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Long Island Car Parade to take place on August 15 in Hicksville



(By our staff reporter) Long island NY: Long Island's IDP USA is set to keep India's flag flying high with a Car Parade on August 15 in Hicksville, the hub of Long Island and the newest Little India. This is the 8th year in a row that IDP USA is organizing the India Day Parade, albeit in an innovative way this time. This was announced on August 4 at a Zoom press conference addressed by IDP USA President, Mukesh Modi, and his team, as well founders of the parade, Bobby Kalotee and Kamlesh Mehta Over 150 cars are expected to

form the cavalcade starting from Patel Brothers on South Broadway at 4 p.m., where dignitaries such as Town of Oyster Bay Supervisor Joe Saladino, State Senator Kevin Thomas, Grand Marshall Raj Bhayani and IDP USA President Mukesh Modi will speak from a stage after tricolor flag hoisting. A high official from the Indian consulate is also expected to grace the occasion. The cars displaying two Indian flags on either side, led by the IDSP USA float with the Grand Marshal and couple of other VIPs, will drive down from Patel

Brothers to Apna Bazar, make a U-Turn, pass in front of Asa Mai Hindu temple, and culminate in Badshah Farmers Market. At the end point, there will be a short program concluding around 6 p.m; it will comprise a couple of patriotic songs, greetings from dignitaries, as well as recognition of sponsors, team members and supporters. At Patel and Badshah, cold drinks and small snack packs will be distributed free. President Mukesh Modi said that all necessary permissions have been taken and all protocols and guidance of health authorities will be strictly followed. He elaborated, "All participants will stay socially distanced and wear masks. The occupants of the cars will not come out of their vehicles. Only a limited number of people will be allowed to assemble at the programs at the start and end points." All along the parade

route, establishments will distribute flyers on safeguards to prevent Covid. Those watching and cheering the parade from the sidewalks are required to also wear masks and maintain social distance of 6 feet. Bobby Kalotee in his remarks to the Zoom meeting said we should never forget the leaders and martyrs who fought for India's independence. "Corona has confined us to our homes, making us realize how important freedom is," he said. Kamlesh Mehta commended the hard work put in by Mukesh Modi's team, and was confident that the Car Parade will be very successful and will count as the biggest celebration of India's Independence in the tristate area, if not America. Immediate Past President of IDP USA Jay Jasbir Singh expressed satisfaction with the preparations for the parade. The entire proceedings of the Car Parade can be seen live on YouTube, and the Facebook page of Radio Zindagi (540 AM), which will also broadcast it live. The link for YouTube webcast will be given a day before the parade on www.idpusa.org. Those wishing to register their cars (some slots are still open) can go to www.idpusa.org. Participation is free.

Ronkonkoma Rotary Club Installation Dinner



RONKONKOMA ROTARY CLUB INSTALLATION DINNER
SAT, AUG 1ST @ FLOWERFIELD CELEBRATIONS

(By our staff reporter) New York : Rotary Club of the Ronkonkomas, with DG Jax Yonick and PDG's Justin & Arnie Quaranta, installed and welcomed 2020-21 Club President Flora Parekh, President-Elect Camille Bunicci, Secretary John McNamara & Treasurer

Corey Schwartz. Wonderfully Emceed by Harshil Parekh & Taylor Quaranta, the event was coordinated and planned by Paresh Parekh, Rose Quaranta and John McNamara. Picture Courtesy Lori Anne De Iulio Casdia. The splendid venue &

elegant decor of Flowerfield celebrations in Saint James carried out the event with mouthwatering appetizers and dinner operating under Covid-19 Guidelines with less than 50 community leaders and club

members. FREE Henna Tatoo, Mind blowing, Traditional Bharatnatyam and Fusion dance performances by Gaurav Ajmera & Manasa Pisipati were the highlights of the event. For Additional Information Visit www.ronkonkomarotary.org



70% Covid-19 related deaths in Bengal due to delayed admission in hospitals

Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said most of those who died of Covid-19 had delayed getting admitted to hospitals.

Nearly 70% of the Covid-19 related deaths in West Bengal happened due to delayed hospital admissions, the state's top bureaucrat said on Thursday.

"We are analysing each and every Covid-19 related death on a daily basis. Nearly 70% of the deaths took place because people delayed in reaching the hospital," said Rajiva Sinha, chief secretary of West Bengal.

Over the past few months multiple allegations have

surfaced against both state-run and private hospitals that they have refused to admit patients because of various reasons including shortage of beds, resulting in the death of some patients.

Sinha, however, said that there is no shortage of hospital beds. At present there are 11,560 beds in 83 Covid-19 designated hospitals out of which 60% are still vacant. In all there are 23,500 beds in hospitals and safe homes. "There is demand

for a particular category of hospital which can't be guaranteed in a pandemic situation. What we can guarantee is a kind of hospital where patients would be provided with adequate treatment by the best experts," he said.

The state government said that the case fatality rate has dropped to around 2.2% in West Bengal. The National CFR stands at 2.7%. At present only 1,144 patients in the state are in critical condition while 1,043 and 1,946 are

with moderate and mild symptoms.

"This means only two out of 100 Covid-19 patients have died. Out of this, 87% of the deaths were because of comorbidity," he added.

The chief secretary was addressing media persons at the state secretariat. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee was also present.

The Covid-19 pandemic has claimed 1,846 lives in Bengal till Wednesday which also saw the highest single-day



casualties at 61. On Thursday West Bengal tested positive for Covid-19, crossed the 25,000-mark died in Kolkata on of daily swab tests. The Thursday. Banerjee and state has already done West Bengal Governor more than one million Jagdeep Dhankhar tests. Veteran CPI (M) expressed their leader Shyamal condolences.

700 tonnes of Chemical stored in Chennai safe, to be e-auctioned: Customs



Customs authorities on Thursday sought to allay fears over safety regarding the storage of nearly 700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate at a container freight station near here.

could be a risk, even as political party Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) sought the government to ensure its safe disposal.

"The goods are safe and pose no danger" a senior Customs department official told PTI when asked about the fears of safety in the backdrop of the devastating Beirut explosion. Elaborating, the official, on condition of anonymity, said the sleuths had in November 2015 seized 697 tonnes of ammonium nitrate in 37 containers valued at Rs 1.80 crore from the importer. "The importer had misdeclared the goods as ammonium nitrate of fertiliser grade whereas on examination it was found to be

of explosive grade and that (the importer) had not followed the Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012," he said.

The containers were seized then and were since lying at a container freight station in the city while the licence of the importer had been cancelled. While seven tonnes of the chemical got spoilt during the deluge in December 2015, the remaining 690 tonnes were under process of e-auctioning, he said. Earlier during the day, PMK founder S Ramadoss urged the government to take immediate steps to safely dispose of the ammonium nitrate, saying a possible Beirut-like incident

should be avoided. Expressing concern over the reported huge quantity of the seized chemical kept at the freight station here since 2015, he said the uncleared substance could be a risk and that it should be safely disposed of and utilised for purposes like composting.

Tuesday's explosion in Lebanon's port city of Beirut killed 135 people and injured about 4,000.

Buildings were damaged for miles around the city after 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive chemical used in fertilisers, stored at the facility for six years, reportedly caused the explosion.

No communication from Pakistan on Kulbhushan Jadhav case, says India

The Islamabad high court on Monday had directed the government to inform India to appoint a lawyer for Kulbhushan Jadhav in order to file a review petition against his conviction. He is facing a death sentence for alleged spying.

Islamabad has not reached out to New Delhi after the Islamabad high court's order on Monday to the Pakistani government to give another chance to India to appoint a counsel for former Indian navy commander Kulbhushan Jadhav who is on death row.

"We haven't received any communication from Pakistan on Kulbhushan Jadhav case. Pakistan needs to provide unhindered, unimpeded consular access to him,"

external affairs ministry spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said on Thursday. The Islamabad high court on Monday had directed the government to inform India to appoint a lawyer for Jadhav in order to file a review petition against his conviction. He is facing a death sentence for alleged spying.

A two-judge bench of the Islamabad high court headed by chief justice Athar Minallah also directed the Pakistan

government to again inform Jadhav, 50, of his rights under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) order of 2019 staying his execution and calling for a review of his conviction.

India had recently said Pakistan had blocked all its efforts to seek remedies in the case of Jadhav, who was arrested by Pakistani security agencies in Balochistan in March 2016



and charged with spying. India operatives from the Iranian port maintains Jadhav is not a spy of Chabahar, where he was was kidnapped by Pakistani running a business.

Day after bhoomi puja, curious devotees throng Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya

The foundation stone laying ceremony at Ayodhya at the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was broadcast live on Wednesday.



deity's aarti on Doordarshan (national broadcaster)," said Kureel. Next to Hanuman Garhi temple, a group of devotees from adjoining Gonda district were spotted. After paying obeisance to Lord Hanuman, they also planned to visit Ram Janmabhoomi.

"Yesterday we watched Modiji on Doordarshan performing bhoomi puja. My family and relatives wanted to visit Ram Janmabhoomi today (Thursday) itself," said Radhey Shyam Varma, in his 50s. The festivities and celebrations

at Ayodhya post bhoomi puja were also the talking point among people.

However, in Faizabad, (locals differentiate between old Ayodhya and Faizabad for their convenience), there was business as usual and life was back to normal.

A day after the bhoomi puja, curious devotees turned up in large numbers at Ram Janmabhoomi site on Thursday to worship Ram Lalla at the pre-fabricated temple.

The people who queued up outside Ram Janmabhoomi, waiting for their turn to enter, were mostly from neighbouring areas, though some locals were also present.

Devotees also visited Hanuman Garhi temple, a few metres from Ram Janmabhoomi.

The grand bhoomi puja and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation were the talk of the town on Thursday. With pictures of PM Modi performing bhoomi puja still fresh in their minds, some of the devotees were expecting major changes at the Ram Janmabhoomi.

Diwakar Maurya, 51, who came from adjoining Gonda district, could not wait for his turn to enter

the Ram Janmabhoomi.

"I saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi performing bhoomi puja on television (on Wednesday). It was a grand ceremony. Some changes might have been made at Ram Janmabhoomi. Out of curiosity I am here today (Thursday) to see those changes," he said.

There were many others like Maurya in the queue who expected something grand at Ram Janmabhoomi.

However, Saket Kureel, 55, from neighbouring Basti district, wanted to pay obeisance to Ram Lalla at the pre-fabricated temple in which PM Modi had performed 'aarti' before bhoomi puja.

When he last visited Ram Janmabhoomi, Ram Lalla was residing inside the makeshift temple inside a tent.

"I want to see the temple where Ram Lalla is residing at present. I saw PM Modi performing the

Rajasthan HC orders notices to be served to 6 BSP MLAs who merged with Congress

A division bench of Rajasthan high court on Thursday disposed of the petition seeking an immediate stay on the merger of six Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) lawmakers with the Congress in 2019 with a direction to a lower court to serve the notices to six MLAs issued earlier by a single bench last week. A single bench of the high court had earlier sought replies from Speaker C P Joshi and the six lawmakers by August 11 after the BSP and BJP lawmaker Madan Dilawar moved the court against the Speaker's order upholding the merger. On Tuesday, the BSP and Dilawar filed review petitions

seeking a stay on the merger. Prateek Kasliwal, counsel for speaker CP Joshi said that the special appeal filed by the petitioner



Madan Dilawar and BSP is not maintainable. "The HC has disposed of the appeal filed by the BSP and

BP MLA Dilawar. The court directed the district judge to get the notices served the BSP MLAs as well as if required to take assistance of the Jaisalmer superintendent of police to serve the notices. The court had also directed to publish the notice in a local newspaper and at the same

time it is redirected to the single bench that it should give its decision on August 11 on the petition filed earlier," Kasliwal said.

On August 4, the BSP and BJP MLA Madan Dilawar filed a petition in the division bench of the High Court seeking immediate stay on the merger of six BSP MLAs with Congress last year. The BSP had prayed to the division bench to accept the special appeal and to suspend the effect of the order of assembly Speaker dated September 18, 2019 whereby he declared that six elected representatives of the BSP have merged with Indian National Congress.

Six days after 1st rejection, Kejriwal govt resends LG proposal to reopen weekly markets and hotels in Delhi

The issue had led to a stand-off between Delhi government and LG's office last week.

Delhi government led by Aam Aadmi Party's Arvind Kejriwal has sent a fresh proposal to lieutenant governor Anil Baijal recommending reopening of hotels, gyms and weekly markets, citing the decline in the number of Covid 19 cases in the national capital. The new proposal has been sent almost a week after the rejection of a similar proposal by the government bringing the differences between the government and the LG's office into sharp focus.

Delhi has witnessed a steady decline in the number of active coronavirus cases and the sharp rise in new cases, which was a cause of worry back in June, has stabilized, easing the pressure on medical facilities and giving the government confidence to seek wider relaxations for further

resumption of economic activities. However, the LG's office has indicated that relaxations such as allowing local weekly markets and gymnasiums to operate may lead to a resurgence in the number of cases and has therefore spurned Kejriwal government's insistence on that count.

The issue has become the latest point of stand-off between the two power centres in the city-state that have often been at loggerheads over various issues. Kejriwal's deputy Manish Sisodia, had last Saturday, sought home minister Amit Shah's intervention to force LG Anil Baijal's hand to allow reopening of weekly markets and hotels citing a need to give economic activities in the capital another shot in the arm.

In his letter to Shah, Sisodia had

cited statistics to claim eight per cent of Delhi's business and employment was suffering due to the coronavirus disease outbreak.

"Due to the closure of weekly markets, five lakh families are sitting at home. Now when they are hopeful that with control over coronavirus in Delhi they will get an opportunity to restart their business, binding them under the decision of closure is unfair to Delhi's economic situation and hopes of lakhs of people," Sisodia had written. He had indicated that the Delhi government will resend the proposal to Baijal on Tuesday. "If traders start their business, jobs will be generated, and that the condition of the economy will improve," the deputy chief minister wrote in his letter.

Baijal had rejected the first



proposal a day earlier on Friday describing capital's Covid 19 situation as "fragile" and stating that the threat was still "far from over". Baijal's office had claimed that CM Kejriwal had agreed with the LG's assessment advocating adoption of "a cautious and conservative approach". The AAP government has been looking to give further impetus to economic activities in the Unlock 3 phase and has accused LG's office and the Centre of adopting two yardsticks for Delhi and the rest of the

country. A Union home ministry notification has allowed opening of gymnasiums in Unlock-3 while sustaining the restrictions on mass activities including social, political and religious functions. It has also not allowed metro rail services, swimming pools, cinema halls, entertainment parks among other activities that lend itself to mass participation. The Kejriwal government is also pushing for resumption of metro rail services in its bid to revive the Capital's economy and complete pending projects.

US congressional body expresses bipartisan 'concern' over Kashmir

It was a rare instance of bipartisan criticism of the Kashmir changes. Democrats have condemned it before, and in many public forums such as congressional and semi-congressional hearings and on social media, headlined most prominently by Senators Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, an Indian American.



The US House of Representatives committee that oversees foreign relations on Wednesday expressed bipartisan "concern" over the situation in Kashmir in a letter to external affairs minister S Jaishankar by its top Democratic and Republican leaders, worded carefully so as to not sound a discordant note. "We note with concern that conditions in Jammu and Kashmir have not

normalised one year after India's repeal of Article 370 and the establishment of Jammu and Kashmir as a Union Territory," Eliot Engel, the Democratic chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, and Michael T McCaul, the top Republican called the ranking member, wrote in the letter.

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Republicans had been mostly supportive thus far through their silence, taking the lead from the Trump administration's

carefully calibrated response that it was an "internal matter" for India but it wanted the restrictions in place in the immediate aftermath be removed at the earliest. Cognizant perhaps of the significance of the bipartisan nature of their criticism, the two lawmakers sought to soft-land it by averring themselves as "champions" of the relationship, which they have been indeed over the

years, and added they were "delighted" at the two countries' "close cooperation on issues from defense to climate change".

They also offered full-throated support for India in its ongoing border tensions with China. "This closer relationship is all the more important as India faces aggression from China along your shared border, which is part of the Chinese government's consistent pattern of unlawful and belligerent territorial aggression across the Indo-Pacific. The United States will remain steadfast in support of India's efforts to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity."

They also acknowledged "the ongoing serious security and counterterrorism concerns in the region", in a barely veiled reference to threat emanating from across border in Pakistan.

The House Foreign Relations Committee controls the state department's budget, and

uses that power to influence the country's foreign relations. Its Senate counterpart - the Senate Foreign Relations Committee - wields similar influence through its power to confirm or reject the appointment of ambassadors and senior officials.

Engel had joined the top Democrat on the senate foreign relations committee, Senator Bob Menendez, to call on India to protect the constitutional rights of "all it citizens" in reference to the Kashmir restrictions.

"As the world's largest democracy, India has an opportunity to demonstrate for all its citizens the importance of protecting and promoting equal rights, including freedom of assembly, access to information, and equal protections under the law," they had said then in a joint statement. But it was not a bipartisan action like Wednesday.

Used PPE kits dumped in the open at Patna hospital ring alarm bells

Safe disposal of medical waste related to Covid-19, sterilisation of waste and incineration are among the 21-point guidelines that the Bihar health department has recommended to tertiary healthcare institutions and medical colleges treating Covid-19 patients.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) kits, used by healthcare workers attending to coronavirus disease (Covid-19) patients, can be seen littered on the campus of the Patna Medical College Hospital (PMCH), ringing alarm bells about the spread of the contagion and underlining the blatant violation of the latest state government's guidelines. The thunderstorm that struck Patna on Wednesday evening did not help the cause either, as the litter flew all over the place on the hospital campus.

HT has sourced pictures of disposable PPE kits lying strewn in the open such as outside the autopsy room of the forensic medicine

and toxicology department, PMCH, on Wednesday morning, barely two days after the Bihar health department's principal secretary, Pratyaya Amrit, gave a pep-talk to the state medical college and hospital administrative authorities on Monday (August 3).

Safe disposal of medical waste related to Covid-19, sterilisation of waste and incineration are among the 21-point guidelines that the state health department has recommended to tertiary healthcare institutions and medical colleges treating Covid-19 patients.

The guidelines suggest a separate set-up for the disposal of PPE kits for

private ambulance drivers ferrying Covid-19 patients to the hospital.

It has been specifically instructed to keep separate rooms for wearing PPE kits for the hospital's nurses, ward boys, and hospital attendants.

However, the photographs conveyed contrary to what Amrit has prescribed.

"I have personally seen drivers of private mortuary vans, who ferry bodies for autopsy, discard their PPE kits at the corner of the autopsy room. We have discussed the issue with the probationary IAS (Indian Administrative Service) and IPS (Indian Police Service) officers deputed for the control room at PMCH and have requested them that armed



police personnel is deployed there. I have also urged the medical superintendent to persuade the civic authorities to lift the garbage from there twice a day," said Dr. Vidyapati Chaudhary, principal, PMCH.

At present, the PMCH incinerator, where PPE kits are to be disposed of, is dysfunctional.

"We have asked the private

agency, which operates the incinerator, to repair it soon. Else, we will dock its charges," Dr. Chaudhary added.

Dr. Bimal Karak, superintendent, PMCH, was not available for comments.

On August 2, the state government had sanctioned Rs 252.54 crore as an incentive - equivalent to a month's basic salary for doctors

and employees of the healthcare department, who are at the frontline battling the Covid-19 pandemic.

"This (incentive) will boost the morale of the doctors, healthcare, and frontline workers and its good effects will be visible," said a communique of the state information and public relations department (IPR), quoting Anupam Kumar, secretary, IPR.

Ayodhya marks the twilight of the first Republic

Hindu nationalism has been the bedrock of the Indian State and polity. Nehruvian secularism was the fringe

The last time a temple existed in Ayodhya, Krishnadevaraya was emperor in the South ruling over the Vijayanagara empire, Nuno da Cunha was governor of Portuguese India, Spanish conquistadors were setting foot in Texas, and Suleiman the Magnificent was inaugurating the era of Ottoman supremacy in West Asia. With the bhoomi puja on August 5, the long saga of struggle of a people has come to an end. This day falls on the first anniversary of the full constitutional integration of Jammu and Kashmir to India, making it a symbolic date in post-colonial India. This is the twilight of the first Republic.

The first Republic was founded on the myth of a secular-socialist India supposedly born out of the anti-colonial struggle. However, the Indian freedom movement was always a Hindu movement. From its origin, symbolism, language, and support base, it was the continuation of a Hindu resurgence already underway, but which was disrupted by the British conquest. The coming together of various pagan traditions in the Indian subcontinent under the umbrella of Hinduism is a long-drawn-out process. But it began to consolidate as a unified political entity in the colonial era in the form of Hindutva. The Hindutva concept is driven by an attempt by the older pagan traditions, united by a dharmic framework and intertwined by puranas, myths and folklore, to navigate the modern political and intellectual landscape dominated by nations and nation-states. Hindutva is not Hinduism. Hindutva is a Hindu political response to political Islam and Western imperialism. It seeks to forge Hindus into a modern nation and create a powerful industrial State that can put an end to centuries of persecution that accelerated sharply over the past 100 years when the Hindu-Sikh presence was expunged in large swaths of the Indian subcontinent.

India's freedom struggle was guided by the vision of Hindu nationalism and not by constitutional patriotism. The Congress brand of nationalism

was but a subset of this broader Hindu nationalism with the Congress itself as the pre-eminent Hindu party. The Muslim question forced the Congress to adopt a more tempered language and symbolism later and to weave the myth of Hindu-Muslim unity. But it failed to prevent the Partition of India. The Congress was taken over by Left-leaning secular denialists under Jawaharlal Nehru who, instead of confronting reality, pretended it did not exist. After centuries, Hindus were the



dominant power. Despite self-denial, the post-colonial State was essentially a Hindu State. The misleading secular-communal debate blinded us to the obvious; the Republic of India is a Hindu reformist State. It abolished the caste system, integrated and Sanskritised the Dalits and large sections of tribals, codified Hindu social laws, revived classical and folk art forms and replaced Urdu-Persian with Hindi and native languages, controlled Hindu temples, introduced an element of uniformity in temple laws and even harmonised rituals and continues to intervene in Hindu social and religious matters with popular legitimacy. At the same time, it has left Islam outside its ambit in the guise of minority rights and freedom of religion. The Indian state intensified the historical process of Hindu consolidation even as Nehruvian elites denied that India is a Hindu polity above all. Hindu nationalism has never been fringe; it is Nehruvian secularism that was the fringe. And with the fall of the old English-speaking elites, the system they

created is also collapsing along with accompanying myths like Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb and Hindu-Muslim unity. The fact is that Hindus and Muslims lived together, but separately. And they share a violent and cataclysmic past with each other, which has never been put to rest. Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb was an urban-feudal construct with no serious takers outside a limited circle. In villages, whatever unity existed was

because the caste identities of both Hindu and Muslims dominated instead of religious identities or because Hindu converts to Islam maintained earlier customs and old social links with Hindus like common



gotra and caste.

But all that evaporated quickly with the Islamic revivalist movements such as the Tabligh and pan-Islamism from 19th century onwards. It never takes much for Hindu-Muslim riots to erupt. There was nothing surprising about the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA)? protests and widespread riots. As political communities, Hindus and Muslims have hardly ever agreed on the big questions of the day.

What we are witnessing today is twilight of the first Republic. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is but a modern vehicle of the historical process of the rise of the Hindu rashtra. In the north, Jammu and Kashmir is fully integrated. In the south, Dravidianism is melting away. In the east, Bengal is turning saffron. In the west, secular parties must ally with a local

Hindutva party to survive. The political debate has decisively shifted from the pseudo-secular paradigm to the Hindu-pseudo Hindu one. The Ram mandir is reborn. The CAA is the law. The National Population Register is underway. And the National Register of Citizens will happen sooner or later. Although history is never linear, it is time to face the truth: Hindu nationalism has always been the bedrock of the Indian State and polity. However, as we witness the rise of a new republic, the question which we must ask is what its shape will be? Is becoming a Hindu State India's destiny?

There are no clear answers given the lack of precedent, barring a few instances such as the Vijayanagara empire.

Even the Hindutva movement has concerned itself with the Hindu rashtra and not Hindu rajya.

Pakistan's cartographic absurdity

The new map shows shallowness and weakness. It has no legitimacy

The Imran Khan government has issued a map that shows the entirety of Jammu and Kashmir and the former Gujarati princely state of Junagadh as Pakistani territory. Such maps were common in the 1950s. Over time, Junagadh was largely dropped, but Survey of Pakistan maps have shown the border running south of Jammu. The map has kept the self-determination flag flying by printing across Kashmir that its future will be "decided" under the relevant United Nations resolutions. Curiously, the border between this fictional Greater Pakistan and China is a "frontier undefined" - something not reflected in Beijing's maps.

Ancient maps have some use in territorial disputes, overnight ones produced by a weak government have none. Mr Khan issued the map one year after the



amendment of Article 370. One of the policy shifts explicit in India's decision was that the future of this part of Kashmir would no longer be negotiated with Islamabad. Pakistan has spent the past year trying to argue it is essential to the issue. Initially, it turned to the international community to get some support. When that failed, it resumed shelling across the Line of Control and supporting terrorism. That Mr Khan's

government has now been reduced to printing pieces of coloured paper should be seen as further evidence that Pakistan has been reduced to a cipher as far as Kashmir is concerned. Nepal, Pakistan and others have recently turned to cartography to provoke the Indian government. But drawn ink lines are not even credible statements. They show shallowness of thought and, most crucially, weakness at home.

Trump policies driving continued economic recovery from coronavirus pandemic

At his news conference Friday night, President Trump rightfully hailed the July jobs report released earlier in the day by the Bureau of Labor Statistics showing that the strong economic recovery from coronavirus shutdowns is continuing. And to keep the recovery going, the president announced that, if his administration can't reach an agreement with congressional Democrats, he will sign executive orders deferring the payroll tax and continuing enhanced unemployment benefits (at an unspecified amount) until the end of the year, deferring payments on student loans, and extending a national moratorium on evictions.

Thanks in large part to the president's determination to put Americans back to work, hiring in July was stronger than the 1.5 million jobs economists expected, with the economy adding more than 1.8 million jobs. That means more than 9 million Americans have returned to work since the coronavirus lockdowns bottomed things out in April. The unemployment rate dropped significantly again as well last month, falling to 10.2 percent — almost a full percentage point lower than June. Double-digit unemployment will soon be a thing of the past and the Trump economy will resume the strong performance it registered before the coronavirus arrived in the U.S. and nations around the world from China. In total, the U.S. economy has regained about 9.3 million jobs over the past three months — the fastest rate of job creation in American history. That enormous record-breaking accomplishment far surpasses the much-touted economic recovery coming out of the Great Recession under the administration of President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden. The Great Recession ended in June of 2009. The following month, there were about 130.5 million jobs in the U.S. It took until September of 2014 — five years and two months — for the Obama-Biden economy to add 9 million jobs (there were 139.5 million jobs in September of 2014). You read that correctly. It took 62 months for the Obama-Biden economic recovery to produce roughly the same number of jobs the Trump economic recovery added in just three months.

To accomplish this remarkable feat, President Trump presided over the three highest job-creation months since the government began reporting the data (May at 2.7 million jobs, June at 4.8 million, and July at 1.8 million). If the Obama-Biden administration had achieved of job creation at this level for three months, the left-wing media would be praising Obama and Biden as economic miracle workers. But the anti-Trump media now greet the good economic news about our recovery with only unjustified skepticism.

In reality, the picture is clear. Things are getting better — and far faster than any of the experts predicted — even though COVID-19 is still with us. July witnessed California, Texas and Florida pulling back on their attempts to reopen their economies, and New York continuing its shutdown.

The fact that we still had the third-highest job creation month on record shows that the pro-growth policies of the Trump administration are facilitating economic recovery on an absolutely unprecedented scale and against absolutely unprecedented headwinds.

Faithful viewers of CNN, however, might well have been taken by surprise when they saw this encouraging news.

Just two weeks ago, National Economic Council Director Larry Kudlow went on CNN to discuss the recovery, only to encounter deep incredulity from anchor Jake Tapper.

To watch Tapper grill Kudlow, you'd think the cable news anchor was a doctor, an economist, and an epidemiologist all at once. According to Tapper, the country "reopened too quickly, wiping away the progress made prolonging harm to the economy."

Nothing Kudlow said about the myriad of reliable economic indicators that all strongly suggested a robust, self-sustaining economic recovery could convince Tapper that his partisan narrative was wrong.

Instead, Tapper wanted to talk about what is now an obviously inaccurate U.S. Census Bureau survey that supposedly showed America had lost 7 million jobs in the first four weeks of July.

Tapper even put an ugly red line-graph on the screen showing American employment going "kerplow." As they say, hope springs eternal. Kudlow was clearly confused as to what the heck Tapper was talking about, considering that the month of July wasn't even over yet.

On Friday morning, Yahoo News' Myles Udland was still aggressively promoting the "reopening broke the economy" narrative shortly before the Bureau of Labor Statistics released the July jobs data. Udland cited various data sources to back up his claim that "the labor market at best cooled off in July. And perhaps did worse than that." I guess the third-best job creation month on record, which substantially beat economists' expectations, is a cooling off when it follows the two best months on record. But who could have known what was coming? Well, despite what you hear about high "initial claims" numbers for people going on unemployment insurance in July, the total number of people receiving state unemployment benefits actually declined by more than 1 million between the week ending July 4 and the week ending July 25 — an impressive 7 percent drop.

From Kashmir to Ayodhya, the BJP's total domination of politics

You had to be in Ayodhya this week, as I was, to understand the enormous political vindication the bhoomi puja ceremony for the Ram Mandir affords the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The decision to build a temple and provide an alternative site for the Babri masjid may have been one delivered by the court, but for the party and its followers, the labour was entirely that of the Narendra Modi government. While the streets were dressed up in hues of saffron — balloons, festoons, flags — the dominant visual was that of Prime Minister (PM) Modi. He literally towered over the town with hoardings and posters on every street lamp. The day had spiritual resonance for millions of devotees. But, without needing any obvious iteration, the political messaging was unmissable. The cult of Modi was stronger than ever before.

Liberals and progressives lamented the triumphalism, the capture of the mainstream media space by hours of unquestioning wallpaper coverage and by the abject neglect of the other big story — the one-year anniversary of the effective nullification of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

But the inconvenient truth is this: From Kashmir to Ayodhya, it wasn't just the BJP's political supremacy that was on display; so also was the abject failure of alternative politics. Most of the other political players, led by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, spluttered to say "Me Too" on the mandir, in one form or the other. There were subtle differences in articulation. Some such as Rahul Gandhi chose to tweet about what lord Ram stood for. But mostly, the Congress, whose PM

Rajiv Gandhi first unlocked the gates at the Ayodhya site, desperately wanted a slice of the pie. On J&K, save a few individual politicians (P Chidambaram among them), there was hardly any meaningful or noticeable alternative commentary. In effect, whether Ayodhya or Kashmir, the day underlined the BJP's total capture of the dominant political narrative. Opposition parties privately complain that no response from them is deemed good enough. If they object to developments in J&K, they are called anti-national. If they play along, they are termed pale imitations. If they act Nehruvian, they are called textbook secularists; if they support religious symbolism, they are called pseudo-liberals. They need to get over this whining and whingeing. Their real failure is two-fold: The absence of a powerful personality who can take on Modi and the absence of a unique and compelling story to tell. You can't define yourself either in shades of what you are contesting or entirely in antithesis to it. By doing so, what you reveal is that you have nothing to say for yourself. Or that you are unsure of your messaging. India's ideological Left may have been purer or more committed than the chameleon colours of the Congress. But when it comes to elections and politics, that is not especially effective either. Most progressives expend all their venom attacking people they don't see as angry enough or Left enough, instead of channelling that same energy into finding a new lexicon of constitutional liberalism. Ironically, the Right-wing attacks the same individuals the Left-wing does, amounting to a zero-sum game.



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A 'generational catastrophe'

The UN's warning is timely. Pay heed to education

On August 4, the United Nations (UN) released the secretary-general's policy brief on the impact of Covid-19 on the world's education system. The policy brief points to the fact that the closure of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94% of the world's student population (up to 99% in low and lower-middle income countries). It suggests that despite the delivery of lessons by radio, TV and online, and efforts of teachers and parents, many students still do not have access to education. It highlights how learners with disabilities, those from marginalised communities, displaced and refugee students, and those in remote areas are at highest risk of being left behind. And it warns that the knock-on effects on child nutrition, child

marriage and gender equality could be enormous. The cumulative impact of all these on children may lead to a "generational catastrophe" that could waste human potential, undermine decades of progress, and exacerbate entrenched inequalities. This is not good news for any nation, more so for those in the low and lower-middle income segments such as India. According to Unesco, nearly 321 million Indian children have been at home since March-end. There is no clarity on when schools will reopen.

In the last few decades, especially since the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, India has seen a surge in school enrolments and infrastructure development in the

primary and secondary segments. But the learning outcomes have not kept pace. The pandemic has now exacerbated this existing challenge. In addition, the extended period of closure means students don't have access to midday meals; and with parental incomes under strain, there could be a spike in drop-out rates, especially among girls.

While the focus must be now be ensuring the safety of students, teachers and staff, and putting in place protocols for school reopening, there has to be an extensive assessment of the learning loss and well-thought-out plans to bridge the learning gap, and schemes to retain students. This entails tweaking the syllabus and changing pedagogy. This forced break must also be



used to align the sector to the National Education Policy (NEP), which was released last week, especially to its foundational learning goals. Last but not least, governments will have to arrange for funds required for the sector.

This will be a challenge post-Covid-19, but starving the education sector of finances will be irresponsible, for it is crucial to meeting India's development goals and creating an inclusive society.

J&K: A year of hope and despair

Compensate citizens for economic loss; restore statehood; allow 4G services; release prisoners



autonomy and nursing unrealistic expectations, to have not only lost that status but also been reduced to a UT and virtually locked down for almost a whole year along with the closure of educational institutions has been traumatic. In Jammu, the move was generally welcomed as it was around the country. To be fair, this policy had been on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s agenda for many years, though no one expected the dramatic manner in which it was implemented. The restoration of full statehood for J&K is a demand from both the regions. There is no reason why the erstwhile state should be demoted to the category of a UT, which is looked upon as a humiliation. The restoration should also involve a structure that ensures for the first time a fair distribution of political, financial and administrative authority between the J&K regions. The expensive and obsolete darbar move can be dispensed with, and a new structure put in place that ensures undisturbed year-round administration to both the

regions. Domiciliary provisions for safeguarding public appointments and purchase of land by non-residents should be adopted on the same lines as in the hill states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

The restructuring promised enhanced economic development to both regions and has raised high expectations. But the state and its people have suffered massive financial losses over the last year. Tourism, which is the mainstay of the Kashmiri economy, has totally collapsed as a result of which thousands of people involved in the tourism trade have been rendered unemployed. Horticulture has also suffered and there has been a sharp drop in the export of apples from the Valley. The cancellation of the Amarnath Yatra in Kashmir and the Mata Vaishno Devi Yatra in Jammu has also caused extensive unemployment and commercial losses. The first task before the government, which is now directly administering the state, therefore, must be to

compensate for these massive losses without delay. It is only once the financial distress has been contained that economic development can begin and investors will feel secure enough to start putting money into new projects. Ladakh has also been badly hit by the drop in tourism. The disturbing influx of Chinese troops, which has been pushed back by our security forces, continues to be a source of deep national concern, especially to the people of Ladakh. While the official claim is that militancy has decreased over the last year, militant attacks still occur from time to time. However, we must now look realistically to the future. The first requirement is the resumption of normal political activity. This will necessarily involve a fresh unbiased delimitation based on the 2011 Census, followed by elections to the state assembly as may be decided by the Election Commission. The delimitation should include allotting additional seats due to the hundreds of thousands of refugees in the Jammu region who remained disenfranchised.

The creation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir by my ancestor Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1846 was a significant geopolitical event in the subcontinent. It resulted in the extension and consolidation of the northern borders of India all the way up to Central Asia (Gilgit-Baltistan) and Tibet (Ladakh). These Dogra campaigns involved the heavy sacrifice of lives but finally resulted in the creation of the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the largest princely state in India. This multi-regional, multilingual, multi-religious and multicultural state finally disappeared a year ago.

It is important to understand that J&K was a unique state which encompassed far-flung areas that had not previously been

administered by India. The end of the state a year ago, therefore, had significant geopolitical implications. These involve Gilgit-Baltistan, which we lost in 1947 along with Pakistan-occupied J&K as well as Aksai Chin, which we lost in 1952, and the Saksham valley, which has been handed over to China by Pakistan. Although these areas were not after 1947 under Indian administration, the dismantling of the state into two Union Territories (UTs) seems to have disturbed both our neighbours.

Internally, while the Ladakhis welcomed the realisation of their long-standing desire to become a UT, the response in J&K was very different. For Kashmiris, who took pride in their special status, and were pressing for more

UNSC: A diplomatic 'two-front' war

India warded off the China-Pakistan game on Kashmir. But don't let the guard down



Stoking diplomatic deadwood in the hope that the embers may catch fire is a parlour game at the United Nations. One of our neighbours - Pakistan - has indulged in this for years. "The India-Pakistan Question", inscribed on the United Nations Security Council (SC)'s agenda on January 6, 1948, was last considered by SC on November 5, 1965. Yet, on the annual requests of Pakistan, the item has remained an inert part of the Council's formal agenda. These requests are followed by sundry communications, in a bid to stir

the pot. They are circulated and filed. No one is bothered. Then, in August 2019, following changes to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)'s special status provided in the Indian Constitution, China weighed in favour of its "iron brother" and initiated what was akin to a diplomatic "two-front war".

Using its perch on the Council, China took over the driver's seat of this venture. Since China did not have the requisite majority to call for a formal meeting, it requested an informal consultation. China proposed a draft outcome statement and

lobbied for support. The tussle was transformed into one between a Permanent Member of the Council - China; and a non-member of the Council - India. Pakistan was the cat's paw in the equation.

The duo threw everything into the fray. They argued along the following three axes. Contrary to previous Council decisions, India changed the status quo, violating international law. The change resulted in large-scale human rights violations, leading to a serious humanitarian situation. This, along with India's military assertiveness along the Line of

Control constituted a threat to international peace and security. The Council, which is responsible for maintenance of international peace and security, needed to respond.

The same talk that we hear now on India-China issues was voiced then. Can India take on an economy five times its size? Can actions evoking criticism domestically be shielded from global scrutiny? Will a global power, which had sewn up vast swathes with its Belt and Road Initiative, not get broad support against a mid-sized delegation with limited resources?

A blow-by-blow account is left for another time. Suffice it to say that then, as now, hubris of global overreach was on display. Then, as now, quiet diplomacy was in play. Then, as now, despite the disparity in the power equation, some stay silent. Then, as now, key partners weigh in our favour. The closed-door outcome was better than expected. The public diplomacy victory was the icing on the cake.

More efforts - including one earlier this week - have been made. These follow a slightly different tack. Pakistan writes a letter to the president of the Council. China follows up to raise the

matter during closed, informal consultations under "Any Other Business". The "pinprick" doesn't yield anything, as overwhelmingly, others aren't interested. The rubric "Any Other Business" can be used by anyone, to raise anything. Some have used it to prick China about Hong Kong, and in course of discussions also referred to the treatment of Uighurs. Others target Russia by raising matters not on the active agenda. In short, failed "pinpricks" are par for the course. Our overcoming such efforts provides useful "lessons learnt".

First, in August 2019, the People's Republic of China took the unprecedented step of trying to extricate an agenda item that it had historically never engaged with. When the item was last considered in 1965, it was the Republic of China whose representative sat on the Council. China invalidated the oft-repeated shibboleth that it will handle "differences through peaceful discussion" bearing in mind "sensitivities and concerns". Despite not succeeding, China keeps trying in other ways. Try, try and try again seems their theme song; never letting our guard down needs to be ours.

The Mandal moment

It empowered. But it also opened a Pandora's box

Thirty years ago, on August 7, Indian politics and society changed. In a historic move, the VP Singh government decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, and open up reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs. This came in the wake of the gradual political rise of the backward communities, which was due to a set of complex factors. The first was the demographic weight of the backward communities. The second was the fact that OBCs were not a natural constituency of the Congress and preferred peasant-based formations, socialist parties and regional parties - all of which were on the

ascendant then. And the third was the impact of the Green Revolution which led to their economic empowerment and desire for upward professional mobility. The immediate political trigger for Mr Singh's decision was an effort to counter the Mandir politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which sought to prioritise religion over caste, but its impact went way beyond that.

The Mandal moment saw ferocious backlash by sections of upper castes. This opposition was articulated on two axes - the fact that reservations compromised merit, and if at all reservations should open up beyond what was offered to Scheduled Castes and Tribes, it should be on economic lines. These arguments hid

beneath it a real fear of losing power and opportunities. And it launched an era of open hostility between upper castes and backward communities, particularly in the Hindi heartland. OBCs became a force to contend with, and it is no surprise that no government in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar can now be formed without their active support.

But it also opened up a Pandora's Box. For one, the resentment of those communities which did not have a share in the reservation pie increased. And political parties, in order to appease them, continued to expand reservation - to the extent that now economically weaker sections of dominant communities avail quotas, and in many states,



there is over 70% reservation in key spheres. This has undermined the entire purpose of reservation, envisaged as a tool to address historic injustice, and made it an exercise in power distribution and employment generation. Second, within OBCs, some communities benefited more than others,

which led to a political divide and demands for sub-categorisation, a process currently underway. Mandal empowered communities. But the entire architecture of reservations needs a review, with the aim of creating a just, inclusive and equal society, without pandering to populist movements.

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Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW: If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, follow the steps below to help protect other people in your home and community.

Stay home except to get medical care

- **Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.
- **Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.



Separate yourself from other people in your home, this is known as home isolation

- **Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific “sick room” and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Limit contact with pets & animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.
 - Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people with the virus limit contact with animals until more information is known.
 - When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick with COVID-19. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them. See COVID-19 and Animals for more information.



Call ahead before visiting your doctor

- **Call ahead:** If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor’s office or emergency department, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.



Wear a facemask if you are sick

- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people and before you enter a healthcare provider’s office.
- **If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live in the home should stay in a different room. When caregivers enter the room of the sick person, they should wear a facemask. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.



Cover your coughs and sneezes

- **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
- **Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



Clean your hands often

- **Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- **Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- **Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.
- **Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

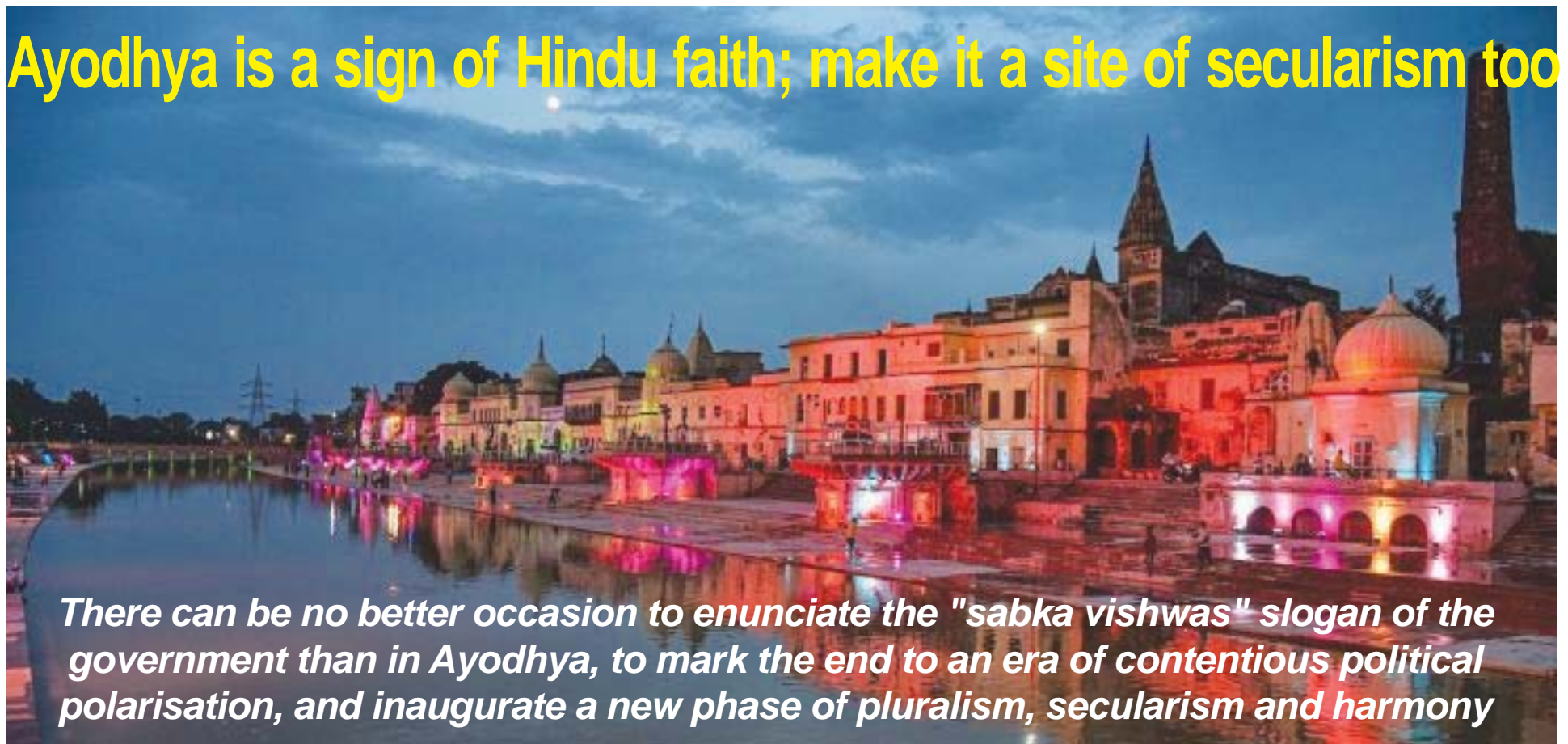


Avoid sharing personal household items

- **Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.



Ayodhya is a sign of Hindu faith; make it a site of secularism too



There can be no better occasion to enunciate the "sabka vishwas" slogan of the government than in Ayodhya, to mark the end to an era of contentious political polarisation, and inaugurate a new phase of pluralism, secularism and harmony

On August 5, nine months after the Supreme Court (SC) decided in favour of the Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will preside over the bhoomi puja to mark the beginning of the construction in the holy town. Ayodhya, in Indian history and mythology, is associated with the Hindu faith as the birthplace of Ram, and the Ram Rajya that he presided over after a long battle against evil. Ayodhya, in Indian politics, has been associated with

unprecedented Hindu political mobilisation, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a protracted legal dispute, and yes, Hindu-Muslim tensions and communal violence.

As the construction of the temple commences, Mr Modi has a rare opportunity to fuse together both these strands of Ayodhya. The temple is a political, intellectual and legal victory for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, for the BJP, for its countless workers who participated in the rath yatra that brought the issue to national

centre stage, for Mr Modi himself whose political life has coincided with the rise of Hindu political consciousness, and for millions of devotees who wanted to see a temple at the disputed site. This is a victory which the devout will, undoubtedly, mark with renewed faith. Mr Modi will not be off the mark in acknowledging this.

At the same time, the contentious history leading up to the temple cannot be erased. The fact that Muslims have abided by the rule of law and

accepted the SC verdict in the spirit of closure is laudable - but cannot take away from the insecurity they have felt at the political mobilisation around the issue. The fact that the Babri masjid was demolished, and this was illegal according to the same SC verdict that allowed the temple, cannot be denied either. It is, therefore, incumbent on Mr Modi to not only mark the day as one of celebration for the devout, but also a day of sobriety, reaching out to those on the other side of the divide. There can be

no better occasion to enunciate the "sabka vishwas" slogan of the government than in Ayodhya, to mark the end to an era of contentious political polarisation, and inaugurate a new phase of pluralism, secularism and harmony. Ram took care of all his subjects, with compassion and empathy. PM Modi must reach out to all citizens, with the same compassion. That would be a true tribute and redefine the meaning of Ayodhya in Indian political lexicon.

Preserving the wildlife ecosystem

The Animal Welfare Board of India needs to be held accountable

Camera-traps used in the last tiger census (2018) captured the presence of more free-ranging domestic dogs than tigers in 17 tiger reserves, according to a report in The Indian Express. There is also a substantial presence of both dogs and livestock in at least 30 tiger reserves, the report added. The presence of feral and abandoned dogs and livestock in forests, say experts, could lead to the transmission of diseases to wild animals. These stray animals also compete with wild animals for resources, affecting their foraging patterns. The National Tiger Conservation Authority has said that livestock and dogs are found in fringe areas of forests close to villages. While the camera-trap capture

has provided real-time evidence now, this problem has been growing for years. India has about five million stray cattle, thanks to rural distress and fodder shortage (both make livestock maintenance expensive), lack of the adequate number of shelters, increase in peri-urban dairies, and a ban on cattle slaughter in many states. The feral dog population is 60 million because of the breakdown of the animal birth control (ABC) programme, increasing cases of abandonment of dogs, and the lack of adequate waste management and requisite number of shelters. A 2018 research by ATREE found that free-ranging dogs attacked 80 species of wildlife between 2015



and 2016, mostly mammals. The problem of stray animals is not just in forests, but also in Indian cities. Instead of endless debates on whether it's right

to feed dogs or not, citizens must demand answers on the operational record of the Animal Welfare Board of India, why governments have reduced

funding and support to the ABC programme and failed to untangle the problem of multiplicity of authorities and build shelters.

To win the trust of the people of J&K, trust them



Democracy and secularism must become real for the Indian citizens of J&K and Ladakh. This is the way out

Different sections of Indians hold sharply divided views about the developments of August 5, 2019, in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Were these, in fact, as many Indians believe, simply a consummation of a process initiated by the state's accession to India upon Independence, which had left it with a special status? After all, Article 370 was titled "Temporary Provisions". Or was it, as several other Indians including Kashmiris see it, a repudiation of a commitment guaranteed by the Constitution, the abrogation of which has betrayed even a semblance of the freedom that the state was promised? The personnel appointed to administer the two new Union territories (UTs) are, without a doubt, of great merit. The officer chosen as lieutenant governor (LG) of the UT of Ladakh was Chief Information Commissioner of India who has accepted a demotion in status in the service of the nation. But Ladakh is left with a makeshift administration, without a recruitment agency to fill gazetted posts, no formal bank and locked in a dispute over the location of its headquarters - Muslim-majority Kargil or Buddhist-majority Leh in what is a Muslim-majority UT. Although

in contrast, the officer appointed LG for J&K is a bureaucrat of the Gujarat cadre, he is assisted by an array of advisers of outstanding reputation. The administration won approbation for the efficiency with which it arranged testing materials on the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak and the return of students stranded abroad and also migrant labour. But the virus' spread has been exacerbated by the import of migrant workers to work with the public works department. Many of them have tested positive. Many young people are out on the streets of Srinagar without any form of protection despite government advice.

In the Rajya Sabha debate on the J&K Reorganisation Bill 2019, reading down Article 370 of the Constitution, home minister Amit Shah said the state's special status was the root cause of corruption. But a year since Article 370 was abrogated, a long-time campaigner for the right to information, good governance and transparency in the J&K government, Raja Muzaffar Bhat, found that corruption remains pervasive.

The Centre has been busy in enacting legislation such as the domicile law and the UT government in issuing sanctions. Five medical colleges, including two All India Institutes of Medical Science,

have been inaugurated and colleges of nursing sanctioned. Announcements are regularly made of the LG sanctioning a host of hydel projects in the power-deficit state, which nonetheless is a major contributor to the national power grid. Long-pending road construction has been approved. But educational institutions remain shut with no provision for distance learning except in a single school in Pulwama. Power and water supply are fitful; roads await maintenance for years including vital link roads along the Line of Control.

A Forum for Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir constituted by retired justices of the Supreme Court and the high courts, ex-civil servants, former senior defence personnel, academics and campaigners for human rights recently released its first report, Jammu and Kashmir: The Impact of Lockdowns on Human Rights covering the year following August 5, 2019. Their findings: One, the absolute priority given to counter-insurgency has brought across-the-board violations of human rights and increased terrorist activity. Two, in the 11 months of lockdown, the public saw incessant harassment through closures, barricades,

checkpoints and suspension of communication, crippling public health, with pervasive post-traumatic stress disorder even among children. Three, education flounders at every level with the limiting of networks to 2G thereby making online classes dysfunctional, in violation of the constitutional right to education. Four, commerce and industry have suffered massive losses. Tourism and cottage industries, reliant on 4G networks, are out of business. Local employment is at a standstill.

Five, journalists have faced harassment with recourse taken even to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Six, the military presence has been accentuated.

After August 5, 2019, the Concerned Citizens Group, of which I am a member, made two visits to Kashmir on September 17-18, 2019 and November 22-26, 2019. In our statement of May 20, 2020, we said that J&K has continued in a social, economic, political and communication lockdown since August 5, 2019, now doubly reinforced by the pandemic. "Senior political leaders," we wrote, "including a former chief minister, continue to be in detention, in several cases under the draconian Public Safety Act. Meanwhile, there are attempts to incubate

artificial political processes - through village and local body elections and facilitating the launch of a new political party. However, these processes have failed to fill the political vacuum."

Following the August 5, 2019 decision, there have been discussions in the US Congress, the European Union parliament, the UN Security Council and statements by the UN Human Rights Commission on Kashmir. Many security analysts believe that J&K's change in constitutional status has brought about the Chinese intrusion into Ladakh. But while many residents protest that their lands have been occupied by China, the Union government has maintained a degree of ambiguity on the issue.

Where do we go from here? For residents of J&K and Ladakh, democracy and secularism must be real as they have been for all other Indians by making them participants in governance. The government knows this, which accounts for its abortive efforts to institute panchayat raj. But gestures will not do. The country must place its trust in its own people if it expects their trust in return.

The rise of the proud, global Hindu

The Ayodhya movement redefined secularism, brought the political Hindu to the centre stage

The pandemic is certain to ensure that the bhoomi puja of the proposed Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya on August 5 will be an extremely sanitised affair, despite the extraordinary significance of Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's presence. No doubt the occasion will be solemn and will be marked by the presence of a few hundred guests, carefully chosen for their contributions to a movement that has dramatically altered the politics of India and the mentality of a majority of Hindus.

Yet, it will be a very different occasion from the shilanyas on November 9, 1989, when Kameshwar Chaupal, a Dalit, was specially chosen to lay the first consecrated brick for the temple at a spot that the Congress government of the day had, after much agonising and calculation, deemed to be undisputed. The day had a special significance: It coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event that culminated in the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union. It also marked the first

occasion in independent India that there was a mass mobilisation of kar sevaks in Ayodhya for the construction of a Ram temple and, by implication, the removal of the 16th century Mughal shrine that had, however, been functioning as a Ram temple since 1949.

What the jurist Nani Palkhivala described as the Ayodhya years were heady times marked by high emotionalism and political polarisation. Beginning with the consecration of nearly 200,000 bricks from all over the country and culminating in the 1996 general election that saw the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) displace the Congress as the largest party in the Lok Sabha, India was in ferment. On the face of it, the mass mobilisation of Ram bhakts was aimed at the construction of a temple on the spot where lord Ram was believed to have been born - a quasi-religious movement that also incorporated the demand to right a historical wrong. However, the significance of the Ayodhya movement was more far-reaching. First, the movement reopened a

debate that had been left deliberately inconclusive by the founding fathers of the Republic: The meaning of secularism in the Indian context. The premise that the Indian State would maintain a measure of equidistance from all faiths and show equal respect to all beliefs was understood. The Constitution also guaranteed statutory protection to minority religions. At the same time, despite the attempts by modernists to rise above all forms of symbolism, it was generally accepted that the cultural underpinnings of Indian nationhood were, loosely-speaking, Hindu - but not exclusively so.

This loose consensus based on good sense and mutual accommodation was broken in 1976 when, at the height of the Emergency, Indira Gandhi injected the term secularism into the Constitution. Hitherto, secularism had been understood in spirit but never written into the rule book of public life. The immediate consequence of this shift to "progressive" politics were

attempts at a codification of Jawaharlal Nehru's belief - as elucidated by his official biographer S Gopal - that "the problem of minorities was basically one for the majority community to handle. The test of success was not what Hindus thought but how Muslims and other communities felt..." Translated into secularist politics, this implied that Hindus must live in a state of permanent magnanimity, and, in the realm of competitive politics, never assert themselves as Hindus. The Ayodhya movement challenged this pseudo-secularism - LK Advani's coinage that acquired popularity



in the 1990s - frontally. Second, in attempting to re-establish the Hindu underpinnings of Indian nationhood, the Ayodhya movement brought the political Hindu to the centre stage of public life. There was undeniably an element of faith in the movement for a Ram temple, but its mass appeal owed almost entirely to a political context. There was the outbreak of separatism in the Kashmir and the expulsion of Hindu Kashmiris from the Valley, a momentous development that the secular parties chose to brush under the carpet.

Signalling belligerence

China is making it clear it won't budge. Respond accordingly



Events over the last week have made it clear that the situation in eastern Ladakh remains grim. There is a clear disjunct between China's, entirely erroneous, description of the disengagement process as almost complete and India's, factual, understanding of the ground reality regarding the deployment of People's

Liberation Army troops. Military and diplomatic-level talks between the two sides have made little progress. The Chinese ambassador to India, late last week, reiterated the Chinese position and stuck to Beijing's narrative of the Galwan incident, blaming India. All of this points to a clear signal from the Chinese. Talks or no

talks, Beijing is telling New Delhi that it will not budge. The chutzpah here is staggering. China wants the Indian side to pull back from what is Indian territory; it wants patrolling powers curtailed; it wants to convert the new facts on the ground it has created by violating past pacts into the new reality; it wants India to

give up on its own territorial claims in the region; and all this while, it also expects Delhi to be held responsible for the stand-off in the first place. There is little doubt that events over the past three months have shown China is India's most dangerous strategic adversary. In the immediate context, Delhi has to focus on retaining and

boosting its military strength at the Line of Actual Control. It should also come up with creative ways to exert military pressure on China, perhaps in other geographies where Beijing is more vulnerable, to force it to step back - while factoring in the risks of escalation carefully. It must continue to tell China that Beijing's fond hope of retaining the economic benefits of the relationship while posing a security threat will not be entertained. It must cement international partnerships, and actively participate in the global narrative against China's belligerence, for hedging is no longer a viable option. It must prepare for not just a long winter in Ladakh, but a difficult decade ahead where India's territorial integrity and sovereignty will be challenged from two fronts. And it must focus on the domestic front to ensure political stability, social harmony, and most importantly, economic growth and national unity to be able to take on China. Beijing's signals leave India with no choice but to respond accordingly.

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Trump's mail-in voting falsehoods are part of a wide campaign to discredit the election

President Donald Trump's barrage of challenges to the reputation, structures and traditions of elections is conjuring up a contentious and potentially constitutionally critical three-month period for America's democracy.

Trump is casting false accusations of massive fraud in mail-in voting, though has now reversed his position on the practice in must-win Florida, leaving the absurd impression it's only fair in states with Republican governors.

"I'm doing our country a big favor by bringing it up, and you know, from a common sense standpoint, if you look at it just out of common sense and pure basic beautiful intelligence -- you know it can't work," Trump said Wednesday.

Trump has baselessly claimed that the result of the November 3 vote will not be known for "years" -- apparently seeking to discredit in advance an election that polls suggest he is currently losing to Democrat Joe Biden.

His campaign has now also initiated a new attempt to wring advantage from the customary arrangements for three

presidential debates. It wants a fourth encounter added and for the clashes to start before the scheduled date of September 29, to take into account early voting that starts in some key states six weeks before the election.

"Move the First Debate up," Trump tweeted on Thursday morning.

This request makes a fair point and is well within traditional parameters of jockeying for position over debates conducted by past presidential campaigns. But Trump's comment in his tweet that the debates are a "public service" is undermined by his campaign's evidence-free claims that Biden is running away from debating him at all. And the campaign also submitted a list of potential moderators, including Fox News hosts, conservative commentators who've given him easy interviews, and opinion journalists who have published work supportive of his presidency. Now the President says he may deliver his speech to the virtual Republican National Convention from the South Lawn of the White House, obliterating the tradition of presidents seeking to safeguard their office from politicization.

Some of these steps, like trying

to shape the conditions of mail-in voting, are not necessarily sinister and fall more into the category of legal challenges frequently made by both parties to win advantage within the structure of elections. But others come across as the actions of a campaign that believes its own claims it is winning.

Demanding more debates -- as Trump is doing -- is a time-honored tactic of a trailing candidate needing a game-changer. The upshot of Trump's complaints on mail-in voting often appears to be an attempt to limit the number of people can vote -- when they may fear showing up to a polling place during a pandemic exacerbated by his own mistakes. There is also a key attempt by the Trump campaign to lay the groundwork for legal and political challenges that could discredit Biden's victory if he wins and to give Trump's ego an out if voters reject him.

None of this is surprising. After all, the President made inaccurate claims of massive voter fraud in the popular vote in the election that he won in 2016. The evidence in the impeachment trial strongly



suggested that the President used his power in an attempt to coerce a foreign power into interfering in the election based on false claims of corruption against Biden.

And as President, Trump has relentlessly attacked institutions that have held him to account and countered his false narratives, including the courts, the press, US intelligence agencies and independent government watchdogs. Casting doubt on election institutions is consistent with his normal behavior.

For his entire life in business before he entered politics, Trump bent rules, laws, traditions and ethics. His willingness to do so now signals that he is prepared to do anything within his power

to win the election. And it suggests that he's also willing to drag the country through a corrosive period of legal and political brinkmanship if the election is close.

If he loses power in such circumstances, Trump's tactics could sow a sense of grievance and disenfranchisement among his voters that would shatter his successors' attempts to forge unity and could damage US democracy for years ahead.

A politically motivated reversal The President introduced a new caveat to his opposition to mail-in voting on Wednesday that may reflect concern among Republicans that he risks suppressing his own vote in several tight swing states.

Modi's brutal treatment of Kashmir exposes his tactics - and their flaws



At midnight on 4 August 2019, phones in Kashmir went dead and internet connections were cut. On 5 August 2019, a year ago today, 7 million people were locked into their homes under a strict military curfew. Up to 10,000 people, from young children and teenage stone pelters to former chief ministers and major pro-India politicians, were arrested and put into preventive detention, where many of them still remain. On 6 August, a bill was passed in parliament stripping the state of Jammu and Kashmir of its

autonomy and special status enshrined in the Indian constitution. It was stripped of statehood, downgraded into two union territories, Ladakh, and Jammu and Kashmir. Ladakh would have no legislature and would be governed directly by New Delhi.

The problem of Kashmir, we were told, had been finally solved once and for all. In other words, Kashmir's decades-long struggle for self-determination, which has cost tens of thousands of lives of soldiers, militants and civilians, thousands of enforced

"disappearances" and cruelly tortured bodies - was over. In India's parliament, home minister Amit Shah went further. He said he was prepared to lay down his life to take over the territories of what India calls Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and what Kashmiris call Azad Kashmir, as well as the frontier provinces of Gilgit-Baltistan. He also threw in Aksai Chin, once part of the erstwhile kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir, now a part of China. He was wading into dangerous territory, literally as well as figuratively. The borders he was talking about lie between three nuclear powers. Amid the unseemly celebrations on India's streets, the extra wattage generated by Kashmir's humiliation intensified the glow of prime minister Narendra Modi's already god-like halo. Provocatively, the Indian meteorological department began to include Gilgit-Baltistan in its weather reports. Few of us in India paid attention to the

Chinese government when it urged India to "be cautious in its words and deeds on the border issue". In India's parliament, home minister Amit Shah went further. He said he was prepared to lay down his life to take over the territories of what India calls Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and what Kashmiris call Azad Kashmir, as well as the frontier provinces of Gilgit-Baltistan. He also threw in Aksai Chin, once part of the erstwhile kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir, now a part of China. He was wading into dangerous territory, literally as well as figuratively. The borders he was talking about lie between three nuclear powers. Amid the unseemly celebrations on India's streets, the extra wattage generated by Kashmir's humiliation intensified the glow of prime minister Narendra Modi's already god-like halo. Provocatively, the Indian meteorological department began to include Gilgit-Baltistan in its weather reports. Few of us in India paid attention to the

Chinese government when it urged India to "be cautious in its words and deeds on the border issue".

In the year that has gone by, the struggle in Kashmir has by no means ended. In just the past few months media reports say that 34 soldiers, 154 militants and 17 civilians have been killed. A world traumatised by coronavirus has understandably paid no attention to what the Indian government has done to the people of Kashmir. The curfew and communication siege, and everything else that such a siege entails (no access to doctors, hospitals, work, no business, no school, no contact with loved ones), lasted for months. Even the US didn't do this during its war against Iraq. Just a few months of Covid lockdown, without a military curfew or communications siege, has brought the world to its knees and hundreds of millions to the limits of their endurance and sanity.

Nepal starts construction of helipad on disputed border area in Bihar

The helipad is nearing completion at Narsahi village, a short distance from Thari border outpost (BOP) of Sashatra Seema Bal (SSB) near Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR) in West Champaran district.

Even before the administration could act on intelligence reports, the Nepal government has begun construction of a helipad at a disputed location on the Indo-Nepal border along West Champaran district of Bihar, officials said Thursday. The helipad is nearing completion at Narsahi village, a short distance from Thari border outpost (BOP) of Sashatra Seema Bal (SSB) near Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR) in West Champaran district, 80 km from Bettiah, headquarters of West Champaran district.

"To the best of our knowledge, construction of the helipad

meant for small choppers started a few days back on the disputed area," said Commandant Rajendra Bhardwaj of 21st Sashatra Seema Bal (SSB) Battalion. On August 4, HT had reported that Nepal was planning to construct a helipad at Narsahi village which is a disputed land on Indo-Nepal border and a tender for which had been floated. The SSB had updated the headquarters about the development.

However, much to their amazement, SSB officials on Thursday came across the construction of a circular cemented structure at Narsahi village. "We are trying to gather

the other related information such as the total area of the helipad and the date on which it came up," said the commandant.

"The construction is at a disputed location. We will update the headquarters with photographs and other details," said commandant Bhardwaj.

Officials blame the changing course of the Gandak river for the controversy around Narsahi. SSB officials said the central part of the Gandak river forms the international boundary between Nepal and India. But with the river changing its course in the 1970s, Narsahi shifted to the other side of the river and later the Indian citizens living there moved to this

part of the Indian territory.

A video clip of the site in HT's possession shows the construction with a yellow border around it at a place near an agricultural field. Bricks and water tanks are seen lying on the site and pieces of iron rods and wet ground point it to be newly constructed.

The development comes after the relationship between India and Nepal has become strained particularly after the latter's Parliament approved a new political map, claiming Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura in Uttarakhand as its territory.

There are also speculations about the proposed construction

of two more helipads along the Indo-Nepal border. These include one at Triveni near Valmikinagar (West Champaran) and other in Ujjaini (Nawalparasi district of Nepal) sharing border with Uttar Pradesh. "There is a concentrated effort being made by a handful of KP Sharma Oli supporters to provoke us whereas a larger section of the Nepalese are in favour to protect their age-old relationship with us. It is high time when New Delhi should break its silence and do the needful," said Mahesh Agrawal, president of Seema Jagran Manch, Bihar, which works in the border areas.

India rejects Pakistan's criticism of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya

Pakistan's foreign ministry had on Wednesday condemned the building of the temple and described the judgement by India's Supreme Court (SC) that paved the way for the construction as "flawed".



He added, "While this is not a surprising stance from a nation that practices cross-border terrorism and denies its own minorities their religious rights, such comments are nevertheless deeply regrettable."

The development came against the backdrop of Pakistan mounting a campaign on the Kashmir issue on the first anniversary (August 5) of India's move to scrap the special status of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and to split the erstwhile state into two union territories (UTs).

India-Pakistan ties have been at an all-time low since last year's stand-off over Pulwama terror attack on February 14 blamed on the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), an outlawed outfit.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Pakistan's Foreign Office had said: "The flawed judgement of the Indian Supreme Court paving the way for construction of the temple not only reflected the preponderance of faith over justice but also the growing majoritarianism in today's India, where minorities, particularly Muslims and their places of worship, are increasingly under attack." The statement said the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) had passed resolutions condemning the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was constructing the Ram temple as

part of an agenda "of converting India into a 'Hindu Rashtra' ". It criticised the haste in starting construction of the temple amid the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic and the controversy over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019, and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), as well as measures that "demonised, dispossessed, marginalised and subjected" Muslims to targeted violence. It also criticised what it described as India's "systematic human rights violations" in J&K and a "design to change the demography" of the region. India and Pakistan have had several testy exchanges in recent months over the treatment of minorities in both countries.

New Delhi on Thursday rejected Islamabad's condemnation of the construction of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, with the ministry of external affairs (MEA) saying Pakistan should not interfere in India's internal affairs and refrain from "communal incitement".

Pakistan's foreign ministry had on Wednesday condemned the building of the temple and described the

judgement by India's Supreme Court (SC) that paved the way for the construction as "flawed".

Responding to these remarks, MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said: "We have seen the press statement by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on a matter internal to India. It should desist from interfering in India's affairs and refrain from communal incitement."

Tussle With Bureaucrats, Political Vacuum And Two Statements: What Led To Sudden End Of GC Murmu's Term In J-K?

(News Agencies)- On August 5 evening, WhatsApp groups in Jammu and Kashmir were abuzz with rumours about the resignation of its first Lieutenant-Governor G C Murmu. The day also marked the first anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370. Meanwhile, the rumours grew stronger by late night. Given the nature of such rumours in Kashmir -- more so since last year -- Murmu had, in fact, resigned from his post. Murmu's resignation, merely nine months after he took oath on October 31 last year, came as a surprise. The unceremonious exit of the former Lt. Governor was so quick that Thursday morning he was seen leaving the Raj Bhawan. Sources attribute the

sudden exit of Murmu to his discord with the civil administration and failure to fill the political vacuum created by the abrogation of Article 370 and bifurcation of the erstwhile state of J&K into two union territories - Ladakh and J&K. Sources admit that even after one-year of abrogation of Article 370, the government has failed to make a tangible infrastructural development on the ground or create a sense of acceptability to the decision. "After one year we have nothing to show to people. We have failed in both infrastructural development and security situations," said a senior security official. Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah had claimed that the

abrogation of Article 370 would open floodgates for infrastructural development and bring peace to the conflict-raven region. Murmu's appointment as the first LG did not go well with the Chief Secretary BVR Subramanyam, who is likely to get Padma Bhushan this year on August 15 for his work prior to and after the abrogation of Article 370. Instead of taking up developmental projects and launching a coordinated fight against CoVID-19, J&K witnessed a major discord between Raj Bhawan and the Civil Secretariat. It was J&K Apni Party leader Altaf Bukhari who made public last month the tussle between the all-powerful chief secretary of J&K and Murmu. Many observers argue that the

Apni Party might not have uncovered the tussle without the consent of New Delhi. Bukhari had met the Prime Minister and Amit Shah in Delhi in March seeking assurances on issues pertaining to J&K. Soon after the meeting, the government came up with domicile law, which was even criticised by Bukhari. Bukhari's party in June issued a statement saying governance in J&K had come to a grinding halt mainly because of "sharp groupism in bureaucracy which seems to be busy in proving loyalties towards their respective centers of influence." "The J&K is witnessing a kind of uncertainty and an unwanted decay in its governance apparatus mainly because of the



lobbyism of its senior civil service officers and the same is going unnoticed in the din of COVID-19 pandemic in Jammu and Kashmir," the statement had said, adding that some officers who show their inclination towards Raj Bhawan are "unfortunately at loggerheads with their bureaucratic colleagues who toe the line of the highest office in the civil secretariat resulting into a growing gulf between people and the dispensation at the helms of affairs." Officials say Murmu would accuse the Chief Secretary of undermining his position and putting hurdles in running the affairs of the Union Territory. Murmu would also ridicule some officials for bad habits like backbiting and using senior bureaucrats against each other, sources say.

Amit Shah's tribute to Sushma Swaraj underlines qualities that will 'inspire generations' to come



Home Minister Amit Shah has paid his tribute to former foreign minister and senior BJP leader, late Sushma Swaraj, on her death anniversary by calling her an outstanding parliamentarian and a brilliant orator who dedicated her life in the service of the nation. Shah's tribute comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi remembering Swaraj as "an articulate voice for India at the world stage". Tributes to Sushma Swaraj ji on her punyatithi. She was a towering figure of Indian polity, an outstanding parliamentarian & a brilliant orator who dedicated her entire life in service of the nation. Her ideals will continue to inspire the generations to come," Amit

Shah tweeted on Thursday. Sushma Swaraj was just 67 years old at the time of her death last year following health complications that made her stay away from taking any ministerial responsibility in the second term of the Narendra Modi government. The Prime Minister had earlier today said that Swaraj served India selflessly recalling her tenure as the external affairs minister in the first term of his government between 2014 and 2019. "Remembering Sushma Ji on her first Purnima Tithi. Her untimely and unfortunate demise left many saddened. She served India selflessly and was an articulate voice for India at

the world stage," PM Modi tweeted earlier today. Hours before she died of cardiac arrest, Swaraj had tweeted her praise for Centre's decision to abrogate Article 370, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir. Vice President Venkaiah Naidu threw light on her helpful nature and said she was a wonderful human being. "Sushma ji was a member of our family. We used to turn to her for advice & help when we first came to New

Delhi. She was a wonderful human being, who was prompt in her responses for any request or solution," Naidu tweeted on Sushma Swaraj's first death anniversary. He added that Swaraj's wit, human nature and prompt response to any problem were in full display on social media when she was the minister. Naidu also called her one of the most popular Indian foreign ministers in recent times. Sushma's successor to the post,

S u b r a h m a n y a m Jaishankar said she was remembered fondly. "Today, more than ever, remember her fondly. Always an inspiration," he tweeted and posted a picture with the former minister. Swaraj was the youngest cabinet minister in the Haryana government who later became the first woman chief minister of Delhi and the first woman spokesperson of a national political party in the country.

She was the information and broadcasting minister in the first BJP government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1996 and also later in 1998. Her speeches in the parliament as the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha between 2009 and 2014 are often remembered for its sharpness, wit and impact. Swaraj was a seven time MP and was thrice elected as an MLA.

Article 370 nullification India's internal matter, other countries should not interfere: Naidu

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Thursday advised nations, including those in India's neighbourhood, to refrain from commenting on its internal matters and asserted that the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir was taken in the larger interest to protect the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country. He also said that India was a parliamentary democracy and the

decision to abrogate Article 370 provisions, which accorded special status to Jammu and Kashmir, was taken after detailed discussion in Parliament and with the support of majority of the members. He made these remarks while delivering the first Sushma Swaraj Memorial Lecture, organised by Panjab University, according to an official statement. His comments come close on the heels of China making fresh

attempt to raise the Kashmir issue at the UN Security Council. The Ministry of External Affairs has said that New Delhi "firmly" rejects Beijing's "interference" in the country's internal affairs. According to the statement, "Naidu wanted other nations to mind their own issues rather than interfering in the affairs of other countries." Referring to the feelings expressed by the late Sushma Swaraj on Article 370 before her death, the vice president

said that as the external affairs minister, she used to articulate India's position quite efficiently and in a "sweet and sober manner". "But at the same time, she used to convey the stand of the country in a firm manner," the statement said quoting him. Paying tributes to Swaraj, he described her as an ideal Indian woman. She was an able administrator who left an indelible imprint on every position she had held, he said.



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Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh may see temperature rise of 7 degrees by 2100: Study



The study, published in the journal *Climatic Change* on July 29, predicted the impact of future climate change in the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh Himalaya, by the end of the twenty-first century using an ensemble of 11 models under three greenhouse gas emission scenarios.

Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh may witness a temperature increase of up to 6.9 degrees Celsius by the end of the century due to climate change, according to a study which warns that the glaciers in this Himalayan region could shrink by 85 per cent if the projections come true.

The study, published in the journal *Climatic Change* on July 29, predicted the impact of future climate change in the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh Himalaya, by the end of the twenty-first century using an ensemble of 11 models under three greenhouse gas emission scenarios.

It also highlights the changes in the distribution of the prevalent climate zones in the region.

"The study has been carried over the entire region of Jammu and Kashmir, including Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, Aksai Chin and other regions across the Line of Control (LoC)," noted Professor Shakil

Ahmad Romshoo, Dean of Research at the University of Kashmir.

"The average annual temperature is projected to increase by 4.5 degrees Celsius, 3.98 degrees Celsius, and 6.93 degrees Celsius by the end of the twenty first century under three different scenarios, respectively," Romshoo, lead author of the research, told PTI.

The temperature increase of 6.9 degrees Celsius for the Jammu and Kashmir Himalayas is way more than the projected average rise in the global and national temperatures by the end of the century.

Romshoo added that if the current emission rates of greenhouse gases are sustained, the global average temperature is likely to rise by nearly 5 degrees Celsius by the end of the twenty-first century under the worst case scenario. Similarly, the average temperature over India is

projected to rise by approximately 4.4 degrees Celsius under such a scenario, he said.

Romshoo noted that there will be significant impacts on almost every sector of the economy in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh due to this climate change driven temperature increase.

"The glaciers, the most important resource of the region, are going to shrink by around 85 per cent by the end of the century if the projections come true," the professor at the Department of Earth Sciences, University of Kashmir, noted.

He explained that this would lead to significant depletion of the streamflows in the Indus basin, the waters of which are shared between several countries in South Asia.

Similarly, the impacts on agriculture, horticulture and even tourism shall significantly threaten the livelihood of the dependent population in the region, the environmentalist warned. The researchers, including Jasia Bashir and Irfan Rashid from the Department of Earth Sciences, University of Kashmir, noted that the drivers of climate change are primarily

the increasing emission rates of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Greenhouse gas emission is directly related to fossil fuel use, industrialisation, deforestation, air pollution, and other environmental unfriendly activities across the globe, they explained. "Though, the mountainous regions like Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh are the least industrialised, unfortunately, they are bearing the brunt of the climate change as the phenomena has global dimensions and footprint," Romshoo noted.

The projected climate change under the three emission scenarios also indicates significant changes in the distribution of prevalent climate zones. The projected climate change under different scenarios revealed that the subtropical and temperate climatic zones would expand while the cold desert climate zone is projected to shrink significantly under all the three scenarios, the researchers noted. "The cold desert climate zone in the Ladakh region would shrink by 22 per cent and correspondingly the subtropical and temperate zones would expand due to the

projected climate change," the researchers noted in their study. "The projected changes in the climate and climate zones by the end of the twenty-first century would have significant impacts on various sectors in the region which might lead to the redistribution and changes in the composition of vegetation, enhancement of snow depletion and glacier recession," said Romshoo. He noted that the situation would also lead to an increase in the frequency of climate extremes, changes in streamflows, in the faunal and floral biodiversity, plant invasions, changes in agriculture and horticulture productivity. This is in addition to the loss of hydropower generation, ecosystem services, and impacts on other key economic sectors in the region, according to the researchers. "The vital information generated in this research would inform policymaking for framing robust strategies for adaptation and mitigation of the impacts of climate change on various socioeconomic and ecological sectors in the region," Romshoo added.

Jaishankar, Pompeo discuss meeting of Quadrilateral dialogue in near future

The matter figured in a phone conversation on Thursday night between Jaishankar and Pompeo, the external affairs minister said in a tweet on Friday. He described the conversation with Pompeo as wide-ranging.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar and his US counterpart Mike Pompeo discussed the holding of a meeting of the Quadrilateral dialogue or Quad in the near future, against the backdrop of growing tensions with China.

The Quad, which also includes Australia and Japan, was upgraded to the ministerial level last September. China has always viewed the grouping with suspicion, though Indian officials have said it is not directed against any country.

The matter figured in a phone conversation on Thursday night between Jaishankar and Pompeo, the external affairs minister said in a tweet on Friday. He described the conversation

with Pompeo as wide-ranging.

"Exchanged views on responding to the Coronavirus challenge. Discussed meeting in the Quad format in the near future," Jaishankar tweeted.

A readout of the conversation from the US state department said the two leaders discussed efforts to "address recent destabilising actions in the region" - an apparent reference to the India-China border standoff and Beijing's activities in the South China Sea - and that the two leaders were looking forward to Quadrilateral consultations.

The two leaders reviewed bilateral cooperation, "including working of relevant mechanisms" and shared "assessments on regional and global issues

including South Asia, Afghanistan, Indo-Pacific & beyond", Jaishankar said in another tweet.

The US readout said Jaishankar and Pompeo "agreed to continue close cooperation on a full range of regional and international issues and look forward to Quadrilateral consultations and the US-India 2+2 ministerial dialogue later this year".

It added that Pompeo spoke to Jaishankar about bilateral and multilateral cooperation on issues of international concern, "including efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, support the peace process in Afghanistan, and address recent destabilising actions in the region".

Pompeo and Jaishankar



"reiterated the strength of the United States-India relationship to advance peace, prosperity, and security in the Indo-Pacific and around the globe", the readout added.

India is preparing to include Australia in this year's edition of the Malabar exercise, which brings together the navies of India, Japan and the US. Experts have also called for greater cooperation between members of the Quad in the face of China's

assertive actions across the region.

Australia has been critical of China's actions along the Line of Actual Control and in the South China Sea. After a recent meeting with Jaishankar, Australian high commissioner Barry O'Farrell said his country Australia opposes any attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo on the LAC, as this will only increase tension and the risk of instability.

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Another 1.18m Americans file for unemployment as benefits expire

Economists worry expiration of \$600 weekly lifeline will lead to sharp drop-off in household spending and set back the economy



emergency benefits since March as part of the government's coronavirus stimulus package. But that agreement expired at the end of last month and Congress is split over a possible extension. About 30 million people have been receiving the extra cash and it has accounted for 15% of all weekly wages paid in the US. The expiration of the benefits without any replacement would likely cause a surge in evictions, hunger and poverty as well as having consequences for the wider economy. According to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) the knock-on effect of removing that cash from the economy could be severe. The EPI estimated 5mn jobs could be lost by July 2021 if it is cut as consumers are forced to cut back on spending. "The \$600 benefit is essential for millions of people to get food, to pay rent, to care for their children, to afford basic necessities.

Another 1.18 million people filed for unemployment benefits last week as economists worry the expiration of enhanced unemployment benefits will lead to a sharp drop-off in household spending and set back the US economy's near-term recovery. Claims dipped last week after two weeks of rises and were the lowest since March but the latest figure from the department of labor marked the 19th week in a row that claims have topped 1m. Before the coronavirus pandemic gripped the US, the record for weekly claims was 695,000 in October 1982. The figures come ahead of Friday's monthly snapshot of the job market. Economists expect the unemployment rate to have dipped to 10.6% in July from 11.1% in June, a significant drop but still three times the pre-pandemic level. Americans have been receiving an extra \$600 in

High school student forced to take off Black Lives Matter mask at graduation ceremony, family says

A Black student was forced to take off his Black Lives Matter face mask in order to graduate, his family says. Dean Holmes, a student at York Catholic High School in York, Pennsylvania, put on a Black Lives Matter mask under his face shield at his July 28 graduation ceremony. As students lined up before the ceremony started, the school's principal pulled him away in front of other students and told him to take off the mask, Holmes told CNN. Holmes had previously been told by another school official to take the mask off, so he eventually relented for fear to not being able to walk across the stage, he said. "I was so mad. I was shaking during the graduation, tapping my leg on edge...when it was over, I couldn't believe it," said Holmes. York Catholic had opted to give every student a face shield instead of a mask for the ceremony. Holmes's father, John, took to Facebook on Saturday saying that the school stifled his freedom of expression and jeopardized his health." ... the capricious action taken against my son demonstrates that York Catholic High School has miles to go before they can put the ugliness of unconscious bias and racism to sleep. As a parent I will not stand for my son being humiliated publicly, having his basic human dignity crushed on what should have been one of the happiest days of his young life," he wrote in the post. Both he and his wife were also wearing Black Lives Matter masks during the ceremony, he told CNN. No masks with messages for graduation, school said. In a statement August 2, Arthur Full, chairman of the York Catholic School Board, said it was standard "decorum" for students to not wear any messages and that any graduate would have been asked to remove it. Two other students previously asked and were given permission to wear a solid color mask under the face shield, unlike Dean, Full explained.

"Police and Community Working Together"



Isolation Hotel Program for Those with COVID-19

COVID-19 is extremely contagious, meaning that it is easily transmitted from one person to another. If you tested positive for COVID-19 or think you might have it because of your symptoms, it is very important that you do not come in close contact with others, including people you may live with. This is called "self-isolation." You may qualify to self-isolate in a hotel, free of charge, for up to 14 days if you do not have a safe place to self-isolate. This can mean:

- Your home does not have space for you to stay six feet away from others
- You share rooms or a bathroom
- You live with someone who is vulnerable

Hotel rooms are also available for New Yorkers without COVID-19 but who live with someone who has COVID-19.

For more information click here: www1.nyc.gov/covid-19-hotel-program

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Cambria Heights man sentenced to 10 years in prison for attempted murder of girlfriend

Girlfriend refused to continue to engage in prostitution

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that a 31-year-old Cambria Heights man has been sentenced to 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to attempted murder in the April 2018 attack on his transgender girlfriend. The defendant beat and slashed the victim when she refused to continue selling sex for cash to fill his pockets. Queens District Attorney Katz said, The victim in this case was attempting to free herself from exploitation and sex trafficking when the defendant who was taking the money she made viciously attacked her. The defendant admitted his guilt and has now been ordered to prison for his criminal actions. The DA added that, Anyone who feels trapped by circumstances similar to this victim's should know this: You are not alone. We are here to continue to vigorously prosecute such cases and protect victims of trafficking and assault. The District Attorney's Office identified the defendant as David Viltus, 31, of 221st Street in the Cambria Heights neighborhood of Queens. The defendant pleaded guilty in February to attempted murder in the second degree before Acting

Queens Supreme Court Justice Peter Vallone Jr. This morning Justice Vallone Jr. ordered Viltus to serve 10 years in prison, to be followed by five years post release supervision and issued an order of protection barring the defendant from having any contact with the victim. District Attorney Katz said, on April 18, 2018, the defendant went to the Hillside Hotel in Jamaica, Queens where the victim, a 29-year-old transgender woman was staying. The victim, who had been prostituting herself for the defendant, refused to continue engaging in sex acts for cash. That's when Viltus erupted in anger. He punched her in the face with a closed fist and used a scalpel to slash her in the face. He smashed a plant on her head and threw her against a door, knocking the door off its hinges. Assistant District Attorney Amy M. Scotto, of the District Attorney's Felony Trials Bureau II, prosecuted the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Mark Osnowitz, Bureau Chief, Peter Lomp, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Trials Pishoy Yacoub.

BP LEE, QUEENS BOTANICAL GARDEN TO ANNOUNCE "QUEENS SUMMER SEEDS 2020"

Summer Wellness Initiative to Promote Education and Healthy Living

QUEENS, NY – Acting Queens Borough President Sharon Lee, the Queens Botanical Garden and additional key partners will announce the launch of the "Queens Summer Seeds 2020" program — a cross-borough initiative to promote wellness, encourage healthy living and build a brighter future for our families through gardening — on Thursday, August 6 at 11:00AM at the Queens Botanical Garden Farm in Flushing. Media interested in attending the socially distanced press conference can access the Queens Botanical Garden via the Parking Garden at 42-80 Crommelin Street. Masks are required. To symbolize rebirth and recovery following the unprecedented challenges our borough has faced thus far in 2020 — while providing Queens residents with an educational, stress-releasing activity to enjoy in a summer where options for leisure are limited — a total of 2,020 seed planter kits will be distributed across more than a dozen organizations and New York City

Housing Authority (NYCHA) communities throughout Queens with either active gardens or similar wellness initiatives. Each partner will also receive personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizers along with the seed planter sets, as the borough's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic hinges on remaining vigilant to maximize safety. Financial support for the program was provided by Borough President Lee, while the seed planter sets were secured by the Queens Botanical Garden, which opened its doors to the public on July 21 as part of Phase 4 of New York City's reopening.

WHAT: Announcement and Distribution of "Queens Summer Seeds 2020" WHEN: Thursday, August 6, 2020 at 11:00AM

WHERE: Queens Botanical Garden Farm, 42-80 Crommelin Street in Flushing

WHO: SHARON LEE, Acting Queens Borough President SUSAN LACERTE, Queens Botanical Garden Executive Director Community Groups

NYC: STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS!

New Yorkers working together can slow the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in New York City.



PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



STAY HOME IF SICK

- Stay home and call your doctor if you have symptoms like coughing, shortness of breath, fever, sore throat.
- If you do not feel better in 24-48 hours, seek care from your doctor.
- If you need help getting medical care, call 311.
- NYC will provide care regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.



PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

- If you have chronic conditions like lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system, avoid unnecessary gatherings and events.
- If you have family or friends who have one of these conditions, do not visit them if you feel sick.



REDUCE OVERCROWDING

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- Stagger work hours, starting earlier or later.
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- If the train is too packed, wait for the next one.

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Bill de Blasio
Mayor
Owens Bertot, MD
Commissioner

Shock turns to anger in Beirut over warnings before deadly explosion

Shock at the devastation caused by the massive port explosion in Beirut was giving way to anger Thursday, as new information emerged that officials in the Lebanese capital had ignored repeated warnings about a stockpile of dangerous chemicals linked to the blast.

There is a growing body of evidence, including emails and public court documents, that officials knew about a shipment of thousands of tons of ammonium nitrate -- once described as a "floating bomb" -- that had been confiscated by Lebanese authorities and was being stored in a warehouse at the port for the past six years, but had failed to act.

The revelation that the blast could be attributed to government negligence has reignited long-held frustration at Lebanon's political class, which sunk the country deep into debt, and at endemic corruption that lined the pockets of the wealthy elite at the expense of basic public services and infrastructure.

The country was already seeing rising unemployment, soaring prices and a currency in free fall -

- for many, the explosion is further proof of government ineptitude and corruption.

Massive clean-up effort

Tuesday's explosion destroyed much of the Lebanese capital's main coastal port, leaving at least 135 people dead, 5,000 injured, and hundreds of thousands homeless. The area in the immediate vicinity of the blast resembled a smoking wasteland with a 400-foot-wide crater, and the empty shells of apartment buildings scarring the city skyline. In downtown Beirut, an army of volunteers launched into a massive clean-up effort Thursday, with people coming from all over city to help sweep streets, pulling debris off cars, or handing out food and water, as residents picked through the rubble of their homes and businesses, trying to salvage what they could.

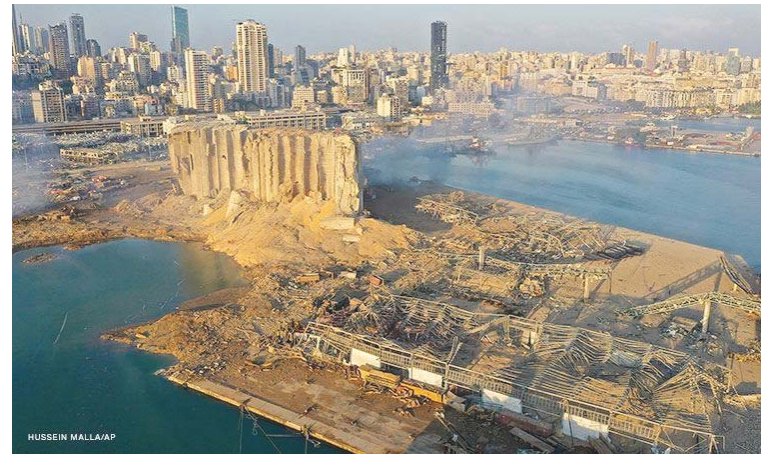
Lebanon's Economy Minister Raoul Nehme said that every apartment and business in the city has been impacted in some way by the blast, and state-run media said 90% of the hotels in the Lebanese capital had been damaged.

The number of deaths is expected

to climb amid ongoing search and rescue efforts. Many people were still missing two days after the blast, and 300,000 have been displaced from their homes.

The city's emergency services, already under strain due to the Covid-19 pandemic, were operating at decreased capacity after four hospitals were damaged in the explosion, which sent a shock wave that was felt 150 miles away in Cyprus and damaged buildings 10 kilometers (6 miles) away. It's still not exactly clear what led to the ignition that wiped out entire streets, but questions swirled Wednesday over whether the authorities had failed to act on those warning signs.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Hassan Diab confirmed that 2,750 metric tons of ammonium nitrate -- typically used as an agricultural fertilizer and in explosives for mining -- had been stored for six years at a warehouse in the Beirut port without safety measures, "endangering the safety of citizens," according to a



statement.

The Lebanese cabinet has ordered an unknown number of port officials to be placed under house arrest in the coming days, pending the results of an investigation into the blast, according to Ghada Shreim, the minister for displaced people. Those involved in "the storage, guarding and investigating of Hangar 12 from 2014 until today" will be included in the arrests, Shreim said.

'Criminal attack'

Lebanese President Michel Aoun promised a transparent investigation into the causes of the explosion, vowing Wednesday that those

responsible would be held accountable and face "severe punishment."

But years of government corruption has left little hope among those on the streets that the investigation will get to the truth of why such large quantities of the dangerous chemical were allowed to be stored in the middle of the city without adequate safety measures -- and who is responsible.

"This accident here, this crisis, for 20 years they're going to talk about it. The investigation, it's never going to end. No conclusion, no results," said one resident in downtown Beirut.

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Beirut explosion: Angry residents rage at leaders after blast



(News Agencies) - People in Beirut have expressed anger at the government over what they say was negligence that led to Tuesday's huge explosion. President Michel Aoun said the blast was caused by 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored unsafely in a warehouse. Many have accused the authorities of corruption, neglect and mismanagement. The blast killed at least 137 people and injured about 5,000 others, while dozens are still missing. A two-week state of emergency has begun.

"How ship's deadly cargo ended up at Beirut port

"Beirut port explosion 'feels like a dream'

French architect Jean-Marc Bonfils, involved in rebuilding the city after the civil war, and firefighter Sahar Fares, one of the first responders at the scene, were among the first fatalities to be named. A German diplomat was also among the dead.

French President Emmanuel Macron - the first world leader to visit since the tragedy - was mobbed as he walked through the city on Thursday, with residents imploring him to help and denouncing their leaders.

"Help us, you are our only hope," one resident called out. "Please don't give money to our corrupt government," said another, before adding: "We can't take this any more."

At a press conference, Mr Macron said a new political order was needed in Lebanon. "The anger I saw in Beirut today also showed signs of hope for the future," he said.

He said France would help organise international aid to Lebanon. Funding was available, he said, but political reforms had to take place before it could be sent.

He vowed that there would be no

blank cheques for Lebanon's leaders, but cautioned that he could not tell the Lebanese government what to do. France is the former colonial power in Lebanon.

Filmmaker Jude Chehab told the BBC: "Beirut is crying, Beirut is screaming, people are hysterical and people are tired."

Chadia Elmeouchi Noun, a resident currently in hospital, said: "I've known all the time that

now is absolutely criminal."

On Wednesday, the government announced that a number of port officials were placed under house arrest pending an investigation into the explosion.

The country's Supreme Defence Council insisted that those found responsible would face the "maximum punishment".

Meanwhile, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have called for an

independent investigation into the blast. In a statement, HRW said it had "serious concerns about the ability of the Lebanese

judiciary to conduct a credible and transparent investigation on its own".

A city of sirens, empty buildings and empty streets

This port was Lebanon's lifeline to the whole world. Something like 80% of the country's grain came through here. I can see the grain silos, which were built way back when, and they're teetering really. They no longer look like they're going to survive. Just beyond there I can see a ship listing heavily. I've lived in Beirut for five years and it's almost unrecognisable - it's a city of sirens, of empty buildings, of empty streets.

As I look at the neighbourhood of Gemmayze just behind the port, I don't think I can see a single pane of glass left. Entire roofs have gone - I can see friends' apartments which are just open to the sky now. All of this area, which was really heavily populated, has been abandoned. No one is coming back here anytime soon.



we are led by incompetent people, incompetent government... But I tell you something - what they have done

FBI agents executed a federal search warrant at YouTube celebrity Jake Paul's home

A law enforcement official confirms to CNN that FBI agents executed a federal search warrant at the Calabasas, California, home of YouTube celebrity Jake Paul Wednesday. FBI Public Affairs Specialist Laura Eimiller tells CNN the search is in connection with an ongoing investigation. The affidavit in support of the warrant has been sealed by a judge and the FBI is prohibited from commenting on the nature of the investigation. Eimiller tells CNN no arrests are planned.

CNN has reached out to reps for Paul for comment.

Arizona charges dismissed

In June, Paul was charged with criminal trespass and unlawful assembly after video showed him at a Scottsdale, Arizona, mall as it was being looted, police said. In a Twitter post, Paul denied that he and anyone else he was with



was engaged in looting or vandalism.

On Wednesday, the Scottsdale Police Department said it is dismissing the charges against Paul and friends Arman Izadi and Andrew Leon.

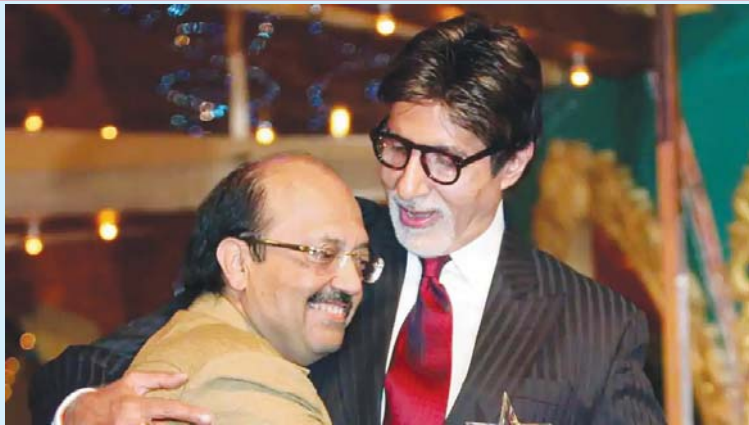
"The Scottsdale Police Department and Scottsdale City Attorney's Office are coordinating with the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona and the FBI to ensure that justice is served regarding criminal acts at Scottsdale Fashion Square on May 30, 2020," Scottsdale PD said in a news release.

"It is in the best interest of the community to dismiss misdemeanor charges without prejudice so that a federal criminal

investigation can be completed. Scottsdale retains the option to refile charges depending on the outcome of the federal investigation," the release added.

The Rise And Fall Of Amar Singh

He came from nowhere and rose so high. But, in the end, he flew away with the wind.



Congress support and Bachchan was Rajiv Gandhi's close friend. To Bachchan, Singh said that Chandra Shekhar was like a brother to him and he, Amar Singh, would personally ensure that any problems that had been created for the Bachchans by the predecessor VP Singh-government would disappear. For years afterwards, Amar Singh would tell the story of how he personally carried the government file relating to a case against the Bachchans around till Chandra Shekhar agreed to sign it and close the case.

"Amitji may have been a friend of Rajiv Gandhi's but it was Amar Singh who got the files signed



In the 1983 film Zelig, Woody Allen (who also wrote and directed the movie) plays the eponymous hero; a man who manages somehow to know everyone (from F Scott Fitzgerald to Adolf Hitler) and who turns up at every important event. The film is a mockumentary, which is to say that it is made to look like a documentary with shots of the fictional Zelig inserted into actual footage of real events. I first met Amar Singh around four years after I saw the movie and in my mind, Amar Singh was always the Indian Zelig: a man who managed to work his way into any situation of consequence and to stand shoulder to shoulder with any important person he saw.

I first met Amar Singh after I moved to Calcutta in 1986. He was no big deal then. Though he was a Rajput, his twin claims to fame were his association with the city's prosperous Marwari community and his friendship with Bengal Congress leaders. As he was neither much of a businessman nor a politician of any great consequence, he was already punching much above his weight. He could get the city's richest men --- the Birlas, the Goenkas, and others --- on the phone and became involved, at a high level, in the feuds that characterized the Bengal Congress of that era. (He was pro-Subrata Mukherjee, anti-Mamata Banerjee and so on.) He also understood the media. He would turn up at the ABP office, where I then worked, escorting visiting notables. He brought Dr. Karan Singh to see us. He came again with Veer Bahadur Singh who was then (if I remember correctly) Telecom Minister. Amar Singh was hardly the only local

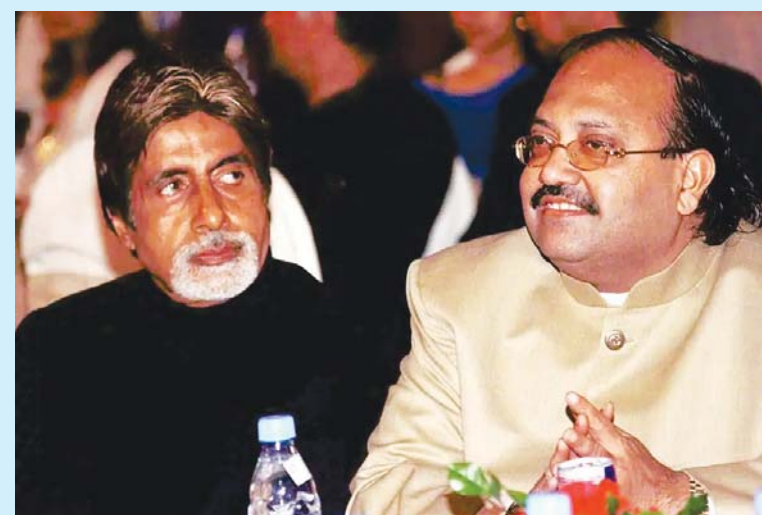
politician to accompany national biggies on their visits to Calcutta. But what made him different was that he demanded almost as much attention as the visitor he was escorting, inserting himself into every conversation and holding forth at length. Interrupt



him and you risked offending the important visitor so most of us heard him out politely. In a few years, Amar Singh had established a presence in Delhi as well. When Jaya and Amitabh Bachchan came to Calcutta for the premiere of Agneepath in 1990, Amar Singh attached himself to Jaya Bachchan whom he had helped with a Children's Film Festival in Delhi. (At the time Jaya was Chairperson of the Children's Film Society.) He was not yet a friend of Amitabh's but because he popped up, Zelig-like, in all the photos, he came off to the general public as a close friend of all the Bachchans. The following year, when Chandra Shekhar was Prime Minister, Amar Singh who knew the PM a little, performed what would become a classic Amar Singh maneuver. He told Chandra Shekhar that he would introduce him to Amitabh Bachchan, who was not only a legend but was also of immediate consequence to Chandra Shekhar because his government was dependent on

and the case disposed off," Amar Singh would boost. This got him nowhere with Rajiv who turned down Amar Singh's request for a Congress ticket for the 1991 election and refused to even meet him despite Amitabh's urging. But it certainly endeared him to Amitabh and by 1992, the

two men were extremely close and spoke to each other on the phone every single day. But equally, there is no doubt that Amar Singh gained much more from the association than he



between the Bachchan brothers. Did Amar Singh precipitate the split? He said various things at various times so it is hard to be certain. But there is no doubt that nearly everywhere Singh went,

admitted. His career advanced within the Samajwadi Party because he was able to deliver the Bachchans whenever Mulayam Singh Yadav needed them. He gained entry to political circles that would never have allowed him in by promising to bring Amitabh along. And though the Bachchans treated him with extraordinary respect and deference, Amar Singh made it a point to gratuitously inform people that Amitabh would come to the airport to receive him when he visited Mumbai and that he had organized the weddings of both the Bachchan children, exercising total control over the guest list.

Nobody really knows what went wrong with that relationship --- I only have Amar Singh's version which was so poisonously anti-Bachchan as to lack all credibility --- but while it lasted, there is no doubt that Singh became the closest friend Amitabh had ever had, especially after the split

there were family issues. He was central to the split between Mulayam and his son Akhilesh. He was openly hostile to Mukesh Ambani and an active warrior for the Anil Ambani camp when the brothers fought. And when the Bajajs had a problem, he turned up there as well, Zelig-like.

By the end of his time in the limelight, Amar Singh had either fallen out with or moved away from every powerful person he was once close too. The parting with the Bachchans was bitter. He ceased to be a figure of any consequence in UP politics after Akhilesh kicked him out of the SP, though he tried very hard but fruitlessly to get somewhere with the BJP.

He was openly attacking Anil Ambani in interviews which meant that the parting could not have been cordial. His attempts to suck up to Mukesh Ambani ("I made a mistake by behaving badly with Mukeshbhai" etc.) were rebuffed. Subroto Roy of Sahara whose planes and helicopters Amar Singh flew around in during the glory days told a TV interviewer that he thought Amar Singh had now become so arrogant that his feet hardly touched the ground.

The story of his fall may not be surprising: any moth that flies too close to the flame always risks going up in smoke. But the more remarkable story is the one of his rise. I saw him at fairly close quarters for over 30 years and I still can't figure out how he managed to fly so high and get so far.

The economic situation is grim

The financial sector, in particular, is vulnerable

On Saturday, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the government was extending its credit facility, originally announced for medium and small enterprises to private professionals such as doctors and chartered accountants. This, the minister said, was being done after stakeholder consultations. The decision is an indicator of the stress faced by professionals such as doctors and accountants, as economic activity is far from normal and new Covid-19 cases continue to rise in most parts of the country. But this is not the only indicator of a troubled economy. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection in the month of July dropped to Rs 87,422 crore from Rs 90,917 crore in June. In July 2019, this number was Rs 1.02 lakh crore. Most analysts have been warning that economic revival has started plateauing in July after showing a brief spike due to lockdown induced pent-up demand in June. Ms Sitharaman herself said that the “government is cautious about overstating the green shoots of a recovery visible in the economy”. As Covid-19 cases continue to climb and large parts of the country experience intermittent

lockdowns, the pandemic's economic challenge will only get more difficult. Supply chains remain disrupted; demand continues to be low; unemployment is still high; and the Centre's budgetary numbers may not quite hold because of both revenue shortages and new expenditure commitments. Among the most complex challenges will be loan-default related difficulties in the financial sector, especially once the ongoing moratorium comes to an end. Any large crisis on this front will necessitate a bailout and impose an additional strain on the government's already



stretched fiscal resources. A sudden withdrawal of credit relief can make firms unviable, and trigger an inflationary shock as productive capacity suffers. These questions will hopefully be discussed at the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting this week. Signalling on this front will

matter more than any decision on policy rates, which many private forecasters believe will see a pause. It will also be interesting to see whether the MPC makes a GDP forecast for this year and whether there has been any revival in consumer confidence after lockdown restrictions have been eased.

2 Chinese generals dissect Xi Jinping's US policy, push for a relook



General Dai said that traditionally, China and the US had a very close trade relationship, but the Trump administration has now branded the country a trade terrorist and a global economic aggressor.

“knock on (America's) door and make a loud announcement that ‘I shall surpass you, replace you and be the world's number one’.” The Nikkei Asian Review analysis authored by a senior fellow at the Lowy Institute in Sydney, Richard McGregor, interpreted multiple voices from China to signal the view that Beijing's interests would have been far better served by sticking with the low-profile policy counseled by Deng Xiaoping. The reference the doctrine of a revered political leader like Deng, was seen as an effort to criticise Xi Jinping without mentioning him by name. In the article (Here is the link to the article published in a mainstream Chinese publication), General Dai said that traditionally, China and the

US had a very close trade relationship, but the Trump administration has now branded the country a trade terrorist and a global economic aggressor. He also listed 10 understanding about the Sino-US relationship. Among them is the United States' ruthless push towards portraying China in a negative light which is beyond the expectations of most Chinese officials. He also said that China has not received support from any country. General Dai then went on to say that the US has been united at the domestic front. He also said that China needs to understand that China is not a paper tiger, but a real tiger that kills people. Suggesting the way forward, the

military general said that China doesn't need to make a loud announcement to be number 1. General Dai said that even if China knows it can beat the US, it needs to keep a low profile. He also said that China should consider the US as world's number 1. Another retired army officer, Major General Qiao Liang had told South China Morning Post in May this year that Beijing “should not consider the coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to take back Taiwan by force”. The military strategist said Taiwan can be used by the US and its western allies to impose sanctions on China that would stop Beijing from importing resources needed for its industry.

Dai Xu, a top general of the People's Liberation Army has advocated that China should take stock of its relative weaknesses compared to the US and behave accordingly, according to a report in Nikkei Asian Review that cited a recent article authored by the officer who has been described as one of China's most prominent hawks. In his article, Dai underscored how no country had come forward to establish an alliance against

the United States through the ongoing China vs US episode that has been playing out. “China has provided assistance to so many countries, benefiting them in so many ways, but at this critical moment, none of them has taken any unified action with China,” Dai wrote. The top general, the analysis in Nikkei Asian Review said, appeared to suggest that China had gotten ahead of itself.. He warned that China should never

Can nuclear war be morally justified?

In the early 1980s, the Harvard law professor Robert Fisher proposed a new, gruesome way that nations might deal with the decision to launch nuclear attacks. It involved a butcher's knife and the president of the United States. Writing in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, Fisher suggested that instead of a briefcase containing the nuclear launch codes, the means to launch a bomb should instead be carried in a capsule embedded near the heart of a volunteer. That person

would carry a heavy blade with them everywhere the president went. Before authorising a missile launch, the commander-in-chief would first have to personally kill that one person, gouging out their heart to retrieve the codes. When Fisher made this proposal to friends at the Pentagon, they were aghast, arguing out that this act would distort the president's judgement. But to Fisher, that was the point. Before killing thousands, the leader must first “look at someone and realise

what death is – what an innocent death is. Blood on the White House carpet”. Killing a person with a butcher's knife may be a morally repugnant act, yet in the realm of geopolitics, past leaders have justified their atomic acts as a political or military necessity. Following the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – 75 years ago this month – the decision was justified only in terms of its outcome, not its morality. The bombing ended World War Two,

preventing further deaths from a protracted conflict, and arguably discouraged the descent into nuclear war for the rest of the 20th Century. Yet those positive consequences cannot obscure the fact that on 6 and 9 August 1945, two of humanity's most destructive objects brought the horrifying power of the atom onto two civilian cities. We can attempt to describe the events through numbers: at least 200,000 people killed by the flashes, firestorms and radiation; tens of thousands more injured;

an unquantifiable inter-generational legacy of radiation, cancer and trauma. We can remember the individual stories – of mothers and children, of priests and doctors, of ordinary lives transformed in a moment. Or we can memorialise the relics left behind, as described in the poem No More Hiroshimas: “The ones that made me weep... The bits of burnt clothing. The stopped watches. The torn shirts. The twisted buttons”.

Cannabis is bad for your HEART: Doctors warn using the drug can trigger heart attacks and strokes

but smoking cannabis has been linked with a slew of damaging heart problems.

Chemicals inside the drug can cause heart rhythm abnormalities within an hour of smoking, studies show. The toxins can alter blood pressure, heart rate and trigger inflammation, all of which are underlying culprits of heart disease and strokes.

The AHA warning applied to people who use the drug recreationally, as well as and for medicinal purposes.

Study author Professor Robert Page, from the University of Colorado, said the review found cannabis has 'the potential to interfere with prescribed medications'.

He added studies have also suggested it may 'trigger cardiovascular conditions or events, such as heart attacks and strokes'.

Professor Page also warned attitudes towards cannabis have changed rapidly', with US states and countries legalising it for medical or recreational use.

He added: 'Health care professionals need a greater understanding of the health implications of cannabis.'

Professor Page and AHA colleagues examined existing research on the connection between cannabis and the heart. Their findings were published in the AHA journal Circulation.

Dr Rose Marie Robertson, the deputy chief science and medical officer for the AHA, said: 'The AHA recommends that people not smoke or vape any substance, including cannabis products, because of the potential harm to the heart, lungs and blood vessels.'

The statement said the a full understanding of how use of cannabis affects the heart and blood vessels is limited by a lack of adequate research.

The debate around marijuana and its claimed medicinal properties is rife.

But the AHA applied their statement against cannabis to people who use it for both recreational and medicinal purposes.

It added: 'Cannabis may have therapeutic benefits, but few are cardiovascular in nature.'

Medical marijuana is legal in 33

US states and Washington, DC, where it is prescribed for pain management, anxiety and depression.

Washington DC, as well as 11 other US states, have already legalised recreational cannabis use.

Only people with specific conditions are able to get cannabis-based medicine with THC in it in the UK. However, it is difficult to get a prescription.

The most common chemicals in cannabis include THC, the component of the plant that give a 'high', and CBD, which does not produce a 'high' or intoxication.

Existing studies have found that within an hour after cannabis is smoked, THC may cause heart rhythm abnormalities.

These include tachycardia, premature ventricular contractions, atrial fibrillation and ventricular arrhythmias.

THC also appears to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the 'flight or fight' response.

It can result in a higher heart rate, greater demand for oxygen from the heart, higher blood pressure while laying down and dysfunction within the walls of the arteries.

On the other hand, studies on CBD found links with reduced heart rate, lower blood pressure, increased vasodilation which

helps arteries to open up, lower blood pressure and potentially reduced inflammation.

It's for these same reasons that people chose to use CBD products with the aim of reducing anxiety, depression, chronic pain conditions and more.

Inflammation is an underlying culprit of the narrowing of the arteries that can lead to heart disease and strokes.

Therefore, CBD alone may be beneficial - but the AHA did not say this.

Smoking and inhaling cannabis, regardless of THC content, has been linked with a number of heart problems.

Cardiomyopathy, or heart muscle dysfunction, angina, or chest pain, heart attacks, heart rhythm disturbances, sudden cardiac death and other serious cardiovascular conditions have all been discussed in the scientific literature.

Professor Page said: 'Many consumers and health care professionals don't realise that cannabis smoke contains components similar to tobacco smoke.'

Smoking and inhaling cannabis, regardless of THC content, has been shown to increase blood concentrations of carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas, five-fold.

And blood levels of tar increase

three-fold, similar to the effects of inhaling a tobacco cigarette. Tar is a sticky black liquid that is residue from burning tobacco and other plant material, like cannabis.

Chest pain, heart attacks, heart rhythm disturbances and other serious heart conditions are associated with carbon monoxide intoxication, the statement said, whether from tobacco or cannabis.

For anyone with existing heart disease, risks go up.

Smoking cannabis has triggered heart attacks, a higher risk of strokes and heart failure in people with underlying heart disease, studies show.

The review also found cannabis has the potential to interfere with prescribed medications, therefore the AHA urged for a better understanding of the risks among doctors.

Some studies suggest cannabis use, both CBD and THC, may be safe and effective for older populations.

Older adults, although the least likely to use cannabis, often use it to reduce neuropathic pain, improve quality of life and decrease prescription drug use such as opioids.

And it's been reported cannabis can have benefits for patients with age-related diseases, including Parkinson and Alzheimer

disease.

Some two million Americans with heart disease currently use marijuana or have used it in the past, according to a recent report in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology.

But concern about them using the drug include the potential of how it could interact with other medications including blood thinners, anti-depressants, antipsychotics and statins.

Existing studies on marijuana and the heart are short-term, observational and retrospective studies. This means they can spot a trend, but cannot say for certain there is cause and effect.

There is an 'urgent' need for 'carefully designed, prospective short- and long-term studies regarding cannabis use and cardiovascular safety,' Professor Page said.

However, this could be challenging given that marijuana is classified as a Schedule I drug by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), which limits scientists from studying it.

Professor Page said anyone planning to use marijuana should discuss possible risks with their health professional first.

But if people do choose to use cannabis for whatever reason, it is vital they only use legal cannabis products.

India-UK project to study impact of drug-resistant bacteria in Musi, Adyar rivers

Newcastle University, the James Hutton Institute in Scotland, IIT Gandhinagar and IIT Madras.

Experts will sample and model the two contrasting river networks in India, the Musi river in Hyderabad, which has high concentrations of antibiotics released from production facilities, and the less polluted Adyar river in Chennai.

The team aims to learn how far resistant bacteria travel before they die or are eaten by other organisms in a unique combination of experiments, field sampling and mathematical modelling of resistance dynamics and water flows.

Jan Kreft from the University of

Birmingham said: "We don't know how quickly antibiotics are degraded in the environment and how much they are diluted by rainfall and by entering larger



rivers."

"In our AMR flows project, we will learn how antibiotics from manufacturing and the resistant bacteria they select will flow through river networks and how far they can be transported in

rivers, from where they can spread onto fields and into communities during floods - allowing us to make a quantitative risk assessment to help create

environmental standards for safe concentrations of antibiotics in water bodies."

Indian project lead Shashidhar Thatikonda of IIT Hyderabad added: "We know from

previous research that the River Musi is now a factory of superbugs. Modelling water flows will be crucial in predicting the fate of resistant bacteria in the environment and we aim to create models

that will be applicable in other rivers and countries."

The scientific advances will also allow the team to compare the effectiveness of different interventions such as separate treatment of waste streams from manufacturing of antibiotics, decentralized sewage treatment or containment reservoirs, the university said.

"The recommendations we will produce will help bring down the levels of resistance in the environment. This will contribute to reduce the abundance of resistant pathogens that make infections untreatable," Thatikonda said.

PM Modi's Ayodhya ceremony widely watched across the world, highest viewership from US, UK

The live telecast of the Ram temple event in Ayodhya on August 5 was widely watched across the world. It was broadcast by television stations in UK, USA, Canada, Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, Nepal and several other countries.

The main signal was generated by public broadcaster Doordarshan which placed multiple cameras, Outside Broadcasting (OB) and Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG) vans for elaborate production and live telecast.

People also watched the event on YouTube streams. The highest viewership came USA, UK, France, Italy, Netherlands, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Nepal, Pakistan,

Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Mauritius, according to public broadcaster Doordarshan.

In India, over 200 channels took the event, it further said.

The signal of the event was distributed through news agency Asian News International (ANI) to about 1200 stations and by Associated Press Television News (APTN) to 450 media houses across the world. Doordarshan's news arm DD News separately shared visuals with Asia Pacific countries.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi performed the 'bhoomi poojan' in Ayodhya for the Ram temple,

bringing to fruition the BJP's 'mandir' movement that defined its politics for three decades.

Amid the chanting of shlokas, PM Modi consecrated the very first bricks for the temple at the spot where devotees believe Lord Ram was born.

"The wait of centuries has ended," he said after performing the groundbreaking ceremony made possible by a Supreme Court verdict last year that allowed the construction of the temple at the site where the Babri mosque was demolished by kar sevaks in 1992.

President Ram Nath Kovind said the event defines India's spirit of social harmony and people's zeal, while Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu said the construction of the Ram temple



is much more than a religious affair and the structure will stand as a tribute to the best of timeless human values.

The groundbreaking ceremony was held in the Uttar Pradesh city on Wednesday morning. The road leading from Hanuman Garhi temple to the ceremony site (Ram Janmabhoomi) wore an illuminated look in the

evening, with several earthen lamps lit outside shops, houses and guest houses.

Some people also celebrated by bursting firecrackers in the temple town. It was in 1990 that then BJP president Lal Krishna Advani embarked on the Ram Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya to galvanise support for the temple.

Beirut explosion: What we know so far

The warehouse where the initial fire and explosions were observed was completely obliterated and an adjacent grain silo was heavily damaged.

Satellite images highlight complete devastation in the port area, with one ship apparently blown out of the water and onto the dockside.

The explosion's shockwave blew out windows at Beirut International Airport's passenger terminal, about 9km (5 miles) away from the port.

The blast was also heard as far away as Cyprus, about 200km (125 miles) across the Mediterranean Sea, and seismologists at the United States Geological Survey said it was the equivalent of a 3.3-magnitude earthquake.

What was the cause?

Lebanon's President, Michel Aoun, blamed the detonation on 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate that he said had been stored unsafely at a warehouse in the port.

A similar amount of the chemical arrived on a Moldovan-flagged cargo ship, the MV Rhosus, which docked in Beirut in 2013 after suffering technical problems while sailing from Georgia to Mozambique.

The Rhosus was inspected, banned from leaving and was

shortly afterwards abandoned by its owners, according to Shiparrested.com. Its cargo was reportedly transferred to Warehouse 12 following a court order, and should have been disposed of or resold.

Ammonium nitrate is a crystal-like white solid commonly used as a source of nitrogen for agricultural fertiliser. But it can also be combined with fuel oils to create an explosive used in the mining and construction industries. Militants have made bombs with it in the past.

Experts say that ammonium nitrate is relatively safe when stored properly. However, if you have a large amount of material lying around for a long time it begins to decay.

"The real problem is that over time it will absorb little bits of moisture and it eventually turns into an enormous rock," Andrea Sella, professor of chemistry at University College London, told the BBC. This makes it more dangerous because if a fire reaches it, the chemical reaction will be much more intense.

Ammonium nitrate has been associated with deadly industrial accidents. In 1947, a ship carrying 2,000 tonnes of the chemical exploded in Texas, killing 581 people.

A fire appears to have triggered the explosion of the ammonium nitrate in Beirut.

Lebanese broadcaster LBCI and Reuters news agency cited sources as saying the fire was started by welding work being carried out on a hole in Warehouse 12.

The port's general manager, Hassan Koraytem, confirmed that maintenance was conducted on the door of the warehouse before the explosion.

"We were asked to fix a door of the warehouse by State Security and we did that at noon, but what occurred in the afternoon I have no idea," CNN quoted him as telling OTV.

Who were the victims?

The 137 people who were killed included Jean-Marc Bonfils, a Beirut-born French architect. Mr Bonfils, who was involved in restoring buildings damaged in the city during the civil war, was broadcasting video of the incident live on Facebook after the first explosion but was injured in the second and later died. French Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot said that France and Lebanon were united in grief at his death.

Firefighter Sahar Fares was

a first responder at the scene of the blast. Her fiancé Gilbert Qaraan mourned her in a post on Instagram, saying his heart burned with the loss. A photo posted on social media showed Sahar and seven male colleagues, all of whom are said to have died.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said a female diplomat from the German embassy had died in her apartment.

The Lebanon-based cruise ship agency Abou Merhi said two people died and seven were injured when its Orient Queen ship was severely damaged by the blast.

There are also reports of one American, one Australian and two Egyptians killed in the blast.

Who is to blame?

President Aoun promised a transparent investigation into the blast.

"We are determined to go ahead with an investigation and unveil the circumstances surrounding what happened as soon as possible and hold those responsible and those who were negligent accountable and serve them the most severe punishment," he said on Wednesday after visiting the ruined port.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab described the circumstances that led to the explosion as "unacceptable".

Mr Koraytem and the director general of Lebanese Customs, Badri Daher, said their warnings about the danger posed by the stored ammonium nitrate and calls for it to be removed were repeatedly ignored.

"We requested that it be re-exported but that did not happen. We leave it to the experts and those concerned to determine why," Mr Daher told broadcaster LBCI.

Documents circulated online appeared to show that customs officials sent letters to the judiciary seeking guidance at least six times from 2014 to 2017.

The government has ordered officials at the port who oversaw the storage of the ammonium nitrate to be put under house arrest pending the completion of the investigation.

Many Lebanese have been unimpressed by the government's promises of transparency and accountability. They see the investigation as an attempt by a political elite accused of corruption, neglect and mismanagement to dodge blame for the disaster.



US election 2020 polls

Who is ahead - Trump or Biden?

Voters in America will decide on 3 November whether Donald Trump remains in the White House for another four years.

The Republican president is being challenged by Democratic Party nominee Joe Biden, who is best known as Barack Obama's vice-president but has been in US politics since the 1970s.

As election day approaches, polling companies will be trying to gauge the mood of the nation by asking voters which candidate they prefer.

We'll be keeping track of those polls here and trying to work out what they can and can't tell us about who will win the election.

How are the presidential candidates doing nationally?

National polls are a good guide as to how popular a candidate is across the country as a whole, but they're not necessarily a good way to predict the result of the election.

In 2016, for example, Hillary Clinton led in the polls and won nearly three million more votes than Donald Trump, but she still lost - that's because the US uses an electoral college system, so winning the most votes doesn't always win you the election.

With that caveat aside, Joe Biden has been ahead of Donald Trump in national polls for most of the year. He has hovered around 50% in recent weeks and has had a 10-point lead on occasions but Mr Trump has recovered somewhat in the last few days.

By contrast, in 2016 the polls were far less clear and just a couple of percentage points separated Mr Trump and his then-rival Hillary

Clinton at several points as election day neared.

Which states will decide this election?

As Mrs Clinton discovered in 2016, the number of votes you win is less important than where you win them.

Most states nearly always vote the same way, meaning that in reality there are just a handful of states where both candidates stand a chance of winning. These are the places where the election will be won and lost and are known as battleground states.

In the electoral college system the US uses to elect its president, each state is given a number of votes based on its population. A total of 538 electoral college votes are up for grabs, so a candidate needs to hit 270 to win.

As the map above shows, some battleground states have a lot more electoral college votes on offer than others so candidates often spend a lot more time campaigning in them.

Who's leading in the battleground states?

At the moment, polls in the battleground states look good for Joe Biden, but there's a long way to go and things can change very quickly, especially when Donald Trump's involved.

The polls suggest Mr Biden has big leads in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin - three industrial states his Republican rival won by margins of less than 1% to clinch victory in 2016.

But it's the battleground states where Mr Trump won big in 2016

that his campaign team will be most worried about. His winning margin in Iowa, Ohio and Texas was between 8-10% back then but he's neck-and-neck with Mr Biden in all three at the moment.

Those poll numbers may help explain his decision to replace his re-election campaign manager in July and his regular references to "fake polls".

Betting markets, however, are certainly not writing Mr Trump off just yet. The latest odds still give him about a one in three chance of winning on 3 November.

Has coronavirus affected Trump's numbers?

The coronavirus pandemic has dominated headlines in the US since the start of the year and the response to President Trump's actions has been split predictably along party lines.

Support for his approach peaked in mid-March after he declared a national emergency and made \$50 billion available to states to stop the spread of the virus. At this point, 55% of Americans approved of his actions, according to data from Ipsos, a leading polling company.

But any support he had from Democrats disappeared after that, while Republicans continued to back their president.

The most recent data, however, suggests even his own supporters have begun to question his response as states in the south and the west of the country have dealt with renewed outbreaks of the virus. Republican support had fallen to 78% by early July.

This may explain why he has

been less optimistic about coronavirus recently, warning that the situation will "get worse before it gets better".

He also donned a face mask for the first time recently and called on Americans to wear them, saying "they'll have an effect" and show "patriotism".

One leading model produced by experts at the University of Washington predicts the death toll will have passed 230,000 by 1 November - just two days before the election.

Can we trust the polls?

It's easy to dismiss the polls by saying they got it wrong in 2016 and President Trump frequently does exactly that. But it's not entirely true.

Most national polls did have Hillary Clinton ahead by a few percentage points, but that doesn't mean they were wrong, since she won three million more votes than her rival.

Pollsters did have some problems in 2016 - notably a failure to properly represent voters without a college degree - meaning Mr Trump's advantage in some key battleground states wasn't spotted until late in the race, if at all. Most polling companies have corrected this now.

But this year there's even more uncertainty than normal due to the coronavirus pandemic and the effect it's having on both the economy and how people will vote in November, so all polls should be read with some scepticism, especially this far out from election day.

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REVEALED: Deutsche Bank hands over Donald Trump's financial records to NYC prosecutors as state attorney general says she will make a 'major national announcement' today



(News Agencies) - New York prosecutors were able to obtain Donald Trump's financial records from Deutsche Bank last year, it has been revealed, as the state's attorney general plans a mysterious major announcement on Thursday.

The office of Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, a Democrat, sent a subpoena last year to Deutsche Bank as part of its investigation into Trump's business dealings, the New York Times reported Wednesday, citing four people familiar with the inquiry.

The bank complied with the subpoena, turning over records including financial statements Trump gave the bank when he was borrowing money, two of those people told the Times.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, also a Democrat, also subpoenaed the bank for records related to Trump last year following Michael Cohen's testimony.

The subject of the announcement was not immediately clear, and

Thursday at 11.30am.

Vance, a Democrat, this week suggested a grand jury subpoena for Trump's tax returns was part of an investigation of 'possibly extensive and protracted criminal conduct at the Trump Organization,' including alleged insurance and bank fraud.

Vance's investigation into Trump and the Trump Organization was spurred by disclosures of hush payments to two women who said they had had sexual relationships with Trump before he became president. Trump has denied the claims.

Vance's office declined to comment on the New York Times report. Attorneys for Trump and for Deutsche Bank didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Manhattan prosecutor, who is a Democrat, was among several authorities in New York who launched investigations last year after Trump's former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, told congress that the president

told a federal judge this week that it was a 'complex financial investigation' that followed public reports of 'extensive and protracted criminal conduct at the Trump Organization.'

As part of the investigation, Vance asked Trump's

'They failed at every stage of the game,' Trump said. 'Even before I got in this was starting with the Mueller deal. Mueller started a little bit after,' Trump corrected himself. Mueller was appointed after former Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from



accountants to turn over eight years of his personal and corporate tax records. The accounting firm has yet to comply as Trump and Vance have battled in court over the validity of the subpoena.

Other investigators have requested records from Deutsche Bank, which was one of the few banks willing to lend to Trump after a series of corporate bankruptcies starting in the early 1990s.

Trump addressed the case at a White House press briefing on Monday, saying 'This is just a continuation of the witch hunt.' It's Democrat stuff they failed with Mueller they failed with everything,' Trump said, referencing Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation, which generally confined itself to allegations of a conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russians. The report preceded a failed Democratic impeachment effort.

overseeing the Russia investigation in 2017.

Trump also said he was barely familiar with the matter, which was reported in the New York Times and a variety of outlets as a court filing was made public.

'There's nothing that I know even about it,' Trump said. 'I said what's this all about? I know nothing about it.'

'It's a terrible thing that they do. It's really a terrible thing. The witch hunt has gone on long enough,' he said.

Two congressional committees, both controlled by Democrats, subpoenaed the bank for documents related to Trump, who sued to block their release. Trump has said the investigations are all politically motivated. Earlier this week, he called Vance's investigation 'a continuation of the witch hunt.'

After Trump's shock election victory in 2016, his relationship with Deutsche Bank has attracted scrutiny from lawmakers.

The House Financial Services Committee has examined possible money laundering in US property deals involving Trump. The House Intelligence Committee has investigated whether Trump's dealings left him vulnerable to the influence of foreign individuals or governments.

The two committees issued subpoenas in April 2019 requiring Deutsche Bank to hand over the banking records of Trump, his children and his businesses.

Last month, the Supreme Court ruled that prosecutors in New York could seek Trump's financial records from lenders including Deutsche Bank.

It is part of a criminal investigation that began in 2018 into Trump and the Trump Organization, the president's family real estate business, spurred by disclosures of hush payments made to two women who said they had past sexual relationships with him - pornographic film actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal. Trump and his aides have denied the relationships.

Investigators hope the records will reveal whether there are any financial links between Trump and Russia's government, sources familiar with the probe have said. Sources within Deutsche Bank have denied any Russian connections to Trump loans.

At the time he became president in January 2017, Trump owed the bank around \$350 million, according to sources.

The Financial Services Committee also issued a subpoena to Capital One, which had maintained a long-term relationship with Trump and has been scrutinized for some of its business practices.



it may be unrelated to the widening criminal probe into Trump's business practices. On Wednesday night, James' office said she will deliver a 'major national announcement' on

had a practice of misleading business associates and tax officials about the value of his assets.

Vance hasn't disclosed details about his probe, but his lawyers

Poll reveals 61% of black Americans want the police to remain in their neighborhoods - despite calls to defund them

A new poll suggests 39% of black Americans are not confident that they would be treated with respect in an encounter by police.

The figure compares to just 9% of white people who share the view that they would not be treated favorably during an encounter with law enforcement. It's not clear whether the black American's negative views expressed in the poll are as a result of their own bad experiences or from hearing the experiences of others many of which have been heavily documented in recent years.

Out of the group of black Americans who are 'not at all confident' that the police would treat them with courtesy and respect, 59% want them to spend less time in their neighborhood.

But, the survey also revealed that majority of all other black Americans want the police to spend the same amount of time in the areas where they live including those who are 'not too confident' about being treated considerably by police.

The findings come in a poll by Gallup which also found that 61%

want the police presence in their neighborhoods to remain the same despite calls to defund and reform policing across the country.

The majority of black Americans want to retain their local police force and for officers to spend the same amount of time in their neighborhoods as they currently do.

The poll suggests that roughly equal proportions of black Americans would also like the police to spend more time in their area (20%) as those who would like them to spend less time there (19%).

The figures are relatively similar to those in other demographics with 71% of white Americans and 67% of all U.S. adults wanting to retain the status quo, including 71% of white Americans.

A previous survey conducted in July found that 90% of black citizens would like to see reforms take place including improving police relations with the communities they serve, along with the prevention of abusive behavior and the punishment of those in police departments who perpetrate

abuse.

Out of four racial/ethnic groups of white, Asian American, Hispanic and black Americans, Asian Americans were revealed to be most likely to want less police presence where they live, with 28% indicating this, compared to 12% of white people, 17% of Hispanics and 19% of blacks.

One question in the survey asked Americans to estimate how often police were in their neighborhood. Black Americans' reported seeing police more often than the national average at 32%. The number was lower for white Americans and Asian Americans with 22% and 21% respectively. Hispanics also report seeing a similar amount of police in the areas where they live to that of black Americans with 28% seeing police in their neighborhoods.

The poll also found 41% of black Americans say they sometimes see police in their area which corresponds to the national average. A further 27% say they never or rarely see them.

Despite reporting seeing police with greater frequency than other demographics the poll also found



News Group via Getty Images

that black Americans do not wish to see changes to their local police force.

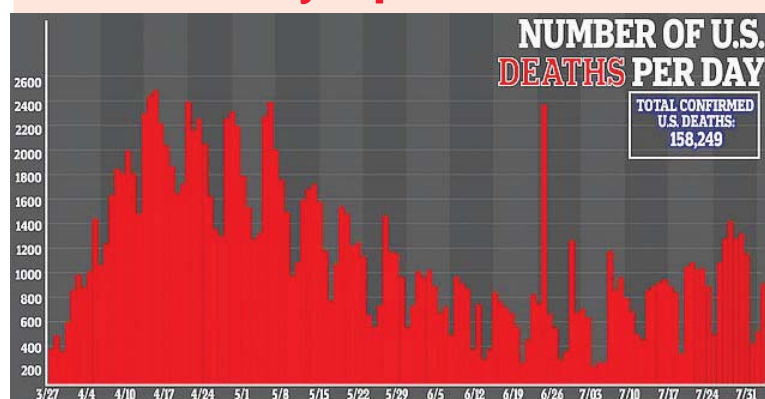
A third say they would like to see cops spend less time close to their homes although most adults, 56%, believe police should spend the same amount of time, with 10% wanting more police presence.

While the poll suggests that black Americans are comfortable with the number of officers on patrol where they live, there have vastly different opinions on what

kind of treatment they believe they would receive should they face an encounter with law enforcement.

In the poll, fewer than one in five black Americans felt confident the police in their area would treat them with courtesy and respect. A similar number of Asian Americans (24%) said the same. Hispanic Americans are far more optimistic with 40% believing the experience would be polite, while 56% of white people felt the same.

Dr Fauci says parts of US are 'on fire' with COVID-19 and America has WORST



Dr Anthony Fauci says the 'numbers don't lie' when it comes to coronavirus in the United States as he acknowledged that the country has the worst COVID-19 outbreak in the world and some states, in a sense, were 'on fire'. Fauci, who is a member of the White House's coronavirus task force, said that the US has 'quantitatively' suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic as the country averages nearly 60,000 new cases and 1,000 deaths per day.

His comments came during an interview on Wednesday with CNN's Dr Sanjay Gupta at a virtual Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health forum.

When asked if the US had

suffered the worst globally given the country represents a quarter of total COVID-19 infections but only holds about 5 percent of the world's population, Fauci said: 'Yeah, I mean it is. Quantitatively, if you look at it, it is.'

'The numbers don't lie.'

'Every country has suffered. We, the United States, has suffered... as much or worse than anyone. I mean, when you look at the number of infections and the number of deaths, it really is quite, quite concerning.'

Data from Wednesday shows that the US represents 22 percent of global COVID-19 deaths and more than 25 percent of worldwide infections.

The US has so far recorded 4.8 million positive cases and more

than 158,000 Americans have died from COVID-19.

Deaths related to COVID-19 have now risen nationally for four straight weeks, while the number of infections have declined for the second week, according to an analysis of data.

Fauci's tone contrasts with comments made by President Donald Trump on Monday when he declared in an interview with Axios on HBO that coronavirus was 'under control' in the US.

When confronted by the fact that an average of 1,000 Americans are dying each day from COVID-19, Trump said: 'They are dying, that's true. And you have - it is what it is.'

'But that doesn't mean we aren't doing everything we can. It's under control as much as you can control it. This is a horrible plague.'

In an interview with Reuters in which he was asked if he shared that sentiment, Fauci said some parts of the country were more under control than others.

'We're a big country. You can pick out some parts of the country that are looking good and you could say is under control; you could pick some

parts of the country that are on fire, in the sense, I mean you're having outbreaks that you know you don't get 70,000 cases a day when nothing's going on,' he said. Trump also said in that interview, which was filmed on July 28, that the country's current death rate was 'lower than the world'.

Citing a series of charts and graphs regarding death rates in comparison to cases, Trump said: 'The United States is lowest in numerous categories. We're lower than the world, than Europe.'

He went on to say: 'Death is way down from where it was. Where it was is much higher than where it is right now.' Even though deaths are now rising across the US, they are below the levels seen in April when an average of 2,000 people a day were dying from the virus.

Deaths surged in April in the weeks after coronavirus infections spiked mostly in the Northeast. The number of fatalities are now increasing in Sunbelt states and across the Midwest after infections surged there throughout June and July. The death rate is a lagging

indicator and can continue to rise weeks after new infections drop. A coronavirus death, when it occurs, typically comes several weeks after a person is first infected.

Fauci went on to say that he doesn't believe the US would have to lockdown again like it did in April to stop the spread. 'We can do much better without locking down,' he said.

He said Americans should wear masks, keep physically distanced, shut down bars, wash their hands and favor outdoor activities over indoor ones in order to help stop transmission of the virus.

Meanwhile, Dr Deborah Birx - who is leading the White House task force - warned nine cities on Wednesday about increasing cases.

In a call with state and local officials that was obtained by the Center for Public Integrity, Birx said there were encouraging signs in southern states hit hard by the pandemic.

'We are concerned that both Baltimore and Atlanta remain at a very high level,' Birx said on the call.



One pilot brings the world to Iceland

Ancient tales of trolls and magic live on in Iceland, an island nation of volcanoes, lava fields, glaciers and ice caves. To fully explore every corner of the dynamic landscape, unravel local folklore and battle the natural elements, one must take to the skies.

Enter Jón Kjartan Björnsson, the pilot with a mission to show the real Iceland.

Björnsson, a helicopter pilot for 35 years, has taken camera crews, directors and actors to some of the most stunning spots in the country.

The thundering waterfalls and deep valley gorges seen in TV's "Game of Thrones" and the movies "Oblivion" and "Flags of Our Fathers" are thanks to Björnsson's expert navigation skills.

Björnsson explains that since you cannot use a zoom on the wide-angle camera, the trick to getting that intimate feel is moving the actual helicopter close to the shot: "If it feels like you're close, you are close," he

says.

Iceland, the alien planet

Although Björnsson loves to showcase his strikingly dramatic country, many of the shots he enables filmmakers to create are not presented as Iceland at all.

In fact, Björnsson says, "Whenever directors want to show somewhere on another planet, they shoot in Iceland!"

The aerial filming world is small, explains Björnsson, who describes it as a big family.

The desolate volcanic deserts, glaciers and lush mossy valleys seen on the planets of Eadu and Hoth in "Star Wars," in "Game of Thrones" Land Beyond the Wall, and in Thor's home of Asgard were all filmed in Iceland. Iceland also stands in for an alien planet in the movie "Interstellar," where astronauts travel through a wormhole to find another home after Earth becomes uninhabitable.

And in the post-apocalyptic film "Oblivion," Iceland features as both a war-torn and ravaged Earth as well as its potential

replacement, the planet of Titan. Iceland immersion

In addition to work on feature films and television series, Björnsson is also responsible for getting the director and filming crew in the right spot for the FlyOver Iceland video used in the exhilarating experience based in Reykjavík.

The FlyOver exhibit, currently in Vancouver and Iceland and soon in Las Vegas and Toronto, takes visitors on a sensory ride suspended over a 20-meter (65.6-foot) screen. The experience blends some of those amazing sights depicted on film with the physical sensation of flying, including an actual mist falling on your face from a waterfall.

You might even get a whiff of fresh mountain flowers as you glide over a meadow.

In one stunning sequence in the Iceland film, Björnsson flies right through an impossibly narrow arch that has the whole audience gasping and holding their breath as they feel themselves trying to

make it through the arch.

In fact, he tells CNN Travel the width was very comfortable at about 50 meters, but it sure looks and feels narrow as you embody the role of the silent passenger, sitting beside Björnsson, trusting Björnsson.

The finished footage from FlyOver and Björnsson's other projects - full films and shows -- creates the impression that the audience is right there with him. It's as close as most people can hope to get to many of Iceland's otherwise inaccessible territory. Remarkably for a man who has been flying professionally for over three decades, Björnsson says he is actually scared of heights and prefers low-level flying.

One scene in the eight-and-a-half-minute minimovie takes place at Iceland's highest peak, at 7,000 plus feet (2,134 meters) above sea level. "I almost had to close my eyes sometimes!" Björnsson quips.

Björnsson routinely has the opportunity to fly over places most Icelanders will never visit.

"Most of those sites in FlyOver are pretty difficult to get to unless you have a helicopter. The little lighthouse just south of Iceland is probably the most difficult one. But when you have the helicopter, you can go wherever you like to go!"

That remote and lonely little lighthouse is known as The Þridrangaviti lighthouse and is located on the Westman Islands, about five miles off the coast of mainland Iceland.

The making of the movie Some parts of the island do not feature in the final cut of director Dave Mossop's 2019 FlyOver Iceland video because weather conditions posed insurmountable obstacles.

Filming took place over a year and a half in all seasons. Mossop says that they were stranded for days in the northern part of the island when bad weather, including sideways snowstorms and zero light, made it impossible to film or to leave. This part of the country seldom sees tourists and locals had warned Mossop that flying and filming would be difficult. The challenging shoots, nonetheless, reaped great rewards: The helicopter's positioning gives viewers a grasp of the sheer scale of Iceland's glaciers, not visible in this way by land -- or even accessible.

Black sands, lava fields and deep green valleys look like a series of dramatic canvas landscapes stitched together into one true masterpiece. "One of the most remote places that we got to visit and one that you would never be able to experience in its full effect from the ground is called the Tungnaa river, and I think it's one of the seven wonders of the world."

Microsoft Flight Simulator's 2020 reboot may be the safest way to fly this year

Avgeek desktop gamers and wannabe airline captains can finally get the high-altitude fix they've been craving.

Following a prolonged period of hibernation, the rebooted Microsoft Flight Simulator, officially available on August 18, could be the perfect antidote to pandemic-induced cabin fever -- or to airplane cabin withdrawal symptoms, for those who've been bumped off their real-world flight plans due to Covid-19.

Getting misty-eyed over the imminent demise of the "Queen of the Skies"? Flight Simulator will let you fly your very own Boeing 747 on that round-the-world trip you had to cancel this year.

Or if looping the loop over the snow-capped Pyrenees is your thing, the new flightsim helps users master the controls of a

Pitts aerobatic plane as it slices through snow and wind effects that mirror real-world weather, derived in real time from climatic data sources. Alternatively, if you didn't manage to get your skiing holiday in this spring break, you could go off-piste and get some digital solace by landing your Cessna Citation executive jet at Courchevel Altiport.

Reality? Check.

Photo-realistic graphics are a given in the world of online gaming, but what separates this sim from its rivals is the facility to fly anywhere in a world reconstructed from high-definition satellite-generated Microsoft Bing mapping imagery.

Bing data is siphoned through Microsoft's machine-learning technology which then builds 1.5 billion houses and 2 trillion trees -- not to mention 37,000 airports,

all hand-touched to ensure that each runway has the right length and that taxiways and parking stands are marked correctly.

The colossal quantity of data required to simulate this realistic world in real time is managed using Microsoft's Azure cloud-based platform. Azure does the heavy lifting, so your home computer doesn't need to be of the super-duper variety to deliver a convincing experience.

Take off from London City Airport on a frosty morning, and as you pass the Shard you can even peer through the glinting glazed superstructure into the highly detailed interior of the building -- just one of many architectural icons that have been modeled in geek-satisfying ultra-high-resolution to bring a sense of realism that transcends the norm for digital games.



That's quite a feat for a sim that many fans had assumed, just a few years ago, would never be resurrected, or supported by Microsoft -- given that the last revision was with the release of Microsoft Flight Simulator X (FSX), its 10th version, in 2006. In the meantime, other flight simulator rivals had built their own simmer followings, notably Laminar Research's X-Plane 11, which provides over 3,000

airports, an intuitive interface, high-resolution graphics and even pushback tugs and roaming fuel trucks at airports. Another popular sim is AeroFly FS 2, that offers such features as route planning, an Instrument Landing System (ILS) Omnidirectional Radio Range (VOR), Non-directional Radio Beacon (NDB) plus Virtual Reality support for Oculus Rift and HTC Vive without any additional software.

Satellite imagery reveals new penguin colonies in Antarctica

Satellite imaging has revealed that there are nearly 20% more emperor penguin colonies in Antarctica than previously thought.

However, while the discovery has been welcomed, the previously undiscovered animals will act as "canaries in the coalmine" when it comes to studying the impact of global warming, experts have said.

Scientists discovered 11 new colonies, meaning there are now 61 colonies across the continent overall.

The study, which used satellite mapping technology, will "provide an important benchmark for monitoring the impact of environmental change on the population of this iconic bird," researchers said.

Writing in the journal *Remote*

Sensing in Ecology and Conservation, the authors explained that they used images from the European Commission's Copernicus Sentinel-2 satellite mission to locate the birds. The satellite is part of a program to observe earth and any changes to the environment.

It is difficult to study emperor penguins, which need sea ice to breed, because they live in remote and often inaccessible areas with temperatures as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius (minus 58 degrees Fahrenheit). Climate change is a real threat to the species as the loss of sea ice will devastate their habitats. According to the report, published Tuesday, the new colonies "are situated at the margins of the emperors' breeding range," which makes

them vulnerable as the global climate warms.

Phil Trathan, head of conservation biology at the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), has been studying penguins for the last three decades. He said in a statement: "Whilst it's good news that we've found these new colonies, the breeding sites are all in locations where recent model projections suggest emperors will decline."

"Birds in these sites are therefore probably the 'canaries in the coalmine' -- we need to watch these sites carefully as climate change will affect this region." Three of the new colonies had previously been identified but had not been confirmed until now, the authors said.

Over the last 10 years scientists have been searching for new



colonies by studying the penguins' guano -- excrement -- stains on the ice. The researchers studied the images manually, looking for brown pixels which marked the stained areas. "This is an exciting discovery," said Peter Fretwell, a geographer and lead author of the study, in a statement released by the BAS.

Although welcoming the news, he

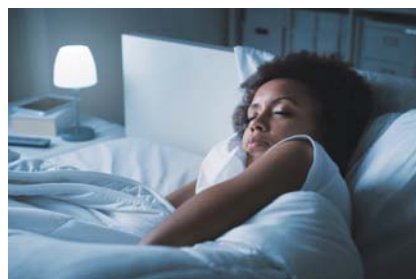
said the discovered colonies only take the overall population count up by 5-10% to just over 500,000 penguins -- about 265,500 to 278,500 breeding pairs. Several colonies were found on sea ice formed around icebergs in shallow water, up to 180 kilometers (111 miles) offshore. Scientists described the finding as "surprising."

10 ways sleep can change your life

What if someone told you there was a magic potion by which you could prevent disease, improve your intellect, reduce your stress and be nicer to your family while you're all cooped up together during the pandemic?

It sounds too good to be true, as if solving those problems would really require dietary supplements, workout programs, diets, meditation and a separate room to cry alone.

It turns out that sleep, according to numerous studies, is the answer. It's the preventive



medicine for conditions related to our physical, mental and

emotional health. And despite how important sleep is, it can be difficult to make it a priority.

"During a pandemic such as Covid-19, there's a potential to induce or exacerbate many sleep issues," Dr. Matthew Schmitt, a doctor of sleep medicine at Piedmont Healthcare in Georgia, told CNN.

"A lack of quality sleep not only affects how we feel during the daytime, but can also impair

our immune system function, which is vital in protecting us from common viral illnesses." A sleep routine is just one of the behaviors that is part of sleep hygiene, a buffet of efforts needed to sleep well that include eating healthy meals at regular times and not drinking too much coffee, said Dr. Meir Kryger, a professor of pulmonary medicine and a clinical professor of nursing at Yale School of Medicine in Connecticut.

"All of these things are really interconnected in terms of their function. All of them are connected to the body clock," Kryger said. "The body is like an orchestra where there's an orchestra leader that's sort of the main timer, but everybody else is playing it together and they're optimizing what they are doing." Once you've developed your sleep routine, here are 10 benefits you could gain from the regimen.

US obesity epidemic could undermine effectiveness of a Covid-19 vaccine

For a world crippled by the coronavirus, salvation hinges on a vaccine.

But in the United States, where at least 4.6 million people have been infected and nearly 155,000 have died, the promise of that vaccine is hampered by a vexing epidemic that long preceded Covid-19: obesity.

Scientists know that vaccines engineered to protect the public from influenza, hepatitis B, tetanus and rabies can be less effective in obese adults than in the general population, leaving them more vulnerable to infection and illness. There is little reason to believe, obesity researchers say, that Covid-19 vaccines will be any different.

"Will we have a Covid vaccine next year tailored to the obese? No way," said Raz Shaikh, an

associate professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

"Will it still work in the obese? Our prediction is no."

More than 107 million American adults are obese, and their ability to return safely to work, care for their families and resume daily life could be curtailed if the coronavirus vaccine delivers weak immunity for them.

In March, still early in the global pandemic, a little-noticed study from China found that heavier Chinese patients afflicted with Covid-19 were more likely to die than leaner ones, suggesting a perilous future awaited the US, whose population is among the heaviest in the world.

And then that future arrived.

As intensive care units in New York, New Jersey and elsewhere

filled with patients, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned that obese people with a body mass index of 40 or more — known as morbid obesity or about 100 pounds overweight — were among the groups at highest risk of becoming severely ill with Covid-19. About 9% of American adults are in that category.

As weeks passed and a clearer picture of who was being hospitalized came into focus, federal health officials expanded their warning to include people with a body mass index of 30 or more. That vastly expanded the ranks of those considered vulnerable to the most severe cases of infection, to 42.4% of American adults.

Obesity interferes with



immune response. Obesity has long been known to be a significant risk factor for death from cardiovascular disease and cancer. But scientists in the emerging field of immunometabolism are finding obesity also interferes with the body's immune response, putting obese people at greater risk of infection from pathogens such as influenza and the novel

coronavirus. In the case of influenza, obesity has emerged as a factor making it more difficult to vaccinate adults against infection. The question is whether that will hold true for Covid-19. A healthy immune system turns inflammation on and off as needed, calling on white blood cells and sending out proteins to fight infection. Vaccines harness that inflammatory response.

Trump continues to lose ground in 2020 election as nation grapples with coronavirus

The national political landscape has clearly and significantly shifted in Joe Biden's favor since he emerged as the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee back in March just as the public health emergency was taking hold.

Given the continuing widespread coronavirus pandemic, the persistent economic devastation millions of Americans are experiencing in its wake and President Donald Trump's inability to wrest control of the crisis in the minds of a majority of Americans, it is probably not all that surprising that his reelection chances have taken a substantial hit. Perhaps the more surprising development is that nothing Trump and his campaign team have tried over the last two months to turn those fortunes around seems to be working. And they have certainly tried. From launching a law-and-order message in the face of mostly peaceful protests for racial justice, to Trump shaking up the campaign by demoting his campaign manager, to a



short-lived attempt at having the President portray himself as a leader in command of the Covid-19 response, the race for the White House has continued to move in Biden's direction. While the cliché is true that the three months from now until Election Day is an eternity in American politics and the race is almost certain to tighten, it is also true that Americans are just six weeks away from beginning to cast ballots and the defining characteristic of this presidential race thus far is Trump's failed leadership in managing the coronavirus pandemic and an inability to convince enough of

the public that Biden is an acceptable alternative. Whatever thin cushion existed for Trump's reelection prospects at the start of this election year has completely evaporated. The President's path to 270 electoral votes is as narrow as it has ever been. For his part, former Vice President Biden is shoring up some traditionally blue-leaning battleground states, expanding the 2020 battleground map into what has recently been more Republican leaning terrain, and opening up multiple pathways to victory. Based on public and private polling, where the

campaigns are placing their strategic bets with millions of advertising dollars, where the candidates and their surrogates are spending time in person or virtually, conversations with Trump and Biden campaign advisers, Republican and Democratic political operatives, members of Congress, and political professionals involved with outside groups, our current Electoral College outlook reflects that substantial movement in Biden's direction. Since our last outlook, we have moved five states (and one congressional district) in the direction of the Democrat. Michigan and Pennsylvania, two states Trump won in 2016 that had been reliably blue for the better part of two decades in presidential elections, are being moved from battleground to lean Democrat, placing an additional 36 electoral votes to Biden's total. We've also moved Virginia from lean Democrat to solid Democrat as the demographics and population shifts in the commonwealth continue to trend

away from Republicans and both campaigns appear to be disinclined to spend substantial dollars competing there. In addition, Georgia, Ohio and Maine's 2nd Congressional District had all been leaning in Trump's favor in our last outlook and have now all been moved to the battleground category, which reduces Trump's electoral vote count by 35 votes. In this new outlook, Trump starts with a solid base of 125 electoral votes from 20 states that are most likely to be uncontested in the fall. When you combine that base of solid states with the additional 45 electoral votes that are currently leaning in his direction, it brings Trump's total to 170 electoral votes -- 100 votes away from reelection. Biden's quest for the White House starts with a solid base of 203 electoral votes from 16 states and the District of Columbia. When you add in the 65 electoral votes that are leaning in his direction, it brings his total to 268 electoral votes - just 2 away from winning the presidency.

Tinseltown bows to Beijing: Hollywood is slammed for changing cast, plot, dialogue

Hollywood is censoring blockbuster films to placate China and ensure that its multi-billion dollar box office revenue keeps pouring in, a damning report has claimed.

Filmmakers are increasingly pandering to the officialdom in Beijing by editing dialogue, plot and casting, the report concludes.

Movies which it says have been artistically compromised by the Communist Party paymasters include Bohemian Rhapsody, Iron Man 3, and the upcoming Top Gun sequel.

Not only is China changing versions of Hollywood films within its own borders, but it is claimed that Beijing's thought-policing pervades the final edits screened in cinemas across the world.

The report was compiled by the non-profit PEN America, which champions free speech. China is the world's second largest box office market behind the US and studios are becoming increasingly reliant on its

business.

American films earned 2.6 billion dollars (about £2 billion) in China last year, according to the Hollywood Reporter, with Disney's superhero extravaganza Avengers: Endgame making 614 million dollars (about £468 million).

The PEN report says studios are self-censoring to ensure favorable treatment from the Chinese government, which can lead to better release dates and preferential advertising arrangements.

The country's censorship regime is opaque, according to the report, with filmmakers 'reliant on rumor and innuendo to determine where the actual boundaries of censorship lie'.

Hollywood's alleged willingness to bend to China has angered the White House.

In July, US attorney general William Barr slammed the film industry for being 'all too willing to collaborate with the Chinese Communist Party'.

The PEN report contrasted Hollywood's perceived

readiness to criticize politicians at home with its attitude towards Beijing.

The report says Hollywood 'enjoys a reputation as a place uncowed' by the US government and is 'often gleefully willing to speak truth to American political power'.

However, it takes the opposite approach to the Chinese government, according to PEN.

And if Hollywood, in its position as the center of global filmmaking, is unwilling to stand up to China's demands, there is little chance of others around the world taking the risk, the study says.

'In effect, Hollywood's approach to acceding to Chinese dictates is setting a standard for the rest of the world,' the report states.

Examples of censorship listed in the report include Marvel's 2016 superhero film Dr Strange, which is accused of whitewashing a major Tibetan character for fear of jeopardizing the film's chances in China.



And upcoming action movie sequel Top Gun: Maverick is criticized for the 'mysterious disappearance of the Taiwanese flag' in a 2019 trailer.

The 94-page document, titled Made in Hollywood, Censored by Beijing: The US Film Industry and Chinese Government Influence, makes a series of recommendations. It says Hollywood studios should insist any version of a film censored for the Chinese market does not become the default version issued for a global release. 'Filmmakers cannot reduce their work to

the lowest common denominator of only content that is deemed acceptable by one of the world's most censorious regimes,' the report states.

PEN also recommends studios 'openly and transparently' acknowledge how and why a film has been censored.

The measures 'would be a powerful step toward shoring up Hollywood's commitment to freedom of expression in the face of this growing dynamic of censorship and propagandistic government influence,' according to the report.

SC to hear on August 20 Vijay Mallya's review plea on transfer of \$40 million to his children

Vijay Mallya had filed the petition seeking review of the apex court's May 9, 2017 order by which he was held guilty of contempt of court for transferring \$40 million to his children in violation of the order.

The Supreme Court Thursday said it would hear on August 20 the petition filed by businessman Vijay Mallya, who has sought review of its 2017 order holding him guilty of contempt of court for transferring \$40 million to his children.

The matter came up for hearing through video-conferencing before a bench comprising Justices U U Lalit and Ashok Bhushan, which adjourned it as one of the documents was not available on the record.

The apex court had in June directed its registry to explain as to why Mallya's review petition had not been listed before the concerned court for the last three

years.

It had directed the registry to furnish all the details including names of officials who had dealt with the file concerning the review petition in the last three years. The fugitive businessman had filed the petition seeking review of the apex court's May 9, 2017 order by which he was held guilty of contempt of court for transferring \$40 million to his children in violation of the order. Mallya, who is an accused in a bank loan default case of over Rs 9,000 crore involving his defunct Kingfisher Airlines, is presently in the United Kingdom.

The apex court's 2017 order had come on a plea by consortium

of banks led by the State Bank of India (SBI), which had said that Mallya had allegedly transferred \$40 million received from British firm Diageo, to his children in "flagrant violation" of various judicial orders. It was dealing with pleas of lending banks seeking contempt action and a direction to Mallya to deposit \$40 million received from offshore firm Diageo respectively.

The banks had then alleged that Mallya concealed the facts and diverted the money to his son Siddharth Mallya and daughters Leanna Mallya and Tanya Mallya in "flagrant violation" of the orders passed by the Karnataka High Court.



Mallya had in May lost his application seeking leave to appeal his extradition to India in the UK Supreme Court, setting a 28-day clock on his removal from the UK.

The UK top court's decision marks a big legal setback to the 64-year-old flamboyant businessman, who had earlier lost his high court appeal against

an extradition order to India on charges of alleged fraud and money laundering related to unrecovered loans to his now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines.

Mallya has been based in the UK since March 2016 and remains on bail on an extradition warrant executed three years ago by Scotland Yard on April 18, 2017.

Bank fraud case: ED raids former J-K minister's son Hilal Rather



The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday launched multiple raids in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged bank fraud probe against

The central probe agency has field a money laundering case against Hilal Rather and others, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), taking cognisance of a CBI FIR and Income Tax Department probe against him and pertains to a Rs 177-crore alleged bank fraud scam.

Hilal Rather, son of former Jammu and Kashmir minister Abdul Rahim Rather, officials said.

They said the raids are being conducted at 16 locations in Kashmir, Jammu, Delhi and Ludhiana.

The central probe agency has field a money laundering case

against Hilal Rather and others, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), taking cognisance of a CBI FIR and Income Tax Department probe against him and pertains to a Rs 177-crore alleged bank fraud scam.

The raids are aimed to gather more evidence, they said.

The CBI has alleged that Hilal Rather entered into a criminal conspiracy with the then officials of the J and K Bank to get loans of Rs 177.68 crore (approx) in violation of rules and guidelines. His father, a former finance minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, is a National Conference (NC) leader.

Vodafone Idea bounces back; shares close 7% higher after initial loss

On the BSE, the stock had plunged 7.39 per cent to Rs 7.64 in early trade. Later, it erased the losses as the trade progressed. It finally closed at Rs 8.83, a gain of 7.03 per cent.

Shares of Vodafone Idea bounced back from early lows to close 7 per cent higher on Friday.

On the BSE, the stock had plunged 7.39 per cent to Rs 7.64 in early trade. Later, it erased the losses as the trade progressed. It finally closed at Rs 8.83, a gain of 7.03 per cent.

On the NSE, it settled the day 6.66 per cent higher at Rs 8.80. During the morning trade, it had cracked 7.87 per cent to Rs 7.60.

Value-buying at lower levels may have led to recovery in the stock.

In terms of volume, 1,121.88

lakh shares were traded on BSE and over 68 crore on NSE. Vodafone Idea, after market hours on Thursday, reported widening of net loss to Rs 25,460 crore in the June quarter after it made additional provisioning to pay past statutory dues, and said its ability to continue as going concern hinges on the Supreme Court allowing more time to pay dues.

The nation's third-largest telecom operator had a net loss of Rs 4,874 crore in April-June 2019 and Rs 11,643.5 crore in the preceding March quarter.

It had reported a net loss of Rs



73,878 crore in full 2019-20 fiscal. VIL's revenue from operations came in at Rs 10,659.3 crore for the first quarter of FY2021, sliding 5.4 per cent from the year-ago

period.

The company's Q1 average revenue per user (ARPU) - a key metrics for telcos - took a hit and fell to Rs 114 from Rs 121 in the

previous sequential quarter, the declines presenting a stark contrast to Reliance Jio and Airtel, both of which recorded ARPU gains during the quarter.

Cameron Diaz reveals why she quit acting in interview with Gwyneth Paltrow

Former Hollywood star Cameron Diaz has revealed her reasons for retiring from the movie business, saying she found "peace" when she quit acting. Diaz appeared on Gwyneth Paltrow's "In goop Health: The Sessions" series Wednesday, discussing her wine business, how her mentality changed as she got older and the impact her career had on her well-being and relationships.

"I just decided that I wanted different things out of my life. I had gone so hard for so long, working, making films and it's such a grind," said Diaz. "I didn't really make any space for my personal life."

Diaz, 47, was nominated for four

Golden Globes over the course of a 20-year career that ran from 1994-2014. She is best known for her roles in "The Mask" (1994), "There's Something About Mary" (1998) and "Vanilla Sky" (2001).

When asked what it felt like to walk away from a successful movie career, she replied: "A peace. I got a peace in my soul." She added: "I finally was taking care of myself."

The former actor said she decided to really focus on her relationships with family and friends after handing over control of certain aspects of her life to other people for many years.

"When you're making a movie, it's a perfect excuse -- they own you. You're

there for 12 hours a day for months on end and you have no time for anything else," she said.

"Actors are infantilized. We're put in a position where everything is taken care of for us."

Diaz said she never really felt comfortable with that sort of life, and had to take back responsibility after retiring.

She decided to become "self-sufficient" and prove she could take care of herself as an adult, "putting all the pieces of my life together the way that I wanted it to be put together, not how other people thought it should go."

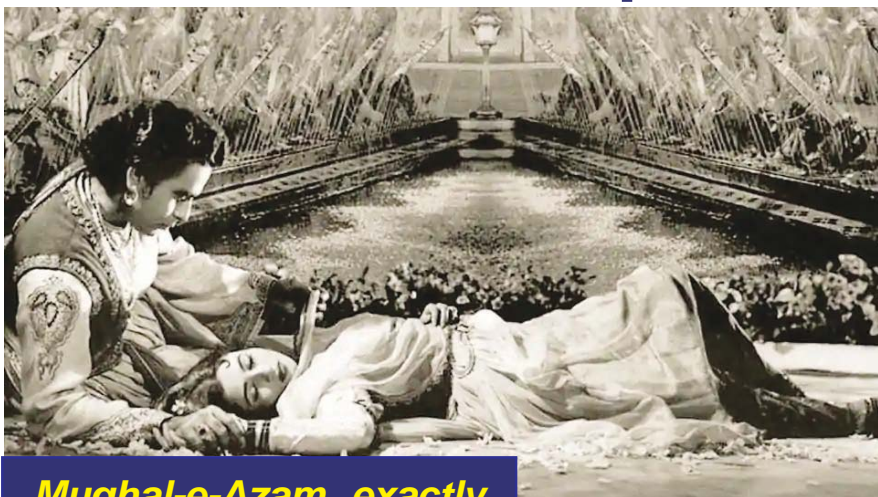
Diaz also said it's "intense" being in the public eye.

"There's a lot of energy coming at you at all times when you're really visible as an actor and doing press and putting yourself out there," she said.

Diaz has released two books -- "The Body Book" and "The Longevity Book" -- and married Good Charlotte singer Benji Madden in 2015. The couple announced earlier this year the birth of their daughter Raddix Madden.



August 5: A tribute to the values of the Republic



Mughal-e-Azam, exactly 60 years ago, displayed a bold imagination of the nation, law, governance and dissent

leaders who were present at the bhoomi puja, and others who were not in attendance, were instrumental in initiating and encouraging imaginaries of a majoritarian Hindu India. For them, the destruction of a

As the triumphant narratives of August 5, celebrating the bhoomi puja that marks the beginning of the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya get recorded in history, they will inaugurate a new majoritarian identity for a Republic that was hitherto proudly upheld as a secular, democratic polity where all religions of the nation and their followers had equal rights. Some of us, however, would like to remember this date for a different reason that is cause for celebration as well. August 5, also marked the 60th anniversary of K Asif's dream project, the magnificent Mughal-e-Azam, that released on this date at Maratha Mandir in Bombay to massive crowds, eagerly awaiting a film that had been 15 years in the making. The difference between the two events - equally popular - could not be starker. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

monument such as the Babri masjid, which they claim was built on a site that was the exact birthplace of lord Ram, was crucial to overcome centuries of humiliation at the hands of "foreign rule". This dream project is now set to be realised, and with it, we will see the birth of a new Republic that goes against the founding principles of this nation. So how does Mughal-e-Azam represent a different imaginary of the Republic? Can a film that has its roots in a play that was written in 1922 in Lahore - Anarkali by Iqbal, that was read and appreciated by several luminaries all over north India, including Rabindranath Tagore; that was realised on screen several times; and that colonised the imagination of K Asif when he first encountered it in 1944 as a 20-year-old, embody different imaginaries of nationhood, law,

CBI files FIR over Sushant Singh's death, names Rhea Chakraborty as accused



criminal intimidation.

"The investigation of FIR No. 241/2020 dated 25.07.2020 registered u/s 341, 342, 380, 406, 420, 306, 506, 120B IPC, PS- Rajiv Nagar, District-Patna, related to death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput has been transferred to Central Bureau of Investigation for investigation," the CBI FIR says.

The agency had earlier said that

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday registered an FIR in Sushant Singh Rajput death case, after a Central notification on Wednesday handed over the case to the agency on the recommendation of the Bihar government, said agency officials. The FIR filed by the agency is based on the one registered by Bihar police in Patna and names Rhea Chakraborty, her parents, her brother Showik apart from two others for suspected offences of criminal conspiracy, abetment of suicide, wrongful restraint, wrongful confinement, theft, criminal breach of trust, cheating and

it was in touch with Bihar police, which had first registered the FIR against Sushant's former live in partner Rhea Chakraborty and his family members on his father's complaint.

"A regular case is therefore registered u/s 341, 342, 380, 406, 420, 306, 506, 120B IPC against (1) Rhea Chakraborty and her family members (2) Shri Indarjit Chakraborty, (3) Smt. Sandhya Chakraborty, (4) Sh. Showik Chakraborty, (5) Sh Samuel Miranda, and (6) Mrs Shruti Modi and others," the CBI FIR states further.

PM Modi's Ayodhya ceremony widely watched across the world, highest viewership from US,



(Story on
Page 30)

Cannabis is bad for your HEART: Doctors warn using the drug can trigger heart attacks and strokes



(News Agencies) Cannabis is bad for the heart and may trigger heart attacks and strokes, doctors have warned. The American Heart Association (AHA), who reviewed the available evidence, now recommend avoiding cannabis to protect the heart. In a scientific statement, it said smoking cannabis has some of the same harms as tobacco, which is known to be a leading cause of death worldwide.

Research has shown the recreational drug may have health benefits -

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India-UK project to study impact of drug-resistant bacteria in Musi, Adyar rivers



(News Agencies) The release of antibiotics into India's rivers by manufacturers and its impact on the spread of potentially fatal drug-resistant infections is the focus of a new £1.2 million research project, the University of Birmingham announced on Thursday. The project, jointly funded by the UK and India, will be conducted by the university with experts at the Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad. An estimated 58,000 babies die in India every year from superbug infections passed on from their mothers. The project is part of a £8 million package of UK-India government-backed research aimed at deepening existing scientific research collaboration with five new programmes to tackle anti-microbial resistance (AMR). Supported by the UK's Natural Environment Research Council and India's Department of Biotechnology, the cross-disciplinary team also includes researchers from

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Beirut explosion: What we know so far

(News Agencies)- Here is what we know so far. What happened? The disaster was preceded by a large fire at the Port of Beirut, on the city's northern Mediterranean coast. In videos posted on social media white smoke could be seen billowing from Warehouse 12, next to the port's huge grain silos. Shortly after 18:00 (15:00 GMT), the roof of the warehouse caught alight and there was a large initial explosion, followed by a series of smaller blasts that some witnesses said sounded like fireworks going off. About 30 seconds later, there was a colossal explosion that sent a mushroom cloud into the air and a supersonic blastwave radiating through the city. That blastwave levelled buildings near the port and caused extensive damage over much of the rest of the capital, which is home to two million people. Hospitals were quickly overwhelmed.

"What we are witnessing is a huge catastrophe," said the head of the Lebanese Red Cross, George



Kettani. "There are victims and casualties everywhere." Beirut Governor Marwan Abboud said as many as 300,000 people had been made temporarily homeless and that collective losses might reach \$10-15bn (£8-11bn).

How big was the blast? The blast destroyed the immediate dockside area, creating a crater approximately 140 metres wide, which flooded with seawater.

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