

UK launches new visas open to Indian scientists, academics

LONDON, JULY 7 /-/- The UK has launched new visas that will be open to overseas scientists and researchers, including Indians, to encourage the growth of the country's research sector.

The new UKRI Science, Research and Academia scheme, which is being added to the already existing Tier 5 (Temporary Worker Government Authorised Exchange) visa route, opened from yesterday for researchers, scientists and academics from outside the European Union (EU) to come to the UK for up to two years. "The UK is a world leader in research and innovation and these changes will make it easier for international researchers to work and train in the UK," said UK immigration minister Caroline Nokes in a statement announcing the launch.

"We must have an immigration system that makes sure we can attract leading international talent and benefit from their knowledge and expertise. I recognise the crucial role that science makes to the UK economy and society and I am determined that the UK will continue to welcome leading scientific and research talent from around the world," she stated. The scheme will be operated by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), which brings together the country's seven research councils, Innovate UK and Research England. It will mean that UKRI, along with 12 approved research organisations such as the Natural History Museum, will now be able to directly sponsor highly skilled individuals, such as specialist technicians, to work and train in the UK.

The sponsor organisations will be monitored by UKRI as the scheme owner and they will also require individual Tier 5 sponsor licences. "Research and innovation is inherently international as are the unprecedented 21st century challenges we must address," said UKRI chief executive Professor Mark Walport. "Global collaboration through the movement of talented people plays an essential role in meeting these challenges and this new scheme will provide further support for international researchers to work and train in the UK," Walport said.

The Tier 5 Government Authorised Exchange (GAE) is the principal visa route by which professionals from outside the European Economic Area who wish to undertake training and work experience are able to come to the UK. The route allows individuals entering the UK through this scheme to stay for up to two years. The UK's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will monitor the activity of the scheme on a regular basis with UKRI, to provide assurance that it is meeting the criteria for a Tier 5 scheme, the Home Office said.

The UK government said the new scheme demonstrates its commitment to make the UK a "dynamic, open, globally-trading" nation. Some of the other reforms to the country's visa system in recent months have included removing doctors and nurses from the Tier 2 visa cap, allowing more Indian doctors among others to address staff shortages in the state-funded National Health Service (NHS).

Heartbreaking scenes described in Thai boat sinking; 38 dead

PHUKET, JULY 7 /-/- Divers who entered the wreck of a tour boat that sank in a storm off the southern Thai resort island of Phuket described heartbreaking scenes of bodies of children found in the arms of their mothers, as the search continues for the 18 mostly Chinese tourists missing in a disaster that has left dozens dead.



The death toll from Thursday's tragedy climbed to 38, in Thailand's biggest tourist-related disaster in years. It was not clear how many of the dead and missing were Chinese. The previous announced death toll was 33, with authorities saying all of those victims were Chinese. "It's very difficult to see. It's traumatic. It's tragic but the best thing to do, our job as divers, is to bring back the bodies to their families," diver Philip Entwistle told a group of newsmen before resuming the search today. The boat, with 105 people, including 50 tourists, capsized after the stricken ship was hit by a 5-metre (16-foot) wave. The death toll jumped Friday after the navy sent divers to the wreck. In images shortly after the sinking, rescued people sat in large rubber

life rafts surrounded by churning seas.

Phuket Gov Nongnaphat Plodthong announced at a news conference today afternoon that the death toll had climbed further to 38, with 18 missing. Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, the leader of Thailand's military government, expressed his "sympathies and deepest condolences" to the families of the dead. The government will "exert all efforts to find those still missing and provide support to all survivors of this tragic event," he said in a statement. Reports in Thai media said police charged the owner and captain of the stricken ship with carelessness causing death and injury. Chinese President Xi Jinping called for all-out search and rescue efforts, telling the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chinese diplomats in Thailand to take greater measures, and also urging Thai authorities to spare no efforts.

Chinese Ambassador Lyu Jian had an "emergency" conversation with Thai Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusritak, the Chinese Embassy said in a statement. It quoted the embassy chief on Thailand to quickly mobilize an intensive search for the missing and "to tend and make appropriate arrangements for the rescue of Chinese tourists, treat and cure the injured and receive family members of the Chinese tourists involved." Lyu said it hoped Chinese tourists, treat and cure the injured and receive family members of the Chinese tourists involved. Lyu said it hoped Chinese tourists, treat and cure the injured and receive family members of the Chinese tourists involved.

Amul Thapar not in Trump's shortlist for US SC justice: Media report

WASHINGTON, JULY 7 /-/- Prominent Indian-American judge Amul Thapar has failed to make it to the shortlist of the three candidates from which President Donald Trump is likely to pick his replacement for retiring US Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, a media report said today. Justice Kennedy, 81, recently announced his retirement from the US Supreme Court. He met Trump at the White House soon after he told his colleagues in the Supreme Court that July 31 would be his last day at the apex court. Trump is likely to announce his nominees to replace Kennedy on Monday. The US President interviewed seven candidates from his master list of 23 judges, the White House said. Thapar, 49, a Cincinnati-based appeals court judge, was among the first four candidates interviewed by Trump on July 2. The three others were justices Brett Kavanaugh, Amy Coney Barrett and Raymond Kethledge. A day later, Trump interviewed three other individuals. According to National Public Radio (NPR), Trump has reduced the names of the potential nominees to three judges - Brett Kavanaugh, Amy Coney Barrett and Raymond Kethledge.

The first two are the top contenders for the position, the report said. While final nominees will be known only when Trump makes the announcement, this would be the second time that Thapar might not be able to make the final cut after being interviewed by Trump. Thapar was on the shortlist of candidates after judge Antonin Scalia died in 2016. Trump finally nominated Judge Neil Gorsuch. Talking to newsmen travelling with him to Montana aboard Air Force One, Trump said he had interviewed some "extraordinarily talented and brilliant" people during the process. Families of some Malaysian victims have blamed Honda, the leading foreign brand in the country, of not doing enough to warn car owners of potentially deadly risks from the air bags or track down second-hand car owners. The defective air bags have faulty inflators and propellant devices that may deploy improperly in an accident, shooting out metal fragments that can kill or injure. Last year, Takata pleaded guilty to fraud in a US court and agreed to pay more than 1 billion in penalties for concealing the defect. (AP)



Runners sprint in front of wild cows during the first running of the bulls of the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, Spain.—REUTERS

Punished for trying to free people from slavery imposed by some generals and judges: Sharif

LONDON, JULY 7 /-/- A defiant Nawaz Sharif today said he has been sent to jail because he tried to free the people of Pakistan from the slavery imposed on them by some generals and judges and vowed to continue his political struggle from behind the bars. The deposed former Prime Minister Sharif was sentenced in absentia to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment by an anti-graft court in Islamabad in one of the three corruption cases against him in the Panama Papers scandal, dealing a huge blow to his party ahead of the elections on July 25. Addressing a press conference in London along with his daughter Maryam, Sharif said, "I promise that I will continue this struggle until Pakistanis are not free of the chains that they are kept in for saying the truth." "I will continue my struggle till the people of Pakistan are not freed of the slavery imposed on them by some generals and judges," he was quoted as saying by

the Dawn newspaper.

During his tenure before being disqualified by the Supreme Court in the Panama Papers case, Sharif had a tenuous relationship with the powerful military as well as the judiciary. Sharif, 68, is currently in London attending to his wife Kulsoom Nawaz who was diagnosed with throat cancer last year. He, however, did not give any specific time or date for his return to Pakistan. When asked, Sharif mentioned the deteriorating health of his wife as the reason for him not being able to return immediately. Sharif said that if the punishment for "demanding respect for the vote is jail, I am coming to face it".

"I am returning to the country to face the jail and the handcuffs if this is the price I have to pay for loving my country," he said. "I will stand with the masses and stop those who are attempting are creating impediments in the way of the votes," he added.



People jump over a campfire during a celebration on the traditional Ivana Kupala (Ivan the Bather) holiday in Kiev, Ukraine July 6, 2018. The ancient tradition, originating from pagan times, is marked with grand overnight festivities during which people sing and dance around campfires, believing it will purge them of their sins and make them healthier.—REUTERS

UK town to be Amritsar's twin city in memory of Maharaja Duleep Singh

LONDON, JULY 7 /-/- A small UK town in the East Anglia region of England will become the twin city of Amritsar as it celebrates the 125th death anniversary of Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire, with a two-week-long Punjab festival.

Thetford in Norfolk was home to Duleep Singh and the organisers of the Festival of Thetford & Punjab believe the town has strong resonance with the lush fields, intense farming activity and livestock grazing of the Indian state. "Elveden Manor in Thetford was home to the last Maharaja of Punjab for many years and Thetfordians are extremely proud of their unusual resident," explains Seema Anand, a historian

N-talks with N Korea very productive: Pompeo

TOKYO, JULY 7 /-/- US secretary of state Mike Pompeo insisted today that two days of talks with his North Korean counterpart on dismantling Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal had been "very productive". But, briefing newsmen before flying to Tokyo, he offered few new details as to how North Korea

would honour its commitment to "denuclearise" in exchange for US security guarantees. "These are complicated issues, but we made progress on almost all of the central issues, some places a great deal of progress, other places there's still more work to be done," he said. (AFP)

through the town centre as a collaboration between Bhagra and Morris dancers and Dhol Drummers will include Punjab food stalls, Sikh martial arts Gatka, henna painting and storytelling activities along the River Ouse, encompassing the town's annual River Festival. "The cultural legacy of Duleep Singh is as significant for Punjab as it is for Punjab. The festival provides an opportunity for audiences to learn more about his fascinating story, and get involved in a range of activities, talks and events. It is also a chance for us all to further explore the under-appreciated links between Thetford and Punjab due to this shared heritage," says Festival Director Indi Sandhu.

Heavy rain hits Japan, 38 die, 50 missing

TOKYO, JULY 7 /-/- Torrents of rainfall and flooding battered a widespread area in southwestern Japan today, with local media casualty reports climbing quickly. Public broadcaster NHK said 38 people were dead, four were injured seriously and 47 were missing.

Television footage showed a residential area in Okayama prefecture seeped in brown water spreading like a huge lake. Some people fled to rooftops and balconies and waved furiously at hovering rescue helicopters. Okayama prefecture said a man caught in a landslide died, and six others were missing. Evacuation orders had been issued to more than 360,000 people, the prefecture said in a statement. Throughline affected areas, parked cars sat in pools of water. NHK TV said water had reached as high as 16 metres (52 feet) in the worst-hit areas. Kyoto news service, which put the death tally at 34 people, said one death was in a landslide in Hiroshima, which had set off a fire, while the body of a child was found in another area. NHK said a woman died in her home in Hiroshima when it got buried in a mudslide. (AP)

Iran executes 8 over 2017 IS attack on Tehran

TEHRAN, JULY 7 /-/- Iran said today it executed eight people convicted in the 2017 Islamic State group attack on parliament and the shrine of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Tehran.

The June 7, 2017 attack has so far been the only assault by the Sunni extremists inside of Shiite Iran, which has been deeply involved in the wars in Iraq and Syria where the militants once held vast territory. The judiciary's official Mizan news agency and semi-official news agencies in Iran acknowledged the executions Saturday, but did not say when they took place. Executions in Iran are carried out by hangings.

While Iran is one of the world's top exporters of the death penalty, such mass executions are rare. The last mass execution reported in August 2017 was of seven men convicted of rape in Mashhad at the same time. The news agencies on Saturday named those executed as Soleiman Mozafari, Esmail Sufi, Rahman Behrouz, Majed Morozai, Siyas Arzi, Ayoub Esmaili, Khosro Ramazani and Osman Behrouz.

The Islamic State attack killed at least 18 people and wounded more than 50. Over a dozen others remain on trial over the attack. Iran's Parliament Revolutionary Guard responded to the attack by launching six missiles into eastern Syria targeting IS militants. (AP)

New ID to deliver recognition, protection to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: UN

UNITED NATIONS, JULY 7 /-/- About 900,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh will soon get credit card-sized plastic IDs that will help provide them another level of protection and preserve their right to voluntarily return to Myanmar in conducive conditions, according to the UN refugee agency.

As per the UN estimates, nearly 700,000 minority Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh to escape violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State since August 25 last year when the army launched a military crack-down.

Myanmar does not recognise Rohingya as an ethnic group and insists that they are Bangladeshi migrants living illegally in the country. The exercise, which began at the end of June, is expected to take up to six months to complete. It will help consolidate a unified database for the purposes of protection, identity management, documentation, provision of assistance, population statistics and ultimately solutions for an estimated 900,000 refugees who have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh in successive waves of forced displacement," Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in Geneva.

Since August last year, more than 720,000 have fled in what was one of the world's largest and fastest growing refugee emergencies in decades. "The verification will play a key role in establishing refugees' identities and their declared places of origin in Myanmar," Yaxley said. "It will help preserve their right to voluntarily return home, if and when they decide that the conditions are right to do so," he said. The exercise will help boost accurate refugee data supporting of the government and humanitarian partners to better understand their specific needs, plan, target and deliver protection and assistance; and avoid duplicating services. "Biometric data, including iris scans and fingerprints as well as photographs, are used in the exercise to confirm individual identities for all refugees over the age of 12," Yaxley said.

The credit card-sized plastic IDs, issued jointly by the Bangladesh Government and the UNHCR, contain a number of anti-fraud features.

Scotland Yard's senior Indian-origin female officer faces investigation

LONDON, JULY 7 /-/- One of Britain's senior-most Indian-origin female officers has been placed of restricted duties as Scotland Yard investigates allegations that she broke the rules on being nominated for a royal honour.

Parm Sandhu, currently serving as temporary chief superintendent with the Metropolitan Police, has been served with a "gross misconduct" investigation notice and could potentially face a serious disciplinary charge. "The Met's Directorate of Professional Standards (DPS) is investigating the conduct of three officers following an allegation that the breached guidelines relating to the UK honours nomination process, a Met Police statement said. "A temporary chief superintendent currently attached to human resources was served with a gross misconduct notice on Wednesday 27 June and has been placed on restricted duties, it said. The two other officers a detective superintendent and an inspector, both from frontline police were also served with misconduct notices on June 27 but they remain on full duties while enquiries continue, the force added.

According to the BBC, the inquiry is focusing on whether Sandhu encouraged her subordinates to support her nomination for the Queen's Police Medal (QPM), which is awarded twice a year by Queen Elizabeth II as part of her honours' lists. The medals are given to serving police officers in the UK in recognition of distinguished service or outstanding courage in the line of duty. National Police Chief Constable guidelines say that "any person can nominate any other person for an honour". However, as with other honours, people are not expected to nominate themselves. It is not meant to contribute to or know about the process.

The internal Met investigation is examining an allegation that Sandhu may have contacted other officers with a summary of information to support her QPM nomination. The inquiry is at an early stage and no disciplinary action has been taken so far. Sandhu, who joined the police service in 1989, rose through the ranks to become borough commander in Richmond upon Thames. She is one of the most senior ethnic minority female officers in the Met Police and in 2006 received an Asian Women of Achievement Award. Last month, she had been promoted to chief superintendent in the Metropolitan Police, adding: "I will be the first woman of colour to hold this rank." She is being supported through the ongoing investigation by representatives of the Police Superintendents' Association.