



In this image courtesy of the US Marine Corps taken on Thursday and released yesterday, fortunate evacuees wait for their flight out of Afghanistan at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul, Afghanistan.

PHOTO: AFP

# Unite to defeat BJP

## Sonia Gandhi urges all Indian opposition parties to set aside differences ahead of 2024 polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Congress President Sonia Gandhi yesterday said time has come for all Indian opposition parties to rise above their different compulsions and "plan systematically" and unitedly for the 2024 parliamentary election against Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party.

"We all have our compulsions, but clearly, a time has come when the interests of our nation demand that we rise above them," Sonia said while virtually addressing a congregation of 15 opposition leaders including West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

She said the ultimate goal is 2024 Lok Sabha polls and must plan systematically to give a government which believes in values of freedom movement and in the principles of the Constitution.

"The 75th year of Independence occasion to reaffirm our collective resolve. Congress will not be found wanting," Sonia said.

Mamata proposed a core group of opposition leaders to decide on joint programmes and movements.

She urged opposition parties to keep aside differences and work together to defeat BJP in 2024 parliamentary polls.

Among other opposition leaders who

attended today's meeting were Maharashtra Chief Minister and Shiv Sena leader Uddhav Thackeray, DMK leader and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar, Rashtriy Janata Dal's Tejashwi Yadav and CPI(M) Sitaram Yechury.

However, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav stayed away from the meeting while Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Mayawati and Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party's Arvind Kejriwal were not invited.

Mamata Banerjee who is sparing no chance to remind the Congress that they can't call the shots till they parties need to come together.

The Opposition also plans to step up protests all over the country from September 20 to 30 addressing various public issues.

Over the next few days more such meetings are expected to be held with an eye on polls. But two messages from Sonia Gandhi were clear: One her meet was a rebuttal to the dinner meet called by the rebel G23 leader Kapil Sibal in which most top leaders attended. Second, pointed to Mamata and the likes questioning the Congress, the party may be down but it was definitely now out.



### MORE NEWS

#### EU says no recognition of Taliban, no political talks

The European Union has not recognised the Taliban, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said yesterday, nor is it holding political talks with the militants, a week after they seized control of Afghanistan. The head of the EU executive spoke after visiting a reception centre in Madrid for Afghan employees of EU institutions evacuated from Kabul. Von der Leyen said she would propose an increase in the 57 million euros (\$67 million) in humanitarian aid which the Commission had allocated this year for Afghanistan. She said EU development aid is tied to respect of human rights, good treatment of minorities and respect for the rights of women and girls. "We may well hear the Taliban's words but we will measure them above all by their deeds and actions," von der Leyen told a news conference. She said the Commission was ready to provide funding to EU countries which help resettle refugees, and she planned to raise the resettlement issue at a G7 meeting next week.

#### Suicide attack targeting Chinese national kills 2 in Pakistan

A suicide bomb attack in Pakistan on a motorcade carrying Chinese personnel injured one Chinese national and killed two local children, the Chinese embassy in Islamabad said yesterday. The attack took place on Friday at the Gwadar East Bay Expressway project in Balochistan, the embassy said. Several wounded people were treated at a local hospital, it said. The embassy called on the Pakistan authorities to conduct a thorough investigation of the attack. No group has claimed responsibility for the incident. In July, a suicide bomber attacked a bus carrying workers to a dam construction site in northern Pakistan, killing 13 people, including nine Chinese nationals. Pakistan's foreign minister said Pakistani Taliban militants known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan were behind that attack. Beijing is investing over \$65 billion in infrastructure projects in Pakistan as part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, under its wider Belt and Road initiative.

#### Taliban websites disappear from internet, reason unclear

The official websites of the Taliban, who swept to power in Afghanistan on the back of a lightning offensive last week, appeared to have vanished from the internet late on Friday. It was not immediately clear whether a technical fault or something else was to blame. The Taliban operate separate websites in Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Urdu and English. All five appeared to be unreachable on Friday. A spokeswoman for CloudFlare, which online records list as providing protection for the Taliban sites, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The outage was first reported by The Washington Post.

SOURCE: WEBSITES

## Delta variant continues to disrupt life

AGENCIES

### Covid-19

Police arrest hundreds of protesters as Australia reports record cases

Shanghai places hundreds in quarantine after airport cases

Sri Lanka announces lockdown as coronavirus cases surge

Australian police arrested hundreds of anti-lockdown protesters in Melbourne and Sydney yesterday and seven officers were hospitalised as a result of clashes, as the country saw its highest ever single-day rise in Covid-19 cases.

Mounted police used pepper spray in Melbourne to break up crowds of more than 4,000 surging toward police lines, while smaller groups of protesters were prevented from congregating in Sydney by a large contingent of riot police.

Victoria state police said that they arrested 218 people in the state capital Melbourne. They issued 236 fines and kept three people in custody for assaulting police. The arrested people face fines of A\$5,452 (\$3,900) each for breaching public health orders.

Police in New South Wales, where Sydney is the capital, said they charged 47 people with breaching public health orders or resisting arrest, among other offences, and issued more than 260 fines ranging from A\$50 (\$35) to \$3,000. The police said about 250 people made it to the city for the protest.

Sydney, Australia's biggest city with more than 5 million people, has been in a strict lockdown for more than two months, failing to contain an outbreak that has spread across internal borders and as far as neighbouring New Zealand. The vast majority of the 894 cases reported across Australia yesterday were found in Sydney, the epicentre of the Delta variant-fuelled outbreak. Australia has had about 43,000 COVID-19 cases and 978 deaths. But while those numbers are low, only about a third of Australians aged 16 and above have been fully vaccinated, according to federal health ministry data released on Saturday.

Meanwhile, authorities in Shanghai have quarantined hundreds of people in an attempt to halt a fresh Covid-19 outbreak in the city after infections were detected in cargo workers at its airport, the municipal government said yesterday.

Two of the cargo workers, a Chinese national and an Ethiopian national, were included among four locally transmitted cases in mainland China's tally of 20 new confirmed infections for Aug 20, announced yesterday.

In Sri Lanka, authorities announced a 10-day lockdown starting on Friday night in an effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus, as surging infections and deaths overwhelm the island's health system.

The Indian Ocean nation recorded its highest single-day death toll of 187 and 3,793 cases on Wednesday.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa met with members of the presidential task force on coronavirus and was expected to address the nation on Friday evening.

Daily infections have more than doubled in a month to an average of 3,897, according to the Reuters Global COVID tracker.



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1910 - Korea was annexed by Japan after five years as a protectorate.

1973 - Henry Kissinger was named US Secretary of State.

2006 - All 170 passengers and crew on board a Russian Tu-154 airliner were killed when it crashed in Ukraine.

2010 - Thirty-three Chilean miners trapped underground for 17 days manage to send message to surface, making first contact with rescuers.

SOURCE: WEBSITES

## Taliban stop Afghan govt employees from returning to work

AFP, Kabul

Government employees in Kabul were blocked by Taliban militants from returning to their offices yesterday, the first day of the Afghan working week.

Since the hardline Islamist group seized power six days ago, government buildings, banks, schools and universities have remained largely closed.

Only a few private firms, including telecom companies, have been operating since the Taliban swept back to power -- although there have also been two public holidays since then.

The blocking of employees from entering their offices came despite the Taliban announcing they would allow government staff to continue working.

"I went to the office this morning, but the Taliban who were at the gate told us they have not received any orders to reopen government offices," said Hamdullah.

"They told us to watch TV or listen to the radio for an announcement about when to resume work."

The Taliban have yet to form a government and in the chaos of a collapsed administration, one of the top concerns among Afghans is continuing to earn a salary.

Two days after seizing power the Taliban announced a general amnesty, and said everyone should return to work.

Spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has said the group's new government would be "positively different" from their 1996-2001 regime, infamous for barring women from almost all aspects of public life.

He also announced a general amnesty. "All those in the opposite side are pardoned from A to Z," he said. "We will not seek revenge."

On Saturday, most roads in the capital were largely deserted save for the route to the airport, which was clogged with people scrambling to join a US-led evacuation.



Protesters carry placards and wave Afghan flags as they demonstrate in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan, in Parliament Square, central London, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Roads leading to the foreign ministry in central Kabul were also closed, an employee told AFP.

"They aren't allowing anyone to enter," he said on condition of anonymity.

"One of them even told me to wait until the new minister and directors are appointed."

The foreign exchange market was also shut as it awaited instructions from the central bank, traders said.

Another employee at the Kabul municipality said he was disappointed that the Taliban were not yet re-opening offices.

"I came with a lot of hope but left disappointed," he said. Workers at the offices of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation in Kabul, however, were allowed to enter after showing their ID cards, an employee there said.

## Invitation to Bid (ITB) for Laboratory Equipment

Tender Ref. No. icddr,b/SCM/OTM/2021/39 Date: 22 August 2021

icddr,b leads the four-year TB implementation project titled "USAID's Alliance for Combating TB in Bangladesh Activity". icddr,b invites renowned equipment manufacturers and authorised agents/distributors of laboratory equipment to participate in a bidding process for supplying and installation of laboratory equipment (portable X-ray system with AI).

Interested participants can download the ITB document from the web address below: <https://www.icddr.org/work-with-us/tender-notices>

(Supply & installation of laboratory equipment (portable X-ray system with AI))

Pre-bid meeting will be held on 26 August 2021 at 12:00 PM through Microsoft Teams. Interested bidders should notify icddr,b about their interest in participating in the pre-bid session through email [\[supplychain@icddr.org\]](mailto:supplychain@icddr.org) by 25 August 2021 within 5.00 PM. Please mention 'Bid Reference' and 'Interested in Pre-Bid Participation' in the email subject.

Offerors shall submit their password protected Technical and Financial offers through email to [supplychain@icddr.org](mailto:supplychain@icddr.org). Offers must be received not later than 05 September 2021 by 3:00 PM BST. Bid opening session will not be conducted as a public opening. Please see the bid document for details.

icddr,b reserves the right to accept or reject all/part of the proposals without assigning any reason whatsoever. This ITB will also form a part of the contract and will be binding upon the tenderer.



Senior Manager, Procurement  
Email: [supplychain@icddr.org](mailto:supplychain@icddr.org)

## Malaysia PM sworn in

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A new Malaysian leader was sworn yesterday following the previous government's collapse, reclaiming the premiership for his scandal-mired party without an election.

Ismail Sabri Yaakob is a stalwart of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the lynchpin of a long-ruling coalition that lost power in landmark elections during the multi-billion-dollar 1MDB graft scandal in 2018.

He was named as the new prime minister Friday, days after his predecessor quit following a turbulent 17 months in office.

Malaysia's king opted to appoint a new premier based on who had majority support in parliament, rather than call an election, over concerns a vote could worsen a dire coronavirus outbreak.

In an elaborate ceremony at the national palace, Ismail Sabri, wearing a traditional Malaysian outfit, took the oath of office before the king.

The 61-year-old was deputy prime minister when UMNO was a partner in the last government, and has held several other cabinet posts during a long political career.

His predecessor Muhyiddin Yassin quit after losing his parliamentary majority, as public anger grew over his government's handling of the pandemic.

After announcing the new leader, the king, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, urged politicians to put aside their differences to fight the virus.

Ismail Sabri becomes Malaysia's third new prime minister in less than four years.

But his government is essentially a rejigged version of the one that collapsed a week ago, with Muhyiddin and his allies backing him.

There have been signs of public unhappiness, with a petition against his appointment garnering hundreds of thousands of signatures, and some fear his government will be as unstable as its forerunner.



## Sri Lanka bans 'drunk driving' of elephants

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will issue captive elephants with their own biometric identity cards and ban their riders from drinking on the job under a wide-ranging new animal protection law.

Many rich Sri Lankans keep elephants as pets, but complaints of ill treatment and cruelty are widespread.

The new measures are aimed at protecting the animals' welfare and include strict regulations around working elephants, as well as mandating a daily two-and-a-half-hour bath for each creature.

It brings in multiple regulations for working elephants. Baby elephants can no longer be used for work -- even cultural pageants -- and cannot be separated from their mothers. Logging elephants cannot be worked for more than four hours a day and night work is prohibited.

From now on, no more than four people can ride an elephant at once. Their use in films is banned, except for government productions under strict veterinary supervision, as is allowing their riders to drink while working. Owners must send their animals for medical check-up every 6 months.

Those who violate the new law will have their elephant taken into state care and could face a three-year prison sentence.