



US SECRETARY OF STATE
BLINKEN DISCUSSES
AFGHANISTAN SITUATION
WITH JAISHANKAR,
QURESHI | P4



GOVT MUST WAKE
UP AND PROTECT
INDIANS IN
AFGHANISTAN:
CONGRESS | P9

ANANYA PANDAY
REACTS TO TROLLS
CALLING HER 'FAKE
PANDAY' | P15



SOUTH ASIAN

MidWeek

NEWS WEEKLY



Tuesday, August 17, 2021 www.southasiandaily.com Vol 21 Issue 33, Phone 647-272-8182, 905-670-3687

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Y MEDIA EXCLUSIVE

CANADA HAS SECURED ENOUGH VACCINES FOR 2 SHOTS AND ADDITIONAL BOOSTER SHOTS

STRONG TIES BETWEEN CANADA & INDIA ARE IMPORTANT TO ME PERSONALLY AND TO OUR COUNTRY

CANADA IS NEVER GOING TO RELY ON FOREIGN JURISDICTIONS FOR PPE

YUDHVIR JASWAL
Group Editor - Y MEDIA

ANITA ANAND
MINISTER OF PUBLIC SERVICES & PROCUREMENT

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PM TRUDEAU ANNOUNCES FEDERAL ELECTIONS ON SEPTEMBER 20

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Sunday called for a snap election which will take place on September 20. The announcement was made after the Prime Minister met Governor General Mary Simon to request her to dissolve Parliament. As required by law, the campaign for the country's 44th general election will last 36 days.



US SECRETARY OF STATE BLINKEN DISCUSSES AFGHANISTAN SITUATION WITH JAISHANKAR, QURESHI



NEW YORK, (IANS) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has discussed the Afghanistan situation with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar as he made a round of calls to foreign ministers with direct interests in the country overrun by the Taliban.

UNSC DEMAND ZERO TOLERANCE FOR TERRORISM, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN: TIRUMURTI

UNITED NATIONS, (IANS) The UN Security Council members demand zero tolerance for terrorism in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and require a political settlement for the regime to be recognised, India's Permanent Representative T.S. Tirumurti said on Monday. Addressing reporters outside the Council chamber after presiding over an emergency meeting on Afghanistan, he said that the session heard "the sentiments among the council members on zero tolerance for terrorism, and the Secretary General (Antonio Guterres) unequivocally underlined this important aspect".



ADITYA JHA APPOINTED CHAIR OF ICCC'S ADVISORY BOARD

The Board of Directors of the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce (ICCC) unanimously decided to appoint Dr. Aditya Jha as the Chair of the Advisory Board of the Chamber for a four-year-term starting August 2021. A renowned and respected community leader, Dr. Jha will be pivoting the Chamber's thrust into developing strategies that will enable our 44 year old institution to be relevant and highly effective in fulfilling its strategic mandates including: * ICCC@50 Vision & Action plan as ICCC turns 50 years milestone in 2027.



Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

- Effective sept. 7, Ontario makes Covid-19 vaccination policies mandatory for high-risk settings.
- Ontario to begin offering third doses of Covid-19 vaccines to most vulnerable populations.
- Starting Wednesday, August 18, all children turning 12 years old before end of 2021 will be eligible to receive their first dose of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine.
- Fully vaccinated Canadians to receive vaccine passports for international travel by Fall.
- Canada to require vaccinations for all federal public servants, air and train passengers by Oct. 2021.
- On September 7, Canada's borders to reopen to any fully vaccinated travellers.
- Over 82% Ontarians 12+ inoculated with first dose of Covid-19 vaccine, 74% fully vaccinated.

TALIBAN TAKEOVER IN AFGHANISTAN- WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Surprising everyone, the Taliban has won a stunning military and political victory. The United States (US)-supported Afghan government led by President Ashraf Ghani could not stand up to the Taliban assaults and has ultimately surrendered. In a lightning campaign, Taliban forces managed to reach the gates of Kabul in record time and Have now taken over power. According to a Reuters report former President has abdicated and moved to Tajikistan. It is being estimated that a monumental humanitarian tragedy is in the making and the fate of thousands of Afghan lives hangs in balance, not to speak of the modern values, democracy and liberties. Amid this crisis, a cold geopolitical calculation is needed. The rapidly changing political and more importantly, military situation in Afghanistan has forced all major stakeholders to re-evaluate and adjust their strategies. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US President Joe Biden have spoken over telephone about the current situation in Afghanistan following Taliban takeover, the Downing Street said in a statement. The two leaders welcomed their countries' cooperation in recent days to help evacuate their nationals, current and former staff, and others from Afghanistan, the statement said, Xinhua news agency reported. "They resolved to continue working closely together on this in the days and weeks ahead to allow as many people as possible to leave the country," it added. Johnson and Biden, during the phone call on Tuesday, also agreed on the need for the global community to come together to prevent a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Britain's plans include increased humanitarian aid to the region and resettlement of refugees, it said. Britain's Home Office said on Tuesday night that up to 20,000 Afghan refugees will be offered a route to set up homes in Britain over five years. In their phone conversation, the two leaders also agreed to hold



a virtual Group of Seven (G7) leaders' meeting in the coming days to discuss the Afghanistan situation. In a televised speech on Monday, Biden stood by his decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan while acknowledging Kabul's collapse to the Taliban came much sooner than Washington had anticipated. Just over a week, the Taliban, which the US overthrew in 2001, went from winning control of its first provincial capital to taking over Kabul, capital of the war-torn Asian country. Johnson said on Sunday that the US decision to pull out of Afghanistan has "accelerated things". Taliban Announces 'General Amnesty' For Afghan Govt Officials, Urges Women To Join Government, Return To Work Two days after the Taliban captured Kabul, the insurgent group on Tuesday urged the Afghan government employees to return to work in an effort to bring back normalcy in the capital city. Declaring a general amnesty, the Taliban urged all to restart their normal lives with confidence, reports Xinhua news agency.

I CONTD. ON PAGE 9



PANORAMA INDIA HELD THE UNIQUE & HISTORICAL INDIA DAY DRIVE THRU PARADE. I CONTD. ON PAGE 7



POLITICAL SENSEX STATES ELECTIONS INDIA 2022

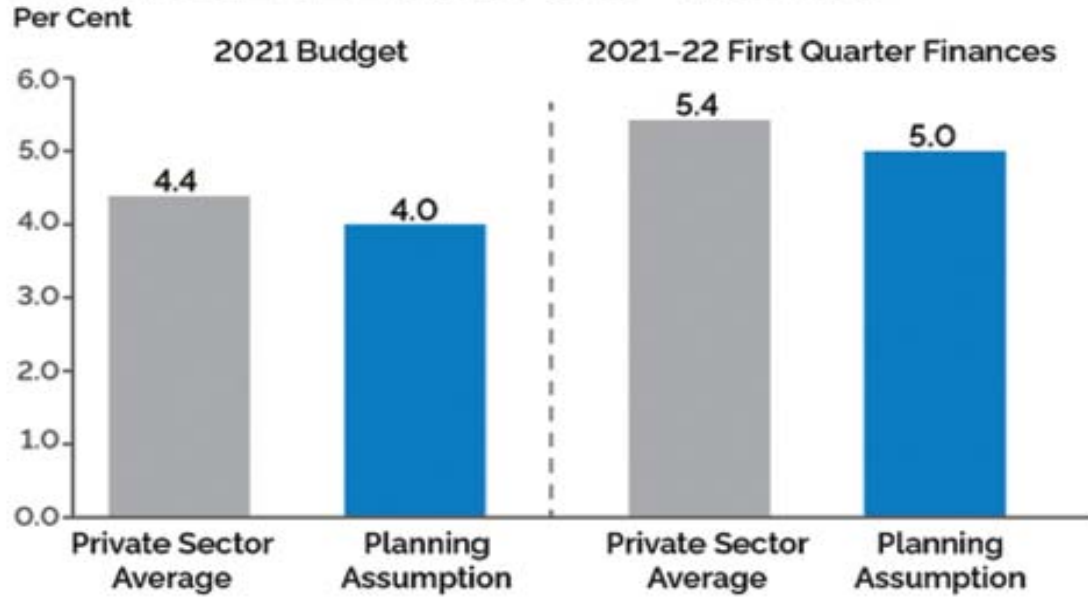


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Ontario 2021 Real GDP Growth



Ontario Releases 2021–22 First Quarter Finances, Projecting A Deficit Of \$32.4 Billion In 2021-22

TORONTO — Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy released the 2021–22 First Quarter Finances, maintaining the government's commitment to regular timely and transparent updates on Ontario's finances. "Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government's response to COVID-19 has been supported by Ontario's Action Plan, a flexible and clear framework to protect people and jobs," said Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance. "This approach ensured transparency and accountability, even amidst the significant economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic."

While uncertainty related to the pandemic and the future pace of economic recovery remains since the 2021 Budget private sector real gross domestic product forecasts for 2021 have been revised significantly upwards, reflecting significant progress on COVID-19 vaccinations and stronger than expected United States and global growth. In its first fiscal and economic update since the 2021 Budget, the government is projecting a deficit of \$32.4 billion in 2021-22, an improvement of nearly \$700 million from the outlook presented in the 2021 Budget. This improvement is the result of prudent fiscal management and higher than projected revenue due to a stronger 2021 growth forecast for the province.

"Although we are seeing positive economic signs, we cannot let up on our focus on getting through the pandemic, and protecting the province's health, jobs and economy," said Minister Bethlenfalvy. "We've always been clear that it would be growth that would fuel our return to a more sustainable fiscal position. The continued growth in employment and the modest deficit improvement projected in the 2021–22 First Quarter Finances are evidence that our plan is working. But we will maintain our focus on the plan outlined in the 2021 Budget to get us through this crisis."

No plans to recognise Taliban as Afghan legitimate govt: PM Trudeau

OTTAWA, (IANS) Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said his government has no plans to recognise the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

"Canada has no plans to recognise the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan. When they were in government 20 years ago, Canada did not recognise them," said Trudeau, Xinhua reported.

"Our focus right now is on getting people out of Afghanistan and the Taliban need to ensure free access to people to get to the airport," he said on Tuesday. "We're working with our allies on what Canada as part of the international community can do to stabilize the situation, protect civilians, and put an end to the violence. This includes taking leadership by bringing Afghans to safety in Canada," he said. Kabul fell to the Taliban on Sunday.

Two aircraft carrying diplomats, troops and Afghans from Kabul landed in Canada Monday night.

On Tuesday morning, the Canadian Foreign Affairs Ministry confirmed that one flight landed in Toronto carrying Afghans who qualified to

With continued uncertainty about variants of concern, the risk of surges and future waves of the pandemic and the need to target future investments to spur economic recovery, the government is also maintaining prudence and flexibility to respond to emerging needs. So, in addition to reducing the deficit projection, the government is taking the prudent step of setting aside \$2.2 billion of this revenue for the Time-Limited COVID-19 Fund.

"Our flexible approach has served Ontario well throughout the pandemic," said Minister Bethlenfalvy. "It will continue to ensure a lack of resources is never an obstacle in the Province's response to COVID-19." The next step in the government's plan will be outlined in the 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, to be released by November 15, 2021.

QUICK FACTS

The 2021–22 First Quarter Finances provide an update on Ontario's fiscal and economic outlook as of June 30, 2021. It is the first fiscal and economic update provided since the 2021 Budget, which was released on March 24, 2021.

Highlights of the 2021–22 First Quarter Finances include:

Projecting a deficit of \$32.4 billion in 2021–22, an improvement of nearly \$700 million from the outlook presented in the 2021 Budget. Updated 2021-22 revenue projections, \$2.9 billion higher than forecast in the 2021 Budget, due to increased Government of Canada transfers and higher projected tax revenues related to a stronger 2021 economic growth forecast.

Setting aside \$2.2 billion for the Time-Limited COVID-19 Fund, which will ensure the Province continues to maintain the flexibility necessary given the ongoing uncertainty related to the pandemic and future pace of economic recovery.



come to Canada under the government's recently announced special immigration measures for former interpreters and embassy staff who helped Canadians in Afghanistan.

The second flight landed in Ottawa and included returning staff from the Canadian embassy in Kabul.

Amrullah Saleh emerges to declare himself Afghan 'legitimate caretaker President'

Afghanistan's First Vice President Amrullah Saleh on Tuesday announced that he is in the country and is the "legitimate caretaker President". President Ashraf Ghani earlier left the country amid the Taliban advance and his whereabouts remain unknown. Earlier, there were reports that Saleh had also fled with Ghani. "Clarity: As per d constitution of Afg, in absence, escape, resignation or death of the President the FVP becomes the caretaker President. I am currently inside my country & am the legitimate care taker President. Am reaching out to all leaders to secure their support & consensus," Saleh said in a tweet. "In my soil. With d people. For a cause & purpose. With solid belief in righteousness. Opposing Pak bcked oppression & brutal dictatorship is our legitimacy," Saleh had tweeted earlier. "It is futile to argue with @POTUS on Afg now. Let him digest it. We d Afgs must prove thtAfgH isn't Vietnam & the Talibs aren't even remotely like Vietcong. Unlike US/NATO we hvn't lost spirit & see enormous oprtnities ahead. Useless caveats are finished. JOIN THE RESISTANCE," he said in another tweet.



'CONSERVATIVES, LIBERALS NECK AND NECK IN FEDERAL ELECTION AMONG VOTERS IN THE GTA:' FORUM RESEARCH POLL

TORONTO- In a random sampling of public opinion conducted by Forum Research among 503 GTA voters, 36% of decided / leaning voters would vote Liberal, followed by Conservatives (35%) and NDP (17%), if the election were held today. 6% would vote for the People's Party of Canada, 3% would vote for the Greens, and 2% will support other political parties.

Respondents most likely to say they will support the Liberals include those aged 65+ (50%), females (41%), and those who live in the 416 regions (40%). Respondents are most likely to say they will support the Progressive Conservatives include those aged 55-64 (47%), male (44%), and those who live in the 905 regions (37%). Respondents most likely to say they will support the NDP include those whose gender identities are non-binary (47%), those aged between 25-34 (31%), <25 (24%), 45-54 (22%), and female (21%). These results will change as voting intentions change and are subject to the usual margins of error.



INDIA CONDEMNS MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH'S STATUE VANDALIZATION ONCE AGAIN IN PAKISTAN

LAHORE, (IANS) The statue of 19th century Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh has been vandalized for the third time in Lahore, Pakistan, reports said. "Shameful this bunch of illiterates are really dangerous for Pakistan's image in the world," commented Pakistan Information and Broadcasting Minister Fawad Chaudhry on Twitter.

Member of a radical party, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) pulled down Ranjit Singh's statue at the Lahore Fort. The statue had previously been vandalized by TLP workers on at least two different occasions in the past.

In a video shared on Twitter, the man could be seen striking the statue with his bare hands and damaging its arms and other parts.

The statue, which was unveiled at the 'Mai Jinda' haveli in Lahore in June 2019, was earlier vandalized by radical Islamists in August 2019 and then again in December last year. A teenage visitor had broken the arm of the Maharaja's statue in December 2020. After he was nabbed, he told the police that his 'religious sentiments were hurt seeing the statue of a Sikh ruler at the fort.

RCMP CHARGED GURDEEP SINGH MANGAT, 46, OF BRAMPTON FOR SMUGGLING 83 KG OF COCAINE ACROSS THE BORDER



The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) – Southern Ontario Region and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) – Border Integrity Team are committed to safeguarding our country and keeping contraband goods, such as narcotics, from reaching our communities.

I CONTD. ON PAGE 7

PM MODI CHAIRS CCS MEETING ON AFGHANISTAN SITUATION, INDIANS' SAFETY



NEW DELHI (IANS) Amid the evolving situation in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attended the meeting. Though the details of the meeting were not shared, it is leant that the government's highest decision making body discussed the tense security situation there. The government's priority is to safely evacuate the remaining Indians left there and also ensure the security of Hindus and Sikhs there. India has initiated various development projects in Afghanistan both by the government and the private sector and their future hangs in the balance due to the political developments in that country. The main challenge for travel to and from Afghanistan is the operational status of Kabul airport, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs said on Tuesday. In view of the prevailing situation in Afghanistan, the government decided that the Embassy personnel in Kabul would be immediately moved to India. This movement has been completed in two phases and the Ambassador and all other personnel reached New Delhi on Tuesday. "We have been issuing periodic travel and security advisories for all Indian nationals in Afghanistan, given the deteriorating security situation there. Those already in Afghanistan were urged to return immediately while others were advised not to travel there," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement on Tuesday. "Nevertheless, we understand that a number of Indians are stranded in that country, some of whom are employed by third country organisations. Our immediate priority is to obtain accurate information about all Indian nationals currently present in Afghanistan."

PUNJAB CONGRESS CHIEF SIDHU APPOINTS PARGAT SINGH AS PUNJAB CONG GENERAL SECRETARY



CHANDIGARH, (IANS) Newly-appointed Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu on Monday appointed Jalandhar Cantt MLA and his close confidant Pargat Singh as the new general secretary of Punjab Congress ahead of the Assembly elections in the state scheduled next year.

In a statement, Sidhu said, "With the approval of interim Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, Congress general secretary K.C. Venugopal and Punjab Congress in-charge Harish rawat, I hereby appoint Pargat Singh as Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee general secretary (organization) with immediate effect." The appointment came days after Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh had a meeting with Sonia Gandhi in the national capital.

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Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

Ontario is taking action to increase protections for vulnerable Ontarians:

- ➔ Making COVID-19 vaccination policies mandatory in high-risk settings
- ➔ Providing third doses to vulnerable populations
- ➔ Extending Pfizer eligibility to children turning 12 before the end of 2021
- ➔ Pausing Ontario's exit from the Roadmap to Reopen



ONTARIO MAKES COVID-19 VACCINATION POLICIES MANDATORY FOR HIGH-RISK SETTINGS

TORONTO — In response to evolving data around the transmissibility of the Delta variant and based on the recent experiences of other jurisdictions, the government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, is taking action to increase protection for our most vulnerable, including frail seniors, immunocompromised individuals and young children who are not yet eligible for vaccination. This includes making COVID-19 vaccination policies mandatory in high-risk settings, pausing the province's exit from the Roadmap to Reopen and providing third doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to vulnerable populations. The government is also expanding eligibility for the Pfizer vaccine to children born in 2009 or earlier.

To protect vulnerable patients and staff in settings where the risk of contracting and transmitting COVID-19 and the Delta variant is higher, the Chief Medical Officer of Health has issued a directive mandating hospitals and home and community care service providers to have a COVID-19 vaccination policy for employees, staff, contractors, students and volunteers, and for ambulance services to have a COVID-19 vaccination policy for paramedics. The vaccination policy must be effective no later than September 7, 2021, and at a minimum will require these individuals to provide proof of one of three things: Full vaccination against COVID-19; A medical reason for not being vaccinated against COVID-19; or Completion of a COVID-19 vaccination educational session.

Individuals who do not provide proof of full vaccination against COVID-19 will be required to undertake regular antigen testing. These settings will be required to track and report on the implementation of their policies to the provincial government. This is similar to the vaccination policy requirements currently in place for long-term care homes. "While Ontario remains a leading jurisdiction for first and second doses administered and we have the infrastructure in place to manage outbreaks, the Delta variant is highly transmissible and the experience of other jurisdictions shows we must remain vigilant as we head into the fall," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "By taking additional measures in high-risk settings we will further protect our most vulnerable, safeguard hospital capacity, ensure a safe return to school and keep Ontario running."

To support the return to school plan, the Ministry of Education intends to introduce a vaccination disclosure policy for all publicly-funded school board employees, and staff in private schools as well as for all staff in licensed child care settings for the 2021-22 school year, with rapid antigen testing requirements for staff who are not immunized against COVID-19. The Ontario government is also working with public health units and publicly funded school boards to run voluntary vaccination clinics in or nearby schools to make vaccines even more convenient and accessible for eligible students,

their families, educators and school staff returning to school this fall. Vaccination policies will also be implemented in other higher-risk settings such as:

- Post-secondary institutions;
- Licensed retirement homes;
- Women's shelters; and

Congregate group homes and day programs for adults with developmental disabilities, children's treatment centres and other services for children with special needs, and licensed children's residential settings.

"With the support of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, our government is taking action to make schools as safe as possible," said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. "Our plan will protect our schools, ensure rapid speed with contact tracing, all with the intention of keeping them open for the benefit of Ontario students."

As an additional measure to continue protecting Ontario's most vulnerable, based on the recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other health experts, the province will begin offering third doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to those at highest-risk, providing them with an extra layer of protection against the Delta variant. This includes:

- Transplant recipients (including solid organ transplant and hematopoietic stem cell transplants);
- Patients with hematological cancers (examples include lymphoma, myeloma, leukemia) on active treatment (chemotherapy, targeted therapies, immunotherapy);
- Recipients of an anti-CD20 agent (e.g. rituximab, ocrelizumab, ofatumumab);
- and Residents of high-risk congregate settings including long-term care homes, higher-risk licensed retirement homes and First Nations elder care lodges. Locations and timing for third doses will vary by public health unit and high-risk population based on local planning and considerations, with some beginning as early as this week where opportunities exist.

In addition, to further support a safer return to school by ensuring more children and youth can benefit from the protection offered by the vaccine, the province will extend eligibility to the Pfizer vaccine to children born in 2009. Ontario has closely monitored data from Alberta and British Columbia in making this decision, and these provinces have offered the Pfizer vaccine to youth born in 2009 for several months with no risks identified. Starting on Wednesday, August 18, 2021, all children turning 12 years old before the end of 2021 will be eligible to receive their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and can book their appointment through the provincial booking system, through their public health unit, or pharmacies, or can walk-in to vaccination clinics across the province.

CANADA TO REQUIRE VACCINATION OF FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND FEDERALLY REGULATED TRANSPORTATION SECTOR

Vaccination is the most effective tool to reduce the risk of COVID-19 for Canadians and to protect broader public health. It is our most important instrument and so we continue to take action to get as many Canadians vaccinated as possible. The Government of Canada today announced its intent to require vaccination as early as the end of September across the federal public service. Vaccinations are our best line of defence and for those few who are unable to be vaccinated, accommodation or alternative measures, such as testing and screening, may be determined in each situation, to protect broader public health by reducing the risk of COVID-19.

As the country's largest employer, the Government of Canada is committed to playing a leadership role by further protecting the health and safety of public servants and the communities where they live and work across Canada and around the world. Omar Alghabra, Minister of Transport said, "The Government of Canada is leading by example in requiring vaccinations for public service employees, and we are asking all federally regulated employers to develop vaccine plans to ensure their employees and workplaces are safe. This is the right thing to do and will ensure Canada continues to build back better from the global COVID-19 pandemic."

In addition, as soon as possible in the fall and no later than the end of October, the Government of Canada will require employees in the federally regulated air, rail, and marine transportation sectors to be vaccinated. The vaccination requirement will also extend to certain travellers. This includes all commercial air travellers, passengers on interprovincial trains, and passengers on large marine vessels with overnight accommodations, such as cruise ships. The government will engage with key stakeholders, including bargaining agents and transportation sector operators, as we plan for the implementation of these initiatives. Details will be communicated as the work unfolds. The process will include determining how this requirement will be implemented, through the confirmation of COVID-19 vaccination and other means of protection, such as testing when necessary. Further, the Government of Canada expects that Crown corporations and other employers in the federally regulated sector will also require vaccination for their employees. The government will work with these employers to ensure this result. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health said, "There are enough doses in Canada for every person to be fully vaccinated across the country. By getting vaccinated, you are protecting yourself, your family and your community. By being fully vaccinated, you are also protecting the safety of your workplaces. If you haven't been vaccinated yet, please make a plan to do so." Today's announcement comes in recognition of the dynamic public health situation in Canada. Since



the start of the vaccination campaign in mid-December, less than 1% of COVID-19 cases have been among those who were fully protected by the vaccine. These measures will contribute to reaching the overall levels of vaccination Canada needs to sustain a resilient economic recovery in the face of more transmissible and dangerous COVID-19 variants of concern. More than 71% of eligible people in Canada are fully vaccinated, and more than 82% have had their first shot. However, more than 6 million eligible people in Canada are still unvaccinated. We are urging all of you to get out there and get vaccinated now. Doing so will help keep our communities safe. The Government of Canada is also calling on all organizations beyond the federally regulated sector to put in place their own vaccination strategies, drawing on the advice and guidance available from public health authorities and the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.

"We know vaccinations are the best way to help protect our fellow Canadians from COVID-19 variants of concern. We are encouraged by the many federal employees who have already been vaccinated and hope that vaccination rates will continue to climb as the Government of Canada moves ahead on its vaccination strategy," said Dominic LeBlanc, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. "Driving vaccine uptake in Canada to as high a level as possible is one of the most effective, and least disruptive, means at our disposal to sustain the gains we have made in recent months, and ensure that we continue on our path to economic recovery, and a healthier and more equitable future. With this announcement, we are doing more to protect the health and safety of Canadians and reduce the risk of COVID-19," said Jean-Yves Duclos, President of the Treasury Board.

CANADA MOVING FORWARD WITH A PROOF OF VACCINATION FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL



While Canadians should continue to avoid non-essential travel worldwide, the Government of Canada recognizes that proof of vaccination credentials will support the re-opening of societies and economies.

Canadians are looking for a more reliable and secure way to demonstrate their COVID-19 vaccination history to foreign and Canadian border officials. To that end, the Government of Canada is collaborating with the provinces and territories to develop a proof of vaccination that will facilitate cross-border travel, while reducing the risk of spread and importation of COVID-19. We are also continuing to engage with Indigenous partners across the country to ensure that a proof of vaccination credential responds to the needs and rights of Indigenous peoples.

The Government of Canada is working with provinces and territories to develop a secure pan-Canadian approach. This plan is based on advice from our public health officials with priority placed on the safety and security of all Canadians.

For Canadians who decide to travel, using proof of vaccination will provide foreign border officials with the vaccination history needed to assess whether a traveller meets their public health requirements and provide a trusted and verifiable credential for when they return home.

"Thanks to the incredible progress that Canadians have made, our country is reopening—gradually, cautiously and guided by public health. This means that many Canadians are contemplating doing something they haven't done in over a year and a half: travelling. Our work with the provinces and territories to provide consistent proof of vaccination is a key step forward in ensuring Canadians will have the documents they need once it is safe to travel again," said Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Travellers will be able to submit their proof of vaccination in ArriveCAN (mobile app or Canada.ca/ArriveCAN) when coming back to Canada. While the focus is on digital proof of vaccination, we will also make sure that these documents are accessible for all Canadians who may need to use them. The Government of Canada encourages everyone who is able to do so, regardless of travel plans, to get vaccinated. Vaccination with a complete series of approved COVID-19 vaccines provides individuals with substantial protection against the virus.

US APPROVES THIRD DOSE OF COVID VACCINE FOR PEOPLE WITH WEAK IMMUNE SYSTEMS



The U.S. Food and Drug Administration amended the emergency use authorizations (EUAs) for both the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine and the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine to allow for the use of an additional dose in certain immunocompromised individuals, specifically, solid organ transplant recipients or those who are diagnosed with conditions that are considered to have an equivalent level of immunocompromise. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices is scheduled to meet Friday to discuss further clinical recommendations regarding immunocompromised individuals. Today's action does not apply to people who are not immunocompromised.

"The country has entered yet another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the FDA is especially cognizant that immunocompromised people are particularly at risk for severe disease. After a thorough review of the available data, the FDA determined that this small, vulnerable group may benefit from a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna Vaccines," said Acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock, M.D. "Today's action allows doctors to boost immunity in certain immunocompromised individuals who need extra protection from COVID-19. As we've previously stated, other individuals who are fully vaccinated are adequately protected and do not need an additional dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at this time. The FDA is actively engaged in a science-based, rigorous process with our federal partners to consider whether an additional dose may be needed in the future." People who are immunocompromised in a manner similar to those who have undergone solid organ transplantation have a reduced ability to fight infections and other diseases, and they are especially vulnerable to infections, including COVID-19. The FDA evaluated information on the use of a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna Vaccines in these individuals and determined that the administration of third vaccine doses may increase protection in this population. These patients should be counselled to maintain physical precautions to help prevent COVID-19. In addition, close contacts of immunocompromised persons should get vaccinated, as appropriate for their health status, to provide increased protection to their loved ones. It is recommended that immunocompromised individuals discuss monoclonal antibody treatment options with their health care provider should they contract or be exposed to COVID-19. The FDA has authorized monoclonal antibody treatments for emergency use during this public health emergency for adults and pediatric patients (ages 12 and older weighing at least 40 kilograms or about 88 pounds) with positive results of direct SARS-CoV-2 viral testing, and who are at high risk for progressing to severe COVID-19 and/or hospitalization. One authorized product includes use for preventative (prophylaxis) treatment after being exposed to SARS-CoV-2; however, this product is not a substitute for vaccination.

INDIA AT 75: WHERE WE STAND

BY ASAD MIRZA

The Indian republic has achieved much during the last 75 years of its existence, yet the question of majority and minority remain central to the national politics.

On August 15, 2021, as India completes 74 years after independence and 71 years after becoming a republic, instead of feeling ecstatic and consolidating our achievements we are forced to ponder the question, whether our freedom fighters, leaders and constitution framers dreamt of the India in its present form?

At present we are standing at a crossroad, where a vast multitude of Indian citizens are wondering about their legal standing and the future, besides feeling concerned about the continued secular and inclusive character of the Indian society. The largest majority of the country along with millions of other linguistic and religious minorities besides illiterate, landless, backwards and a mass of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been forced to ponder over the question of their legal identity in the country, whose constitution's preamble read: We, the people of India..... Secular, Democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens...

The largest minority community in the country has been thrown so many challenges in the last three years, that though confused and floundering, it was trying hard to come to terms with the harsh reality of being part of an India, which is being governed by the forces, which have always remained inimical to it.

A large number of people believe this to be the doing of the right-wing government at the centre. But the moot question is, how did it happen and who allowed it to happen? Leading us to a more sensitive and ponderous question, whether India ever really was a truly secular republic at all?

No one can deny the intricate human ties between the Indian citizens. Their sharing and caring for each other in times of need, standing together with each other in times of adversity. Coexisting and surviving for centuries as brethren, before the colonial masters altered the narrative based on two distinct communities.

Though it was presumed that independent India would provide a level playing field to all its citizens, irrespective of their caste and creed, the reality itself is vastly different. Writing in Young India, Gandhi longed for a Swaraj, which would be the rule of all based on justice, '...to me Hind Swaraj is the rule of all people, is the rule of justice.' -Young India--16.4.1931.

Secular forces in India

Broadly, what is happening now shouldn't worry any one, as it is happening due to their own complicity or lackadaisical attitude. When the so-called secular parties were in power, they never tried to reign-in the hard-line Hindutva elements, in reality they always mollified and pampered them under the veneer of equal rights to every religion. Or within their hearts they too wanted India to be a Hindu Rashtira. In addition, a large number of highly educated Indians exercised their



franchise in favour of the BJP, in the last two general elections, maybe being sympathetic and giving them a chance to govern, was considered being a Hindu Indian. Though within their heart they knew what they were doing was not due to love of their country but it was to pamper the soft spot within their heart for the Hindutva. And though they too have suffered from demonetisation, GST, rising inflation, yet they are still not ready to accept their wrong decision, as they want to watch the full movie, and yes, howsoever they profess to be seen as an educated, secular, forward looking, liberal person, within their hearts most are pro-Hindutva and are least concerned about minorities or backward classes of the country, except to have drawing room conversation about their plight.

The secular parties also pampered and kowtowed to the fixated Muslim elements, clerics who claimed to be Muslim leaders or representatives, due to which the Hindutva forces always bemoaned the appeasement of the minorities at the cost of the majority, and in turn reaped benefits for themselves at the hustings.

Muslims in India

The Muslim community apart from educational backwardness also faced its influence and economic power waning from 1947 onwards. However, it got a shot in the arm with middle-east boom, after the 70s. Though, in the traversing period and till 1980s, its economic spine was tried to be broken by frequent riots in cities where it had proved its mettle as skilful entrepreneurs. And most of these riots happened when the so-called secular parties were in power both at the centre and state level.

From mid-70s onwards, the community consolidated its economic gains and moved forward on the road to educational and social prosperity. From 90s on, economic liberalisation further helped the community in a big manner, as now scores of its young technocrats found meaningful jobs at various MNCs, as there unlike the government sector the playing field was set level for all.

This economic independence also helped it to further consolidate its successes and the current generation is proof of this. A generation, which is not burdened by the baggage of partition and is socially and educationally empowered to take on its foes at an equal footing. A

generation, which is equally at home wearing jeans and hijab, keeping beard and observing fasts, bringing to reality the adage that education, opens doors to emancipation. A generation, which is proud to be part of the secular framework of the country and its own religious identity, and has become adapt at finding a central path between the two.

This is what has upset the Hindutva forces. They are afraid of a group, which is not shy of taking any challenge marred by its identity or its religion and is very comfortable in striking a workable balance between the two.

In the current scenario, to remain steadfast and work towards consolidating our secular democratic republic, the responsibility lies on the opposition and other parties to question the establishment's each and every policy in the parliament and at various other fora, and in the meanwhile also strive to work towards establishing a society and polity which does not rely on petty gains but wants to make the country stronger, based on principles enshrined in its constitution and obligated to by its founding fathers.

In addition, Muslims have to introspect and change their outlook on major issues confronting them. They have to focus on getting educated, getting rid of un-Islamic rituals, better utilise the community funds generated through Zakat and inculcate a community psyche, where each instead of the other, should first aim to reform him and his family and then come forward to reform the society in a professional and committed manner without keeping an eye on becoming the community leader. Remember we have to empower our community and this would be possible only when we are able to get the maximum number of our youngsters in every department of the administration, police, judiciary and military.

(Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi. He writes on Muslims, educational, international affairs, interfaith and current affairs. @asad-mirza.blogspot.com)

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed within this article are the personal ideas of the author. The facts and conclusions appearing in the article do not reflect the views of Y Media and Midweek Newspaper, and Y Media does not assume any responsibility or liability for the same.

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PANORAMA INDIA HELD THE UNIQUE & HISTORICAL INDIA DAY DRIVE THRU PARADE

Panorama India with the support of the India Consulate General in Toronto celebrated India's 75th Independence Day. Presented by ICICI Bank Canada's Indian@Heart Club and in partnership with Tourism Mississauga, on Sunday, August 15th Panorama India organized the first-ever grand India Day Drive Thru Parade, featuring over 9.5 hours of cultural and celebratory programming. Several dignitaries, community leaders and the larger community were in attendance throughout the day. The event was conducted keeping safety and protocols in place where the community attended in their cars as they got to drive thru and experience the culture and heritage of India. This was a first-ever unique Drive-Thru experience which allowed the community to come together safely in person in their cars as well as virtually via 36+ TV and digital media channels live streaming the entire day. The event received an overwhelming amount of appreciation and gratitude from the community for creating a safe experience where they were able to come out and celebrate this very special occasion. "It was such a pleasure to see such a positive response from the community and I commend Panorama India for bringing everyone together again successfully and safely" shared Hon. Apoorva Srivastava, Consul General of India in Toronto. The day kicked off with an opening ceremony being telecasted and with limited dignitaries due to covid restrictions from the community, political leaders and sponsors in attendance. Panorama India's chairperson, Sumeeta Kohli welcomed the audience both in person and watching live, sharing greetings from the board and the entire organization. Following the chair's speech, Consul General Apoorva Srivastava shared greetings followed by MPP Nina Tangri sharing greetings from the Premier of Ontario, honourable Doug Ford. Mayor of Mississauga Bonnie Crombie and Mayor of Brampton Patrick Brown also delivered greetings for India Day. In addition, MPP Deepak Anand and MPP ShereefSabawy, Tourism Mississauga representatives, partner organizations, community leaders and Panorama India sponsors were present. Following the opening ceremony, dignitaries were then invited to attend the official opening of the drive thru parade with an opening march lead by a drum procession to walk through the parade. Panorama India is pleased to share that over 650 cars attended this sold-out occasion. "I want to personally thank all of our incredible sponsors, artists, and the community organizations, as well as the number of dedicated volunteers and staff who made this day possible. We wanted to create a unique, once in a lifetime India Day celebration that allowed our community at large to come out safely and celebrate this very important occasion. I am grateful to the City of Mississauga working with us on every step and planning to ensure the success of this momen-



tous day. Our community organizations created incredible state floats displaying the culture and heritage of India. I want to invite all of you to join us on Sunday, August 22nd at 7pm on our Namaste Live announcement of the winners of the vote for your favourite float competition" said Sumeeta Kohli, Chairperson Panorama India. Sponsor for the India Day celebrations engaged each car with giveaways and mementos as they drove past their floats. "We thank our presenting and diamond sponsor ICICI Bank Canada @IndianHeart Club and our partner sponsor Tourism Mississauga. In addition we want to thank our Gold sponsors HSBC Bank, SBI Canada Bank, Kotamarti Group and City of Mississauga for supporting this celebration" shared JanakBhawanani, CFO Panorama India. "Thank you to our food drive partners Sai Dham Food Bank and Seva Food bank for supporting the India Day Drive. We thank our food vendor partners Chaska Street Food and Kirtida Kitchen for creating a memorable food truck experience onsite for all the attendees. We are happy to have been able to give back to our local community partners and support the recovering restaurant industry" said Sanjay Agarwal, Vice-Chair-Sponsorship & Vendor Management, Panorama India. "15 states of India floats were on display created by community organization partners and all those both watching at home on the live stream channels and those driving through in person could vote for their favourite float. We thank everyone for voting and supporting all those who worked so hard to present their states" stated Vaidehi Raut Bhagat, Vice-Chair-Community Relations & Sponsorship and Dr Thomas Thomas, Director of Community Relations & Logistics of Panorama India. Judges Jonita Gandhi, Victoria Clarke, and Sandeep Goel scored the floats. Winners will be decided based on 50% judges and 50% public voting. The Drive-Thru offered a full-day of amazing pro-



gramming for families and the like to enjoy featuring approximately 130 artists in over 44+ performances, representing 20+ states of India. "I am so proud of all the artists who performed to showcase their love and enthusiasm for India. They have worked so hard, and I am truly amazed at all the wonderful talent that was displayed" Anusha Iyer, Director of Programming. The day was concluded with a special presentation live streamed on all 36+ TV and Media channel "Comedy Hour with Chandan Prabhakar", following the special lightings for the extraordinary day. "It was a perfect ending to a special day watching the CN Tower light up for the Drive Thru Parade of the CN Tower, and then watching the special lighting for India day by the Mississauga Civic Centre Clock Tower and Brampton City Hall Clock Tower." shared Tanvir Kaur, Director of Digital Media & Logistics, Panorama India. In celebration of India Day, Panorama India held live Virtual Art Competition for kids on Saturday, August 7th presented by "Colour Happy". "The competition was a resounding success with 202 children participating, ranging from kindergarten to Grade 9 in 4 categories. The winners will be announced live on our Namaste Live segment this Sunday, August 22nd. We invite you to join us" stated ShibaniSahney, Director of Social Media, Panorama India. To bring together vendors from across Canada, India and US, Panorama India held the Virtual India Day Expo, an online market place, on Sunday, August 8th. The event showcased premium and expo sponsors and partners who connected with the community virtually sharing their services. In addition, live webinars were conducted where all could attend and listen to the sponsors. "We thank the community attending and supporting all the vendors. We wanted to create an opportunity for many who could all meet online and support businesses" shared Arun Chauhan, Director of Digital Technology, Panorama India. "Panorama India would like to thank the community for coming out and making this India Day Drive Thru Parade such a success. We are glad so many families were able to come out and celebrate together safely from their cars. " sharedSumeeta Kohli, Chairperson, Panorama India.

RCMP CHARGED GURDEEP SINGH MANGAT, 46, OF BRAMPTON FOR SMUGGLING 83 KG OF COCAINE ACROSS THE BORDER

CONTD. FROM PAGE 4

On August 9, 2021, a commercial truck driven by an Ontario resident entered Canada at the Blue Water Bridge in Point Edward, Ontario, and was referred for a secondary inspection. During the examination, border services officers discovered and seized approximately 83 kg of suspected cocaine. "We are proud of our officers at the front line who work tirelessly to protect Canadians and keep drugs out of our communities. This seizure is another example of the ongoing cooperation that exists between the CBSA and the RCMP," said An Nguyen, District Director, St. Clair District Operations, Canada Border Services Agency. The CBSA arrested Gurdeep Singh Mangat and transferred him and the suspected cocaine to the custody of RCMP officers from the Border Integrity Unit, Windsor Detachment, who is conducting the investigation. The RCMP charged 46-year-old Mangat of Brampton, Ontario with:



Importation of a controlled substance, contrary to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act
Possession for the purpose of trafficking, contrary to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act
Mangat's next scheduled court day is on August 19, 2021, at the Ontario Court of Justice in Sarnia. The investigation is ongoing. The RCMP wishes to recognize the invaluable assistance provided by the Lambton County Ontario Provincial Police at the onset of this investigation. Inspector Rae Groff, Acting Officer in Charge, RCMP Border Integrity Program, O Division said, "I commend the CBSA and our RCMP officers who once again, through a joint effort contributed to keeping our communities safe. This collaboration demonstrates our continued commitment in working together to effectively disrupt the drug trade."

Quick facts

If you have information about suspicious cross-border activity, please contact the CBSA Border Watch Line at 1-888-502-9060. Anyone with information regarding criminal activity is encouraged to contact their local police, the RCMP at 1-800-387-0020 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.

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OSLER HEALTH SYSTEM PARTNERS WITH SEAMLESSMD FOR BEFORE AND AFTER SURGERY MONITORING

Greater Toronto Area, Ontario – William Osler Health System (Osler) has partnered with SeamlessMD, a Digital Patient Engagement platform, to help improve patient safety, quality and outcomes for surgery patients. This platform is a great addition for patients as Osler carefully and gradually resumes normal operations, including some priority non-urgent surgeries and procedures across its three hospital sites.

Osler worked with SeamlessMD to empower all patients undergoing elective and emergency surgery with a digital companion that assists them from surgical preparation through to their recovery at home. With SeamlessMD, patients at Osler are guided before and after their surgical procedures with education, progress tracking and symptom monitoring after their procedure using their own devices (e.g. smartphone, tablet, computer). Customized dashboards also enable the Osler care team to monitor the health of patients throughout their journey. The platform supports multiple languages including English, Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Portuguese, Italian and French, prominent in Osler's diverse communities.

More than 2500 patients have already benefited from the digital experience, with 90 per cent of patients recommending SeamlessMD to others to help manage their health at home following their in-hospital procedures. One patient shared "I felt less on my own after leaving the hospital."

Another patient shared that the digital experience was "quick and easy and felt like someone was checking in on me each day." The platform also helps to facilitate internal efficiencies, including improved communication and workflow across care teams, which helps to streamline Osler's surgical operations. Health care staff are also able to digitally collect and view pre-operative patient data (e.g. pre-anaesthesia questionnaires and COVID-19 screening forms), thereby minimizing unnecessary visits to the hospital. If patients consent to be enrolled on the platform, their email address is added into the system and they then receive an email with instructions on how to set up their password. Once that is complete, patients can start using SeamlessMD and receive real-time updates and reminders on their appointments and surgery dates. SeamlessMD is developing a Machine Learning model for more accurate risk prediction (e.g. readmissions) models and Osler, a collaborator in the process, is one of the first partners with access to this advanced model to further optimize patient care.

This endeavour is federally funded by Scale AI, Canada's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Supercluster, whose initiative is to identify cross-sector collaborative projects and provide funding and expert guidance to help Canada stay ahead of the AI curve.

"SeamlessMD has been one of Osler's many excellent technology part-



ners, helping us to deliver innovative patient care across all of our hospital sites," shares Dr. Rardi van Heest, Vice President of Medical Affairs at William Osler Health System. "Patients love their technology-enabled experience, and our staff at the pre-anesthesia clinics and surgeon's offices have improved day-to-day operations with SeamlessMD's streamlined perioperative dashboards."

"SeamlessMD is helping us bring state-of-the-art technology and innovation to our surgery patients and deliver safer patient care even from a distance" says Jane de Lacy, Vice President of Clinical Services at William Osler Health System. "We are particularly proud to have made the platform available in multiple languages, which helps us to provide more accessible, convenient care for our diverse patient community."

"We are excited to collaborate with Osler in this unique partnership, as the multi-site organization continues to demonstrate exemplary leadership in healthcare innovation," Dr. Joshua Liu, CEO at SeamlessMD. "We remain dedicated to the delivery of safe and effective virtual care during COVID-19, and are grateful for the ongoing support provided by Scale AI."

About William Osler Health System

William Osler Health System is a hospital system, which includes Brampton Civic Hospital, Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness and Etobicoke General Hospital, and serves 1.3 million residents of Brampton, Etobicoke and surrounding communities within the Central West region. Osler's emergency departments are among the busiest in Canada and its Mental Health Program is one of the largest in the province. William Osler Health System Foundation seeks to create a healthier community through giving by inspiring its communities to invest in exceptional health care close to home.

About SeamlessMD

SeamlessMD provides the #1 digital patient engagement platform used by hospitals and health systems to elevate the patient experience, improve outcomes and lower costs. Patients access digital care plans on their smartphones, tablets or computers and are guided through their health conditions or treatments via reminders, education and progress tracking. Providers receive alerts, monitor patients and access analytics to deliver better care. SeamlessMD is directly integrated with Epic and Cerner. Health systems such as Trillium Health Partners, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre and Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre use SeamlessMD to improve patient satisfaction while reducing hospital length of stay, readmissions, and costs.

For more information and to see SeamlessMD in action, please visit: www.seamless.md

ADITYA JHA APPOINTED CHAIR OF ICCC'S ADVISORY BOARD

CONTD. FROM PAGE 3

- * Strengthening ICCC Brand in Canada & India As a premier Canada-India trade and investment promotion organization.
- * Business outreach Guide ICCC with action plan to connect with the leaders of Indo-Canadian, Canadian and Indian business leaders in the Canada India trade corridor.
- * Stakeholder outreach Help establish deeper relationship with the political leaders, Bureaucrats and Think Tank as well as Canadian trade bodies.
- * Paradigm shift Help in developing evaluation/attraction parameters that would enable attracting and retaining sponsors in Canada & India.

Dr. Aditya Jha is a Life member of the ICCC, former ICCC Board member and has the rare distinction as recipient of the ICCC's Technology Award (2004) and Lifetime Achievement Award (2014). He has been honoured with the Order of Canada (2012), Honorary Doctorate (2009) by Ryerson University's Ted Rogers School of Business Management, vested in the Hall of Fame as Champions of Public Education in Canada by the Learning partners and has received many more awards and accolades.

His philanthropic giving includes nurturing entrepreneurship with Canada's Indigenous community. His private charitable foundation (www.poaofoundation.org) has fourteen endowments (for scholarships) and five grants (for entrepreneurship) at five Canadian universities/colleges besides his philanthropic activities in India and Nepal. He has served on various federal/provincial and education boards over the last 15 years.

Dr. Jha is serial entrepreneur and has had rich international professional experience in Asia, North America and Europe and at present he is the Chairman & Founder of dgMarket International Inc., USA with offices in nine countries including India (Mumbai & Delhi).

He obtained degrees leading to Post graduate studies in Computer Science and is an alumnus of Delhi University, Kurukshetra University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Ryerson University. He last served as General Manager at Bell Canada before launching his entrepreneurial venture.

TALIBAN READY TO PROVIDE SAFE PASSAGE OF CIVILIANS TO AIRPORT: US

WASHINGTON, (IANS) The Taliban told the US that they would provide safe passage of civilians to Kabul airport, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan has said.

"The Taliban have informed us that they are prepared to provide the safe passage of civilians to the airport. And we intend to hold them to that commitment," Sullivan told reporters in a White House briefing on Tuesday, Xinhua news agency reported.

He said the US believes the evacuation underway in Kabul could last until the end of this month. "We're talking to them (the Taliban) about what the exact timetable is for how this will all play out."

Sullivan said it is still too early to judge whether the Taliban is the legitimate governing power in the country.

"Right now, there is a chaotic situation in Kabul where we don't even have the establishment of a governing authority," he said.

"Ultimately, it's going to be up to the Taliban to show the rest of the world who they are and how they intend to proceed. The track record has not been good, but it's premature to address that question at this point," he added.

Earlier in the day, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said that US commanders on the ground had discussions with the Taliban outside the airport, without providing further details.

Over 4,000 US troops would be on the ground by the end of Tuesday to support the evacuation mission, and US troops had no hostile interactions with the Taliban, according to US Army Major General Hank Taylor.

He said Kabul airport remains secure, and 5,000 to 9,000 people could be evacuated per day.

President Joe Biden, facing mounting criticisms from the public and lawmakers over the chaotic evacuation, said Monday that he stands by his decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan while acknowledging Kabul's collapse came much sooner than Washington had anticipated.

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CANADIAN REAL ESTATE ASSOCIATION SAYS 'NATIONAL HOME SALES DECLINED BY 3.5% ON A MONTH-OVER-MONTH BASIS IN JULY'

OTTAWA: Statistics released by the Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA) show national home sales were down between June and July 2021. National home sales declined by 3.5% on a month-over-month basis in July. Actual (not seasonally adjusted) activity declined by 15.2% year-over-year. The number of newly listed properties dropped by 8.8% from June to July. The MLS® Home Price Index (MLS® HPI) rose 0.6% month-over-month and was up 22.2% year-over-year. The actual (not seasonally adjusted) national average sale price posted a 15.6% year-over-year gain in July.

Home sales recorded over Canadian MLS® Systems edged back a further 3.5% on a month-over-month basis in July 2021, marking the smallest of four consecutive declines since March. While sales are now down a cumulative 28% from that March peak, Canadian housing markets are still historically quite active. Month-over-month declines in sales activity were less broad-based than seen in the past few months, although sales were still down in about two-thirds of all local markets. Declines were led by Edmonton and Calgary, although that may be because the current trend of softening sales is a little more recent in these markets. In a market like Montreal, where sales began to moderate way back at the start of the year, activity edged up month-over-month in July. The actual (not seasonally adjusted) number of transactions in July 2021 was down 15.2% on a year-over-year basis from the record for that month set last July. July 2021 sales nonetheless still marked the second-best month of July on record. "While the moderation of sales activity continues to capture most of the headlines these days, it's record-low inventories that should be our focus," said Cliff Stevenson, Chair of CREA. "We still have extremely unbalanced housing markets all over the country, so your best bet is to consult with your local REALTOR® for information and guidance about buying or selling a home in these still unprecedented and challenging times," continued Stevenson.

'TECHNICAL FAULT' LED TO DEATH OF 3 EMPLOYEES, 2 INJURIES IN PAKISTAN ORDNANCE FACTORIES' (POF) PLANTS IN RAWALPINDI DISTRICT

ISLAMABAD, (IANS) Three employees were killed and two others injured when an explosion took place inside a defence industrial complex in Rawalpindi district of Pakistan's east Punjab province on Thursday evening, an army statement said.

The accident happened due to a technical fault in one of the plants of Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) in Wah Cantt town of the district, located some 37 km northwest of Islamabad, the Xinhua news agency reported. The accident site has been cleared and the situation has been controlled by POF technical emergency response team, the military's media wing Inter-Services Public Relations said in the statement. The explosion shattered window glasses of nearby houses and sent a shockwave in the whole town, creating panic among the people, according to local media and sources.

PM TRUDEAU ANNOUNCES FEDERAL ELECTIONS ON SEPTEMBER 20

CONTD. FROM PAGE 3

Trudeau's Liberal Party has been running a minority government for over two years now and the next general election was due in October 2023.

The latest opinion polls give the ruling Liberal Party (35.6 per cent) a lead of over seven points over the opposition Conservative Party (28.8 per cent).

The Jagmeet Singh-led New Democratic Party is in third place with 19.3 per cent support.

If the trends hold, Trudeau's party is likely to cross the majority mark of 170 seats in the House of Commons.

27 Fast and Easy Fix Ups to Get the Best Price for Your GTA Home

TORONTO - Because your home may well be your largest asset, selling it is probably one of the most important decisions you will make in your life. And once you have made that decision, you'll want to sell your home for the highest price in the shortest time possible without compromising your sanity. Before you place your home on the market, here's a way to help you to be as prepared as possible.

To assist homesellers, a new industry report has just been released called "27 Valuable Tips That You Should Know to Get Your Home Sold Fast and for Top Dollar." It tackles the important issues you need to know to make your home competitive in today's tough, aggressive marketplace.

Through these 27 tips you will discover how to protect and capitalize on your most important investment, reduce stress, be in control of your situation, and make the best profit possible.

In this report you'll discover how to avoid financial disappointment or worse, a financial disaster when selling your home. Using a common-sense approach, you will get the straight facts about what can make or break the sale of your home.

You owe it to yourself to learn how these important tips will give you the competitive edge to get your home sold fast and for the most amount of money.

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ZABIHULLAH MUJAHID, THE TALIBAN'S SPOKESPERSON, ADDRESSES REPORTERS IN KABUL, AFGHANISTAN ON TUESDAY, AUG. 17, 2021. MORE THAN 100 NEW OFFICIAL OR PRO-TALIBAN ACCOUNTS AND PAGES HAVE SURFACED ON FACEBOOK, YOUTUBE AND TWITTER, DESPITE A BAN ON THE GROUP BY THE SITES.

TALIBAN TAKEOVER IN AFGHANISTAN- WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

CONTD. FROM PAGE 3

It also urged women to join its government. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that the situation in Kabul was completely under control and law and order returned to the city. Mujahid reiterated that life and properties of people were safe as there are reports that the Taliban has arrested about 200 people involved in looting of government properties and vehicles. The Taliban leadership has ordered its members and "once again instructs them that no one is allowed to enter anyone's house without permission. Life, property and honor of none shall be harmed but must be protected," Mujahid said. Late on Monday, flight operations of military transport planes had resumed from the Kabul airport and dozens of flights were conducted, according to residents living nearby. The planes were evacuating foreigners and some of their Afghan workers. The flight operations were suspended on Monday morning after thousands of Afghans flocked to the airport to flee Kabul. Taliban members on Monday took control of the outside of Kabul airport while thousands of US forces were inside the airport helping evacuating the crowds. At least 10 Afghans were reportedly killed in the stampede and a shooting inside the airport within the past two days. Also on Monday, the offices of the Afghan Public Health Ministry and the Kabul municipality were reopened. Wahid Majrooh, acting minister of public health, appeared together with Taliban public health representatives in a televised footage, urging medical workers to return to their jobs, including female medical employees. Small shops were also reopened around the city while banks and business centres mostly remained closed as of Tuesday morning. Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said on Tuesday that the insurgent group does not wish to "repeat any conflict, any war". "We want to do away with the factors for conflict.

Therefore, the Islamic Emirate does not have any kind of hostility or animosity towards anybody," Mujahid said in his first press conference since the Taliban overthrew the Afghanistan government on Sunday. He added that all animosity "has come to an end". "We would like to live peacefully. We do not want any internal or external enemies," he said, Geo News reported. The Taliban would not seek retribution against former soldiers and members of the Western-backed government, the spokesman said, saying the movement is granting amnesty to former Afghan government soldiers as well as the contractors and translators who worked for international forces. Speaking on women's rights, he said it is a "very important issue". "The Islamic Emirate is committed to the rights of women within the framework of Sharia. Our sisters, our women will have the same rights and will be able to benefit from them. "They can have activities in different sectors and areas on the basis of our rules and regulations - in education, health and other areas," Mujahid said, adding that "they will work with us shoulder-to-shoulder". Mujahid also said that any concern regarding women that the international community may have, the Taliban would like to "assure them that there will be no discrimination against women". He reminded the world, however, that "our women are Muslims who will be happy to be living within the framework of Sharia (law)". Mujahid also said that private media could continue to be free and independent in Afghanistan, adding that the Taliban is committed to the media within its cultural framework. "Islam is a very important value in our country. Nothing should be against Islamic values when it comes to the activities of the media," he said. "They can critique our work so that we can improve," the Taliban spokesman added.

Full Vaccination Or Negative Covid Report A Must For Entering Punjab



Only those who are fully vaccinated against coronavirus or have a negative RT-PCR test report will be allowed to enter Punjab from Monday, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said today. People coming from neighbouring Himachal Pradesh and Jammu will be strictly monitored. In schools and colleges in Punjab, only fully vaccinated teaching and non-teaching staff, or those recently recovered from COVID-19, can physically be present to teach even as online classes remain an option for students. Mr Singh also wants teachers and non-teaching staff to be prioritised for vaccination, with special camps. The state's Health Minister, meanwhile, pitched reducing the gap between the two doses to prioritise second dose for teachers and other school staff. Punjab on Friday reported 88 Covid cases and no deaths. The state's total case tally is nearly six lakh.

Punjab has ramped up Covid testing in schools after their reopening. The government has also decided conduct RT-PCR tests of at least 10,000 samples from schools daily. Apart from Punjab, schools in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh have also reported several positive cases among students in the past week as offline classes resumed. Punjab has ramped up Covid testing in schools after their reopening. The government has also decided conduct RT-PCR tests of at least 10,000 samples from schools daily. Apart from Punjab, schools in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh have also reported several positive cases among students in the past week as offline classes resumed. According to the state government, Punjab's Covid positivity rate has seen a marginal rise to 0.2 per cent due to the rising cases in Himachal Pradesh and other parts of the country.

‘GOVT NEED NOT DISCLOSE ANYTHING THAT COMPROMISES NATIONAL SECURITY’: SC ON PEGASUS ROW

The Centre Tuesday told the Supreme Court that it has "nothing to hide" in the Pegasus row and that the matter concerns "national security." A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) N V Ramana issued a notice to the Centre and said that the government must reply within ten days on allegations that the Israeli spyware was used for snooping, adding it will decide on forming a committee after getting the response. The bench, also comprising Justices Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose, told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that the apex court does not want the government to disclose anything which may compromise national security. Stating that the matter cannot be "subject to a public debate," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the apex court, "These software are purchased by every country and the petitioners want it to be divulged if the software has not been used. If we divulge this then the terrorists can take preventive steps. These are national security issues and we cannot hide anything from the court." Mehta further added that the details can be submitted to a committee of experts. "We can divulge this to a committee of experts and it'll be a neutral body. Would you as a constitutional court expect such issues to be divulged before court & put up for public debate? Committee will place its report before court. But how can we sensationalise the issue." The Supreme Court was hearing a batch of petitions seeking an independent probe into the allegations of surveillance through the use of Pegasus spyware. During the hearing on Monday, the Centre "unequivocally" denied all allegations made by the petitioners in the Pegasus matter and told the Supreme Court in an affidavit that "with a view to dispel any wrong narrative spread by certain vested interests and with an object of examining the issues raised", it would set up "a Committee of Experts in the field which will go in to all aspects of the issue.



INDIA STARTS SINGLE ENTRY E-VISA FACILITY FOR AFGHANS



In the wake of the prevailing situation in Afghanistan where the Taliban have seized power, India has introduced a new category of e-visa for Afghan nationals to fast-track their applications for entry into India. These visas will be valid for six months only and will be granted only after security clearance, sources said. "MHA reviews visa provisions in view of the current situation in Afghanistan. A new category of electronic visa called "e-Emergency X-Misc Visa" introduced to fast-track visa applications for entry into India," a statement from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said on Tuesday. Sources said the visa is being granted to facilitate the stay of Afghan nationals fleeing Afghanistan for six months in India. There is no clarity yet on what will happen after this validity period expires. India does not have a refugee policy and grants shelter to foreigners facing persecution in their countries on a case-to-case basis. "India already provides X Miscellaneous category visa to foreigners whose purpose of entry into India does not match with any prescribed category. In the case of Afghanistan, the e-visa facility was not extended to the nationals of that country until now. However, since our mission is now shut in Afghanistan, people are being allowed to get online visas. All these applications, however, will first be cleared by security agencies," a home ministry official said.

UP MINISTER: ‘AMID TALIBAN SAVAGERY, GOVT SETTING UP ATS TRAINING CENTRE IN DEOBAND’

The Uttar Pradesh government has decided to set up a training centre for Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) commandos in Saharanpur's Deoband, known for its Islamic seminary Darul Uloom Deoband. "Amid the Taliban's savagery, here is a piece of news from UP. Yogi Ji has decided to open a commando training centre in Deoband. The work has also started on a war footing," UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's media advisor Shalabh Mani Tripathi said in a tweet in Hindi. Over one and a half dozen ATS officers, selected from all over the state, will be deputed there, he added in his tweet. According to sources, the government has already allotted over 2,000 square meters of land for establishing the ATS training centre in Deoband.

UNSC DEMAND ZERO TOLERANCE FOR TERRORISM, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN: TIRUMURTI

CONTD. FROM PAGE 3

With deft diplomacy, Tirumurti was able to steer the deeply polarised Council to an agreement on a statement formally setting out its stand on post-Taliban Afghanistan. The negotiations on the statement that sets minimal requirements for the Taliban, with what would be considered innocuous anywhere else, dragged on for nearly five days after Norway and Estonia circulated the first draft. Summing up the highlights of the meeting, Tirumurti said the members "reaffirmed the fact that we need immediate cessation of hostilities, and violence". As for recognition of Afghanistan's new regime, he said the precondition was "a political settlement". "And that political settlement should fully respect the human rights of women, children, and minorities," he said. Tirumurti, who convened the meeting at the request of Norway and Estonia who have responsibility for Afghanistan matters, hinted at the difficulties he faced in getting an agreement on the statement. "Discussions are on to see how best we can address some of the issues in the press statement. And we do sincerely hope that this will come out sooner rather than later," he said. Tirumurti finally succeeded in getting an agreement on the press statement. The statement, released later, called for "an immediate end to the violence in Afghanistan, the restoration of security, civil and constitutional order, and urgent talks to resolve the current crisis of authority in the country and to arrive at a peaceful settlement through an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned process of national reconciliation". The Council "reaffirmed the importance of combating terrorism in Afghanistan to ensure the territory of Afghanistan should not be used to threaten or attack any country, and that neither the Taliban nor any other Afghan group or individual should support terrorists operating on the territory of any other country", according to the statement. It also called for "the establishment, through inclusive negotiations, of a new government that is united, inclusive and representative - including with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women".

It underlined that institutional continuity and adherence to Afghanistan's international obligations, as well as the safety and security of all Afghan and international citizens, must be ensured. It also said that the UN and other humanitarian agencies and organisations should be allowed to provide assistance across conflict

GOVT MUST WAKE UP AND PROTECT INDIANS IN AFGHANISTAN: CONGRESS



The Congress on Monday said that the Modi government should "wake up from its slumber" and protect Indians in strife-torn Afghanistan. Describing the situation in Afghanistan as "extremely alarming" Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said India's strategic interests were at stake. "But the government has not put in place any plan to evacuate its citizens there, which is a gross abdication of duty," he said. "The Congress party stands solidly behind protecting India's interests and expects a mature political and diplomatic response from our Government over the complete collapse of government in Afghanistan and Taliban takeover," he told reporters.



Taliban says India can continue development work in Afghanistan

The Taliban has now occupied Afghanistan. With this, the process of leaving the country of Afghan citizens and foreign nationals has started from there. Meanwhile, the Taliban has said that the projects on which India was working in Afghanistan should be completed. India is working on several development projects in Afghanistan and has invested about \$3 billion there. Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen told Pakistan's Hum news channel, "India should complete its projects in Afghanistan because they are for the people." The Pakistani news anchor also asked about the situation will be now as India has made a huge investment in Afghanistan but never recognized the Taliban, while many consulates of India are in Afghanistan. In response, the spokesperson said that the Taliban will not allow any country to use the land of Afghanistan to fulfil its purpose, or to organize a feud against any other country. They can come here and complete their projects because they are for the people, he said. On the other hand, India is constantly talking to America on the issue

of Afghanistan. Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar spoke to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday. Apart from this, Jaishankar also spoke to US State Department spokesman Ned Price. Notably, after the Taliban occupation in Afghanistan, Blinken has spoken to the foreign ministers of all the countries that have invested a lot on development plans in Afghanistan. India is also included in this. Meanwhile, military flights evacuating diplomats and civilians from Afghanistan resumed early on Tuesday after the runway at Kabul airport was cleared of thousands of people desperate to flee after the Taliban seized the capital. The number of civilians at the airport had thinned out, a Western security official at the facility told Reuters, a day after chaotic scenes in which US troops fired to disperse crowds and people clung to a US military transport plane as it taxied for take-off. Flights were suspended for much of Monday when at least five people were killed, witnesses said, although it was unclear whether they had been shot or crushed in a stampede.


SUKHBIR BADAL TO UNDERTAKE 100-DAY YATRA ACROSS PUNJAB

CHANDIGARH, (IANS) Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) President Sukhbir Singh Badal announced on Tuesday that he would undertake a 100-day yatra across 100 constituencies in Punjab starting Wednesday to expose the 'corrupt' and 'scam-ridden' Congress government as also the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Addressing the media here to launch the party's campaign 'Gall Punjab Di', the SAD chief said he would hold 700 public meetings and address each and every section of the society during his 100-day yatra during the course of which SAD workers would go to each and every village and ward in the state. He said the purpose of this exercise is two-fold: To bring the corruption of the Amarinder Singh-led government as well as his council of ministers before the people, and to collect feedback from the people as to what they expected from the next SAD-BSP government. Punjab is scheduled to go to the polls next year. Sukhbir Badal also released a chargesheet against the Congress and AAP on the occasion. He said while Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has a lot to answer vis-a-vis the Rs 6,500 crore excise scam, five of his ministerial colleagues have been accused of indulging in corruption. Taking the Chief Minister head-on, Sukhbir Badal said Amarinder Singh has destroyed Punjab in the last four-and-a-half years. He said Punjab has the misfortune of having a Chief Minister who doesn't come out of his home, doesn't meet even his own ministers, doesn't listen to the people and even teachers seeking to meet him are thrashed brutally.

INITIATE STEPS TO REPEAL FARM LAWS, PUNJAB CM URGES PM MODI



NEW DELHI, (IANS) Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Wednesday and urged the latter to initiate immediate steps to repeal the three 'contentious' farm laws, besides amending the relevant law to include the farmers in the free legal aid category. Amarinder Singh's media advisor Raveen Thukral tweeted after the meeting: "Punjab CM @capt_amarinder calls on PM @narendramodi, seeks immediate steps for repeal of #FarmLaws & amendment to relevant law for including farmers in free legal aid category. #FarmersProtests." The Punjab Chief Minister, who called on the Prime Minister here on Wednesday evening and submitted two separate letters, called for immediate review and revocation of the three farm laws which have triggered widespread resentment among the farmers of Punjab and other states, who are protesting on the borders of Delhi since November 26 last year. Pointing at the prolonged agitation, during which scores of farmers have lost their lives, the Chief Minister said the stir had the potential of posing security threats for Punjab and the country with Pakistan-backed anti-India forces looking to exploit the farmers' disgruntlement with the government. Urging the Prime Minister to intervene for expeditious redressal of the farmers' 'legitimate' concerns, the Chief Minister said the continued agitation is not only impacting economic activities in Punjab but also has the potential to affect the social fabric, especially when political parties and groups take strong positions. Amarinder Singh noted that earlier too, he had sought the Prime Minister's appointment for a meeting with an all-party delegation from Punjab. He further underlined the need to compensate the farmers for the management of paddy straw at Rs 100 per quintal and also to address the fears of DAP shortage, which could aggravate the farmers' problems and the crisis triggered by the farm laws. In another letter, the Chief Minister stressed that due to the fragmentation of landholdings, and persistent disputes with lessees and various market operators and agents, the farmers are also facing heightened litigation these days, causing stress to their meagre financial resources. Stressing the need to reduce the farmers' financial burdens as a result of such litigation, he noted that the Central Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987 provides free legal aid to certain categories of persons, who are perceived to be the vulnerable sections of the society. Pointing out that the country's farmers are also very vulnerable, he said that they are, at times, compelled to commit suicide due to financial problems, even though they remain proud and prefer to till their land even at the cost of their lives.



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NEW ZEALAND REPORTS FIRST COVID-19 CASE IN SIX MONTHS, PM ANNOUNCES NATIONWIDE LOCKDOWN



A case of coronavirus has come to light in New Zealand after 6 months. It is feared that this could be a Delta variant of the virus. As a precautionary measure, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has announced a nationwide lockdown from Tuesday. Ardern said that the country was completely free from new cases of coronavirus for 6 months. In such a situation, after the first case of Delta Variant comes to the fore, the government cannot take any risk. While addressing the country through television, PM Ardern said, "We have seen what can be the consequences if the cases of this variant start increasing. So we have got only one chance to escape from it and we have to take advantage of it." Referring to Australia's struggles against coronavirus, she said that the neighbouring country has fought a major battle against the Delta variant. She said that after seeing the fatal consequences of this variant in Australia, it is necessary that we take an immediate and appropriate decision on this issue so that its spread can be contained. She added that New Zealand will have to take strict steps to prevent it. Gradually, relaxations will be given, she said. Along with the lockdown, strictness regarding masks and social distancing has also been increased in the country. Officials said that one of the reasons for taking strict measures like lockdown is that getting the delta variant in Auckland has nothing to do with border or managed isolation. Notably, New Zealand has been appreciated all over the world for its excellent management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of the population of 50 lakh, only 26 people have died due to the virus.

'TIME FOR JOE BIDEN TO RESIGN', SAYS DONALD TRUMP AS TALIBAN SEIZES CONTROL OF AFGHANISTAN

Former US president Donald Trump on Sunday called for the resignation of his successor Joe Biden amid the take-over of Afghanistan by the Taliban after US troops withdrew from the war-torn nation after nearly 20 years. In a statement, Trump said, "It is time for Joe Biden to resign in disgrace for what he has allowed to happen to Afghanistan." The 75-year-old also called on Biden over a surge in COVID-19 cases in the US, domestic immigration, economic and energy policies, news agency AFP reported. The Taliban on Sunday took over Afghanistan, 20 years after they were toppled by the US invasion. The terrorist outfit entered the Afghan capital Kabul, took possession of the presidential palace, which led to president Ashraf Ghani fleeing the nation. Ghani said he flee Afghanistan to 'avoid bloodshed.' Joe Biden has set August 31 as the deadline for the complete withdrawal of US troops from the nations. Under Trump's presidency, the US brokered a peace deal between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Doha last year and said the United States will withdraw all its troops from the nation by May 2021, in exchange for various security guarantees from the terrorists. After Biden took over the White House in January this year, he pushed back the deadline of troops withdrawal without setting any conditions.



MEET TALIBAN CO-FOUNDER MULLAH ABDUL GHANI BARADAR, WHO MAY BECOME NEXT PRESIDENT OF AFGHANISTAN

One of the co-founders of the Taliban, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar now heads the political office of the Taliban and is part of the negotiating team that the group has in Doha to try and thrash out a political deal that could pave the way for a ceasefire and more lasting peace in Afghanistan. He was believed to have fought side-by-side with Mullah Omar during the Soviet invasion in the 1970s. He grew up in Kandahar - the Taliban stronghold. The two founded the Taliban movement in the early 1990s amid the chaos and corruption of the civil war that erupted after the Soviet withdrawal. Baradar, who was reported to have been one of Taliban founder Mullah Omar's most trusted commanders, was captured in 2010 by security forces in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi and released in 2018 and was relocated to Qatar. He was then appointed head of the Taliban's political office and oversaw the signing of the withdrawal agreement with the Americans. After the Taliban's collapse in 2001, it is believed that Baradar was among a small group of insurgents who approached interim leader Hamid Karzai with a letter outlining a potential deal that would have seen the militants recognise the new administration.



US EASES TRAVEL ADVISORY FOR INDIA TO LEVEL 2, URGES ITS CITIZENS NOT TO TRAVEL TO J&K

The United States has eased its travel advisory, lowering it to Level 2 on Monday. This comes after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said the South Asian nation now has a 'moderate level of COVID-19'. Early this year, the US had put India in Level 4, asking its citizens not to travel to India. In July the United States had improved the travel advisory for India, upgrading from Level 4 category to Level 3. Level 3 urges citizens to reconsider travel. The Level 4 category means no travel. The US State Department also urged American citizens not to travel to Jammu and Kashmir, except the eastern Ladakh region and its capital of Leh, due to terrorism and civil unrest. They have also been advised not to travel within 10 km of the India-Pakistan border. "Your risk of contracting COVID-19 and developing severe symptoms may be lower if you are fully vaccinated with an FDA authorised vaccine. Before planning any international travel, please review the CDC's specific recommendations for vaccinated and unvaccinated travellers," the State Department said.

DEATH TOLL FROM HAITI EARTHQUAKE REACHES 1,419

The death toll from the powerful earthquake that struck Haiti on Saturday climbed to 1,419, Xinhua reported citing authorities. The quake destroyed 2,868 homes and damaged another 5,410, officials from the agency said. The destruction has also pushed hospitals to the brink and blocked roads that would carry vital supplies. "When it comes to medical needs, this is our biggest urgency. We have started to send medications and medical personnel to the facilities that are affected," Prime Minister Ariel Henry said. "For the people who need urgent special care, we have evacuated a certain number of them, and we will evacuate some more today and tomorrow," the prime minister added. The earthquake struck at 8:30 a.m. about 10 kilometres deep, with its epicentre about 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) northeast of Saint-Louis-du-Sud in the southwest part of the country.

'STAND SQUARELY BEHIND MY DECISION', SAYS US PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN OVER AFGHANISTAN PULLOUT

Amid the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan as the US is pulling out its troops, US President Joe Biden on Monday said, "I stand squarely behind my decision. After 20 years, I've learned the hard way that there was never a good time to withdraw US forces." Biden, in a televised address from the White House, said that the American troops should not be dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves. The US troops went to Afghanistan for 20 years with clear goals, to get those who attacked America on September 11, 2001, for punishing the Taliban for its links with Al Qaeda. He added, "Our mission was never supposed to be nation-building." Biden said that 'thousands' of American citizens and Afghans, who had worked with the US troops, will be evacuated in the coming days, and also threatened a 'devastated' military response if the Taliban launch attacks in the meantime, news agency AFP quoted. Talking about Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fleeing the nation, Biden said Afghan political leaders gave up and Afghan military collapses, sometimes 'without trying to fight.'



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