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Vol. 20

Issue 28

Friday 3 September to 10 September 2021

\$1

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## Hurricanes are here to stay

➤ A huge volume of rain overwhelmed the region's infrastructure, showing the lethal impact of climate change. Three days after Hurricane Ida made landfall in Louisiana, its weakened remnants tore into the Northeast and claimed at least 43 lives across New York, New Jersey and two other states in an onslaught that ended Thursday and served as an ominous sign of climate change's capacity to wreak new kinds of havoc.

Story on  
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# Long Island Indo-American Lions Club Annual Gala



(By our staff reporter) - Long Island Indo-American Lions Club hosted their 1st Annual Gala recently in Great Neck Long Island. Gala was organized under the leadership of club's President Indu Gajwani. Here are some exclusive pictures from the event. (Pictures shared by Indu Gajwani)

## Premium Indians USA Kings Cricket Team Launched for American Premier League

**SEASON ONE TO BE HELD IN NEW JERSEY FROM SEPTEMBER 20 TO 30 AT YOGI BERRA STADIUM**



Press Release (New Jersey) Finally professional cricket has arrived in USA with American Cricket League (APL) announcing the 1st season of the seven nation league in New Jersey. Jay Mir, the founder and Chairman of APL with his vision to bring highest quality cricket in T20 format set out and sought the approval from the United States Cricket Board which reports to ICC. A sport which is followed by about two billion fans, cricket is long sought after by cricket lovers in USA. Though the game was 1st played in USA in late 1800s, but it never took roots. Now with about 20 million immigrants from

countries where cricket is 2nd religion, the game had to be launched. Jay formed American Sports and Entertainment Group and built his plan on the lines of IPL. He announced the exciting tournament in summer and starting to auction the teams. He sold Pakistani, English, Australian and West Indies team quite quickly but held on to the most coveted and sought after team of Premium Indians. He was looking for an enterprising businessman who would bring in the best to APL with a premium Indian team.

And Sam Singh, the fast growing NRI from North India was the best fit. Sam has



been growing very quickly in space worked closely with the entertainment space in Jay to firm up the offer. Rest USA and sports was a natural is now history as Sam Singh step forward. Sam with his becomes the 1st and proud Chief consultant Sunil Hali, a owner of Premium Indians veteran in marketing, USA KINGS, the Indian team entertainment and media for APL.



## Indian Man In Canada Develops Web System To Limit Covid Misinformation

(Insider Bureau)-A team led by an Indian-origin researcher in Canada has developed a new system that increases the correctness and reliability of online health-related searches by 80 per cent to help people make better decisions about topics such as COVID-19.

The team at the University of Waterloo in Canada noted that the internet search engines are the most common tools the public uses to look for facts about COVID-19 and its effect on their health.

A proliferation of misinformation can

have real consequences, so the team created a way to make these searches more reliable.

"With so much new information coming out all the time, it can be challenging for people to know what is true and what is not," said Ronak Pradeep, a PhD student in the Cheriton School of Computer Science at Waterloo and

lead author of a study.

"But the consequences of misinformation can be pretty bad, like people going out and buying medicines or using home remedies that can hurt them," Mr Pradeep said.

The researchers said even the big search engines

that host billions of searches every day can not keep up since there has been so much scientific data and research on COVID-19 in such a short time.

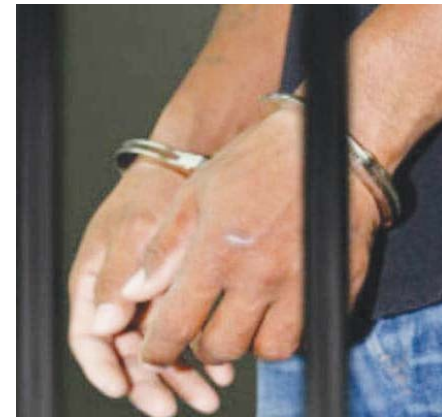
"Most of the systems are trained on well-curated data, so they don't always know how to differentiate between

an article promoting drinking bleach to prevent COVID-19 as opposed to real health information," Mr Pradeep said. "Our goal is to help people see the right articles and get the right information so they can make better decisions in general with things like COVID," he added.



## Indian-Origin Man Jailed For Stealing Excavator In Singapore: Report

(Insider Bureau)-A 44-year-old Indian-origin man was jailed in Singapore for two-and-a-half years for stealing an excavator and attempting to sell it to a heavy-vehicle repairman in March 2018, according to a



media report.

After committing the theft, Nanthakumaran Lokanathan fled to Malaysia and was arrested only two years later, reported TODAY newspaper.

He was sentenced on Thursday.

Court documents did not state how he stole the heavy construction equipment, which was worth about 31,000 Singaporean dollars, according to the report. The court heard that a construction firm Ram Brothers Construction & Trading rented it and last left it along a pathway outside 14 Jalan Tukang in Jurong Industrial area on March 28, 2018.

The next day, a representative from the firm checked the excavator's global positioning system and realised that it was on the premises of used-

vehicle-parts dealer Hon Li Hin Enterprise, in the Kranji industrial area. Closed-circuit television camera footage showed that Nanthakumaran brought the excavator into the compound that day before leaving.

## Indian-Origin Man, 20, Gets Reformative Training For Sex Assault In Singapore



(Insider Bureau)-An Indian-origin man in Singapore was sentenced on Wednesday to at least six months' reformative training, a regimented rehabilitation programme for under 21 years who commit serious crimes, for performing sexual acts on his drunk friend.

Hari Kishen Balakrishnan, 20, had pleaded guilty earlier this year to one count each of sexual assault by penetration and making an obscene film. Another charge of molestation was taken into consideration for sentencing. He committed the offence on November 7 last year. Balakrishnan, took seven video clips of him performing sex acts on the drunk and naked 23-year-old woman, a friend whom

he had given alcohol, the Today newspaper reported.

Though he had deleted the clips of sexual acts, police later recovered them during forensic investigations, it said.

The prosecution pointed out that if Balakrishnan was sentenced as an adult offender, he could have been jailed for at least six years and subjected to caning. Offenders are given a minimum period of reformative training that is subject to how they respond to the rehabilitation.

District Judge May Mesenas stressed that rehabilitation was the predominant sentencing consideration for young offenders, but given the seriousness of Balakrishnan's offences, deterrence had to feature in the punishment as well.



# Prime Time

## Daily Hindi News Bulletin



**Geeta Saxena**







# Jallianwala Bagh row

## Historian slams revamp as Cong, BJP trade charges



(News Agencies)-The reported changes in the old structures of the Jallianwala Bagh after the renovation have kicked off a controversy with the Congress terming it "indecent cruelty". The removal of the traces of the massacre has also irked prominent historians like Kim A Wagner. The constructed entrance, which was used by British soldiers to march into Jallianwala Bagh has been converted into a gallery. The narrow lane which was blocked by British soldiers to prevent Indians from escaping has also been revamped.

There are allegations that an attempt to glamorise this monument has been made by

installing lights and murals.

**DEVASTATED: KIM A WAGNER**

Historian Kim A Wagner who wrote "Amritsar 1919: An Empire of Fear and the Making of a Massacre" slammed the renovation.

"Devastated to hear that the Jallianwala Bagh site of Amritsar massacre 1919 has been revamped -which means that the last traces of the event have effectively been erased. This is what I wrote of the memorial in my book, describing a space that has now itself become history," Kim A Wagner said.

**CONGRESS OFFENSIVE**

Congress leader and Punjab

government spokesperson Dr Raj Kumar Verma also slammed the BJP saying that its leaders have no knowledge about Jallianwala Bagh's history.

"They are not freedom fighters. Martyrs' Well and the soil of Jallianwala Bagh speak volumes about the sacrifices. Jallianwala Bagh is a reality, not fiction. They should have avoided artificial things," said Dr Raj Kumar Verma.

**LITTLE IMPACT: HISTORIAN** Historian Professor Pramod Kumar, however, said the revamp will have little impact on the harsh memories of the massacre.

"When you renovate your historical monuments, you tend

to alter them. You interpret the way you alter it. Call it a distortion or reinforcing the memory. If an attempt has been made to erase a memory, then it is a matter of discussion, otherwise, the monuments normally reinforce the same memory."

"I don't think that this controversy can be resolved. Most of these problems are integrated problems," said Professor Pramod Kumar, Director, Institute of Development Communication, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He said that we are increasingly having controversies on various monuments and various

buildings which are historical. "Partly because there are political parties which are competing with each other to have access and also to present monuments in a different manner as per their own ideological commitments," he said.

**BJP HITS BACK**

Reacting to Rahul Gandhi's statement, the BJP advised him to drop the names of Gandhi's family members from various institutions and to rename them using the names of the martyrs. "Congress party has ruled the country for a long period. They should tell the people how many schemes were dedicated to freedom fighters and martyrs. How many medical colleges, IITs and AIIMS opened in the name of martyrs during the Congress regime," said BJP leader Vineet Joshi.

"More than 300 schemes, institutions have been named after Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Would be better if Congress renamed these institutions after the names of martyrs. Congress is just doing politics," he said

Joshi further said that the Congress is crying foul as its concern is something else.

"You (Congress president) have been removed from the trust of Jallianwala Bagh. That is why you are raising this issue," Vineet Joshi said.

## Biswajit Das rejoins TMC, says was never comfortable in BJP

(News Agencies)-In a setback for the West Bengal BJP, party MLA Biswajit Das joined the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Tuesday.

Biswajit Das, a two-time MLA from the TMC, had switched over to the BJP in 2019. He won from Bagda on BJP's ticket in the 2021 Assembly election.

After joining the TMC, Biswajit Das told India Today TV that he left the party due to some misunderstanding.

"The way Mamata and Abhishek Banerjee are leading is very impressive. Due to some misunderstanding, I left TMC but now I have returned home," he said.

Biswajit Das also said that outsiders who cannot speak Bengali cannot rule the state. "I never felt very comfortable in the BJP. I wanted to return to the TMC long ago. The BJP has done nothing for



Bengal," he said in presence of TMC secretary general Partha Chatterjee.

Biswajit Das also said that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is a household name, and she is known for her developmental works. He claimed

that 20 more MLAs will be joining the TMC in the coming days.

On Monday, another BJP legislator, Tanmoy Ghosh, had returned to the TMC. He said he left the saffron party after it

tried to create chaos among the people through its vindictive politics. With Biswajit Das joining the TMC, the BJP's strength in Bengal Assembly has come down to 72.

The BJP won 77 of the 292 seats of the West Bengal assembly that went to the polls. The Trinamool Congress won 213 seats, while ISF and GJM bagged one seat each. Voting in Jangipur and Samserganj had to be postponed after the death of one candidate each in the two seats.



## Amit Shah launches portal for registrations of units under New Central Sector Scheme for J&K

(News Agencies)-Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday launched a web portal for registration of units under the New Central Sector Scheme for Jammu and Kashmir. He said that the new industrial policy is the fulfilment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise after revocation of Article 370 and 35A and that the Centre aims to create a new horizon for the overall development of the Union Territory.

The minister said that the government will provide financial assistance and subsidy for the already existing industry in J&K and that as part of the Rs 80,000 crore package announced by the PM, 96% of the central money has already been provided.

"Article 370 was the biggest roadblock in the development of the union territory. A new environment was created after August 5 2019, when it was revoked," Amit Shah said.

**The minister said that the government will provide financial assistance and subsidy for the already existing industry in J&K.**

The New Central Sector Scheme for the industrial development of Jammu and Kashmir was cleared by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade earlier this month. The scheme offers four incentives: Capital Investment Incentive, Capital Interest subvention, Goods & Service Tax Linked Incentive

(GSTLI) and Working Capital Interest Subvention.

J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said that there is a paradigm shift in the region and an environment has been created for industrial development and foreign investments. "Because of the environment created in the state, by June-July more than 10 lakh visitors came to the state and we are expecting Rs 50,000 crore in investments and working for the creation of 10 lakh jobs," Manoj Sinha said. He added that the law and order situation has improved, which would give a fillip to industrial growth. Meanwhile, Minister of Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal said that a new development policy has been crafted and Rs 28,000 crore has been earmarked for the overall redevelopment of Jammu and Kashmir. The government is also taking steps to ensure ease of doing business for small and big industrial sectors, Goyal said.

## Kerala logs over 30,000 Covid-19 cases, 115 deaths in 24 hours



(News Agencies)-Kerala reported 30,203 new Covid-19 cases and 115 deaths in the past 24 hours. The test positivity rate (TPR), which had dipped to 16.74 per cent on Monday, rose to 18.86 per cent after testing of 1,60,152 samples in the last 24 hours.

With that, 3,15,52,681 samples have been tested in the state till now.

Since Monday, 20,687 people have recovered from the infection, taking the total recoveries to 38,17,004 and the number of active cases to 2,18,892. There are currently 5,45,393 people under surveillance in various districts. Of these, 5,13,686 are in home or institutional quarantine and 31,707 in hospitals.

**Night curfew in Kerala**

The Kerala government has imposed night curfew from this week to contain the spread of Covid-19 in the state. The curfew timing will be from 10 pm to 6 am. While announcing the night curfew, CM Pinarayi Vijayan said that Kerala has been witnessing a surge in Covid-19 cases since the lockdown was relaxed. He added that the pandemic was "further aggravated by the Onam rush".

## Maharashtra Minister Anil Parab seeks 2 more weeks to appear before ED in money laundering case

**Maharashtra Transport Minister Anil Parab has sought two more weeks to appear before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money laundering case.**

(News Agencies)- Maharashtra Transport Minister Anil Parab failed to appear before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday in connection with a money laundering case citing his pre-scheduled engagements.

On Sunday, the financial probe agency had summoned Anil Parab in connection with an extortion case lodged against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh.

Senior Shiv Sena leader Parab sought two weeks' time to appear before the agency. In his response sent to the ED, Anil Parab said, "It may please be appreciated that due to pre-occupations scheduled quite earlier, I am required to attend to certain public functions in my capacity as a public servant being a Minister in the State of Maharashtra on the appointed

date i.e. 31 August 2021 for my meeting with you." "As such, due to already scheduled engagements in the public interest, may I request you to please reschedule the date of my appearance before you on any date after two weeks?"

The minister, however, has also asked the ED officials to share with him the details of the ongoing probe over which the agency summoned him.



"Further, the summons received does not indicate the subject of investigation. May I, therefore, also request you to please enlighten me about the point of investigation which has necessitated issuance of the captioned summons to me

to enable me to effectively provide the requisite inputs, if I can, in furtherance of the present investigation? This is without prejudice to my rights and contentions in law," he said in the letter.



# Prime accused in Kodanad heist and murder case fears threat to life, seeks police protection



**KV Sayan, the prime accused in Kodanad heist and murder case, has sought police protection.**

In April 2017, a heist and murder had taken place at the Kodanad estate of J Jayalalithaa, former Tamil Nadu chief minister. In the incident, a watchman named Om Bahadur was murdered. What went missing in the heist is still a mystery.

The Kodanad case has only turned mysterious with every passing day. Just days into the heist and murder, one of the prime suspects in the case, Kanagaraj, was killed in a road accident in Salem. Shockingly on the following day, another accused, KV Sayan, met with a road accident as well. Sayan lost his wife and child due to the accident.

After this, a CCTV operator at the Kodanad estate had also died by suicide in July 2017.

(News Agencies)-KV Sayan, the prime accused in Kodanad heist-cum-murder case, has sought police protection, citing a threat to his life.

KV Sayan's advocate Senthil told India Today that a letter

seeking protection was sent a week back to Nilgiri police.

KV Sayan has mentioned in his letter that he has been receiving intimidating calls from random people. In a major setback to former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister

Edappadi K Palaniswami, the Madras High Court said that the police can further investigate the Kodanad heist-cum-murder case. The AIADMK leader had been alleging that the DMK was trying to falsely implicate him in

the case. The Nilgiris sessions court adjourned the Kodanad case hearing on Friday to September 2. KV Sayan had appeared before the Nilgiris sessions court on Thursday. What is the Kodanad case?



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# Assam floods:

## Houses submerged, people forced to live on roads in Morigaon

**The flood situation in Assam's Morigaon district has worsened as many people were forced to take shelter on the road after floodwaters entered their homes. According to the administration, more than 50,000 people have been affected by the current deluge in the district.**

**A**mid the Covid-19 pandemic, lakhs of people in Assam are now fighting the devastating

flood situation. Many people in Morigaon district were forced to take shelter on the road after floodwaters entered their homes.

Rubeja Khatun said her home was completely flooded and her family was facing hardships. "We had faced similar problems last year also. We are now taking shelter on the road. We are facing a food crisis also and problems of my children's education too," Rubeja Khatun said. According to the Morigaon

district administration, more than 50,000 people have been affected by the current deluge in the district.

At least 129 villages under two revenue circles, Mayong and Bhuragaon in Morigaon district, are reeling under floodwaters.

The floodwaters from the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries have submerged 979 hectares of agricultural land in the district.

The farmers in Morigaon district are worst affected by the floods and struggle to support their families after they were badly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic last year. Ajit Sarkar, a farmer in Lesaibori area under Mayong revenue circle in Morigaon district, has now taken shelter on

the road along with his family. The 55-year-old said he and his family members were facing a lot of problems as their only income came from farming. "This year we got a little bit from farming, but last year, we lost everything. All the roads connected to our area are flooded and boats have become the only way to get to other places. Nearly 30,000 people in our locality are affected in the current deluge," Ajit Sarkar said. Many people in the area were also facing a food crisis, he said. "If any villager falls ill, we face various problems with providing medical treatment because the entire area is now flooded," Ajit Sarkar said.

Bikramjit Biswas, a college student in Lesaibori area, said

due to floods, he was not able to attend his online classes. "Electricity has been cut off in our locality due to flooding. We are facing many problems," the 19-year-old said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday spoke to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to take stock of the situation and assured the state of all possible help from the Centre. "Spoke to Assam CM Shri @himantabiswa and took stock of the flood situation in parts of the state. Assured all possible support from the Centre to help mitigate the situation. I pray for the safety and well-being of those living in the affected areas," PM Modi said in a tweet.

**Thane civic official attacked during anti-encroachment drive, loses 2 fingers**



(News Agencies)-Ahawker was arrested for attacking Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) assistant municipal commissioner Kalpita Pimple during an anti-encroachment drive. The Thane civic body official lost two of her fingers during the attack.

The incident took place on Monday evening. Kalpita Pimple was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a hospital for treatment. Her condition was reported to be stable.

The accused was identified as Amarjeet Singh Yadav. He was booked by police under relevant Sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) for attempted murder, assaulting and deterring public servant while performing duty. Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Vinay Rathod said, "Yadav doesn't have any past cases against him. We will investigate the incident and take action against all those responsible." The incident took place in Thane's Kasavadavali area when assistant municipal commissioner Pimple was carrying out an anti-encroachment drive against hawkers in the area. When her team upended Amarjeet Singh Yadav's cart, he allegedly took out a knife and attacked Kalpita Pimple from behind.

Kalpita Pimple lost two of her fingers and sustained injuries on her head. Her security guard also suffered injuries during the attack.

Deputy civic commissioner Ashwini Waghmare of the encroachment department said Kalpita Pimple was undergoing treatment at a hospital. "Policemen are present with us during demolition drive. Pimple was attacked suddenly from behind. In case, we feel that there can be a law-and-order issue at the spot, we stop the drive temporarily and take it up two days later.

## Punjab police say terror attack foiled, 'highly radicalised' operative held

(News Agencies)-With the arrest of a highly radicalised operative identified as Saroop Singh, a resident of Johal Dhari Wala village in the Tarn Taran district, the Punjab police said they foiled a possible terror attack in the border state. The police said the arrested operative was linked to foreign-based terrorist entities. The police have also recovered two live Chinese-made P-86 mark hand grenades from his possession, said Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) Dinkar Gupta on Tuesday. The DGP said that Saroop Singh

was apprehended by the Tarn Taran Police on suspicion at a checkpoint on Amritsar-Haridwar road on Monday.

The development came at a time when the Punjab has been witnessing huge influx of grenades and RDX-laden tiffin-boxes, besides the recovery of other arms and ammunition. It signals major attempts being made by terrorist outfits and anti-national elements based abroad to disturb peace and communal

harmony in the border state.

On August 8, the Amritsar Rural Police recovered five hand-grenades of similar mark along with a tiffin-bomb from Daleke village in Lopoke area.

Later, the State Special Operation Cell, Amritsar on August 16 recovered two hand-grenades of same make and model (P-86) along with other weapons from suspects identified as Amritpal Singh and Shammi. Similarly, the Kapurthala Police

recovered a consignment of two live-hand grenades, one live tiffin-bomb and other explosive material from the possession of Gurmukh Singh Brar and his associate from Phagwara on August 20. DGP Dinkar Gupta said that during preliminary investigations, Saroop Singh revealed that he came in contact with foreign-based terror handlers over the social media. "He was further radicalised, cultivated by them and motivated to carry out terror acts in Punjab," DGP Dinkar Gupta said.







## PM Modi sets up high-level group on Afghanistan to focus on India's priorities

**The high-level group comprises External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and senior officials.**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has constituted a high-level group, comprising External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and senior officials, in view of the "evolving situation in Afghanistan" to focus on the "immediate priorities of India". India's main priority is to ensure safe evacuation of those Indian nationals who are still left in Afghanistan, which is now completely under the Taliban with the last of the US forces having withdrawn on the night of August 30.

India and Afghanistan have been very close partners for the past two decades, with huge

investments in infrastructure and also manpower.

"This panel has been meeting regularly over the last few days. It is seized of issues pertaining to the safe return of stranded Indians, the travel of Afghan nationals (especially minorities) to India, and assuring that the territory of Afghanistan is not used in any manner for terrorism directed against India," sources said. Apart from the safe return of Indians and Afghans who wish to leave the country, New Delhi's priority is to ensure that Afghan soil is not used against India in the future. While the government is waiting and watching the developments unfold in Kabul, it

is also "monitoring" international reactions, including the resolution passed on Tuesday by the UN Security Council. According to sources, India has been in touch over the last few days with key members of the UNSC on this matter. This issue was the subject of Jaishankar's phone conversation with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and high-level officials of other members. The UN Security Council, under India's presidency, passed Resolution 2593 demanding that the territory of Afghanistan not be used to threaten any country or shelter terrorists. UNSC Resolution 2593 addresses India's key concerns

pertaining to Afghanistan at this time. Therefore, India played an active role in ensuring its passage.

"As the President of the UNSC, India felt it important that given the seriousness of the situation, there should be a Security Council Resolution," said sources. The Resolution demands that Afghan territory not be used to threaten/attack any country or to shelter/train terrorists or plan/finance terrorist acts. It specifically mentions individuals and entities designated pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1267, i.e., Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, etc.

**CBI court convicts seven people, including SBI officials, in 2008 loan fraud case**



**A** special CBI court in Mumbai has convicted seven people,

including former employees of State Bank of India (SBI), in a 2008 loan fraud case.

The court announced imprisonment for the accused, ranging from five years to one year, and fined them up to Rs 23 lakh.

The case pertains to a complaint filed by SBI in 2008 in connection to a loan availed from the Opera House branch of State Bank of India.

Zarina Bataliwala alias Nargis Rusi Divendry, one of the accused, had applied for a loan of Rs 1.25 crore from the Opera House branch of SBI in 2008. The branch manager had given the loan papers to a field officer and chief manager of the bank. The documents were verified by them and forwarded to the credit processing cell, where it was checked by two other staffers.

The SBI stated that the bank officials overlooked discrepancies in documents and sanctioned the loan without proper diligence. The entire amount was diverted without its end utilisation, the SBI stated. On Monday, Bataliwala was convicted of cheating, criminal conspiracy and sentenced to five years in jail.

## Bengal post-poll violence: CBI files 3 more FIRs, total 31 cases registered

(News Agencies)-The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered three more FIRs in connection with the post-poll violence in West Bengal. The fresh cases were filed by CBI in Purba Medinipur district's Nandigram and Cooch Behar's Sitalkuchi areas. With this, the total number of cases registered by CBI in poll violence-related incidents has reached 31.

Earlier, two people were arrested by the CBI in one of the previous FIRs filed in connection to the violence that took place in West Bengal after the assembly election results were declared in May. The two arrested - Biju and Aasima Ghosh - were accused of assaulting BJP support Ayan Mondal and two others with

bamboo sticks in Nadia district on May 14, according to sources.



The CBI is probing the Bengal post-poll violence on directions of

Calcutta High Court. Earlier, The Calcutta High Court ordered a probe by the CBI in all the rape and murder cases that allegedly took place in West Bengal after state assembly elections.

Several Public Interest Litigations (PILs) were filed before the High Court alleging people were killed, raped and made to flee in the violence that

took place after the assembly election results were declared. Following the High Court's order, the CBI constituted special teams to probe the post-poll violence in West Bengal. The teams are being headed by senior officers of the rank of Joint Directors and consist of Deputy Inspector General, Senior Superintendent of Police, and three Superintendent Police.



# Cops not helping

Mumbai cops reach BJP  
MLA Ram Kadam's  
house after he  
announces to celebrate  
Dahi Handi



(News Agencies)-

Mumbai Police personnel reached the residence of BJP MLA Ram Kadam on Tuesday after he announced to celebrate the Dahi Handi festival, which has been banned by the Maharashtra government in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to reports, Ram Kadam was organising Dahi Handi inside his house when the police reached his residence. The police are not allowing him to move out, the leader said.

"Today, we showed the Thackeray government that no one can dampen our spirit. We have upheld the Hindu tradition and even after the Thackeray government not giving permission, we celebrated this Hindu festival," said Ram Kadam.

On Monday, the police had issued a notice to Ram Kadam asking him not to indulge in any activity that could lead to a law and order situation and a spread in Covid-19 cases.

Last week, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray told Dahi Handi festival organisers that Maharashtra should set an example by postponing celebrations for some time to fight Covid-19.

**RAM KADAM CALLS OUT SHIV SENA**

Opposing the CM's order, Ram Kadam said, "All I am saying is allow me with five other people. All of them are doubly vaccinated. This Hindu tradition is very old and we need to keep the tradition alive. We won't be breaking any Covid protocols. But I am not being allowed to move out from my house."

One petitioner in a West Bengal post-poll violence case alleged that the state government has not yet taken any steps to form the court-ordered special investigation team. Another petitioner claimed the cops are not helping her at all.



## SIT still not formed, allege West Bengal post-poll violence petitioners

On August 19, the Calcutta High Court ordered a CBI probe into murder and rape cases during the alleged post-poll violence in West Bengal earlier this year. The bench also ordered the formation of a court-monitored special investigation team (SIT) to probe all other offences related to alleged post-poll violence.

However, one petitioner in a post-poll violence case has alleged that the state government has not yet taken any steps to form the court-ordered SIT. Another petitioner has claimed that she is not able to enter her home even now, nearly four months since she fled as a result of the alleged violence. **DELAY IN FORMATION OF SIT**

On Tuesday, one petitioner questioned the delay in constitution of the special investigation team before the division bench of Acting Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court

Rajesh Bindal.

Rabishankar Chatterjee, the counsel for petitioner Kashinath Biswas, alleged that the state government has not taken any steps to form the three-member SIT, even though it has been ten days since the order was passed.

Acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal said that the court is aware of the matter.

"After August 20, the CBI started its work, which is why I mentioned before the court that there is no updated status on the formulation and functioning of the SIT. The court said it will take appropriate steps and is aware of the matter," said Rabishankar Chatterjee. According to the August 19 court order, the SIT was to be constituted with three Indian Police Service officers, namely Suman Bala Sahoo, Soumen Mitra and Ranveer Singh.

On August 19, the court had also directed both the CBI and SIT to file a status report within

six weeks, which has been slated to be heard on October 4.

**'UNABLE TO ENTER MY HOME'**

Another petitioner, Mamuni Saha, claimed she is still not able to enter her home after having fled during alleged post-poll violence in West Bengal earlier this year. It has been nearly four months and two arrests have also been made by the CBI in the cases, but her family still has not been able to return home, she said.

"I spoke to the police officers, they are not clear about it. The officer in charge told me that he will speak to the local leaders and then let me know. He said he would try. I have been out of my house since May 5," Mamuni Saha told India Today.

Mamuni Saha, who along with her husband is a member of the BJP, claimed that she fled her south Kolkata house in Bhowanipore area after her family was attacked by

Trinamool Congress workers on May 5.

Her family, that is her 8-year-old daughter, son, husband and her, fled the area and moved to the outskirts of Kolkata. She alleged that the cops are not helping her now. "I have been told by the police that my shop, which I had been operating for 20 years, is on a footpath and cannot be allowed to open. For 20 years, there was no issue. What has happened now? The police are not helping me an inch," alleged Mamuni Saha.

She claimed that her lawyer Abhinav, who is a member of BJP leader Priyanka Tibrewal's team which fought the post-poll violence case in Calcutta High Court, will file a petition in court to get an order enabling Saha's return to her residence.

"All I want is to return home with my family," Mamuni Saha said.





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## First India-Taliban meet takes place in Doha, discussions held over safety of Indian nationals

**In the first India-Taliban meet in Qatar's Doha on Tuesday, Indian envoy Deepak Mittal held discussions with the head of Taliban's political office Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai over the safety and early return of Indian nationals from Afghanistan.**

(News Agencies)-Indian Ambassador to Qatar, Deepak Mittal, met head of Taliban's political office Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai in Doha on Tuesday and held discussions on safety, security and early return of Indian nationals stranded in Afghanistan.

The meeting took place at the Embassy of India, Doha, on the request of the Taliban side, an official statement said.

"Discussions focused on safety,

security and early return of Indian nationals stranded in Afghanistan. The travel of Afghan nationals, especially minorities, who wish to visit to India also came up," the statement said.

The Indian ambassador raised India's concern that Afghanistan's soil should not be used for anti-Indian activities and terrorism in any manner. The Taliban representative assured the ambassador that these issues would be positively addressed, the

statement added.

Taliban want 'good ties' with India Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid told India Today on Monday that India is an important country in the region and the new regime in Afghanistan will not be a threat to them. In an exclusive interview, Zabihullah Mujahid recounted India's good relations with Afghanistan and said the new government formed under the Taliban would want good relations with India. Asked about reports

suggesting the Taliban siding with Pakistan against India, Zabihullah Mujahid said such reports were baseless. "The Taliban won't allow any other country to be endangered by us. We assure India that our side will not be a threat to them," he said. In a statement on August 26, Zabihullah Mujahid had said that the Taliban see Pakistan as their "second home". "Afghanistan shares its borders with Pakistan. We are traditionally aligned when

it comes to religion; the people of both countries mingle with each other. So we are looking forward to further deepening of ties with Pakistan," Zabihullah Mujahid had said in an interview with Pakistan's ARY News. Zabihullah Mujahid said the Taliban want countries to have their embassies in Afghanistan. "The presence of ambassadors in Afghanistan is beneficial. We want all countries to have good relations with us," he said.

## Puducherry Assembly Speaker Embalam R Selvam hospitalised after mild heart attack

(News Agencies)-Puducherry Assembly Speaker Embalam R Selvam has been hospitalised after he suffered a mild heart attack on Tuesday.

Embalam R Selvam suffered the attack when he was on the way to the assembly and experienced uneasiness and chest pain.

He was immediately taken to the Government General



Hospital where the ECG report showed some abnormalities. His condition is currently stable, Dr. Ravi, RMO of the hospital said. A cardiologist is also attending Selvam in the ICU.

Puducherry Chief Minister Rangasamy and Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan visited him at the hospital.

His condition is being closely monitored.



# Insult to martyrs: Rahul Gandhi calls out Modi govt over revamp of Jallianwala Bagh memorial

**Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has called the Centre's revamp of the Jallianwala Bagh memorial an "insult to martyrs". Gandhi said such an insult can only be done by those "who do not know the meaning of martyrdom".**

(News Agencies)-Calling the central government's revamp of the Jallianwala Bagh memorial an "insult to martyrs", Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said such an insult can only be done by those "who do not know the meaning of martyrdom".

Tagging a report on the outrage over the revamp of the memorial, Rahul Gandhi tweeted, "Such an insult to the martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh can only be done by those who do not know the meaning of martyrdom. I am the son of a martyr - I will not tolerate the insult of martyrs at any cost. We are against this indecent cruelty."

In another tweet, Rahul Gandhi said those who didn't struggle for

freedom can't understand those who did. The revamp of the Jallianwala Bagh memorial in Amritsar has been criticised by many on social media, calling it "erasing of history". On Saturday last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated the renovated complex of the Jallianwala Bagh memorial. During the event, PM Modi also digitally inaugurated the museum galleries at the memorial. Four museum galleries have been established through adaptive reuse of redundant and underutilised buildings. They showcase the historical value of events that unfolded in Punjab during that

period, with the fusion of audio-visual technology, including projection mapping and 3D representation, as well as art and sculptural installations.

A sound and light show was also held to depict the events of the day of the massacre.

At the virtual event, PM Modi had said the people of Punjab have been the biggest victims of the country's partition. "We still feel the pain of what happened at the time of partition in every corner of India and especially in the families of Punjab," he said.

Noting that August 14 is now being observed as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day, the prime minister said, "This place will



inspire future generations about the journey of our Independence movement, the sacrifices and countless struggles of our ancestors."

On the fateful day of Baisakhi on

April 13, 1919, the British forces had fired indiscriminately on a large and peaceful gathering of protesters, killing over 1,000 people and wounding hundreds of them.

## CM Amarinder Singh warns banned outfit SFJ against trying to disturb Punjab peace



create trouble in Punjab would be countered with the full might of his government.

"Nobody will be allowed to disturb the hard-earned peace of Punjab and again plunge our people into the dark abyss of the terrorism days, which took thousands of innocent lives," said Amarinder Singh, warning of a befitting response to SFJ's disruptive and divisive acts.

The land of the Gurus, who had always propagated the ideology of oneness of humanity, Punjab was home to all people, regardless of religion, caste and creed, the Chief Minister said. Pannu's pathetic attempts to once again fan hatred, divisiveness and violence in the name of religion and in the garb of a peaceful secessionist campaign for the attainment of Khalistan has already been strongly repudiated by the people of Punjab and India, who want to live and prosper in peace. All political leaders and parties have condemned Pannu's ISI-funded campaign for a separate nation, the CM said.

(News Agencies)-Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Tuesday warned Pakistan's ISI-backed Khalistan ideologue Gurpatwant Singh Pannu of the banned outfit Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) against any attempt to disturb the state's peace, stability and communal harmony. This was a day after the Punjab Police registered an FIR against Pannu over his continued attempts to promote violence in Punjab and his recent assassination threat against Amarinder Singh through a video posted on SFJ's Facebook page.

Amarinder Singh asserted that any bid by SFJ and its self-styled General Counsel Gurpatwant Singh Pannu to

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# Hurricanes are getting scarier



The last few months have seen a whirlwind of devastating extreme events, from extensive flooding in Europe to wildfires in California. With the northern hemisphere hurricane season barely at its peak, multiple hurricanes have already hit the Caribbean and North America. In August, Hurricane Elsa affected Jamaica, Cuba and Florida; Hurricane Grace brought substantial rainfall to Haiti two days after a devastating earthquake before making landfall twice in Mexico. And Hurricane Henri drenched New England.

The contribution of human-caused climate change to these events still needs to be analyzed, but its fingerprint cannot be ignored. Last weekend, while Category 4 Hurricane Ida was besieging Louisiana and Mississippi, Hurricane Nora was bringing rain, flash floods and mudslides to western Mexico. Ida came on the footsteps of the 2020 hurricane season, when Louisiana was in the path of five landfalling storms, including Category 4 Hurricane Laura. While the real scope of Hurricane Ida's impact is just being evaluated, large parts of southern Louisiana, including New Orleans, are without power and will probably remain so for weeks.

This will certainly be a challenge, given the high temperatures in that region at this time of the year. Ida left small coastal towns in Louisiana flooded by storm surge and rainfall, and the Mississippi River had its flow reversed during the height of the storm. One positive note: the levee system in Louisiana, which was significantly improved after Hurricane Katrina, stood the test of Ida -- though the hurricane's effects are not over yet.

The rainfall from its remnants could potentially lead to significant flooding in parts of the eastern US. One of most impressive characteristics of the Hurricane Ida story was the robustness and accuracy of its forecast. On Thursday, August 26, at 2 p.m. ET, while the hurricane that would be Ida was still

a weak tropical storm and had not been named, the National Hurricane Center was already forecasting its landfall in Louisiana as a hurricane -- and in an area close to the final location of landfall. The track forecast remained remarkably consistent over time, with the intensity of the storm at landfall increasing to a major hurricane (Category 3 or higher) by Friday August 27, 5 a.m. ET.

This is an amazing feat, given how difficult it is to make reliable hurricane intensity forecasts days in advance, in particular in cases that involve periods of rapid intensification close to landfall, as occurred with Hurricane Ida. Last year, there were multiple cases of Atlantic storms that went through rapid intensification just before hitting land -- namely Hurricanes Hannah, Laura and Zeta, similar to Hurricane Ida. Besides being hard to forecast, rapid intensification close to landfall could be a key issue for evacuation orders, as clearly explained in this Twitter thread by Kelly Hereid, a climate scientist at Liberty Mutual Insurance. As the planet warms, hurricanes could intensify more rapidly close to land and forecasting those cases could become more difficult.

If the rapid intensification is not forecast with enough time for a large metropolitan area to be evacuated, clearly it could have major consequences. The clear message from climate change studies is to expect increases in the occurrence of the most intense hurricanes, rainfall associated with hurricanes and inundation from storm surge due to sea level rise.

While scientists must still make detection and attribution studies to determine the precise contribution human-caused climate change made to Hurricane Ida, there is little doubt that climate change helped augment the significant impacts associated with its high winds, storm surge and precipitation. As we have witnessed in many of these extreme events this summer, the social and economic impacts are enormous.

## Whether one opposes Hindutva or supports it, it's important to listen to the other side

An international conference, "Dismantling Global Hindutva", scheduled to be held in the US in the second week of September, has triggered a storm of protest. The conference's website shows that it is co-sponsored by departments in dozens of leading American universities with academics and activists, from India and elsewhere, scheduled as speakers.

The conference's poster depicts the nail-removing side of a hammer plucking out saffron-coloured images of what are clearly meant to be representations of RSS workers. Predictably, social media is buzzing with the outrage of Hindutva advocates while opponents of Hindutva are issuing calls for solidarity with the event. In such a highly charged atmosphere, it is imperative to apply the golden rule of conflict resolution. Namely that both sides listen deeply to decipher the concern, the hurt, the anxiety behind the other's complaint or agitation. Can each side apply the principle of purva paksha -- to understand and represent the opponent's view with full integrity and authenticity? In attempting to do this I will depict not the extreme fringe of either side but what I understand to be its core elements.

Let us start with advocates of Hindutva for whom "Hinduism" and "Hindutva" are now inter-changeable terms. They see Hinduism, the third largest religion in the world in terms of population, as being under threat in a world of aggressive proselytisation by Christians and Muslims. There is discontent about Hindu-majority India not being a Hindu rashtra, when there are many officially Christian and Muslim nations. Additionally, both in theory and in

practice, Indian secularism is perceived to have privileged minorities at the cost of Hindus.

Hindutva is therefore seen as a necessary political ideology in order to secure the future for Hindus -- possibly by making India formally a Hindu nation. Some embrace the militant modes of Hindutva because there is a self-image of Hindus as having been passive for too long and not adequately addressing various kinds of insults and affronts, be it in the distant past or now. From this perspective the call for "Dismantling Global Hindutva" is seen as an open threat. The conference poster is thus experienced as an insult.

Now let us look at the concerns and anxieties of those who oppose Hindutva. In essence, this opposition is anchored in the experience of India as a multi-cultural, multi-faith nation with a syncretic culture to be proud of. Commitment to this rich cultural heritage of respect and space for all faiths, is enshrined in India's Constitution.

Opposition to Hindutva has intensified because of the visible increase in social, verbal and physical violence against people who are either non-Hindu and/or oppose Hindutva. Apart from random attacks on individuals, four leading intellectuals -- Narendra Dhabolkar, M M Kalburgi, Govind Pansare and Gauri Lankesh -- have been killed by some advocates of Hindutva. Though similar assassins could not reach him, the eminent author and actor, the late Girish Karnad was at the top of a death-list uncovered by police.

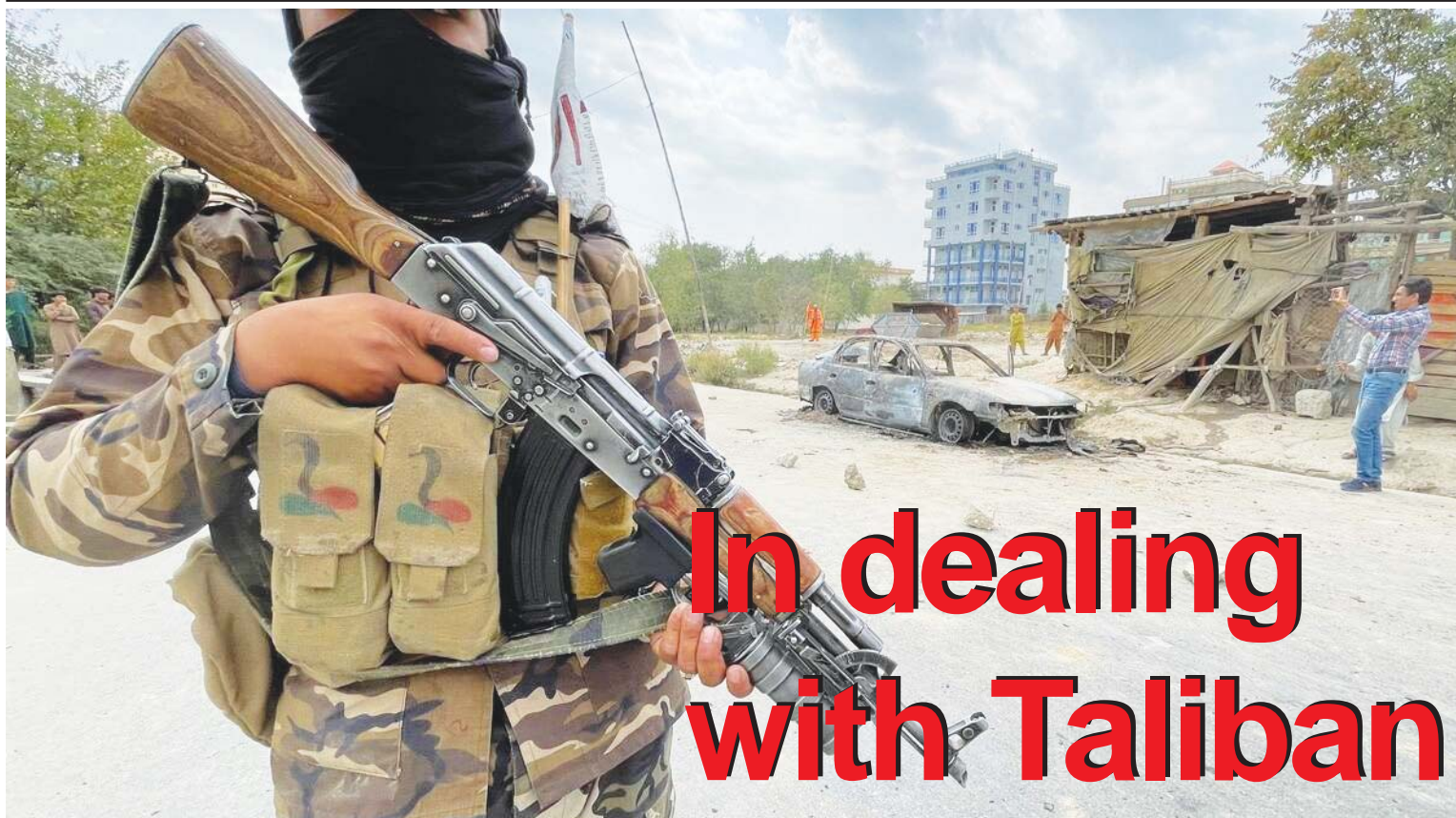


ISSN No. 1554 06X

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## In dealing with Taliban

### India must remember consequences of rushing to recognise communist China in 1949

One of the many issues thrown up by the Taliban's seizure of power has been the question of providing official recognition to the Taliban-led government or the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Should the Indian government provide diplomatic recognition to the Taliban government? Or should it refuse to recognise the Taliban on grounds of its violent overthrow of the previous Afghan government and the unreserved use of terrorism (both, locally and abroad)? This, of course, is quite different from mere engagement or dialogue with the Taliban. States are frequently

compelled to interact and negotiate with a wide variety of non-state actors to serve their interests whilst still denying them legitimacy on the global stage. What should India's policy be moving forward?

One line of thought would argue that India must accept the ground realities in Kabul. It is an obvious fact that the Taliban is in control and so recognition must logically flow from that. Consideration of values should not cloud New Delhi's judgement. After all, there are a whole host of Islamic states that have questionable human rights records that India recognises

and fruitfully engages with. There are two other compelling reasons. First, India has significant interests at stake that may be harmed by delayed recognition or non-recognition. Concerns over cross-border terrorism, radicalisation, drug trade, etc. can hardly be addressed in the absence of a sustained dialogue with whoever occupies the seat of power in Kabul. Second, if India refuses to recognise the Taliban, it may strengthen the hand of its regional rivals-Pakistan and China-leading to a further intensification of national security threats on its northern

frontier.

However, such arguments and their underlying assumptions are somewhat flawed. India had adopted precisely this line of reasoning in 1949 with communist China and failed. The Nehru government felt compelled to provide early recognition to the communists despite close ties with the previous Kuomintang government and Chiang Kai-Shek during the interwar period. There were many similar forces in play. Nehru believed communist China's goodwill was crucial to ensure a peaceful border settlement and to

prevent the rise of communists in India. The reticence to provide similar recognition to the Bolsheviks in 1918 by the West, Nehru argued, was the main reason behind the inability of the Western powers and Russia to forge a common alliance to effectively counter Nazi Germany. So, Nehru proceeded to provide early and unconditional recognition and also chose to maintain India's diplomatic mission in Beijing. He then successfully persuaded Commonwealth countries to follow suit, despite strong reservations about whether the communists would honour China's previous international legal obligations and would refrain from the use of force across the Taiwan straits as well as in Tibet and Hong Kong. Nehru also championed the cause of communist China's UN membership. But did early recognition change anything in communist China's policy? No. Communist China continued to be suspicious of India's intentions in Tibet and the bourgeois nature of its regime and elites. Moreover, it was India's early recognition that gave Mao Zedong confidence in his plans to annex Tibet through force in 1950. Goodwill proved to be an ineffective tool of deterrence. Mao did not risk such offensives in Hong Kong or Taiwan. A very different trajectory can be seen in Pakistan-China ties. Being overzealous in its pursuit of US military aid, Pakistan ceded closer ties with communist China initially.

## There is still hope for Afghanistan

The Taliban may appear powerful today but their greatest weakness is that the Afghans, including a majority of Pashtuns, are not with them. They remember the cruel Taliban rule in 1996-2001 when women were subjected to inhuman atrocities, the country's cultural heritage like the Bamiyan Buddhas was destroyed, music was banned and political opponents and minorities were systematically massacred. They also witnessed the false bravado of the Taliban when they ran helter-skelter in no time once NATO forces descended on Afghanistan after 9/11. No one in Afghanistan mourned their fall.

Instead, people enjoyed freedom and democracy and continued to oppose the obscurantist and violent Taliban. One of the last legitimate surveys conducted in 2019 put the popular support for the Taliban at 15 per cent.

Yet, they are back in Kabul today and there are two important reasons for this: The shortsightedness of the US and its allies; and the dubious role of Pakistan.

The cynical "good enough" terrorism approach guided the US from October 2001, when President George Bush declared a "war on terror". The US succeeded in reducing al Qaeda

and ISIS to pale shadows of their original selves. While going after Osama bin Laden in the caves and mountains of Afghanistan, the CIA and American forces had learnt to manage the Taliban - who were hiding in the South or the unruly borderlands with Pakistan - through dollars and other lollipops. Once Bin Laden was eliminated in 2011, the US leadership was convinced that the al Qaeda threat was over. In 2013, President Barack Obama announced his intention to pull out US forces from Afghanistan. His successors, Donald Trump and Joe Biden, stuck to that line, although the deadlines kept



changing. When the moment finally came, it was exit America and re-enter the Taliban. The Taliban's regrouping began soon after Obama announced the withdrawal. While the leaders in the government in Kabul were busy fighting with each other and

hoping in vain that the US would never abandon them, leaders in Rawalpindi (General Headquarters of Pakistan Army) and Islamabad (Headquarters of ISI) were busy pumping in resources - both human and material - into the Taliban's coffers.



# Fair elections and a strong economy: Both are at risk



President Biden, speaking in Philadelphia last month, warned of nefarious efforts afoot to undermine voting rights, calling them the "most significant test of our democracy since the Civil War." But while much attention has gone to voter suppression laws in states like Texas, too few are focusing on norm-shattering changes to the way elections are administered in this country - and the profound consequences they could have for our democracy and our economy. In the last six months alone, more than 400 bills have been introduced in 49 states that would, under the guise of combating fraud, give state legislatures unprecedented and ominous powers over how elections are administered, votes counted and results certified. A spurious, partisan declaration of fraud might someday soon be enough to overpower democratic outcomes.

These efforts not only threaten our democracy, they threaten to shake the foundations of our market-based economic system. One of the great strengths of the American economy is the rule of law. When domestic and foreign businesses invest in the United States - helping to create jobs - or when investors buy U.S. Treasuries - helping to fund the government programs on which

Americans depend - they are relying on this bedrock. Everything from business confidence to the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency depends on the rule of law. Its degradation could therefore fundamentally affect the way our economy functions, and the economic outlook for the years



and decades ahead.

Whereas democratic best practices would leave election mechanics to independent civil servants, voting oversight in the U.S. has largely been political, albeit bipartisan. In practice, this has worked just fine: So long as each of the two major parties could stand vigilant over the other, a commitment to electoral

competition, repeat play and basic values of popular sovereignty has kept temptations to cheat at bay.

Now, that long-standing balance is in jeopardy. Across the country, bills are advancing to allow state legislatures to control election certification, oversee election processes that

were previously under local control, or strip state executives of power over election administration. Other bills impose financial or even criminal penalties on election officials for inadvertent errors.

On their face, the bills purport to deal with the comparatively humdrum matter of local election administration.

fundamentally, they are about taking power: State legislators are replaying the aftermath of the 2020 election and intentionally weakening the democratic guardrails that prevented the former president from overturning the results. Some of the bills echo Reconstruction-era concerns over "failed elections," a pretense that allows state legislatures to substitute their will for the will of the voters.

Many of these bills are already law, including in swing states like Arizona, Florida and Georgia. In Arkansas, a new law allows a partisan state board to "take corrective action" in a county if a committee of the legislature has doubts about "the appearance of an equal, free and impartial election." In Georgia, where Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger refused the former president's pleas to "find" votes, a new law removes the secretary of State from the state elections board, places that board under firm command of the state legislature and allows the state board to replace local election officials at-will. Georgia has already started a process that could lead to purging bipartisan election boards, replacing election officials with partisan loyalists and leaving formerly bipartisan boards with only Republican appointees.

If this were happening abroad - as it has, in Orban's Hungary,

Kaczynski's Poland, Modi's India, and elsewhere - we would view it as a worrisome sign that democracy's fabric is fraying. Companies and investors would pause before doing business in such places. The same could well happen here. Business decisions are enormously affected by confidence, and the rule of law is integral to confidence. Businesses must be confident that contracts will be enforced and property rights will be honored. If that confidence is shaken by such a fundamental matter as setting aside the voters' choices in favor of legislatures' dictation of an election's outcomes, the consequences could be devastating.

Stability has long been this country's economic calling card. But there is an increasingly jaundiced view, both domestically and internationally, about the future of our democratic order. To avoid further democratic decline - and economic morass - we must shore up faith in the rule of law by fighting back against the politicization of election administration. We must defeat the bills advancing in state legislatures and challenge in the courts the laws already corrupting our system. The ministerial task of tabulating election results cannot become yet another opportunity for partisan mischief.





# We're going to pay for 'exit at any cost' for years to come

This past week our nation lost the bravest amongst us: United States Marines, Navy and Army warriors dedicated to providing safety and security for Americans and Afghan allies as they scrambled to depart. This is an awful price to pay for what could have been a far better outcome in implementing Biden's political rhetoric, far too often wrapped in hubris and arrogance, of "ending the forever war." And just when it could not seem to get worse, this president committed the sin of leaving citizens behind to fend for themselves.

While Biden and his team managed to sidestep every question by focusing on ending the "forever war," they clumsily failed to address the real question of how could they have been so incredibly clueless in accomplishing a withdrawal without putting every single American in Afghanistan fully in harm's way?

Former President Trump is not without blame. Even a casual observer understood that a negotiation between the United States and the Taliban on the future of Afghanistan was fatally flawed because the Afghan government was not invited to the table. As the old saying goes, "if you are not at the table, you are on the menu." Talk about a gut punch to those who really were committed to a better future in Afghanistan.

I was on one of the first flights out of Andrews almost immediately after Sept. 11, 2001, to negotiate access, basing and overflight for the war in Afghanistan. I was then directed to establish the original coalition of the willing for Afghanistan, recruiting and bringing in allies and friends to join the United States. In addition, I worked closely with

U.S. and NATO military commanders to implement command structures and rules of engagement, and later assisted in standing up the NATO training mission for Afghanistan.

The lessons of history were apparently lost on the Trump and Biden administrations. Both got it terribly wrong. They ventured down a path of cutting deals with terrorists - assuming that somehow, this time, they will suddenly be true to their word. They seem to live in a fantasy world where they wave their hand over a problem, utter some meaningless incantation and declare "the war is over," again, not the first time the U.S. has made such a mistake.

While there will be plenty of time to debate the withdrawal itself, there should be no argument that the political decision to be out by Sept. 11 - and the resultant rushed process (calling this planning would be too kind) to meet that date - led to an unconscionable dependence on the Taliban to provide security for Americans and their allies. The further assumption that the Taliban's so-called leadership could not only speak on behalf of, but also had control over the terrorists who have adopted the Taliban moniker as well as their equally blood thirsty cousins, was - and is - mind-boggling.

The callous disregard for our NATO and Afghan allies will have significant consequences for American foreign and economic policy in the days ahead.

When Biden rejected the entreaties of America's closest allies to take a different approach, to extend deadlines to avoid further bloodshed, and instead took his cues from the Taliban, all hope

was lost. Think about this for a moment: The opinions of countries that have fought alongside the United States in multiple wars for decades, who went to war in Afghanistan because the homeland of a member of the NATO Alliance had been attacked, mattered far less to President Biden than the views of terrorists who days earlier were still taking target practice on the U.S. and its allies. There is a strong desire on the part of the new isolationists in this country, the progressive left and the retrenchment right - there is little daylight between them - to hunker down in their domestic enclaves and pretend that what goes on elsewhere does not matter. They are joined by the very well-to-do industrialists who want to ply their trade globally, rule of law be damned, enriching the coffers of authoritarian regimes and genocidal maniacs who offer their populations only misery, imprisonment and often death. Pandering to these people rarely works because nothing will ever be enough. Hiding your collective heads in the sand while China, Russia and Iran divvy up the world, it not an answer - How soon we forget what it led to in the last century. None of it bodes well for America's future. The Biden administration can try to portray this as a new era of peace, but our enemies know that this is yet another American retreat from a strategic part of the globe nestled between China, Russia and Iran. It conveys a message that the United States is a shell of its former self, a country willing to be bullied and cajoled into staying within some sharply proscribed borders articulated not by us, but by them.

## Afghanistan is set to become a sanctuary for extremists



Both Donald Trump and Joe Biden have trumpeted assurances their administrations received from the Taliban that al Qaeda and ISIS will not attack America from Afghanistan. But the Taliban's ideological beliefs align it closely with Salafi-jihadi groups that use violence to advance their aim of enforcing a fundamentalist understanding of Islam. These beliefs led the Taliban to protect Osama bin Laden in 2001 - though the group may have officially disagreed with his actions - and to defy the United States after the 9/11 attacks. Twenty years later, the Taliban is savvier, but the core beliefs of its members remain the same. The danger of these Salafi-jihadi beliefs is that they do not stop at Afghanistan's borders. The Taliban's Islamic Emirate is not the end of the project; rather, it is the start. The vision always has been global, and the Taliban has played host willingly to those seeking to replicate the Islamic Emirate's success elsewhere in the Muslim world. Thousands of foreign fighters are in Afghanistan, drawn to the decades-old Salafi-jihadi sanctuary. A complex network of alliances, partnerships and competitors runs through the country, a network the Taliban can influence but cannot control. In the mix are transnational terror groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State, but also the Pakistani Taliban and the Haqqani Network - a longtime Taliban and al Qaeda bedfellow. Lesser-known groups include the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Turkistan Islamic Party. Each is capable of spawning radicalized recruits for terror attacks against the West, and none has pledged not to recruit and train in their Taliban-provided sanctuaries. Al Qaeda may curtail its activities in Afghanistan, but that does not erase the benefits of its sanctuary. Al Qaeda's General Command called on followers to "abide by the decisions" of the Islamic Emirate and support the Taliban's venture in its statement heralding the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan.





# What the global flow of guns tells us about how states fail

**Pratap Bhanu Mehta writes: The supply of weapons matters, and unless controlled, acquires an autonomous dynamic. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan is the latest example**

There is an old adage that if you want to understand state building or state breakdown, follow the guns. In conflict zones like Afghanistan, it is all too easy to take recourse to debates over development and culture, while ignoring the dynamics of armed conflict, and the presence of weaponry that militarises society and embeds violence. Even a casual perusal of databases at Small Arms Survey, Geneva, that tracks violent conflict and the proliferation of arms, brings home some basic facts about state building and violence.

In their last year of comparative data base 2018, Afghanistan has a rate of 59.8 violent deaths per 1,00,000, below other conflict zones like Syria (187.9), and El Salvador (87). But this data base is also a reminder of two other large trends. First, violence tends to be sticky. Once embedded, it is hard to dislodge. South Africa has a rate of 40.6; Brazil 36.3. Most countries with relatively lower rates are in Asia, or are European social democracies. In Asia, India has a violent death rate of 3.9 per 1,00,000; Pakistan is at 5.9 while big countries like Indonesia, China and Japan are lower than 1. This contrast between Asia and the Americas on this aspect of state building and prevalence of violent death is striking, and rarely made as central to the development literature as poverty.

Violence has complicated causes; even settled societies can have violent political

convulsions. There are also forms of violence other than violent death. The relationship between the presence of firearms and violence is also complicated. But again what is striking is the lower prevalence of civilian firearms in Asia. This data base is for both registered and estimated unregistered arms. India has 5.30 per hundred persons, China 3.2, Indonesia less than one. The US, not surprisingly, has 120 per 100; while Brazil and South Africa are closer to 10. Of course, the raw numbers don't tell much by themselves, but as a first cut they are revealing.

As Priya Satia argued in her brilliant book, *The Empire of Guns, The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution*, the prevalence of guns has a social and political history. Colonial practices embedded guns in some societies and not in others. In the Americas, gun ownership was almost obligatory for whites, as part of a racial strategy of supremacy and dispossession of natives and oppression of slaves. In Asia, by contrast, colonial empires, for their own self-protection, pacified and built state and society by disarming citizens. As Satia shows, the British empire in India not just dispossessed Indians of weapons, it also disarmed them of burgeoning indigenous knowledge in weapon-making that had begun to emerge in the 17th century, including innovative forms of metallurgy. The Arms Act of 1878, which tightly controlled

arms ownership in India, was an exercise in colonial and racial subordination, such that even Gandhi wanted it overturned later. But it is worth wondering about the counterfactual. Given India's social fault lines, if India had been awash with guns, what kind of order might have been possible? It is not an accident that the Indian state in 1959 continued restrictive gun laws. Ironically, fearing lower class rebellion, Britain enacted restrictive gun laws in the 1920s as well. Some armed groups are genuine forces for liberation. But as scholars like Nicholas Marsh and Paul Staniland have argued, the structure of how arms are procured and the social embeddedness of who procures them matters. You can have an instance where a coherent force like a Communist Party or a Maoist movement uses arms to establish hegemony and join the state, as in Nepal. The Taliban's success in being a unifying force

is prima facie more surprising, because development analysts keep telling us that Afghanistan is too decentralised and fractious for a single group to be dominant. But there are other instances where the proliferation of arms simply leads to fragmentation, warlordism or continual insurgency. One thing, however, is clear: The supply of weapons matters, and unless controlled, acquires an autonomous dynamic.

Here the US has been the opposite of the British in India; it has ensured that places it intervenes in are awash in weapons. Just to randomly pick items, it was reported in 2016 in a Pentagon audit that more than 1.5 million firearms supplied to Afghan and Iraqi forces had gone missing. Many of the arms provided to the Mujahideen ended up with successor groups; in Yemen US-supplied arms were being transferred by Gulf states to arms militias. All of this is in addition to the support Pakistan would have provided to so many groups. Saturation of a place with arms is, with rare exceptions, going to backfire. Militias are also hard to decommission, unless they win decisive victories to become the state. In short, you cannot saturate places with weapons and expect development.

In this context, it might be worth looking at the debate over the Small Arms Treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2013. The Treaty aimed to

establish the highest possible common standards for regulating conventional arms, and prevent their diversion and illicit trade. The US has withdrawn from the Treaty because of an ideological commitment to exporting weapons. On India's view, the Treaty protects arms exporters more than importers. But more to the point, the Treaty is not strong enough on arms transfers to non-state actors, which is where a significant part of the problem lies. China has embraced the Treaty in a way guaranteed to make India and the US recoil. Whatever India's motives, its central concern is not philosophically off the mark. If we are worried about the fear of violent death in armed conflict and the disruptions caused by state breakdown, then there is a case for very stringent regulation of arms transfers and diversion. The US has a historical tradition of gun ownership to assert racial privilege; and a history of an armed militia winning a war of independence and becoming a modern state. Perhaps that legacy, and the political economy of the military industrial complex, makes the proliferation of weapons its default option in dealing with conflict. Even Asian states are not immune to this temptation. But there is still truth to the old wisdom, the pacification of violence cannot take place with the indiscriminate spread of weapons. If you want to understand failed states, don't get development consultants.



# How Israel's expertise in climate innovation can help India

**Rony Yedidia Clein, Lior Assaf write: The only way to tackle the climate crisis is by working together, sharing information and experience, and providing mutual support**

Israel has lessons to share. Over decades, Israel has learned to establish agriculture in the desert and arid areas, to recycle 90 per cent of its wastewater, and to desalinate drinking water. It has developed solutions for energy storage, energy efficiency, and renewable energy; it has cultivated a groundbreaking industry of animal protein substitutes, and knows how to preserve forests in conditions of drought and aridity. Israel is a laboratory for the development of practical solutions to the climate crisis.

Take, for example, the developments in research institutes and the private sector in Israel in the field of animal protein substitutes. Products such as poultry, milk, eggs and more are being produced in laboratories using methods that emit almost no greenhouse gases, and which allow huge swathes of agricultural land currently being used for livestock purposes to be freed up for ecological restoration and reforestation.

Even those of us not particularly aware of the climate crisis cannot help but be alarmed by what has been happening around us lately. While massive floods in Germany and Western Europe claimed the lives of hundreds, entire villages in India were washed away by monsoon rains. Giant hailstones rained down on Italy in the middle of summer, and Britain and Switzerland were surprised by sudden wild and rainy weather. Sardinia, Greece, Turkey, Australia, US and Siberia were hit by widespread fires. In California and Canada, temperatures reached unthinkable records of above 50 degrees Celsius. The

average global temperature rise in 2021 is projected to be about 1.2 degrees Celsius above that of the pre-industrial period. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2021 analysis shows that the window of opportunity to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius to avoid the worst impacts of climate change is closing.

The report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a warning for us. We must transition to a lifestyle and economy that supports - not disrupts - the planet's climate, nature and environment.

Change, however, is difficult, and

we need success stories, peer learning, and technologies that will help us move to a zero-emissions economy by 2050 and halve humanity's greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. In India, the Himalayan glaciers, the source of major rivers and aquifers supplying water to hundreds of millions of Indians, are disappearing at an alarming rate. Climate change will increase the risks in low-lying coastal zones due to cyclones and coastal and inland flooding, storm surges and sea-level rise, threatening communities along the Indian coastline. The increased frequency of extreme events such as floods and

droughts will have a severe impact on India's agriculture and water resources, food security and the prosperity of rural communities. Economic development has been a policy priority for India in the last decades - as it lifts millions of people out of poverty while creating larger demands for goods and services, and increasing the demand for energy across all sectors. India has made enormous investments in renewable energy sources, to increase the use of solar, wind, biomass, waste, and hydropower energies. But there are still enormous challenges in meeting Indian demands for energy, food, and water in a sustainable way.

## The Assaults On Atmanirbhar Bharat



Atmanirbhar is a government program for creating the required goods and services within the country, rather than getting them from other economies. This is to be done through addressing the handicaps of the domestic industry and by providing the domestic industry with a level playing field in accessing the domestic market. However, as I had written in this

column a few weeks ago, Atmanirbhar is a program and is not a policy and that it requires a policy and an ombudsman to support the Atmanirbhar program. Since writing that column, I have been flooded with examples of procurements by state governments through RFP's that abound in clauses that are clearly crafted for no other purpose but to exclude the domestic players in an unfair manner, thus not providing them with a level playing field for even government procurements, that are funded by taxpayer money of this country.

In this article, I will take up only one such RFP that has been

released by a state government, for driving their Proactive e-Governance initiative. Clearly, for any such initiative, any private party getting involved will get access to a tremendous amount of citizen data. Now imagine all of it going to a multi-national company (MNC), who can share the data with any other foreign government that is inimical to the interests of the country. Now imagine, that the government is proactively ensuring that only MNC's win the contract, by excluding domestic players, by inserting clauses that cannot be met by domestic players. The said RFP, uses a standard technique that most such RFP use for

eliminating domestic players - the dreaded Gartner quadrant (and such related metrics).

What is the Gartner Quadrant? It is a framework used by a private US-based consulting and research company, Gartner, for communicating if a company is a leader or a laggard in their specific narrow sector. It goes without saying, that Gartner rarely rates any Indian company. In addition, a for-profit US company will obviously be driven by profit motives for any rating it does. It is surprising that Indian state governments find such US company ratings as sacrosanct and as fair metrics for throwing out Indian companies.



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# Kabul shows up Biden as a sheep in sheep's clothing.

## Allies Europe, India & Quad are watching

"We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay," said US President Joe Biden, hours after the bombings at Kabul airport killed nearly a hundred people, including at least 13 US soldiers at last count. His was a valiant attempt to sound angry, resolute and menacing.

He ended up, regrettably for him and his nation, looking exactly like what he is: Sheep in sheep's clothing. In polarised times, Biden's committed voters might still have tears of inspiration in their eyes. Most of the others will feel sorry for him, or laugh. The target of his frustrated ire, Af-Pak jihadist groups, won't be impressed. Don't even try comparing this with Saigon, 1975. There, at least, you were up against a regular army with an Air Force, backed fully by the Communist bloc, including China and under a well-defined leadership. And with wide popular support.

This is an unconditional surrender to an amorphous, armed rabble. With no pretension to a state structure, territorial foothold or international support. Unless you find it face-saving to say, instead, that you surrendered to the Pakistanis. It is indeed Pakistan whose prime minister has proclaimed this as a liberation where Afghans, he says, have broken the shackles of slavery. Does it look like liberation anywhere? If the Afghans saw it as such, they would be out in the streets, celebrating and hugging the victorious Taliban. They are,

instead, jostling desperately in the tens of thousands at Kabul airport to somehow get out. Mothers are throwing their babies across the razor wire, families are waiting in a sewage drain. More of them went there even the day after the bombings, undeterred. Any which way the Biden Administration sees it, it has led the US to its most humiliating defeat.

The defence that they are only picking up the pieces left behind by the Trump Administration is as fake as Biden's show of outrage and determination now sounds. First, Donald Trump had not agreed on an unconditional surrender and retreat. Second, even in the agreement at Doha in February 2020, his administration had refused to accept the Taliban definition of themselves as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. On the first page of the agreement, this is made clear by the American side. Today, this broken superpower is sharing the identities and whereabouts of its most valuable and vulnerable assets in Afghanistan in the hope that they will be protected. This is a great superpower's meltdown. Not quite like the Soviet Union in 1989 because it would mean very little within America, except reducing the Biden Administration to the political equivalent of 'spoilt goods' so early in his tenure. Here is why we use the description 'sheep in sheep's clothing' for Biden. Because, unlike Trump or any of his old challengers for the nomination within his own party,

Biden is a dyed-in-the-bourbon Cold Warrior. That might just be a function of his vintage but, Cold War won, it doesn't seem as if he has the stomach for further power projection. He's also a rare old Cold Warrior who's been risk-averse. Former US President Barack Obama's memoirs reveal how Biden had firmly advised him against the Abbottabad raid on Osama Bin Laden's hideout. His fear then was, what if the operation fails, as it did with another Democratic president - Jimmy Carter and his attempt to bring back the hostages in the US embassy in Tehran (Operation Eagle Claw). To the old, combat-shy war-horse, the design of Operation Neptune Spear, to take out Osama, would have seemed so much like that Carter disaster.

A bunch of helicopters were involved here too, and don't we know from experience how temperamental they can be. Three of the eight sent to Iran broke down, and even after the operation was aborted, one rammed into a transport aircraft, leaving behind a carnage and eight dead soldiers. Biden wasn't inclined to take that risk again. A pukka, America-First Cold Warrior with a consistent record of risk aversion. That's why sheep in sheep's clothing. Biden defeated Trump by building a political product of kindness, sympathy and fairness. Check out his statements in the days leading up to the Kabul debacle and after. None reflected these values for the Afghans.

## Appoint an 'Afghanistan commission' now



The failure of U.S. support to the Afghanistan government and the collapse of that ally are now matters of historical record. The 20-year U.S. campaign to punish the Taliban for supporting terrorism and to prevent them from regaining control of Kabul has ended in defeat. Renewed Taliban control may or may not prompt massive new suffering such as human rights abuses, economic collapse, revenge killings and forced migration. It may or may not seriously undermine U.S. credibility, alliances and international influence. It may or may not have been the likeliest outcome in the long run. It is too soon to know how these propositions will play out with any degree of certainty.

What is unambiguously clear in the immediate aftermath is the systemic policy failure the defeat represents. Tens of billions of dollars in equipment seized by an adversary. Americans stranded in a foreign capital at the mercy of that adversary. Friends and employees of the U.S. government hunted, killed, trapped. U.S. military members and diplomats conducting an urgent evacuation within a tiny, dangerous perimeter. A hasty withdrawal to "protect" our forces leads to the highest U.S. casualty count in a decade. NATO's primary alliance political-military operation ended with confusion and acrimony. Two decades of American blood and treasure spent with none of the gains preserved.

This was a multifaceted failure, and the American people deserve a detailed, expert investigation of the causes and decisions that led to it. After the hostage rescue Operation Eagle Claw ended disastrously at Desert One in Iran in 1980, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff tasked a group of retired senior officers (the Holloway Review Group) to analyze the operation and causes of failure in detail. The report led to significant reforms - albeit after seven years of delay and forceful congressional intervention - referred to as Goldwater-Nichols, which greatly improved joint capabilities and helped restore U.S. credibility.

Unlike the Holloway Review Group, which focused on military technical and operational issues while avoiding policy drivers such as the interagency process, intelligence assessments and presidential decision-making, a macro-level assessment is now needed. This would be akin to the 9/11 Commission, formed in 2002 and concluding in 2004, or the Winograd Commission conducted by the Israeli government following manifest failures in the 2006 Lebanon War.





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# Why Biden's Afghanistan withdrawal puts US citizens in danger here at home

For almost 20 years, since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 2001, the efforts of the U.S. military and the intelligence community have prevented other terrorists attacks from originating in Afghanistan. That may no longer be the case.

Due to the colossal failure of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and one national security blunder after the other, the American homeland is facing the greatest potential terrorist threat in decades. This was confirmed in recently published reports by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis and the National Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC).

On Aug. 26, 13 members of the U.S. military deployed in Afghanistan paid for these mistakes with their lives. It is now increasingly likely that ordinary civilians living in the United States would suffer the same fate as a consequence of these mistakes due to higher risk of terrorist attacks.

In over 40 years of government service, I have never seen anything so poorly planned, badly timed and horribly managed as the current Afghan "withdrawal." These mistakes did not just start overnight. These missteps began years ago with actions like the Obama administration's release of five senior Taliban leaders in exchange for

disgraced Army deserter Bowe Bergdahl. Similarly, many other Taliban leaders have been released from Guantanamo under the false premise that they would not return to the conflict area or participate in terrorist activities. It has become clearly evident that these promises were nothing but lies in order to obtain freedom. The Taliban cannot be trusted. The very Taliban leaders released by the United States have returned to the fight and are now serving in senior positions within the Taliban. Recent strategic mistakes include abandoning Bagram Air Base. It was the most strategic airport in the area with greatest set-back and the best security footprint.

The U.S. troop withdrawal also enabled the release of over 5,000 prisoners from Afghan prisons, including Taliban, Islamic State (ISIS), and al Qaeda fighters who had been captured in operations by U.S. personnel who had sacrificed and risked their lives to do so. These terrorists promptly armed themselves with some of the hundreds of thousands of left behind U.S. small arms and quickly made their way over the short distance of about 30 miles, to the Kabul airport, where some would join in the Taliban standoff with U.S. forces. Others joined the hunt for the remaining Americans, foreigners, Afghan translators and American supporters

still in-country. Some have already been found and killed and unfortunately, many more will be found and likely tortured and executed.

Sadly, this task has been made easier by the U.S. handing over to the Taliban a list of Americans and translators so the Taliban could allegedly facilitate their safe passage to the airport. Another shocking U.S. display of naiveté and lack of understanding or acceptance of the Afghanistan/Taliban reality.

The U.S. abandoned an \$800 million embassy in Kabul, and over \$80 billion of military vehicles, aircraft and weapons systems. These abandoned items include armored and mine-resistant vehicles, over a hundred helicopters, light attack aircraft, cargo planes, hundreds of unmanned drones and Intelligence-Surveillance-Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, night vision equipment, small arms, and potentially large sums of cash.

According to Adam Andrzejewski, CEO of OpenTheBooks.com and a senior policy contributor to Forbes, an accurate account is difficult because the Biden administration is hiding key audits on Afghan military equipment. That said, it is clear that the Taliban is now better equipped than many of the world's armies. I have personally seen video footage of Taliban fighters carrying rifles that are

better equipped than the one issued to my son for Iraq. The American people have not seen the last of these weapons. Not only have we left the Taliban as the best-equipped terrorist force in the world, these systems and this technology will fall into the hands of other terrorist organizations, as well as into the hands of the Chinese and other U.S. adversaries who will reverse engineer and/or develop technology to defeat them.

A greater loss than the billions of dollars in weapons left to the terrorists, is the damage to our national security interests. This "withdrawal" is viewed by our enemies and our allies around the world as a capitulation, abdication and a supreme act of incompetence. The U.K. and many more of our staunchest allies around the world have already strongly condemned our conduct. In fact, the U.K. Parliament recently unanimously voted for the condemnation of President Biden. Although labeled by the Biden administration as a "strategic withdrawal" it is not perceived as such by virtually anyone. In the eyes of the world this is a completely avoidable defeat and an act of incompetence. The entire world watched the chaotic U.S. retreat and the aimless swat at a few minor targets on the way out in frustrated retribution (in at least one strike innocents and children were killed).



# Pak NSA says West risks another 9/11 if Taliban isn't recognised, backtracks later



**Pakistan's National Security Adviser (NSA) Moeed Yusuf, in an interview, was quoted as saying that West risks a second 9/11 situation if it doesn't "immediately recognise" the Taliban. He, however, has backtracked from his statement, saying it was a "gross mischaracterization".**

published in The Times on August 28, 2021, which wrongly interpreted his interview.

Raising objection over the story's sub-title "Risk a second 9/11 if you don't recognize Afghanistan's new leaders, Pakistan's national security adviser warns," the statement released by Yusuf's office said: "This connotation was fabricated and total wrongly attributed to the National Security Adviser". "The statement said it is a gross mischaracterization of the conversation that took place between Ms Lamb and the NSA.

A day after giving a warning of sorts that the West risks a second 9/11 situation if it doesn't "immediately recognise" the Taliban, Pakistan's National Security Adviser (NSA) Moeed Yusuf backtracked from his statement, saying it was a "gross mischaracterization".

In an interview to British

newspaper The Sunday Times on Saturday, Moeed Yusuf was quoted as saying that the West "must immediately engage with the Taliban regime or risk making the same mistakes which led to the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan's national security adviser has warned".

"Mark my words. If the mistakes of the Nineties are made again

and Afghanistan abandoned, the outcome will be absolutely the same - a security vacuum filled by undesirable elements who will threaten everyone, Pakistan and the West," Yusuf was quoted as saying in the interview to The Sunday Times journalist Christina Lamb.

However, a day later, Moeed Yusuf asked The Sunday Times to

clarify and retract the interview, saying that it is a "gross mischaracterisation of the conversation that took place with the journalist.

The Pakistan NSA, in a press release, said: A story titled Work with the Taliban or Repeat the Horror of the 1990s, West Told, authored by Christina Lamb was

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## China targets 55 million jobs, better worker rights in new plan

China's State Council outlined a new employment plan targeting 55 million urban jobs by 2025, better rights for workers and beefing up training of the labor force.

The unemployment rate will be capped at 5.5%, wages as a share of gross domestic product will be increased and the average age of education of the working population will be

raised, the State Council -- the equivalent of a government cabinet -- said in a detailed plan published late Friday.

Beijing has pledged to make employment a top priority of its

economic policies, a goal that's taken on more importance recently as authorities make a bigger push to reduce inequality to achieve "common prosperity." Part of that includes improving

workers' rights, especially in industries like technology, which was put on notice on Friday by a top court warning about excessive-work culture.

On workers' rights, the government pledged to supervise companies to adopt working hours that are in line with the law and ensure employees get time off. It also pledged to reduce discrimination in the workforce, encourage employers to adopt flexible policies for workers taking care of infants and provide professional training to women who left the workplace to give birth.

A new focus in the employment plan is a pledge to grow the share of workers' wages in the economy, a move that would narrow the income gap. Beijing pledged to increase the labor compensation for workers, especially for front-line workers, and simultaneously increase wage and labor productivity.

Authorities are also seeking to boost skills levels in the economy, especially through vocational education.

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# Indian-origin Singaporean alerts tenant about inspection to check overcrowding; jailed

**Kalayarasan Karuppaya pleaded guilty to two charges of violating the Official Secrets Act by communicating information about the upcoming inspection to Damandeep Singh about his rented unit.**



(News Agencies)-An Indian-origin Singaporean, who was working as an inspection officer with a public housing authority, was on Monday sentenced to 25 days in prison for alerting an Indian tenant about impending inspections to check overcrowding in his flat. Kalayarasan Karuppaya, 55, who has been suspended from his duties with the Housing and Development Board (HDB) since January 25 last year, pleaded guilty on Monday to two charges of violating the Official Secrets Act by communicating information about the upcoming inspection to Damandeep Singh about his rented unit.

The accused was not authorised to release the information to the 22-year-old Indian national, Channel News Asia reported.

The court heard on Monday that the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau of Singapore (CPIB) had received information on January 9 last year relating to Kalayarasan providing Damandeep with information about the impending inspection of the HDB flat (apartment) on several occasions in 2019.

As an investigation officer with the rank of higher estate executive, Kalayarasan's work involved conducting

investigations into subletting and occupancy related infringements in HDB estates, said Deputy Public Prosecutor Thiam Jia Min. These included offences such as unauthorised subletting of HDB units, overcrowding and the misuse of units for vice or other illegal activities.

As part of his investigations, the accused would be involved in conducting surprise inspections at units identified in feedback and complaints from members of the public as well as the Singapore Police Force, said Thiam. The accused was aware that information regarding such surprise inspections was confidential information which he was not allowed to share with others, including the owners and tenants of these units.

Together with five others, Damandeep was a registered tenant in the unit in question, Thiam said, noting the maximum number of people allowed to stay in the unit is six.

Any breach of this condition might potentially result in a debarment of unauthorised tenants from renting HDB units for a fixed period and the unit owner from renting out the unit.

A total of about 12 to 13 people were staying in the flat at any one point, she noted, adding that Kalayarasan was not aware of these facts at the time.

The HDB had received a complaint

about suspected overcrowding in the flat where Damandeep was a registered tenant. The police also found the unit overcrowded on two visits on August 24 and September 4, 2019, with 19 and 18 occupants on each occasion respectively.

"Investigations revealed that at all material times, Damandeep and some of the other registered tenants illegally sublet the unit to more tenants, in breach of the HDB rules.

"The purpose of this was so that the illegal subtenants could bear some of the cost of the monthly rental of the unit. They collected about Singapore Dollar 200 (USD 148) monthly from each illegal subtenant," Thiam added.

An Indian-origin Singaporean, who was working as an inspection officer with a public housing authority, was on Monday sentenced to 25 days in prison for alerting an Indian tenant about impending inspections to check overcrowding in his flat.

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## Vietnam lockdown threatens global coffee supplies, may affect your Java costs



(News Agencies)-

Vietnam, a key producer of robusta, which is used in some espresso blends and instant coffee, is in lockdown, causing global coffee supply concerns. As a result of a spike in Delta variant cases, strict travel restrictions have been imposed in Ho Chi Minh, a major exporting hub that operates from China to Europe.

The result is that exporters are having difficulty transporting commodities around the world. Several trade organisations, including the Vietnam Coffee-Cocoa Association, are calling on the government to relax the COVID-19 regulations, so as to prevent further delays to shipments and to reduce related costs.

However, it is unclear how long the Vietnamese government will impose such a tight lockdown on Ho Chi Minh.

The disruption of shipments from such a major producer country as Vietnam follows the loss of Brazil's coffee crop, which is now hitting coffee supplies.

Brazil, the world's biggest producer of coffee, is bracing for coffee losses as it continues to monitor its crops but is expecting significant damage to them.

Due to recent droughts and frosts that have severely harmed Brazil's coffee-growing regions, future prices also look set to spike. Reports claim that many farmers face replanting their trees because of the harsh frosts, which will set back their production by several years.

In light of all this, it is predicted that the price of imported coffee beans will rise, which will affect the cost to the consumer.





## Big lesson for other invaders and for our future generation, says Taliban as US troops leave Afghanistan

(News Agencies)-As the US troops left Afghanistan on Monday night, the Taliban in a statement said, "Congratulations to Afghanistan... this victory belongs to us all."

The Taliban added that it is a "big lesson for other invaders and for our future generation," adding: "It is also a lesson for the world." The Taliban spokesman however added: "We want to have good relations with the US and the world. We welcome good

diplomatic relations with them all." "First I congratulate the whole nation because we have achieved our independence and we were able to force the Americans to leave after 20 years of jihad and sacrifice, all foreign forces, especially the Americans left Afghanistan last night around 12 o'clock and our country achieved its independence," the Taliban spokesperson said.

The US troops left one minute before Tuesday in a C-17 cargo

plane from Kabul's Hamid Karzai international airport. US ambassador Ross Wilson was on the last flight home which had few passengers.

"This independence belongs to the whole nation and all our people were involved in it, they have suffered hardships in these 20 years," the Taliban spokesman added.

President Biden had set August 31 as the final date for military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Reports said the Taliban took control of the airport as the US troops left as guards inspected destroyed US helicopters and armoured vehicles.

"Our plans are extensive, for the airport and the whole country, we would like to announce the good news that the war has ended, overall security will return, there will be a plan for the airport to resume its activities," Zabihullah Mujahid said.

The Taliban also reportedly

removed all checkpoints leading up to the airport as Taliban guards surrounded the area.

"We give full assurances to everybody, no-one should have any concerns, the Islamic Emirate is here to provide security, to secure people's dignity, we work for that day and night. God willing a government will soon be announced, all government offices will reopen, the banks and the economy will start moving," he added.

## Six Islamist militants in Bangladesh get death penalty for killing gay rights activist

(News Agencies)-A Bangladesh anti-terrorism tribunal on Tuesday sentenced six Islamist militants to death in the brutal slayings of two men, including a prominent gay rights activist, five years ago, lawyers said.

In April 2016, assailants hacked to death Xulhaz Mannan, the editor of Bangladesh's first gay rights magazine who had worked for the U.S. Agency for International Development, and his friend Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy. The killings in an apartment in

Dhaka were part of a wave of attacks targeting atheists, moderates and foreigners.

Judge Mojibur Rahman of the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal ruled that the six defendants were responsible for the killings of the two men, but acquitted two others. Police have indicted eight suspected militants in the case. Four of the defendants were present amid tight security in the court Tuesday, while the two others remain at large. Prosecutors identified all of them as members of Ansar-al-Islam, a

domestic militant group.

Defense lawyers vowed to appeal



the ruling to the High Court. Mannan, who also previously worked as a U.S. Embassy protocol officer, was editor of the

gay rights magazine Roopbaan as well as a cousin of former Foreign Minister Dipu Moni of the governing Awami League party. In 2016, Bangladesh was riven by a wave of deadly attacks on foreigners, religious minorities, and secular bloggers, raising fears that religious extremists were gaining a foothold in the country, despite its traditions of secularism and tolerance.

The killings were claimed by various militant groups, including Ansar-al-Islam and al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, or AQIS.

The domestic groups Jumatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh and Harkatul Jihad were also blamed for some attacks.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government has claimed success in controlling the militancy after a nationwide crackdown on radical Islamists left dozens of militants dead and many others in jail. The U.S. had condemned Mannan's killing. In a statement, then U.S. Ambassador Marcia Bernicat said she was "devastated by the brutal murder."





# Cost of America's longest war

## Thousands of lives, trillions of dollars

Here is a look at the US-led war in Afghanistan - which is America's longest war, by the numbers, as the last Americans deployed there departed.

US military planes have carried the last US service members and diplomats from Kabul's airport, ending America's longest war. Ordinary Americans closely watched the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, as they did the start of the war nearly 20 years ago, in the weeks after the 9/11 attacks. But Americans often tended to forget about the Afghanistan war in between,

and it received measurably less oversight from Congress than the Vietnam War did. But its death toll for Afghans and Americans and their NATO allies is in the many tens of thousands. And because the US borrowed most of the money to pay for it, generations of Americans to come will be paying off its cost, in the trillions of dollars.

A look at the US-led war in Afghanistan, by the numbers, as the last Americans deployed there departed.

Much of the data below is from Linda Bilmes of Harvard University's Kennedy School and from the Brown University Costs of War project. Because

the United States between 2003 and 2011 fought the Afghanistan and Iraq wars simultaneously, and many American troops served tours in both wars, some figures as noted cover both post-9/11 US wars.

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### Capitol Hill attack:

## Congress committee asks telecom companies to preserve Trump's call records



A US Congressional committee probing January 6 Capitol Hill attack has asked 35 telephone, email and social media companies to preserve records which can be relevant to its investigation. Reuters quoted source to say that these records include those of US President Donald Trump, Ivanka Trump and Donald Trump Jr. In a statement revealing the data preservation requests, a spokesperson for the House of Representatives' Jan. 6 investigation committee, led by Democrat Bennie Thompson, said it had "sent letters to 35 private-sector entities, including telecommunications, email, and social media companies, instructing them to preserve records" which could be "relevant" to the committee's inquiry. "The Select Committee is at this point gathering facts, not alleging wrongdoing by any individual," the statement added.

# Man facing charges after escaping quarantine hotel in New Zealand

(News Agencies)-New Zealand authorities said Thursday that a man who tested positive for COVID-19 could face a fine or jail time after he escaped a quarantine hotel to return home.

Police dressed in full protective gear arrested the man about six miles away from the hotel in the northern city of Auckland, where New Zealand is currently facing an outbreak of the delta variant, according to The Associated Press.

Authorities said that the man had been on the run for about 12 hours before he was detained, and The

Guardian reported that he appeared virtually in Auckland district court before being returned to a managed quarantine center. The person was charged with failing to comply with New Zealand's coronavirus health order. Under a new law passed last year, he could face a fine or up to six months in jail if convicted, according to the AP. COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said it was not immediately clear how the man escaped, though security footage in the area showed a man hiding in bushes away from security

guards.

Hipkins told the New Zealand Herald that the quarantine facilities are heavily managed and secured, adding, "I am very concerned that someone made it out."

Auckland is currently in a level-four lockdown, the nation's highest, to combat a recent outbreak of the delta variant.

Last month, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced a nationwide lockdown after a single coronavirus infection was reported in Auckland.

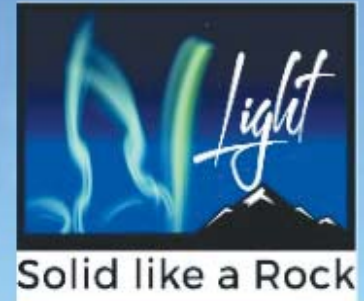


Shortly after the shutdown, authorities recorded several additional coronavirus cases, including one individual who had worked four shifts at Auckland City Hospital while they were infectious.

Days later, New Zealand's government said it would extend the nationwide lockdown to the end of August, ordering residents to only leave their homes for grocery shopping and other essential activities.



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**5 US states nearly out of ICU beds as fresh surge of COVID-19 cases stretch hospitals**



Five states in the US are nearly out of ICU beds as a surge in COVID-19 cases, especially among unvaccinated people, pose a fresh set of problems for the hospitals who are already stretched to their maximum capacity.

According to data from the department of health and human services, Alabama, Georgia, Texas, Florida and Arkansas are left with less than 10% of their ICU bed capacity.

On Monday, data shared by a vaccine adviser from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed a hospitalization rate 16 times higher in the unvaccinated population than in those vaccinated. "This to me seems to be a strong indication that the current epidemiologic curve that we're seeing is really a reflection of failure to vaccinate, not vaccine failure," Dr Matthew F Daley at the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices meeting told the CNN. In Georgia, CEO of Northeast Georgia Health Systems Carol Burrell said it had 287 Covid patients on Monday, which is more than the hospital has had since January. "So, in essence, our hospitals are full," she said, adding, "We're looking to add space in hallways and conference rooms in waiting areas. Our emergency rooms and our urgent care centres are seeing higher volume than they've seen throughout this pandemic."

# US drone attack 'unlawful'



## any threat in Afghanistan should've been reported to us: Taliban

The Taliban on Monday termed the US drone attack targeting a suspected suicide bomber in Kabul as "unlawful". Spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said that if there was any potential threat in Afghanistan, it should have been reported to the group.

A Taliban spokesman said a US drone strike targeting a suspected suicide bomber in Kabul on Sunday resulted in civilian casualties, and condemned the United States for failing to inform the Taliban before ordering the strike.

Spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told China's state television CGTN on Monday that

seven people were killed in the drone attack, describing the US action on foreign soil as unlawful.

"If there was any potential threat in Afghanistan, it should have been reported to us, not an arbitrary attack that has resulted in civilian casualties," Mujahid said in a written response to CGTN.

Pentagon officials said the suicide car bomber had been preparing to attack the airport in Kabul, where US troops were in the final stages of a withdrawal from Afghanistan, on behalf of ISIS-K, a local affiliate of Islamic State that is an enemy of both the West and the Taliban.

US Central Command said it was investigating reports of civilian casualties from Sunday's drone strike.

"We know that there were substantial and powerful subsequent explosions resulting from the destruction of the vehicle, indicating a large amount of explosive material inside that may have caused additional casualties," it said. Mujahid had issued a similar condemnation of a US drone strike on Saturday that killed two Islamic State militants in the eastern province of Nangarhar. He said two women and a child were wounded in that attack.

## Can Americans visit Europe this fall after EU decision? It's complicated. What travelers need to know.

Travel to Europe has been complicated this summer due to a hodgepodge of COVID-19 travel restrictions and entry requirements. Some countries are only allowing vaccinated visitors, others are open to all with a negative COVID-19 test or and/or proof of recovery and still others are throwing quarantines into the mix.

The European Union's decision Monday to remove the United States from its list of safe

countries due to a spike in COVID cases, essentially recommending a ban of nonessential travel such as vacations, adds more confusion to the mix for travelers with plane tickets or plans in the works to visit Europe this fall.

The EU's announcement is only a recommendation to the 27 countries in the bloc and Monday's announcement said those countries are free to make exceptions for fully vaccinated



people.

Travel experts expect most countries to still welcome vaccinated visitors, perhaps adding another requirement for visitors such as a negative COVID test, but confusion is likely to remain until individual countries announce their plans.

"The headlines are frightening," said Scott Keyes, founder of Scott's Cheap Flights, a subscription service for airfare deals. "You see, 'EU bans

tourists.' I've got a trip to the EU next week, what am I supposed to do?"

Similarly, Steve Perillo, CEO of Perillo Tours, a New Jersey-based operator of tours to Italy since 1945, said the widely publicized announcement might prompt some vacationers to put off booking new trips until individual countries reaffirm or adjust their entry requirements in the coming days and weeks.





# 'All we can do'

## Firefighters attempt to merge California wildfires in effort to control one

Firefighters are attempting to steer the aggressive Caldor Fire in Northern California toward the neighboring Tamarack Fire, a "fresh burn area" that could provide an important and natural stopping point for the fast-moving inferno, fire officials said Tuesday during a community meeting.

"Sometimes when the fire is burning extreme that's all we can do," said Eric Schwab, an operations section chief with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire. "It's a fresh burn, and if we get it steered into there ... that basically stops the spread of fire. It's a very valid tactic that we're trying to do."

The Tamarack Fire, which was sparked by lightning on July 4, spans nearly 70,000 acres across Alpine County in California and Douglas County in Nevada. It was 82 percent contained as of Tuesday.

Residents in parts of Douglas County, Nevada, were under evacuation orders Tuesday evening as the Caldor Fire continued its destructive march east. They were instructed to turn off sprinkler systems before leaving their homes amid worsening drought conditions across the West.

"Conserving water NOW will help ensure water supply is available if needed," county officials tweeted.

The Caldor Fire has already

scorched more than 191,000 acres as of Tuesday and is 16 percent contained. At least three firefighters and two civilians have been injured since the blaze started nearly three weeks ago. Earlier Tuesday, the ferocious wildfire continued its rampage toward a popular vacation destination just hours after roads were clogged with fleeing cars when the entire California resort city of South Lake Tahoe was ordered to evacuate and communities just across the state line in Nevada were warned to get ready to leave.

About 700 structures have been destroyed and more than 30,000 remain threatened. Law enforcement officials are working closely with fire crews and the California and Nevada national guards to oversee evacuation efforts and keep a close eye on property.

More than 15,000 firefighters were battling dozens of California blazes, including crews from Utah, Washington, Wisconsin and West Virginia, said Mark Ghilarducci, director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services. About 250 active-duty soldiers were being trained in Washington state to help with the arduous work of clearing forest debris by hand.

Crews from Louisiana, however, had to return to that state because of Hurricane Ida, "another major catastrophic event taking place in the country and is a pull on resources

throughout the United States," he said.

"We are using all of our resources, everything that we have at our disposal," Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak said Tuesday.

He and California Gov. Gavin Newsom declared states of emergencies Monday in advance of the fire's persistent march toward Lake Tahoe. Newsom, who is facing a recall, signed a separate order allowing out-of-county firefighters and other emergency workers to cast their ballots for the Sept. 14 election.

"We thank all the heroic firefighters and first responders working around the clock to combat this rapidly spreading

fire and to protect local communities across California this fire season," Newsom said in a statement.

Lake Tahoe, a popular vacation haven normally filled with tens of thousands of summer tourists, emptied out Monday as the massive Caldor Fire rapidly expanded. Vehicles loaded with bikes and camping gear and hauling boats were in gridlocked traffic, stalled in hazy, brown air that smelled like a campfire. Police and other emergency vehicles whizzed by.

"It's more out of control than I thought," evacuee Glen Naasz said of the fire that by late Monday had been pushed by strong winds across California highways 50 and 89, burning

mountain cabins as it swept down slopes into the Tahoe Basin.

Ken Breslin was stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic less than a mile from his home in the city of 22,000, with only a quarter-tank of gas in his Ford Escape. His son begged him to leave Sunday night, but he shrugged him off, certain that if an evacuation order came, it would be later in the week.

"Before, it was, 'No worries ... it's not going to crest. It's not gonna come down the hill. There's 3,500 firefighters, all those bulldozers and all the air support,'" he said. "Until this morning, I didn't think there was a chance it could come into this area. Now, it's very real."





# 'It looked apocalyptic...': US Air Force members, last to leave Afghanistan, on scenes near Kabul airport



(News Agencies)-Pilots and crew members of the final five C-17 aircraft of the US Air Force to leave Afghanistan have described as "apocalyptic," scenes near the Kabul airport as the United States finally ended its 20-year military presence in the country on August 30, day before a self-imposed deadline to do so. "It just looked apocalyptic," said Lieutenant Colonel Braden Coleman of the US Air Force, who was responsible for monitoring the outside of his aircraft for threats including artillery fire. "It was like one of those movies in which all the aeroplanes had been destroyed. There was a plane that was burned all the way. You could see its cockpit, while the rest of the plane resembled the skeleton of a fish," Lt. Colonel Coleman remarked. Meanwhile, Captain Kirby Wedan, who piloted the plane that led the formation of the final five aircraft out of Afghanistan, said that the situation was "definitely very tense." The Air Force officer said, "We were definitely on the edge watching everything going on to make sure that we were ready. What added to our stress was that the planes were parked in such an area of the airport which had been attacked and breached in the past." Captain Wedan further revealed that during the night, a group of civilians entered the airfield and tried to board the aircraft but were stopped by US Army troops securing the planes. General Jacqueline Van Ovost, the commander of the Air Mobility Command who was watching the final departure from Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, said she could hear instructions being issued by Lt. Colonel Alex Pelbath, the mission commander for the final departure. Finally, Major General Chris Donahue, identified by the Pentagon as the last serving member of the US military to leave Afghan soil, relayed the message, "Job well done. Proud of a you all." Major

General Donahue was the in-charge of security for the evacuation mission. The group's departure from Afghanistan

meant that American forces were no longer present in the country after landing here following the 9/11 attacks. Their withdrawal was

earlier scheduled to end by September 11, the 20th anniversary of the attacks, but was preponed to August 31.

President Joe Biden stood by the deadline despite pressure, both at home and from allies, to extend it by few more days.

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# Russia to begin integrating Nauka module with ISS, month after space station mishap



(SAI Bureau)- Weeks after Nasa cancelled the proposed spacewalk to install solar arrays on the International Space Station, two Russian cosmonauts will venture out on September 3 to prepare the newly arrived Nauka multipurpose laboratory module for operations in space. The Russian module arrived at the space station last month as Moscow replaced the Pirs module that disintegrated into the atmosphere during re-entry. The September 3 spacewalk will be one of 11 such proposed ventures outside the space station to ready the Nauka (the Russian word for 'science') module. The second spacewalk will be conducted on September 9.

"The crew of the Russian segment of the

International Space Station is preparing the necessary equipment and studying the upcoming work schedule," Roscosmos said in a statement. The first spacewalk, termed Russian EVA 49, could last up to seven hours, while the second spacewalk, Russian EVA 50, is scheduled to last about five hours. Preparing Nauka Module During the spacewalk on Friday, cosmonauts Oleg Novitskiy and Pyotr Dubrov will connect power and ethernet cables to the station's general power supply system to integrate the module. "The crew has finished studying the onboard documentation and the spacewalk sequence, hydro laboratory training videos, rails and working areas on the outer surface of the ISS," Roscosmos said. Novitskiy and Dubrov will

exit the Poisk module on the space-facing side of the station's Russian segment. Novitskiy, who is designated as extravehicular crew member 1 (EV1), will wear the Russian Orlan spacesuit with red stripes. Dubrov will wear the spacesuit with the blue stripes as extravehicular crew member 2 (EV2). Nasa said this would be the second and third spacewalks for both cosmonauts and the 10th and 11th spacewalks at the station in 2021. What is the Nauka Module? The Nauka Module, which docked at the space station in July, will serve as a research lab, storage unit and airlock for the Russian segment. The section will take about six months to fully integrate with the space station as

cosmonauts install an airlock and a radiation heat exchanger. The airlock and the heat exchanger are currently located on the Rassvet Mini Research Module. "The Russian crew has also already prepared the instruments necessary for the spacewalks, as some EVA tasks are combined," Roscosmos said.

The launch of Nauka, also called the Multipurpose Laboratory Module, has been repeatedly delayed due to technical problems. It was initially scheduled to go up in 2007. In 2013, experts found contamination in its fuel system, resulting in a long and costly replacement. Other Nauka systems also underwent modernisation or repairs.

## US climate envoy Kerry in Japan to push efforts to cut emissions

Motegi added that he hoped Japan and the United States would lead global decarbonizing efforts at the U.N. conference to be held in Glasgow in late November, known as COP26, and beyond.

Kerry was also scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, as well as Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshi Kajiyama.

Kerry arrived in Japan on Monday and will fly out on Tuesday evening to China for more climate talks - his second trip to the country under President Joe

Biden's administration.

Kerry has called on global leaders to work together and accelerate actions needed to curb rising temperatures to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels. He urged China to join the U.S. in urgently cutting carbon emissions. China is the world's top carbon emitter, followed by the United States. Japan is fifth.

Many countries have pledged to eliminate net carbon emissions by 2050. Japan has promised to strive to reduce its emissions by 46% from 2012 levels, up from an earlier target of 26%, to achieve

carbon neutrality by 2050. China has also set a goal to reach carbon neutrality by 2060.

Suga has said Japan will try to push the reduction as high as 50% to be in line with the European Union.

In order to achieve that target, Japan's Environment Ministry is seeking a significant budget increase to promote renewable energy and decarbonizing programs. The Trade and Industry Ministry plans to use large subsidies to promote electric vehicles and wind power generation, according to a draft budget



proposal for 2022.

The Trade and Industry Ministry, in its draft basic energy plan released in July, said the share of renewables should be raised to 36-38% of the power supply

in 2030 from the current target of 22-24%.

During his Sept. 1-3 China visit, Kerry is expected to meet with his Chinese counterpart, Xie Zhenhua.



# Hundreds of U.S. citizens, Afghan commandos successfully evacuated through secret CIA base

with other agencies to facilitate in various ways access to the airport for American citizens and Afghans at risk."

The New York Times first reported that the U.S. used the base for evacuations. The full scope of the operation in the final days of the evacuation effort, however, has not been previously reported. A CIA spokesperson declined to comment on the operation.

At least some of the evacuees were taken by air from the secret compound, known as Eagle Base, to the airport in order to bypass the chaotic crowds and terror threat around the gates. Several helicopter flights operated by a U.S. company flew from an area around Eagle Base to the Kabul airport beginning on Aug. 15, when the Taliban took control of the city, according to flight data obtained by POLITICO.

Flight data suggests some of the evacuees were flown to Germany. During that same time period, aircraft owned by a U.S. government contractor flew from the Kabul airport to Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

The effort was coordinated with U.S. diplomats and staff who were relocated from the embassy to Hamid Karzai International Airport after the Taliban took control of Kabul. The diplomats had been communicating directly with American citizens who were trying to leave Afghanistan but feared for their safety - especially after the embassy publicly urged Americans not to travel to the airport last week amid threats of an attack from the ISIS-K terror group.

The Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command was also helping reach out to hundreds of American citizens inside Kabul and around the country.

The House Intelligence Committee was briefed about the operation in August, two of the sources said, as lawmakers from both parties were seeking details from the Biden administration about efforts to evacuate Americans from Afghanistan. A spokesperson for the committee declined to comment. Eagle Base, the sprawling CIA compound located less than three miles north of the

airport, has a controversial history. Established early in the Afghanistan conflict at a former brick factory, the base was used by the CIA from 2002 to 2004 for "enhanced interrogation" of terror suspects. The CIA also used it to train Afghan counterterrorism units. But during the rush to leave Kabul in recent weeks, the compound provided a crucial staging base for evacuees hoping to get out of Afghanistan - before it was demolished on Aug. 27 as part of the effort to ensure that no sensitive equipment or intelligence information would fall into the hands of the Taliban.

As the overall evacuation effort continued, the threat from ISIS-K terrorists to specific gates of the airport was growing. American officials began instructing U.S. citizens to head to different gates to gain entry into the airport for evacuation.

As the threat shifted, officials were "constantly mixing it up," the defense official said - one day instructing people to head to one gate, and the next day telling them to meet at another location.

American officials were also directing citizens and at-risk Afghans, including commandos, to head to Eagle Base as a safer way station on their way to the airport. During a call at 4 p.m. on Aug. 25 in Washington, or 12:30 a.m. on Aug. 26 in Kabul, Rear Adm. Peter Vasely, the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, estimated that roughly 1,000 out of 2,000 Afghan commandos

slated for evacuation, along with a number of American citizens coming from Eagle Base, had been successfully routed to the airport. These people got out just in time. Just hours later, at roughly 6 p.m. in Kabul on Aug. 26, an ISIS-K suicide bomber detonated an explosive device just outside the airport, killing 13 American service members and hundreds of Afghans.

## Judge conditionally approves Purdue Pharma opioid settlement

The drugmaker itself will be reorganized into a new charity-oriented company with a board appointed by public officials and will funnel its profits into government-led efforts to prevent and treat addiction.

Also, the settlement sets up a compensation fund that will pay some victims of drugs an expected \$3,500 to \$48,000 each.

After an all-day hearing in which he analyzed the plan's pros and cons for a nonstop 6 1/2 hours, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Robert Drain said he would approve it as long as two relatively small changes were made. If so, he said, he will formally enter the decision on Thursday.

He said that while he does not have "fondness for the Sacklers or sympathy for them," collecting money from them through lawsuits instead of a settlement would be complicated.

The deal comes nearly two years after the Stamford, Connecticut-based company filed for bankruptcy under the weight of the lawsuits. Under the settlement, the Sacklers were

not given immunity from criminal charges, though there have been no indications they will face any. State and local governments came to support the plan overwhelmingly, if grudgingly in many cases. But nine states and others had opposed it, largely because of the protections granted to the family.

The attorneys general of Connecticut, the District of Columbia and Washington state immediately announced they will either appeal the ruling or explore the possibility of doing so.

The Sacklers "should not be allowed to manipulate bankruptcy laws to evade justice and protect their blood money," Connecticut's William Tong said. Some families who lost loved ones to drugs also came out against the settlement, including Ed Bisch, of Westampton, New Jersey, whose 18-year-old son died of an overdose nearly 20 years ago. "The Sacklers are buying their immunity," he said. But other families said they did not want to risk losing the money that will go toward treatment and prevention.

## 3 ways the Delta variant will hurt the US jobs market

jobs report, in slower employment and labor force growth, as well as a more sluggish rate of offices reopening. Here's why:

Consumer demand will soften While we are unlikely to return to the restrictive shutdowns we saw last year, the fear of getting infected is likely to impact willingness to engage in in-person activities, including a wide range of consumption categories and work. It is now clear that Covid-19 will stay with us for the foreseeable future, and spending on in-person services in December 2021 will be weaker than had been expected before the Delta variant emerged. As a result, the demand for workers providing these services will be weaker and employment recovery by December 2021 will be far from complete.

While economic data for July was still solid, August indicators show softening. Real-time statistics show a significant drop in air travel sales, as well as movie theatres' box office returns since July. And Google mobility measures show a drop in travel and leisure-related activities. Early readings from August suggest that consumer confidence has declined, while some businesses are seeing

slowing sales.

The increase in infection risk is likely to significantly impact two groups in particular: senior citizens and families with children younger than 12 (and thus not eligible for the vaccine). These groups spend disproportionately more on consumption categories, such as vacations, restaurants, childcare and services catering to kids. These industries are likely to recover more slowly than expected. In addition, given the ongoing global spread of the pandemic, international tourism will not be back to normal anytime soon. As a result, this week's jobs report and September's will likely show slower than originally expected employment growth, especially in in-person services. In the previous Covid-19 surge from November to January, employment in leisure and hospitality not only slowed down, but declined during that period. The number of jobs available in December 2021 in these industries is likely to be lower than originally expected.

Labor supply will remain tight We hoped that Covid's continuing decline would reduce or eliminate barriers to returning to work, such as fear of infection or the threat

of continued remote learning. But Delta's persistence will keep people out of the job market. Some older workers who have been waiting for infection risk to disappear before they return to work may now retire.

In this week's jobs report and the ones that follow, we are likely to see the recovery in labor force participation lose steam. At the same time, we expect more unemployed workers to find work as the high unemployment benefits gradually expire.

Remote work will make it harder to recover

Delta's rise will slow the return to the office. The delay will lengthen and increase the economic damage to city centers, where many office buildings are located and where workers spend money on food, retail and other consumption categories. Also, the longer workers and employers settle into a remote work environment, the harder it will be to fully return to the office. The share of remote workers in the post-pandemic new normal may be even higher than expected.

At some point, despite the presence of Covid-19, the labor market and the US economy more broadly will return to normal.

## Indian American Community bids farewell to the Dcg Shatrughan Sinha



Ravi Bhooplapur, Dr Shashi Shah & Mohan Kothekar. Mr Sewhani underlined the fact that Mr Sinha was the best DCG New York ever had. He was available 24/7 for the Indian American community and we are going to miss him. Here are some exclusive pictures shared with The South Asian Insider by the organizers. (Pictures by press release)





# Sea-level rise and hurricanes: In it for the long-haul

Climate change is not irreversible. Whether by design or by running out of supply, we'll eventually dramatically reduce our fossil fuel use. Reduce it enough, and carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere will also start dropping. Maybe a few decades after that, the global average temperature will begin a downward trajectory. Once that happens, most of the climate change impacts on extreme weather will likewise begin tapering off. The whole process is going to take a while.

It will take much longer, though, to reverse sea-level rise. Even under a very aggressive mitigation scenario, most models project sea level in the year 2300 to be 1 to 10 feet above present-day levels. Without aggressive mitigation, the projections are much higher. So, we'll have to deal with higher sea levels no matter what.

Climate change is likely to continue to affect many aspects of hurricanes. In Hurricane Ida, we saw lots of ways that sea-level rise in particular makes hurricanes worse.

Along the Louisiana coast, where Ida made landfall, the combination of local land subsidence and global sea-level rise have combined to produce seas that are rising at the rate of about a third of a foot per

decade, maybe more. In some ways, this makes Louisiana a bellwether of what will happen elsewhere as the inexorable rise of sea level continues. So, what did sea-level rise do to Ida and her impacts?

Most obviously, sea-level rise makes storm surges higher. If the sea level is starting off a few feet higher, then storm surge will automatically be a few feet higher too.

This is a big deal. Coastal infrastructure is designed to withstand a certain amount of storm surge. As a storm surge gets higher, those design limits get exceeded. There's a huge difference in impacts between "withstand" and "not withstand."

Inland from the immediate coast, the impacts are even greater. Higher sea level makes barrier islands that much shallower, reducing the first line of defense for storm surges farther inland. It's like lowering the levees: storm surge can move inland more easily, and the amount of water moving inland is greater. So unless you go in and manually raise the barrier islands, the sea-level rise effect is amplified once you get past the barrier islands and coastal marshes.

If sea level rises slowly enough, the barrier islands can migrate inland, and marshes can continually regenerate



themselves. But accelerating sea-level rise, combined with local subsidence, already appears to be happening too rapidly in Louisiana for the marshes to keep up.

In Louisiana, as elsewhere, not only has the ocean risen and the land sunk, but the natural landforms have been altered. In Katrina, now-dismantled levees concentrated the storm surge until it eventually broke through in New Orleans' Ninth Ward. Meanwhile, canals have been carved through the marshes, often for the sake of easier oil and gas exploration, but with the unintended side effect of allowing saltwater to intrude inland and kill off freshwater marsh plants.

In addition to having the most rapid relative sea-level rise in

the United States, Louisiana also has an exceptionally flat coast. As marshes die back or drown, the ocean expands substantially, bringing the Gulf of Mexico closer to inland cities. This means that any storm like Ida making landfall will survive longer and retain its hurricane-force winds longer, causing damage and taking down power lines. Inland cities are at increased risk of wind damage due to sea-level rise even if they are well above sea level.

Scientists are still teasing out the many ways that climate change is affecting hurricanes. Probably more intense rain. Storms that are probably more likely to become major hurricanes. Maybe an overall increase in the number of major

hurricanes, if the total number of storms doesn't decline much. Possibly decreases in the motion of storms in many areas. Changes in rapid intensification that go along with changes in major hurricanes, since most major hurricanes intensify rapidly. Probably a few other things we haven't even considered.

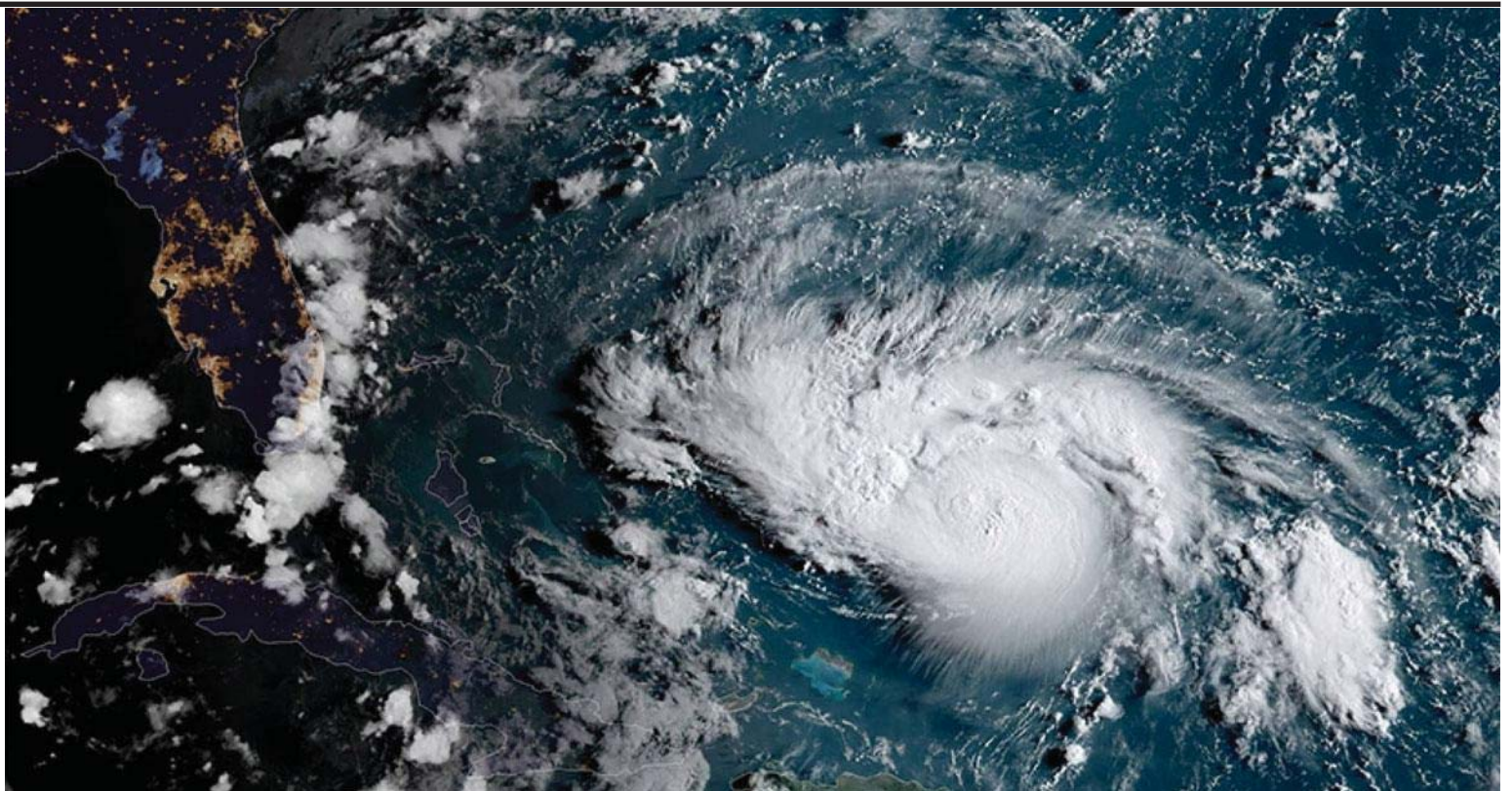
The one that may be most certain, sea-level rise making storm surges worse is also the one that will most likely be the longest-lasting. Long after we've brought carbon dioxide emissions under control, long after global temperatures have started falling, long after rainfall intensity has settled down - the sea will still be rising, and the storms will keep coming.



Although scientists are uncertain whether climate change will lead to an increase in the number of hurricanes, there is more confidence that warmer ocean temperatures and higher sea levels are expected to intensify their intensity and impacts. Stronger hurricanes will be far more costly in terms of damages and deaths without action to make coastal (and inland) areas more resilient.

Hurricanes are subject to a number of climate change-related influences:

Warmer sea surface temperatures could intensify tropical storm wind speeds, potentially delivering more damage if they make landfall. Based on complex modeling, NOAA has suggested that an



# Hurricanes and Climate Change

increase in Category 4 and 5 hurricanes is likely, with hurricane wind speeds increasing by up to 10 percent. Warmer sea temperatures also are causing hurricanes to wetter, with 10-15 percent more precipitation from cyclones projected in a 2 degree C scenario. Recent storms such as Hurricane Harvey in 2017 (dropping over 60 inches in some locations), Florence in 2018 (with over 35 inches) and Imelda in 2019 (44 inches) demonstrate the devastating floods that can be triggered by these high-rain hurricanes.

Sea level rise is likely to make future coastal storms, including hurricanes, more damaging. Globally averaged, sea level is expected to rise by 1-4 feet in low and moderate emissions scenarios during this century, which will amplify coastal storm surge. For example, sea level rise intensified the impact of Hurricane Sandy which caused an estimated \$65 billion in damages in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut in 2012. Much of this damage was related to coastal flooding.

Areas affected by hurricanes are shifting poleward. This is likely associated with expanding tropics due to higher global average temperatures. The changing patterns of tropical storms (a shift northward in the Atlantic) could put much more property and human lives at risk, but much more research is required to build a better understanding of how these

patterns might change.

The connection between climate change and hurricane frequency is less straightforward. It is likely the number of storms will remain the same or even decrease, with the primary increase being of the most extreme storms. For the 21st century, some models project no change or a small reduction in the frequency of hurricanes, while others show an increase in frequency. More recent work shows a trade-off between intensity and frequency — that as warmer oceans bolster hurricane intensity, fewer storms actually form.

A hurricane is a type of tropical cyclone, which is a general term for a low-pressure system with activity like thunder and lightning that develops in the tropics or subtropics. In the Northern Hemisphere, these storms rotate counter-clockwise. In the Southern Hemisphere, they rotate clockwise. Stronger systems are called “hurricanes” or “typhoons,” depending on where they form. Weaker tropical cyclones might be called “tropical depressions” or “tropical storms.”

The National Hurricane Center categorizes Atlantic hurricanes based on wind speed. A storm with winds exceeding 74 mph is a Category 1 hurricane. Storms with winds stronger than 111 mph are considered “major hurricanes” (Category 3 or higher). Wind speed is just one of many factors

that contribute to a hurricane’s impact. Others include its track (the site where the storm makes landfall), size, storm structure, rainfall amount, duration, and the vulnerability of the area it affects.

Frequency and intensity vary from basin to basin. In the North Atlantic Basin, the long-term (1966-2009) average number of tropical storms is about 11 annually, with about six becoming hurricanes. More recently (2000-2014), the average is over 15 tropical storms per year, including about seven hurricanes. This increase in frequency is correlated with the rise in North Atlantic sea surface temperatures, which could be partially related to global warming.

## Threats Posed by Hurricanes

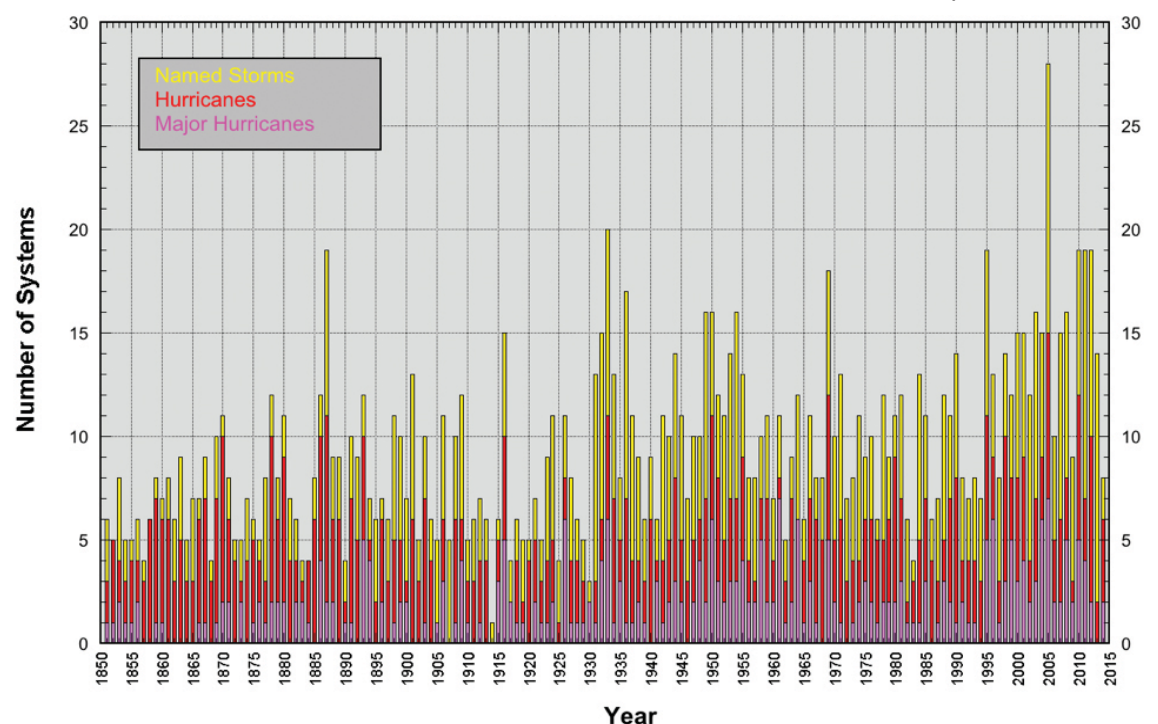
Climate change is adding to the coast and threat of hurricanes.

While there have been extreme storms in the past, recent history reflects the growing expense of hurricanes. Four of the 10 costliest hurricanes on record in the United States occurred in 2017 and 2018. Hurricane Katrina (2005) remains the most expensive hurricane on record costing \$168 billion (2020 dollars).

Find a map of billion-dollar extreme weather events here. The 2017 hurricane season was historic, with Hurricanes Harvey, Maria and Irma costing nearly \$300 billion together (2020 dollars). It is important to note that while stronger hurricanes are more damaging, there are nearly 50 million homes and at least \$1.4 trillion in assets within an eighth of a mile of the coast and a growing amount of property at risk in coastal areas. An important

driver of the increased cost of hurricanes is increasing development in coastal areas. U.S. coastal populations grew by nearly 35 million people between 1970 and 2010. As more development occurs in harm’s way — regardless of climate change — the more likely the damage will grow.

In addition to damages to buildings, hurricanes threaten infrastructure, undermining energy systems, water and sewer systems, transportation, and flood management structures. Stronger hurricanes pose a significant risk to public health and human lives. Hurricane Katrina caused over 1800 deaths, and Hurricane Maria in 2018 caused 2981 deaths mostly in Puerto Rico. Disruptions to water supplies and power systems can create risk for waterborne illness, environmental contaminants, mosquito borne illnesses and cause hospitals to close or affect care for patients.





# Graves Weeping under the Snow



## (A tribute to the Indigenous children who died in Canadian residential schools)

O sweet children under the weeping graves!  
These are not just your graves  
These are the graves of your mother tongue  
Graves of the lullabies that you couldn't listen  
Graves of your mothers' unsung songs  
Your tiny feet dancing in your homes  
They are buried in the the same soil  
The wings and feathers that you used  
To dance like birds  
They too are buried here.

By taking you far away from your homes  
What lessons were they teaching?  
You cried when you saw the big walls devoid of love  
Sitting quietly in the classroom  
Tears flowing over the faces  
Holding heads in your hands  
You remember your homes.  
The backyards from your naive memory  
Were being forgotten daily  
In the falling snows  
Standing quietly and watching tall trees  
You must be remembering your mothers!

How could you know where was your home?  
And how far away you have come  
The home seemed to be hiding behind big trees  
Sometimes it seems to be across the clouds  
In the shadows of the clouds  
The faces of your parents seemed visible  
A far away white cloud looked like grandparents.

Who were those teaching you?  
Sometimes they seemed like teachers  
Sometimes as executioners  
Strange words of our so-called civilized people  
Pierced your hearts  
Your cries reached your homeland far away  
Reaching out to your mothers  
Creating nightmares and darkening the sky  
When you felt homesick  
You may be saying prayers in your mother tongues  
Or your lips freeze and eyes become stones.

Your every innocent game we killed!  
What you considered a playground  
Was actually your graveyard, o children!  
We were killing you word by word  
The decorated wings on your heads and shoulders  
We were plucking out one by one  
Who could have tended to the lashes on your body  
If not mothers?  
Dear children!  
To our hazy eyes

You merely looked like objects.  
From your silently weeping graves  
We have even taken away the stones  
There is a grass now and few trees  
You have become like grass  
You have become like trees  
Now the grass and trees  
Became the stones of your graves.

From your sleeping graves  
The wind blows past  
As if you are howling  
When it rains  
The water pours down  
As if you are crying.

On this earth o children!  
The graves are everywhere  
Some are the graves of mother tongues  
Some are of the buried songs  
Some are of the cultures crying profusely.  
Under our big national flags  
Hidden are the graves of children's ribbons  
In our great history books  
Hidden are the words stolen from your tongues  
Genocide is not just of humans  
It is also of language  
Of culture and civilization  
Of decorated feathers on your heads.  
Schools may also be concentration camps  
Can be like gas chambers  
Any of us at any time  
May become a Nazi  
Our integrity dies very quickly.

O Children! For you and your parents  
The roads became impassable  
The news channels died  
Homes worn-out while waiting for you  
Mothers kept crying while waiting to have  
dinner with you  
Parents have been sitting in your path all their lives  
Yet they could not bring you home  
Every season they frozen and melted like ice.

O Children! Your innocent graves  
Will rise some day  
You will wake up slowly  
To write down our dark deeds on white snow  
The white snow will then melt  
And become tears of humanity.

O innocent children sleeping in weeping graves!  
Please forgive us  
We can't give you the lullabies  
Nor mothers' love you missed  
We can never give you the childhood

Or the folk songs you can sing  
Can't give you the feathers we took from your heads  
Nor the first words that your mothers taught.

Those who survived our culture wars  
Get up and stone the the collapsing buildings  
And the lessons taught in these schools  
For all these have been the devil's work  
Throw some stones at us too  
For we kept on pushing our language  
On the young souls  
Detached from their mother tongue  
We kept loading our heavy religion  
On your innocent heads.

The earth of your graves  
Ate all the evil words we taught  
And all the immoral prayers we made  
Now you are completely divine  
You are as pure as the mother earth  
You are now meeting your homeland  
Meeting your parents.

After killing flower-like children  
We have now lay flowers on your graves  
Some tiny boots and new clothes  
You stayed without them for too long  
While snow continued to fall  
Rain continued to pour  
The leaves kept falling from the trees  
The seasons kept changing  
You have been forced to live in the dark for too long  
We have now lit a few candles for you  
How can we apologize to you?

O Children! We've now become even worse  
We are clearing up forests  
Strangling the Mother Earth  
We are making a lot of bullets  
Building a lot of tanks  
Making deadly bombs  
To kill more children  
And those who aren't even born yet  
The children killed with these weapons  
Won't even find any graves  
Earth scorched by the heat of bombs  
Will become grave stones for them  
And none of us will survive  
To tell what else is buried  
With these innocent children!

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# Gold, Silver prices



## Precious metals witness marginal jump on MCX| Check latest rates

On August 31, 2021, both gold and silver are trading on the higher side of the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). Witnessing a marginal jump, gold futures maturing on October 5, 2021, stand at Rs 47,299 per 10 grams on the MCX. Gold has recorded a hike of 0.25 per cent or Rs 116. On the other hand, silver futures, maturing on December 3, 2021, are trading at Rs 63,776 per kg with a hike of 0.35 per cent or Rs 222.

Yesterday, gold stood at Rs 47,438 on the MCX and silver

recorded a marginal downfall, while trading at Rs 64,085 per kg. The prices of gold and silver stood at Rs 47,164 and Rs 63,587, respectively, on the MCX when the market closed on August 30, 2021.

In India, gold and silver rates largely depend on the international prices and are calculated keeping the latter as bases. Other factors like the USD to INR conversion rate and the supply and demand of gold and silver in MCX trading also play a key role in determining the prices of these precious

metals.

Gold, Silver on international market:

As per Reuters, gold prices were underpinned by a subdued dollar on the global front as investors were eagerly waiting for U.S. non-farm payrolls data, news agency Reuters reported. Meanwhile, the dollar traded on the lower side near two-week lows against a basket of currencies as there was no signal from Fed Chief Jerome Powell in connection with the central bank's tapering timeline. Spot gold ticked a little higher

and rose 0.1 per cent to \$1,812.27 per ounce and U.S. gold futures also saw an upward trend with a hike of 0.2 per cent at \$1,816.00, reports stated. Cleveland Fed President Loretta Mester was quoted by Reuters as saying that the U.S. economy is showing signs of recovery. However, she said that she is still not convinced that the recent inflation readings will be enough to satisfy the goal of price stability which was revamped by the central bank a year ago.

**Bharti Airtel shares jump nearly 5% after board approves Rs 21,000 crore rights issue**



Bharti Airtel Limited's shares jumped nearly 5 per cent on Monday after the telco's approved a plan to raise Rs 21,000 crore by selling stocks to existing shareholders. The move to raise capital is aimed at expanding its network and tackle rising competition in the sector.

Shares of Bharti Airtel ended 4.44 per cent on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) at Rs 620.35. On the National Stock Exchange (NSE), Bharti Airtel's shares closed over 5 per cent higher at Rs 625.

The board has fixed the price of the rights issue at Rs 535 per share. Shareholders who purchase equity as part of the rights issue will have to pay 25 per cent on application and the balance in two more rounds within 36 months.

The payment in the two tranches will be based on the company's requirements, as per stock exchange filings by the telecom firm on Sunday. It may be noted that shareholders will be eligible to purchase one share for every 14 held.

The fundraising is aimed at helping the company boost its balance sheet to invest in 5G technologies and expand its exiting telecom network to compete with market leader Reliance Jio.

It will also help the company repay adjusted gross revenue related liabilities among other dues. The company has so far paid over Rs 18,004 crore of its total Rs 43,000 crore AGR-related dues to the telecom department.

## Petrol, diesel rates unchanged as global oil prices remain volatile.

Fuel prices were unchanged on Tuesday as state-run oil marketing companies (OMCs) decided to keep watch over volatile international crude oil rates. Petrol and diesel prices have not been changed for over a week after a minor reduction in rates.

International crude oil prices fell slightly after damage from Hurricane Ida led to the shutdown of several US refiners. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were down to \$68.88 per barrel, while benchmark Brent crude futures fell to \$73 per barrel.

However, that marginal fall in crude oil prices may not lead to a reduction in domestic fuel rates.



OMCs had reduced rates a few weeks ago after Brent crude futures slipped to \$66 per barrel and any further relief is unlikely

if it stays above \$70. Domestic prices remain elevated as a result.

Petrol price remains steady at Rs 101.49 per litre in Delhi and above Rs 107 per litre in Mumbai. It costs Rs 101.82 per litre in Kolkata and Rs 99.20 for an equal quantity in Chennai. The price of petrol remains

above Rs 100 per litre in many cities despite the recent cut in prices.

Diesel prices also remain high

at Rs 88.92 per litre in the national capital and above Rs 96 per litre in Mumbai. It costs nearly Rs 92 per litre in Kolkata and Rs 93.52 per litre in Chennai. Citizens may have to bear the burden of higher fuel prices for a longer period as OMCs are unlikely to reduce rates in view of higher international crude oil rates.

As the situation stands, only daily revision by OMCs can bring down fuel prices as taxes levied on petrol and diesel are unlikely to be cut anytime in the near future.





# Who are the Panj Piare, and why are they important in Sikhism?

**'Panj Piare'** is not just a group of five baptised people but a concept and tradition founded by 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh.

Former Uttarakhand chief minister Harish Rawat has apologised for comparing Punjab Congress chief Navjot Sidhu and his four advisers to the Panj Piare. On Wednesday, he not only rendered his apology but also promised to do sewa at a gurdwara in his state as a form of penance. Who are the Panj Piara? 'Panj Piare' is not just a group of five baptised people but a concept and tradition founded by 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh established the institution of Panj Piare while founding the Khalsa on the day of Baisakhi in 1699. Addressing a large gathering, he asked for five heads for sacrifice. Five men responded to his call and the Guru baptised them and called them Panj Piare.

Since then, every group of five baptised Sikhs is called Panj Piare and accorded the respect enjoyed by the first five Sikhs.

Who were the first Panj Piare? The Panj Piare were from different castes and states of India. While Bhai Daya Ram hailed from Lahore, Bhai Dharam Rai was from Hastinapur in Uttar Pradesh, Bhai Himmat Rai came from Jagannath in Odisha, Bhai Mohkam Rai from Gujarat and Bhai Sahib Chand was from Bidar, Karnataka.

In return, Guru Gobind Singh made them drink Amrit (sweet water prepared by reciting Gurbani) from one utensil. Then he suffixed Singh with their names and renamed them Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Dharam Singh, Bhai Himmat Singh, Bhai Mohkam Singh and Bhai Sahib Singh.

Apart from defining the religious and social protocol for the Khalsa by dictating it to the Panj Piare, Guru Gobind Singh himself got baptised from them at the same stage to tell the Sikhs that Panj

Piars have higher authority and decision making power than anyone in the community.

The Panj Piare are also seen as a manifestation of the Guru himself.

How did the Guru establish the authority of Panj Piare?

Once, Guru Gobind Singh and his Khalsa army were besieged at Chamkaur by the joint army of Mughal and mountain kings. The Khalsa troops wanted Guru Gobind Singh to leave Chamkaur but he refused. It was then that the Panj Piare ordered the Guru to leave Chamkaur. Guru Gobind Singh did as orders as he was duty bound to follow their command like other Sikhs.

This event is behind the deep-rooted respect accorded to Panj Piare. They have taken many important decisions throughout Sikh history.

Who can become a Panj Piara? Any baptised Sikh can become

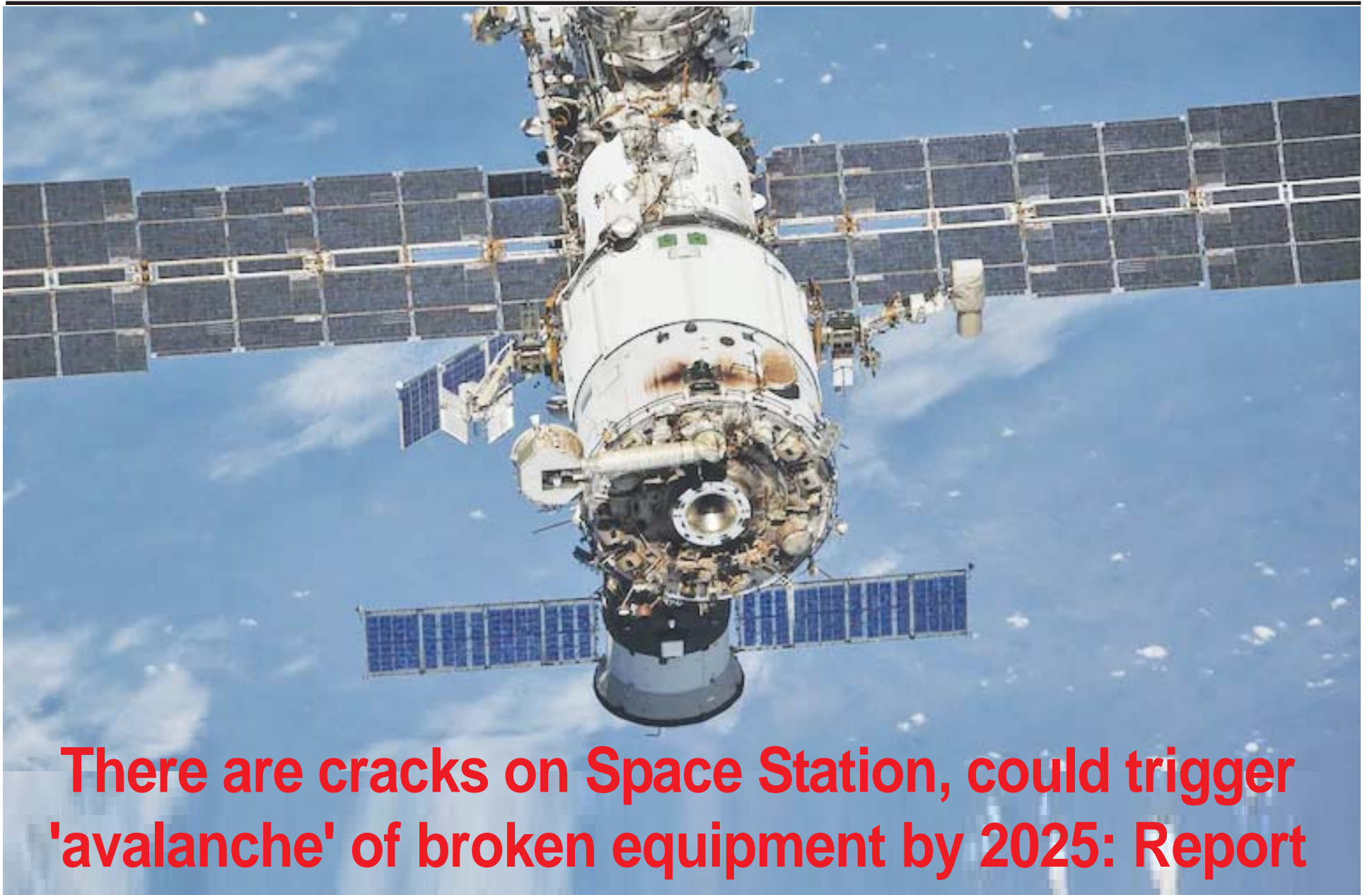
a Panj Piare. The unanimous decision taken by Panj Piare has to be followed by everyone in the community. Akal Takht Jathedar also can't take any decision unilaterally and every diktat from the Akal Takht has to be signed by all the five Jathedars of the five Takhts (Temporal seats) or their representatives.

There was huge controversy when the SGPC-appointed Panj Piare had summoned then Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh over the issue of pardon granted to Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim in 2015. The SGPC was in a fix and it used its powers to sack the Panj Piars from the job. However, mishandling of this crisis by the SGPC reflected poorly on the Shiromani Akali Dal-Badal, and added to the long list of allegations, which the party was already facing for allegedly demeaning Sikh institutions,

traditions and concepts. SAD could secure only 15 seats in the following elections in 2017.

Then Punjab cabinet minister Bikram Singh Majithia, while campaigning for the Bhartiya Janta party candidate Arun Jaitley in the 2014 parliament elections, had slightly changed the lines from the Sikh holy text during a speech in Amritsar. This angered the clergy and Majithia had to apologise and face the threat of 'excommunication' from the Akal Takht. There are many such incidents where even a slight misinterpretation of the sacred Sikh traditions and holy text have stoked a controversy often leading to the clergy meting out a symbolic punishment to the wrongdoer. The Sikh clergy is very wary of people belittling its traditions or the holy text in any way. Hence, comparisons made in jest are also not taken kindly.





## There are cracks on Space Station, could trigger 'avalanche' of broken equipment by 2025: Report

***Russian space agency Roscosmos is also looking into other problems that might have crept into the space station over time, especially following the mishap that happened on July 30.***

Just a month after the International Space Station suffered a major mishap, the ageing outpost is showing signs of degradation faster than expected. Russian cosmonauts have now discovered cracks in one of the segments of the flying laboratory that could widen in the coming months. Officials had already hinted that most of the equipment on the space station is starting to age and have warned there could be an "avalanche" of broken equipment after 2025.

"Superficial fissures have been found in some places on the Zarya module. This is bad and suggests that the fissures will begin to spread over time," Vladimir Solovyov, chief engineer of rocket and space corporation Energia, told RIA news agency.

The Russian space agency ROSCOSMOS is also looking into other problems that might have crept into the space station over time especially following the mishap that happened on July 30. Russia's space agency also reported last month a drop in pressure in the Zvezda service module, which provides living quarters for crew members on the ISS, that was caused by an air leak.

An ageing space station

The Space Station, a scientific laboratory



hovering over 200 miles above Earth is a joint project between the US, Europe and Russia and holds two modules that house both US astronauts and Russian cosmonauts. The station has been a source of research and experiments in microgravity for over two decades.

While the ISS reaches its operational age, Nasa has been pushing for extending its services till 2030, which mostly depends on continuous cooperation from Moscow. The Russian space agency, Roscosmos, has said it will remain part of the ISS until 2024 and that it is open to extending its participation beyond then. The space station has remained in service for over two decades now and has started showing

signs of weathering. Astronauts will soon conduct a series of spacewalks to boost the power capacity on the station whose solar panels have reached their operational life. Mishap on Space Station The latest statement comes in the backdrop of an incident on July 30 when the ISS was thrown briefly out of control as jet thrusters of a newly arrived Russian research module inadvertently fired a few hours after it was docked to the orbiting outpost.

The module's jets inexplicably restarted, causing the entire station to pitch out of its normal flight position some 250 miles above the Earth, leading the mission's flight director to declare a "spacecraft

emergency," US space agency officials said. An unexpected drift in the station's orientation was first detected by automated ground sensors, followed 15 minutes later by a "loss of attitude control" that lasted a little over 45 minutes, according to Joel Montalbano, manager of NASA's space station program.

While Sergei Krikalev, the director of crewed space programs at the Russian space corporation Roscosmos, emphasized that the incident did not inflict any observable damage to the space station, he said that experts would need to study its potential implications.

China offers an alternative

Amid reports of damage onboard the station, China is all set to offer an alternative to the flying laboratory with its Tiangong space station which is under construction in microgravity. China recently launched its first crewed mission to its space station to ready the station. Chinese astronauts are working to prepare the space station for future missions and Beijing is already coordinating with Moscow on a lunar base to be established on the Moon. Reports of damage on the ISS will be seen as a sign of opportunity by Beijing which has already invited global collaboration on its under-construction laboratory in space.



# Zika virus: Is the disease fatal?

## Here's everything you need to know about the virus

Since there is no vaccine available to cure zika virus, questions related to its deaths are common. Here's everything you need to know about the virus and its fatality rate in severe cases.

Several countries, including Indian states such as Maharashtra and Kerala, have been experiencing zika virus outbreaks. Since there is no vaccine or medicine available for zika virus, one must take all the necessary precautions, such as wearing fully covered clothes and using mosquito repellents to stop the spread of the disease.

According to reports, the National Institute of Health is testing a vaccine against zika in humans. Due to the unavailability of vaccines, several questions have been raised related to risk factors and death.

Although zika virus spreads through the bite of the infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, cases of sexual transmission, blood



transfusion, laboratory exposure have also come to the fore. Most of the symptoms of the virus are similar to that of flu, but a majority of people show no symptoms at all.

Generally, symptoms can appear

between three days to two weeks following the infection and can last for several days. It is to be noted that zika is only one of those viruses known to spread through sexual contact.

Can zika virus cause death?

-According to Centers for Disease Controls and Prevention(CDC), deaths are uncommon in zika. The symptoms of zika virus are generally mild and the infected person needs hospitalisation in

severe cases.

-In recent times, there has been an increase in the number of zika virus infections in pregnant women in countries where it is spreading. -In some cases, the virus can cause birth defects in babies born to some pregnant women and newborns are born with undeveloped heads and brain damage.

-The mosquito-borne disease is also linked to a rare condition called Guillain Barre Syndrome in which nerves are attacked by the immune system. In Brazil, the estimated case fatality is around 8.3 per cent, according to CDC.

-In severe cases, zika virus can lead to fatal brain damage in babies and can also result in miscarriage or stillbirth in pregnant women.

-There is enough evidence to show that Zika virus can cause infections during pregnancy, genetic problems and exposure to toxic substances.

# IMF warns nations against adopting crypto assets as legal currency. Here's why

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned countries against adopting cryptocurrency assets as national currency. It said the adoption of cryptocurrency assets such as Bitcoin can impact a nation's macroeconomic stability.

The IMF's warning comes at a time when central American nation El Salvador is getting ready to officially adopt Bitcoin, the world's most popular cryptocurrency, as legal tender from September 7.

It may be noted that the country is witnessing widespread protests against the adoption of Bitcoin as an official currency. In June, El Salvador became the first country in the world to pass a law to award a legal status tender to Bitcoin.

However, IMF was not happy with the nation's plan and had



issued a warning shortly after the legislation was passed.

In a tweet on Sunday, IMF said, "Privately issued crypto-assets like bitcoin come with substantial risks. Making them equivalent to a national currency

is an inadvisable shortcut."

IMF also shared a blog along with the tweet. In the blog titled 'Crypto assets as National Currency? A Step Too Far', IMF highlighted how risky it is for nations to adopt virtual coins as

legal tender. "Some countries may be tempted by a shortcut: adopting crypto-assets as national currencies. Many are indeed secure, easy to access, and cheap to transact. We believe, however, that in most

cases risks and costs outweigh potential benefits," IMF said.

**IMF EXPLAINS CRYPTO RISKS**

The IMF said households and businesses would have little or no incentive to save in a "parallel" crypto asset like Bitcoin even if it was awarded a legal tender status. "Their value is just too volatile and unrelated to the real economy," IMF said.

It also said that having a parallel crypto-asset currency would lead to confusion among people.

"Similarly, government revenues would be exposed to exchange rate risk if taxes were quoted in advance in a crypto asset while expenditures remained mostly in the local currency, or vice versa," IMF said.





# Explained:

## Is India's economy gaining immunity against Covid-19?

India's economy has been recovering rapidly after two waves of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic. The country's economy is also poised to grow at the world's fastest rate. But has it gained immunity against Covid-induced disruptions? Here is all you need to know.

India's economy is on track to rebound sharply after two waves of the Covid-19 pandemic dampened growth during all four quarters of FY21. Official gross domestic product (GDP) data for the first quarter of FY22 will show that the Indian economy grew at a record pace.

A majority of financial analysts predict GDP growth at 18-20 per cent in the June quarter and remain optimistic about economic recovery in upcoming quarters as the second wave fades and more Indians get vaccinated against the deadly virus.

India could even pull off the world's fastest growth this year if it successfully dodges another wave of the pandemic. As the situation stands, India remains well poised to achieve the target as high-frequency economic indicators look promising.

### IS INDIA'S ECONOMY IMMUNE TO FUTURE COVID DISRUPTIONS?

India's economic growth trajectory remains positive at the moment. Crucial economic segments such as manufacturing, services, industrial output, exports and demand.

Activity in many sectors including retail, automobile, agriculture and construction have also gained momentum; only a few contact-heavy sectors such as transport, tourism and hospitality remain weak.

There are many reasons to believe that the Indian economy is gradually growing resilient against disruptions caused by the pandemic. For instance, the economic impact of the second Covid wave in 2021 was far less than the devastation witnessed during 2020 when a strict lockdown was imposed across the country. Though economic recovery momentum suffered due to the second wave, the fact that restrictions were less severe helped prevent a chaotic growth contraction. Allowing greater activity across crucial

sectors limited economic damage despite job losses and a fall in overall industrial output. To put it simply, the second wave did impact India's economy, but it was much lesser in comparison to the first wave. The lessons from the first wave, therefore, helped prevent a major disruption during the second wave.

Higher rate of vaccinations, rapid resumption in manufacturing activity and a milder hit on the all-important services sector are some other reasons that kept the economy afloat during the second wave. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) low-interest regime and measures taken by the government also helped minimise damage.

It would be safe to say that the Indian economy has grown resilient against the pandemic-induced growth disruptions, but far from being completely immune to long-term hurdles - some that are hurting global growth.

### INTERESTING RECOVERY TREND

In a situation where India faces another Covid wave, the economy may suffer briefly due

to disruptions before rebounding strongly - a trend seen after both Covid waves in India. During both waves, a sharp rebound in demand was observed after the situation was brought under control.

The economy collapsed after two consecutive quarters of sharp contractions - 24.4 per cent in Q1FY21 and 7.5 per cent in Q2FY21 - in the previous financial year.

But as soon as the government started lifting restrictions, the economy bounced back strongly as demand rose during the all-important festive season. The economy grew marginally in the third quarter and 1.6 per cent in the fourth quarter.

The economy recovered steadily for some time before being hit by a deadlier Covid-19 wave in April. Although the second wave dented growth momentum, the impact was lower as a nationwide lockdown was avoided.

Many economists believe the economic damage during the second wave was less than previously expected and that a rapid recovery seems to be underway after the situation

came under control.

Although economic recovery momentum has improved rapidly, economists say that the expected GDP growth of 18-20 per cent in the first quarter of 2021-22 is deceptive. This is because the GDP growth percentage first the June quarter will be calculated on the basis of a 24.4 per cent contraction in the same period last year.

It may be noted that no official data is released for tracking for sequential or Q-o-Q growth in India. As per Bloomberg economists, the economy slumped 12 per cent in the June quarter compared to the growth in the previous quarter.

Despite the anomaly in GDP figures due to the weak base effect, there are many reasons to believe that India's growth outlook is recovering fast and in line with the RBI's FY22 annual growth forecast. As far as immunity against Covid is concerned, it would be safe to say that the economy won't face any major disruption similar to the first wave.





## Birds of prey face global decline from habitat loss, poisons

### The biggest threats to these birds are habitat loss, climate change and toxic substance.

Despite a few high-profile conservation success stories like the dramatic comeback of bald eagle populations in North America birds of prey are in decline worldwide.

A new analysis of data from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and BirdLife International found that 30 per cent of 557 raptor species worldwide are considered near threatened, vulnerable or endangered or critically endangered. Eighteen species are critically endangered, including the Philippine eagle, the hooded vulture and the Annobon scops owl, the researchers found.

Other species are in danger of becoming locally extinct in specific regions, meaning they may no longer play critical roles as top predators in those ecosystems, said Gerardo Ceballos, a bird scientist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and co-author of the study published Monday in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"The golden eagle is the national bird of Mexico, but we have very few golden eagles left in Mexico," he said. A 2016 census estimated only about 100 breeding pairs remain in the country.

Harpy eagles were once widespread throughout southern Mexico and Central and South America, but tree cutting and burning has dramatically shrunk their

range.

Of threatened birds of prey that are active mostly during the day - including most hawks, eagles and vultures - 54 per cent were falling in population, the study found. The same was true for 47 per cent of threatened nocturnal raptors, such as owls.

That means "the factors causing the decline have not been remedied" and those species need immediate attention, said Jeff Johnson, a biologist at the University of North Texas, who was not involved in the study. Globally, the biggest threats to these birds are habitat loss, climate change and toxic substances, said Evan Buechley, a research associate at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and a scientist at nonprofit HawkWatch International who was not involved in the study. The insecticide DDT thinned egg shells and decimated bald eagle populations in North America, leading to its ban in the U.S. in 1972. But Buechley said other threats remain, including rodent pesticides and the lead in hunters' bullets and shot pellets. Many raptors feed on rodents and dead animals.

The Andean condor is declining due to exposure to pesticides, lead and other toxic substances, said Sergio Lambertucci, a biologist at the National University of Comahue in Argentina.

Widespread use of an anti-inflammatory drug in livestock led to the rapid decline of vultures in South Asia. The birds died after eating carcasses, shrinking the population of some species by 95 per cent in recent decades.

In East Asia, many raptor species are long-distance migrants: They breed in northern China, Mongolia or Russia and travel down the eastern coast of China to spend summers in Southeast Asia or India.

"Certain areas of the coast will see 30 to 40 species during peak migration," said Yang Liu, an ecologist at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou, who was not involved in the study.

But eastern China is also the most populous and urban part of the country, with steep development pressures. "Sites that are bottlenecks for migration, with thousands of birds passing through, are important to protect," he said.

Of 4,200 sites identified by conservation groups as critical for raptor species globally, most "are unprotected or only partly covered by protected areas," said Stuart Butchart, chief scientist at BirdLife International in the United Kingdom.

A 2018 study in the journal Biological Conservation found that 52 per cent of all raptor species worldwide are decreasing in population.

## Harry Potter book-sized satellite begins detecting solar flares that threaten Earth



A satellite, the size of two Harry Potter paperback books, has started detecting X-ray pulses produced by solar flares. The CubeSat produced the first solar X-ray spectrum just over a week after its launch onboard a Vega rocket.

The CubeSat is being operated by the European Space Agency (ESA) which said that "We are very happy to have acquired our first telemetry from the instrument, showing it is in excellent health."

The satellite will detect the explosive releases of magnetic energy seen as enormous flashes on the Sun's surface. Studying solar flares has become extremely critical seeing a new rush by countries in the modern space race to the Moon and beyond. The enormous flashes on the Sun's surface give rise to space weather, threatening satellites and terrestrial power and communications networks, even aircraft on polar flights.

What is Sunstorm?

Sunstorm is a small satellite developed by ISAWARE, Aboa Space Research Oy, Oxford Instruments Technologies and Talvioja Consulting and hosts a CubeSat manufactured by Finland's Reaktor Space Lab. CubeSats are miniaturised satellites based on standardised 10 cm boxes.

Once demonstrated in space, a follow-on version of the instrument will be flown on ESA's Lagrange operational space weather monitoring mission, ESA had said in a statement before the satellite was launched. "It is important to note that this is just a preliminary look for now, but its stability and data quality are very promising," Juhani Huovelin, Chairman of ISAWARE said in a release.



# Hurricane Ida hits Gulf Coast:

These are the  
most intense  
storms to hit the  
United States

The US Gulf Coast braced on Sunday for what could be one of the strongest storms to hit the continental United States in years. [read more](#)

As of Sunday morning, the National Hurricane Center reported Hurricane Ida packed winds topping 150 miles per hour (240 km per hour), with minimum pressure recorded at 933 millibars (mb), and could gather more strength, forecasters said. (The lower the minimum pressure, the more intense the hurricane) The following are six of the most powerful hurricanes to make landfall on the mainland United States based on minimum

pressure:

Florida Keys Labor Day hurricane, 1935, 892 mb

The hurricane struck the Florida Keys as a Category 5, the highest ranking possible on the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale. It generated wind speeds of up to 200 miles per hour (322 km per hour) and killed more than 200 World War One veterans who were in the Keys to build a highway. After ravaging the Keys, the storm moved north off the western coast of Florida before turning inland. In all, more than 400 people died in Florida. Hurricane Camille, 1969, 900 mb Camille struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast as a Category 5

hurricane, bringing with it devastating storm tides and strong winds that demolished buildings and destroyed orchards. More than 200 people were killed.

Hurricane Michael, 2018, 919 mb

In October of 2018, Michael was the third most intense hurricane to make landfall on the continent, hitting the Florida Panhandle, with its minimum pressure recorded at 919 millibars (mb). Michael was a Category 5 hurricane at landfall, with sustained winds of 160 miles per hour (257 km per hour).

Hurricane Katrina, 2005, 920 mb The hurricane made a direct hit on New Orleans as a Category 3

storm, causing levees and flood walls to fail in dozens of places. Most of New Orleans was flooded, and some people who were stranded in their homes climbed to their roof to await rescue. About 1,800 people died, according to the National Weather Service. Most victims were in Louisiana, but neighboring Mississippi also was hard hit. Katrina caused an estimated \$108 billion in damage, making it the costliest hurricane ever to strike the United States.

Hurricane Andrew, 1992, 922 mb Andrew struck South Miami-Dade County in Florida and caused an estimated \$26 billion

in damage. That ranked as the most expensive storm in U.S. history until Hurricane Katrina inundated New Orleans and pummeled other parts of the U.S. South in 2005. More than a dozen people were directly killed by the storm in Florida, with others dying of indirect causes.

The Indianola, Texas hurricane, 1886, 925 mb

The hurricane destroyed the Texas town of Indianola, which at the time was vying with Galveston to become the state's main port. Several dozen people were killed in the storm, which also ended a catastrophic drought in the region.

## Wrap up cool: Blankets help stave off glacier melt on Swiss ski pistes

In one of Switzerland's most popular Alpine destinations, resort staff have been working over the summer months to limit the impact of warming global temperatures on its glacial slopes - by blanketing the ice to block the sun.

The 3,238-metre (10,623-ft) Mount Titlis has seen large swathes of ice disappear from its glacier over recent decades. Within the next half century, all of it is expected to melt. "We lay the fleece over the glacier like a natural protective shield," Gian Darms, who

manages snow conditions and piste security for cable car operator Titlis Bergbahnen, told Reuters.

Declining snow cover as a result of climate change poses an existential threat to ski resorts throughout Europe. A glacier can provide some protection, preserving piles of snow year-round that can even be deployed on barer ski pistes elsewhere on the slopes.

But the Swiss government has said 90% of its remaining 1,500 glaciers will be gone by the end of the century if nothing is done to cut greenhouse gas

emissions.

Darms said Titlis Bergbahnen has had to continually increase the size of the cover it lays on the glacier in recent years to preserve what is left. A handful of employees work over five-to-six weeks to cover parts of the glacier with a protective polyester fleecing, which helps stave off summer melting and preserve more of the snow that fell in the previous winter. They now cover some 100,000 square metres, or roughly the size of fourteen football fields, with the reflective fleece, which helps radiate the sun's energy



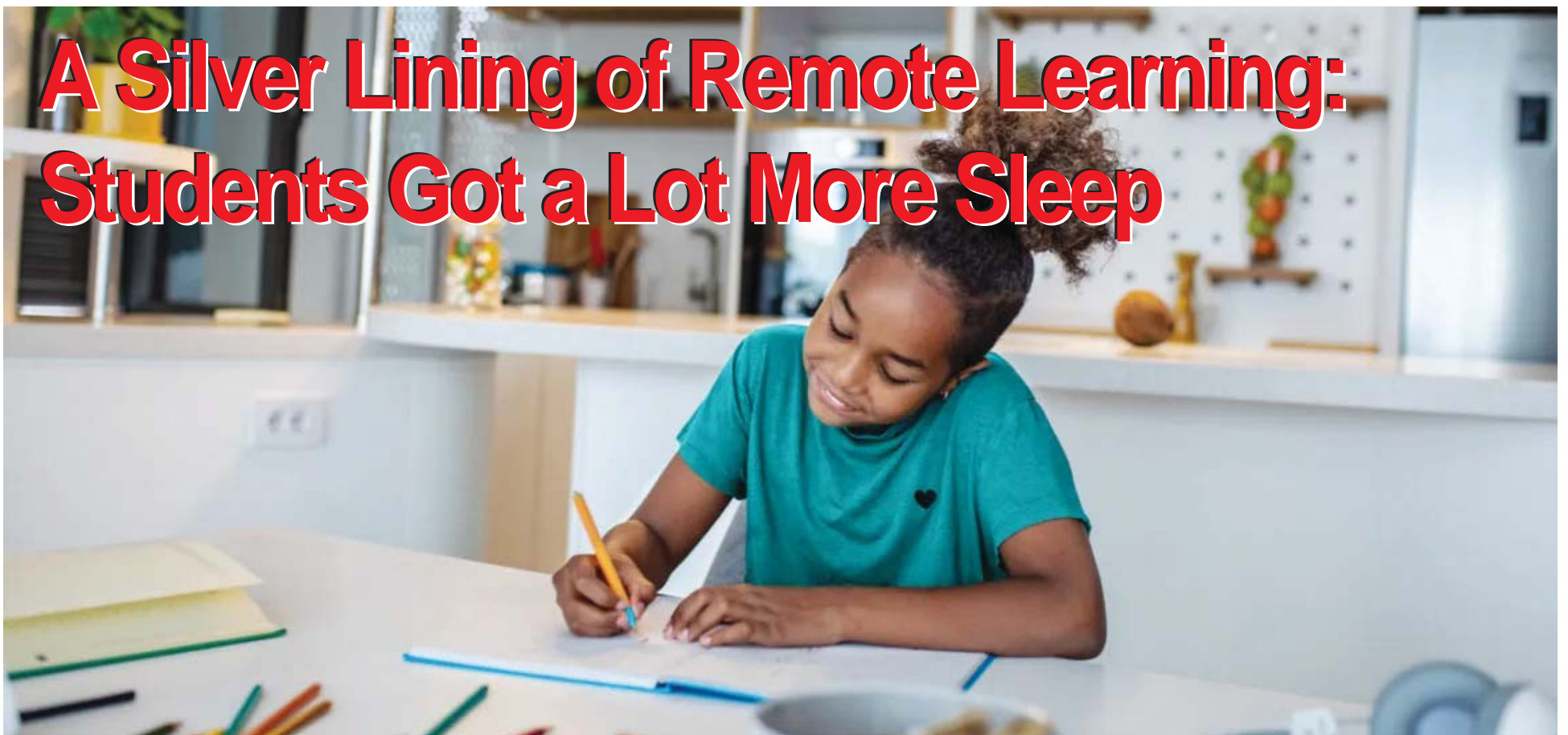
back into the atmosphere, before spending weeks peeling it back off again.

Collected snow is then used to help fill glacial cracks that

otherwise might open on the resort's ski pistes, while also helping to keep in place the lift supports that are fixed into the ice.



# A Silver Lining of Remote Learning: Students Got a Lot More Sleep



When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, schools began to change the way children were educated in an attempt to limit social interactions and slow the spread of the virus. Methods varied across the country, ranging from continued in-person instruction to coursework being conducted entirely online. Many schools also used hybrid instruction, with a combination of on-campus and online teaching. With these changes in teaching, there also came a great deal of variation in class schedules. Some students continued to have planned interactions with their teachers, while others were able to create their own study times. According to a new study in the

journal *Sleep*, one result of this new way of conducting school was that students who were engaged in remote learning got a lot more sleep. In fact, those who were doing their schooling online without live classes or scheduled teacher interactions woke up later and got the most sleep, the study authors said. On the other hand, those who attended in-person classes woke the earliest and got the least sleep. Later school start times linked to more sufficient sleep. To study the relationship between schooling patterns and sleep, the researchers recruited students in grades 6 to 12 through social media between October 14 and

November 26, 2020.

The study participants were placed into one of three groups: in-person, online/synchronous (live classes and teacher interactions), or online/asynchronous (online with no live classes or teacher interactions). In total, 5,245 children participated. With in-person instruction, 20.4 percent of middle schoolers and 37.2 percent of high schoolers reported getting enough sleep. Among those taking synchronous online instruction, 38.7 percent of middle schoolers and 56.9 percent of high schoolers got sufficient sleep. However, those students who did asynchronous online classes fared the best. Over 62 percent of

middle school students and more than 81 percent of high school students said they got enough sleep.

Later school start times were found to be an important factor in whether students got more sleep. Also, even when students had the same start time, students doing online learning got more sleep than in-person learners. For middle school students, a start time of 8:30 to 9:00 a.m. resulted in most children getting adequate sleep.

For high school students, a start time of 8:00 to 8:29 a.m. or later led to more students getting enough sleep. Further, with in-person instruction, a start time of 9:00 a.m. was necessary for 50 percent of students to get

sufficient sleep.

Early start times not conducive to good sleep in teens

The lead author of the study, Lisa J. Meltzer, PhD, said that sleep affects every aspect of children's health and well-being.

"When children and adolescents don't get enough sleep," she said, "we see negative outcomes in terms of physical health (e.g., accidents/injuries, hypertension, obesity) and mental health (e.g., negative mood, increased behavior problems).

"In addition, when students don't get enough sleep, they are more likely to have issues with paying attention, short-term memory, processing new information, and getting their homework done." However, Meltzer said that the early start times that schools generally set are not always the best for children.

She explained that, during puberty, our internal clock is naturally delayed by 1 to 2 hours. This means that adolescents can't fall asleep early, and they need later waking times.

When school start times are too early, this significantly restricts the window of sleep opportunity, said Meltzer, so teens don't get enough sleep.

What is the best start time for schools?

Meltzer said she supports the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics to start school days no earlier than 8:30 a.m. for middle and high school students. This recommendation is also backed by many other major medical and educational groups, she said.

## Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine Gets Full FDA Approval: What to Know

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted full approval to Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine, making it the first vaccine of its kind to reach this regulatory milestone in the United States.

This replaces the emergency use authorization (EUA) that the agency issued last December.

The full approval is for use of the two-dose vaccine to prevent COVID-19 in people 16 years and older. The vaccine will be marketed with the brand name Comirnaty.

The vaccine is still available for 12- to 15-year-olds and as a third dose for certain people with weakened immune systems through the existing emergency approval. Trusted Source.

"While this and other vaccines have met the FDA's rigorous, scientific standards for emergency use authorization, as the first



FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccine, the public can be very confident that this vaccine meets the high standards for safety, effectiveness, and manufacturing quality the FDA requires of an approved product," Acting FDA Commissioner Dr. Janet Woodcock said in a statement. Trusted Source.

Full approval may boost vaccination rates. For the millions of Americans who have already received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine under the EUA, the FDA's full

approval doesn't change much.

But experts hope that full approval will nudge some people who are hesitant to roll up their sleeves.

According to a June poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 31 percent of unvaccinated adults said they would be more likely to get a COVID-19 vaccine if it received full approval from the FDA.

"In my clinic, I had patients express they wanted to wait until full FDA approval before getting vaccinated, and I am sure this is the case for many across the nation," Dr. Natasha Bhuyan, a family physician in Phoenix, told Healthline. "With this approval, we will hopefully see a further boost in vaccinations, especially in areas where vaccination rates are low, and finally, get communities across the nation closer to reaching herd immunity."



# 5 benefits of apple cider vinegar (and a few duds), according to experts

Apple cider vinegar is one of the most popular natural health products around, with claims that it can do almost anything, including sanitizing toothbrushes, curing diabetes and whittling waistlines.

What are the real benefits of apple cider vinegar, according to science? CNN asked seven experts and looked at dozens of studies to bring you the facts.

Here are five ways apple cider (or any vinegar) can help your health -- plus a few popular misconceptions that didn't pass muster.

## 1. It can lower blood sugar

What's the most popular use for apple cider vinegar? If a simple internet search is any measure, it involves diabetes.

Registered dietitian Carol Johnston has been studying the effects of acetic acid, the main component of vinegar, on diabetic blood glucose levels, since 2004.

No vinegar, including apple cider, has been shown in studies to significantly alter or prevent diabetes, said Johnston, a professor of nutrition and an associate dean in the College of Health Solutions at Arizona State University.

"If I was to show that vinegar slows progression to diabetes, then I would need hundreds of people and millions of dollars to do the studies, because diabetes has a lot of causes, including genetics," Johnston said.

RELATED: 5 ways to cut sugar from your life

But studies do show acetic acid can be used as one tool in helping people lower blood sugar. A 2019 randomized clinical trial found "a 10 point decrease in fasting glucose concentrations," Johnston said.

"They used two 'spoons' of vinegar in a glass of water twice a day (with the lunch and dinner meals)." In Johnston's research, the people who benefited most from the use of vinegar were insulin-resistant, a condition called prediabetes.

"In those with prediabetes, it was too good to be true," she said. "It fell a good bit and stayed that way. It may be this is the group that could benefit the most."

It's not just apple cider -- the antiglycemic response can be induced by any sort of vinegar: red and white wine vinegars, pomegranate vinegar or even white distilled vinegar.

But, it only worked in the presence of a starch, she stressed.

"Basically, what acetic acid is doing is blocking the absorption of starch," Johnston said. "If my study subjects eat a starch and add vinegar, blood glucose will go down. But if they drink sugar water and add vinegar, nothing happens. So if you're having bacon and eggs, don't bother. It only helps if you are consuming a

starch."

If you choose to use apple cider vinegar, be sure to tell your doctor, said registered dietitian and CNN contributor Lisa Drayer.

"If you're taking a diabetes drug, the vinegar could amplify the effects of your

meds

she warned, "and your doctor might want to adjust your dosage."

## 2. It can help -- a bit -- with weight loss

Weight loss, or dieting, is another popular use for apple cider vinegar, and there is some evidence that it can help.

The most cited study was done with 175 heavy but otherwise healthy Japanese subjects. The 12-week treatment produced lower body weight, body mass index, visceral fat, waist measurements and triglyceride levels. Sounds great, right?

"People didn't really lose that much weight," Drayer said.

"Only 2 to 4 pounds in three months over a placebo. That's only a third of a pound a week."

Johnston agreed the study showed "a very, very modest weight loss. In fact, I would say most people who are on a diet for 12 weeks and only lose a couple of pounds aren't going to be very happy."

If you are using apple cider or other vinegars as one part of an overall plan, combining it with a healthy diet, portion control and exercise, it might help, Drayer said. She suggested using balsamic vinegar on salads, in a 4:1 ratio with oil, or adding it to sauces for poultry and fish.

"If you were doing all the other things to lose weight, it might give you a slight edge. Also, if you're drinking it in water, that's good, as water makes you feel full," Drayer said.

"Sometimes, people get really excited to try something new, and then their other behaviors change, too," she added. "If this helps people

be more careful overall, that's a good thing."

But be careful. A paper published last year by Johnston found vinegar can erode tooth enamel. If you do take vinegar for blood sugar, "this stresses the importance of taking the vinegar in a diluted form and with a meal to minimize this effect," Johnston said, adding that "drinking through a straw might even be better!"

## 3. It's a food preservative

Used for centuries to preserve food items such as pickles and pig's feet, vinegar is now becoming popular as a natural preservative in processed meat and poultry items as well.

How to get started on a Mediterranean diet  
Most home pickling uses 5% distilled white vinegar because it doesn't affect the color of the vegetables or fruits, but apple cider vinegar is a popular choice because of its mellow, fruity flavor. Do know, however, that it will turn most fruits and veggies dark.

Another popular use for apple cider and other vinegars is as a food wash to reduce bacteria or viruses on the surface of fruits and vegetables. Studies have had varying results, often depending on the type of fruit or vegetable and the amount of time spent in the vinegar solution.

Canada's National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health says vinegars "may damage the organoleptic properties of produce," or how they taste and smell, and has "limited antimicrobial efficacy."

## 4. It helps mosquito and bug bites

The internet got this right: Apple cider vinegar is good to ease the sting or itch of bug bites.

"I do love it for bites, especially mosquito bites," said dermatologist Dr. Marie Jhin, a spokesperson for the American Academy of Dermatology.

"It's a very underutilized home remedy. If you have a lot of bites, put two cups in a full tub of water and soak. It will help with itching," she said.

The internet also touts apple cider vinegar as a treatment for skin infections and acne, a way to fight lice and dandruff, as a natural wart remover or an anti-aging treatment.

"It will dry out a pimple, but it's not an anti-aging method," Jhin said. "I wouldn't recommend it. We have much more effective and safe methods today than this."

RELATED: Apple cider vinegar helps blood sugar and body fat, studies say

While it can help with sunburn, there are many other good remedies so "we don't usually suggest that to patients," Jhin said. Don't turn to it to get rid of head lice or warts, either. One study found vinegar to be the least effective natural method to eliminate lice, and as for warts, they "are caused by a virus, so there's no cure," Jhin explained.





# When Priyanka Chopra stayed up all night to defend India's honour *'I got an A'*



Priyanka Chopra Jonas has been making India proud with her achievements abroad. It wouldn't be wrong to tag her as the 'ambassador' of the country. In fact, the actor herself admits that she has "always felt like I am an ambassador for India," adding that she intends to do this "as long as I can." For her, the journey of making India proud or representing India started quite early. When she was in the ninth grade at a school in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Priyanka said the kids would ask "dumb questions" about India.

In a conversation with Vogue India, Priyanka said the kids in her class would ask questions like "'Do you ride elephants and cows to school?'" She said, "They couldn't believe that we had cars. I was so mad. I had a project coming up for

my final grade and I went home and stayed up all night. I printed out images of modern India: of Mumbai, technology, and all of the cool stuff we have. I remember I got an A on that presentation."

The actor is juggling between different projects. She recently shot for Russo Brothers' Citadel. But unlike before, this time, she sure is struggling to balance her work with her personal life. "Distance sucks," she groaned as she spoke about her husband Nick Jonas. "Not being able to fly back and forth to see each other the way we used to makes it hard. Wherever you go, you quarantine, so it's difficult to schedule," she said. Giving a sneak-peek into the time they spent during the lockdown, PeeCee shared, "We moved into our new house, had

time to pick cushions and decide what our rug was going to be like, and adopted a dog, Panda. We always have family or friends over. That's the kind of home I was raised in and that's how Nick is as well."

Apart from Citadel, the 39-year-old has romantic drama Text For You, The Matrix 4 and the recently announced Bollywood film Jee Le Zaraa in her kitty. While it looks that she has her career life all sorted and charted out, for Priyanka, she tags herself as a "gambling kind of girl."

"I don't have everything figured out. I take risks and I enjoy them. I'm constantly spinning 25 plates in the air. That's not 'figured out', it's playing roulette. I guess I'm just a gambling kind of girl," the actor concluded.

## Vicky Kaushal and Sara Ali Khan-starrer Ashwatthama put on hold?



Vicky Kaushal and Sara Ali Khan's ambitious film, The Immortal Ashwatthama, has been put on hold. Reports claim that the film's shooting has been stopped due to budget constraints. The film was helmed by Uri director, Aditya Dhar, and produced by Ronnie Screwvala's RSVP Films.

**ASHWATTHAMA ON HOLD?**

Earlier, Vicky had shared a picture where he can be seen

preparing for The Immortal Ashwatthama with Aditya Dhar. Now, many reports have surfaced claiming that the film has been put on hold as its budget has crossed Rs 300 crore. According to Pinkvilla, Ronnie Screwvala gave a statement confirming the news. His statement read, "In the last draft of the script, the ambition of the movie and the budget did not match and the overall uncertainty fueled by COVID, did

not help. So all of us Aditya (Dhar), Vicky (Kaushal) and I decided that we need to put this back for another six to nine months. Sara (Ali Khan, the leading lady), also agreed. We will have to work more on the budget and circle back when things look better overall for the magnum opus which Ashwatthama is being planned as." Sources told the website that the big budget had put too much

pressure on the film to perform. The source said, "The film's team started the pre-production work and also discussions with multiple visual effect studios from the West to transport the vision to spectacle. As time passed by, the makers realised that the budget put too much pressure on the film to deliver at the box office.

The estimated budget, even



# Rubina Dilaik's debut film Ardh begins shoot, see first poster

**Directed and written by Palash Muchhal, Ardh stars Rubina Dilaik, Hiten Tejwani, Rajpal Yadav and Kulbushan Kharbanda. The film will have an OTT release in early 2022.**

Bigg Boss 14 winner Rubina Dilaik is all set to make her Bollywood debut with Ardh. The Palash Muchhal directorial also stars Hiten Tejwani, Rajpal Yadav and Kulbushan Kharbanda. On Tuesday, Rubina shared the first poster of the film, announcing that the shoot has begun. She captioned the post, "New Beginnings."

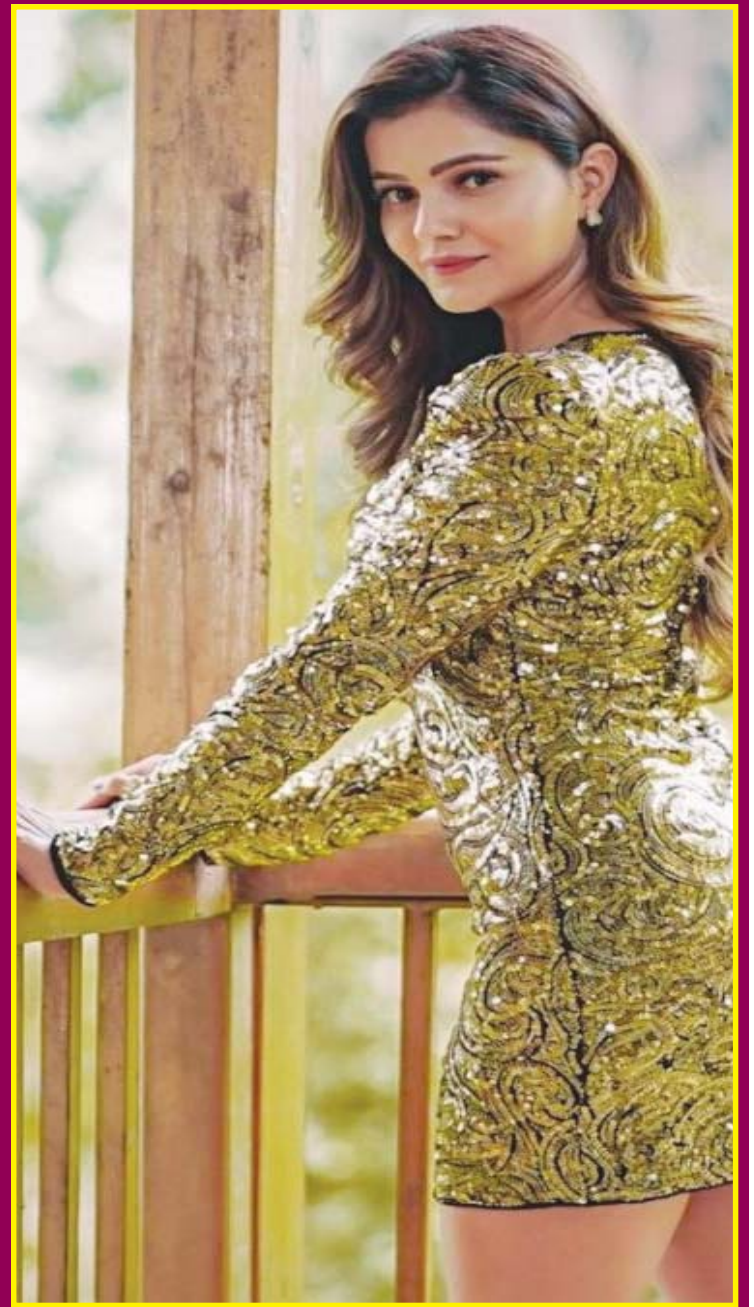
In the poster, Rubina is seen donning a saree with gajras adorning her hair. Given her pose, with her hands resting on her waist, it can be presumed that she is either playing a transgender character like her TV show Shakti or a sex worker. The woman stands tall facing the maximum city as Mumbai's famous spots - Gateway of India, Hotel Taj, Central railway station, Siddhivinayak temple and the

marine drive - are seen in the poster. Rubina Dilaik's close friend Jaan Kumar Sanu congratulated her along with many of her fans. One of her fan pages wrote, "Rubiholics will always be there for your support?????", while



another fan added, "U got more n more success rubi Ardh marks music composer Palash Muchhal's directorial debut. He

has also penned the script. As per reports, the film will see Rajpal Yadav play a transgender character who comes to Mumbai to become a hero. While Rubina's character becomes his support in the new city, Hiten will play his best friend. Talking about getting Rubina Dilaik on board, the director had earlier shared how she beat 50 girls to bag the part. In an interview with ETimes, Palash said, "She came across very good in her look test. About 50 girls had undergone the look test before her. I didn't audition her. I don't audition female actors. Also, I must say that I recollected Rubina's part in Choti Bahu and decided on her after drawing inferences from it. Yes, I had seen her in Bigg Boss 14 too but didn't see that show much, but many of my family members were avid watchers of it."



## Free Guy Movie Review: The Virtual World We're Waiting For

By Max Thind

I went to watch the movie "Free Guy" with some friends, the first movie I've seen in theatres since the pandemic started. It was highly-marketed at a recent game event I went to called Play NYC so, why not? For anyone interested in Games, Interactive-Media or Technology it's a must-watch. Media & associated creative thinking leads to potentially-futuristic landscapes that may someday become reality. That is the case with this movie, very similar to "Ready Player One" it depicts a Virtual Reality landscape, in this case "Free City" & brings the normal gaming atmosphere with it "bank robberies, car chases, easter-egg hunting."

Games are becoming a more centric part of people's lives, they're not going away anytime soon. Movies like these should make it apparent to everyone that games are not only going to become more crucial, they will be necessary in some way for the media to stay relevant. That being said, let's take a dive into the movie before we talk about its impact. The movie has a great upswing &

doesn't let you become bored easily. If you don't play games, then this movie is good at giving you a little idea of what gamers do & how much fun it is to play what you love. You'll notice that with the sometimes-repetitive nature of gameplay they depict in Free Guy. From the daily bank robbers, to the milsims strolling a Halo scorpion tank down main street. Gamers love the games they play & it shows. Moving on, the star of the show never lets down on the excitement. Ryan Reynolds was the best choice for the role & his antagonist is hilarious, I'll try not to spoil anything. The depiction of NPCs (Non-Player Character, People you can't play in the game) is solid, they show npcs going about their daily routine of getting robbed, killed, etc, but with the Westworld twist of sentient characters.

As you can guess, this makes for a quirky show. The rollercoaster ride the movie takes you on doesn't disappoint. We get to experience Ryan Reynolds with immortality, again! Along with the view of what a game like "Free City" & subsequent paywall game "Free

City 2" would both look like. We're given the inside look of what happens when a large corporation or individual behind it has malicious intentions. The protagonist trio fights for their lives, their work & their ambitions. The game-atmosphere felt like it had a solid background, made me think of the industry experts they hired for it. The finale had some great comedic relief from the epic battle going on around us. There is merit to the movie, it was done really well & I've been thinking about going back for seconds. If you're still debating going to the movie, then take a deeper dive with me into the story it tells to game-makers.

"Free Guy" is a movie depicting very average gameplay with a very unique (as of today) landscape. We currently have no true virtual world to compare this to. The closest would be MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online games) or VR World. Which isn't really similar to this, plus the Artificial Intelligence aspect of the movie is still 10 to 20 years away. What IS capable in today's world is a VR-based



game with a haptic feedback full-body controller. Is there demand for such a type of game? I would argue there definitely is, gamers are always looking for the next best way to hangout with their friends online. A VR-based open-world game would be the answer to this, with some form of simplistic social media added to it. Is someone working on this type of game? I'm sure plenty of

companies are, we at Greystone Games are also working on our own version of this as well. It's only a matter of time till we see Free Guy become a reality. Go watch it!

**(Max Thind is Founder of Greystone Games LLC, an indie development studio dedicated to creating outside-the-box experiences for players of all kinds).**



## Hundreds of U.S. citizens, Afghan commandos successfully evacuated through secret CIA base



city's main airport. The clandestine operation, which took place over several weeks in August, resulted in the successful evacuation of hundreds of American citizens and vulnerable Afghans, including members of the elite Afghan special forces and their family members. At least 1,000 Afghan commandos and their family members were evacuated in the overall U.S. effort.

The details of the operation are based on documents provided to POLITICO and conversations with a senior administration official, a defense official and a congressional official, all of whom spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information. A U.S. official confirmed the CIA's involvement in the evacuation, noting that the agency "worked closely

(SAI Bureau)-As the Biden administration scrambled to conduct a massive evacuation effort from Afghanistan, American officials quietly instructed U.S. citizens and at-risk Afghans, including Afghan commandos, to head to a secret CIA base outside Kabul to secure safe passage to the U.S. amid increased risks of a terrorist attack on the capital

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## US climate envoy Kerry in Japan to push efforts to cut emissions



(SAI Bureau)- US climate envoy John Kerry met in Tokyo on Tuesday with Japan's top diplomat to push efforts to fight climate change ahead of a United Nations conference in November. Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi highlighted what he said was the importance of getting other major carbon emitters, especially China, to cooperate. "China is the world's biggest carbon emitter and the number two economy as well, and it is extremely important that we encourage China to firmly fulfill its responsibility to match its place," Motegi told reporters after his meeting with Kerry.

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## Judge conditionally approves Purdue Pharma opioid settlement



(SAI Bureau)-A federal bankruptcy judge gave conditional approval Wednesday to a sweeping settlement that will remove the Sackler family from ownership of OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma and devote potentially \$10 billion to fighting the opioid crisis that has killed a half-million Americans over the past two decades.

If it withstands appeals, the deal will resolve a mountain of 3,000 lawsuits from state and local governments, Native American tribes, unions and others that accuse the company of helping to spark the overdose epidemic by aggressively marketing the prescription painkiller.

Under the settlement, the Sacklers will have to get out of the opioid business altogether and contribute \$4.5 billion. But they will be shielded from any future lawsuits over opioids.

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## Indian American Community bids farewell to the Dcg Shatrughan Sinha

(By a staff reporter) : Recently an impressive and well attended event was held to bid farewell to Shatrughan Sinha, outgoing Deputy Counsel General of India in New

York. This farewell event was held in Long Island, New York under the guidance and leadership of Jagdish Sewhani, President The American India, India Public Affairs Committee.



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## 3 ways the Delta variant will hurt the US jobs market

(SAI Bureau)-The sharp decline in Covid cases during the first half of 2021 raised expectations that the pandemic would gradually die down and the jobs market would return to normal by year's end. But the Delta variant has scrambled that labor market outlook for this year and beyond, with an increasing number of infections, hospitalizations and deaths. There are three sets of implications this Covid surge has for hiring in the US. We'll start to see the Delta variant's ripple effects as soon as this week's

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