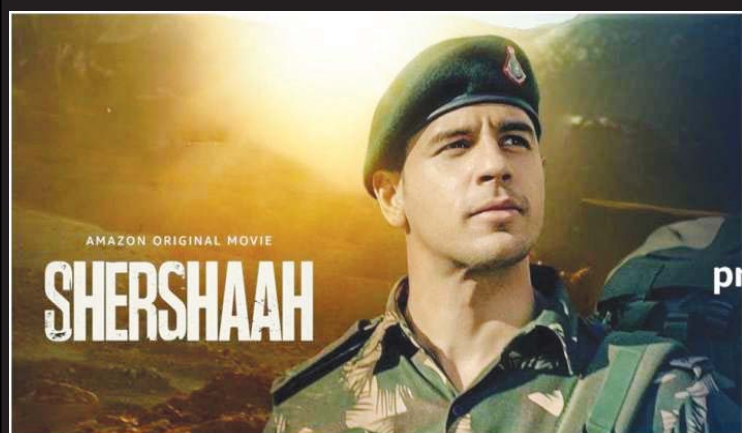
black and white. With lines like "jism chale jaayenge, par zinda rahenge chehre," one can only guess the plot of the upcoming release. The song does not have much of a melody but stressed more on Amitabh Bachchan's recitation with an eye-catching play of the imagery.

Chehre was previously scheduled to release in April, but got postponed due to the second wave of the coronavirus. Producer Anand Pandit, who was certain to have a theatrical release, recently announced that Chehre will release in cinema halls on August 27. Talking about the release, Pandit

said that Chehre "deserved a theatrical release." "We want the magnanimity of the film to be showcased in the right way and hence are excited to finally reach the audience through the cinema screens," he shared.

Director Romy Jafry said in a statement, "We are excited that our film is getting a theatrical release because the way it is shot and the efforts we have taken in terms of the production and post-production can only be experienced in the cinema halls. Also, I assure the audience that it will be beyond satisfaction to watch Amitabh Ji and Emraan together on the big screen for the first time."

## Amazon Prime Video pays tribute to Captain Vikram Batra with a heartfelt video 'Shershaah Ki Daastaan'



Amazon Original movie, and all the brave souls who Shershaah based on the life of fight relentlessly to protect us Kargil War Hero Captain Vikram Batra (PVC) has been winning everyone's heart worldwide. The film salutes the selfless sacrifice of Captain Vikram Batra (PVC) AKA Shershaah during The Kargil War of 1999 that can never be forgotten. His bravery and courage have continued to inspire our entire nation for the last 22 years.

Amazon Prime Video released a heartfelt video 'Shershaah Ki Daastaan', paying tribute to

Directed by Vishnu Varadhan, Shershaah is inspired by the life of Captain Vikram Batra (PVC) and stars Sidharth Malhotra and Kiara Advani in the lead. Jointly produced by Dharma Productions and Kaash Entertainment, Shershaah is streaming now exclusively on



## Atanu Ghosh's Binisutoy: An affecting film with a troubling gaze



Atanu Ghosh's *Binisutoy* - an affecting if ornate film - opens with the cacophony of hope. A local competition promises Rs 50 lakh as the winning amount and people are queueing up. Srabani Barua and Kajal Sarkar (Jaya Ahsan and Ritwick Chakraborty) are among the hopefuls. At one point they find themselves in a room, answering the crucial question: what will they do if they win? Strangers both, they are tied by the eagerness of a common dream. Circumstances ensure they spend most of the day together, interacting with the urgency of unfamiliarity. She informs him how she broke a vase that morning, he tells her about misplacing his fiancée's money. When they part, they do so as confidantes.

A setting such as this makes for an ideal meeting ground of star-crossed lovers. Ghosh uses it for the chance encounter of two people wanting to be someone they are not. Srabani Barua and Kajal Sarkar do not really need the money. They are affluent individuals leading their own lives. She heads her family tea

business and is separated from her husband. He is a civil engineer and is married with a child. But they are also saturated with an emotional numbness that stems from being lonely; they suffer from an entrapment rooted to their textbook existence. This play-acting then becomes their way of escaping as if life is one big reality show. Most films portray how far a story can take its characters. *Binisutoy* outlines how far characters can go in search of a story. It is a whimsical premise but not entirely implausible. Isn't the pursuit of story a more potent incentive to live; wouldn't life become more bearable if it was a story? The possibilities are endless and Ghosh designs the narrative in a way that rewards careful watching. Take, for instance, how Srabani and Kajal keep spinning tales from objects they possess - the bundle of notes, a broken vase - like their curiosity to know the other is a masked desire to be the better storyteller, like the one they are trying to convince of this reality is themselves.

## Gauri Shinde on break from direction since 2016: I had no choice, the pandemic hit, but there's no rush



Gauri Shinde's last 2012. directorial project, *Dear Zindagi* was back in 2016, and the pandemic proved to be

a damper to her plans with her third outing. She says despite the long gap, she is not ready to rush into anything. "Yes, my last film was in 2016 and as the norm would have it, in three years I would have been ready (with another film). But unfortunately, the pandemic has hit. I had no choice, but there is no rush. I really want to wait a little longer to see where all this goes," Shinde shares.

The filmmaker believes that sometimes life throws these things at you for you to take that break and see what you want to do is really worth it.

"I feel there is no point in doing something like films, because it takes so much efforts, strength and stamina out of your life that it better be worth it when you make one. I guess somewhere life is telling me to hang on slightly longer," add the director, whose made her debut as a director with English Vinglish in

Talking about how the entertainment industry has



shaped up during the pandemic, the 47-year-old says where the pandemic is concerned, as human race, we find a way around things and it seems like we already have in some ways - like wearing a mask, social distancing and some basic norms, has now become a part and parcel of our lives.

"Like I have shot some ad films and it has become a second nature where we have sort of accepted this kind of living like this for a while. I hope it does not go on for too long. In this current scenario, we still have to work and a lot of people still need to earn. We also have the need

and urge to channelise our thoughts and ideas. I am hoping it shapes up, and that we are not stuck to our televisions," she continues. "I enjoy watching a lot of stuff on television but I am really missing the theatres and the outing, because cinema in all of our lives for generations has meant that like

when the screen goes dark and there are people around you, it is a kind of community experience to watch and enjoy something together."

She further adds that for her, cinema needs to fulfil three things. "Engage, entertain and have something original and unique to say that make some sort of impact as you close your laptop or television screen. There has to be something that lingers in your mind, that has done something to your heart. These three essentials are what I will look for as a jury member, and even as an audience member," Shinde concludes.

## BellBottom 1st weekend box office: Akshay Kumar's film mints ₹12.65 cr, beats Roohi's opening haul

Akshay Kumar's *BellBottom* has collected ₹12.65 crore over the four-day extended weekend. The Bollywood film, which became the first Hindi film to release in theatres since the second wave of Covid-19 shut them down, collected approximately ₹4.30 crore on Sunday. According to Bollywood Hungama, *BellBottom* witnessed a 35% jump on Sunday alone, benefiting from the festival of

Raksha Bandhan. The film, released on August 19, struggled to surpass the ₹3 crore mark in its first two days of release. On Thursday, the spy thriller collected Rs. 2.75 crore whereas it collected another ₹2.75 crore on Friday. *BellBottom* collected another ₹3.25 crore on Saturday, pushing the box office collections to ₹8 crores until Day 3. It also dethroned Janhvi Kapoor, Rajkumar Rao's horror-comedy



*Roohi*, which released in March, as film with the biggest opening weekend collection this year. *Roohi* had collected ₹12.58 crore and had also released on a Thursday. Theatres are still shut in major centres such as Mumbai and Pune, which is expected to have strongly impacted the collection. According to a Box Office India report, mass pockets such as Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat haven't performed as per

expectations. The report stated that the regions, which usually collect a huge box office collection on occasions like *Raksha Bandhan*, did not show growth higher than Delhi NCR. Speaking with SpotboyE, Akshay noted that given the current scenario, if the film manages to collect even ₹30 crores, 'it is equivalent to ₹100 crore.' He added, "If the movie does ?



## China and Taliban hold their first dialogue in Kabul



(SAI Bureau)-A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said that China has 'effective' communication with Taliban and respects Afghan people's independent decision on their own future and destiny.

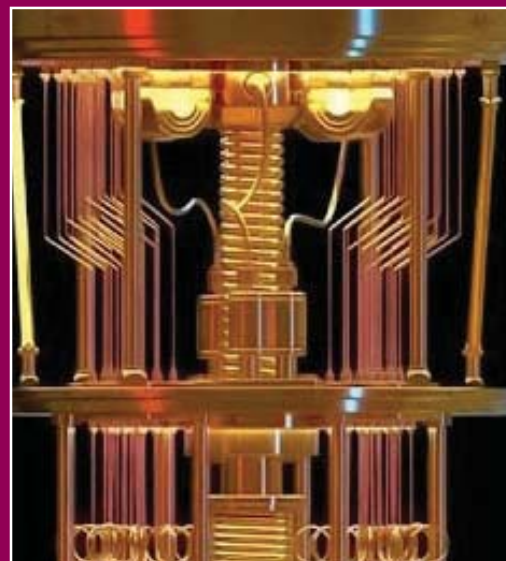
(Contd on page 36)

## The Quantum Supremacy ?

**India has already signaled its intent to develop capabilities in Quantum computing. Why is quantum computing important?**

(SAI Bureau)- Quantum Supremacy is not a term describing hegemony in the field of quantum physics. Quantum Supremacy stands for the theoretical case where quantum computers are believed to be able to quickly solve certain problems that no classical computer could solve in any feasible amount of time. It does sound very interesting, but the question that races to anyone's mind is what is a quantum computer? Quantum computing is the field of computing which leverages the collective properties of quantum states to perform computation. This is based on a branch of physics called Quantum mechanics, where a particle can be in multiple states at the same time, and it explains the aspects of nature at small (atomic and subatomic) scales, for which classical mechanics is insufficient.

(Contd. on page 36)



Like them or not, Taliban are a reality.

Befriending the Taliban is possible, and pragmatic. It's just that it calls for a big reset in the BJP's domestic politics — a formula that goes beyond polarisation.



(Contd. on page 36)



## Scientists discover some baby bats babble like human infants

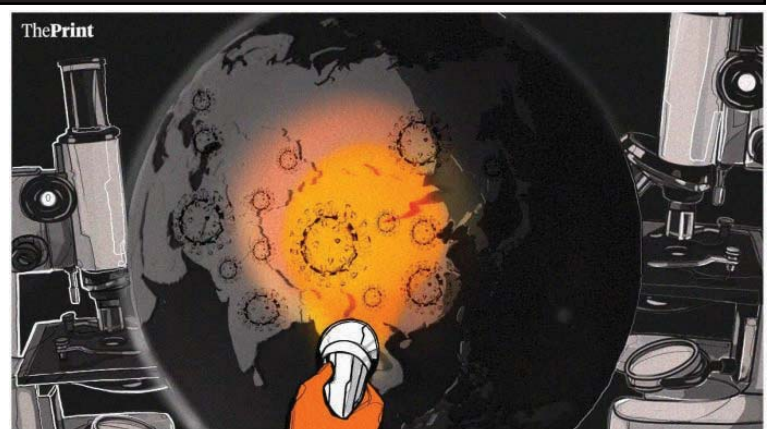
(SAI Bureau)-Scientists have discovered that human babies are not the only babblers, some bats are also very talkative in their infancy and even make sounds that recall the googoo-gagas of our own tots. Babbling in human children is key to developing the

(Contd on page 37)

## China's Wuhan story unravels as world's finest, including from India, nail Covid lab-leak proof

**The global hunt for where the virus behind pandemic came from shows science, democracy and a sense of inquiry can overcome politics, ideology and omerta codes.**

(SAI Bureau)-How do we explain the current state in the Covid pandemic? Let's put it this way. If you watch live cricket on Indian TV channels, you can't miss that prolific perfume advertisement where a young man has his shirt blown away in a storm, exposing his well-muscled torso and a young woman, full female gaze, says: Your clothes are gone. But the fragrance remains. Something of the sort has happened with the pandemic. The second wave has blown away. But what it has left behind is a stink, not a fragrance. Where did this monster virus come from? An animal or a lab, the lab? Did it reach us humans



naturally or because of very dangerous scientific research gone wrong? Is it biological warfare? The virus gone for now, the air is heavy with international suspicion. Until January, while Donald Trump was still in office,

anybody talking of a possibility other than zoonotic (animal-to-human, presumably through an intermediate vector) was dismissed as a conspiracy-theorist nutcase.

(Contd. on page 36)

## India to add 100 more earthquake observatories by 2026: Indian Union minister

(SAI Bureau)-India is going to have 35 more earthquake observatories by the end of this year and aims to add 100 more earthquake observatories by 2026, Minister of State (MoS) for



Science and Technology Jitendra Singh said on Saturday. Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Joint Scientific

(Contd. on page 35)