

News Digest

I'm Not In Self-Quarantine: Dr Farooq

Srinagar: The National Conference patron and Member Parliament Dr Farooq Abdullah Wednesday said that he has not been advised for self-quarantine and the reports in the media were false. "There is no truth in it that I have been advised not to move around and stay indoors in self-quarantine," Dr Farooq Abdullah was quoted as saying. He said he is physically fit and no medical advice has been issued to him by the health experts.

Covid-19: Ladakh Has 84% Recovery Rate

Srinagar: Ladakh has the highest recovery rate of Covid positive patients, highest in the country, officials said. 14 more samples were tested positive on Wednesday in the UT taking the tally of positive cases to 1142 in Ladakh. "18 patients were discharged on Wednesday after their complete recovery taking the tally of recovered persons to 964 in Ladakh," official said. They said that with 18 more recoveries, 964 out of 1142 patients have recovered in Ladakh which is 84.41 percent of total cases in the Union Territory, highest in the country.

33 Discharged From Rainawari Hospital

Srinagar: At least 38 Covid-19 positive patients including 7 Gynae patients and 2 new born babies were discharged from Rainawari hospital today after their repeat samples tested negative for Covid-19 infection. Nodal Officer for Coronavirus at Rainawari Hospital, Dr Bilquis said that 33 patients were from Srinagar and one from North Kashmir's Baramulla district. She said 3 patients were from Mumbai and one was from Uttar Pradesh. "All the patients were asymptomatic and discharged after 10 to 12 days of their Hospital stay." "The total discharged patients from Rainawari Hospital till now are 560. Covid-19 positive patients admitted in the Hospital at present are 50 in General Isolation Wards and 16 positive pregnant patients in Gynae Isolation Ward." A total of Covid-19 positive patients admitted in the hospital are now 66.

CASO Launched In Srinagar Outskirts

Srinagar: Government Forces Monday launched a cordon-and-search operation in Ahmad Nagar area of Srinagar outskirts. Sources said that combined forces launched a cordon-and-search operation Ahmad Nagar Bachapora area. The sudden operation launched in the area surprised people. Sources said the operation was launched following the inputs about the movement of suspected militants in the area. A police official said that random searches were conducted in some houses. He added that search operation concluded peacefully.

Fake Anti-Graft Body ACB Initiates Legal Action

SRINAGAR: The Anti Corruption Bureau on Wednesday initiated a legal action against the fake Facebook post.

"A Facebook post by Muzamil Majeed Bhat regarding Anti Corruption Foundation of India is circulating on social media. The post reads as under, 'On demand of bribe by any State or Central Government employee, then you should complaint to the Anti Corruption Foundation of India District Pulwama with proof in writing above the affidavit of Rs. 10 and send that complaint to us...'Contact-9682171517," a statement said.

"Anti Corruption Bureau is already established for receiving complaints relating to corruption in UT of J&K. Anti Corruption Bureau already has an official WhatsApp No. 94196-78060, Facebook account-J&K Anti Corruption Bureau, Twitter account - J&K Anti Corruption Bureau @JKACB and Helpline No.s. a. Jammu - 0191-2542530 b. Kashmir-0194-2430792 and Toll-free No.18001807152. All these

PAGE 1 Anchor Hoping Against Hope: Half Widows Of Kashmir In Lockdown

Arshi Qureshi

BEFORE abrogation of Article 370 last summer, Habla Begum as a half widow of Kashmir used to get Rs 1,000 monthly assistance from some welfare body. But after the political and pandemic lockdowns were enforced in the valley, she has been struggling to survive despite some Samaritans actively managing destitution in the strife-stricken society.

"Last summer's crisis followed by coronavirus made it tough for us," Habla Begum, sounding sullen, said. "My son is an electrician. He doesn't get work regularly. We're struggling to manage amidst this lockdown."

There're many social welfare

bodies that help these women financially but due to the successive lockdowns in Kashmir, many of them aren't getting the much-needed support.

As the home crisis is deepening for these struggle-hardened half widows of Kashmir today, their troubled past is only returning to haunt them behind the gloomy walls of their home.

"There were times," Habla's daughter, Muskaan, recalled her family's 22 years of unending agony, "when I used to stay hungry at home and wait for my mother the entire day to come back and feed and cuddle me, while she ran pillar to post in search of my father."

Daughter of a disappeared man from Sopore, Muskaan is a college student and one of those thou-



sands of children who were never fortunate enough to meet their father. Her mother is one of the

2,000-2,500 "half widows" in the conflict-torn region.

Half widows are the women

whose husbands disappeared but are not declared dead. These men have disappeared but their muffled cries are still heard in every household of Kashmir.

Muskaan was six-months old when her father Abdul Majeed Gurro, a plywood businessman, was picked up from his house.

"On the morning of 22 December 1998," Muskaan's mother, in broken Urdu, recalled, "I was away with my elder daughter to buy some medicines. When I returned home, my mother informed me that the army took away my husband for some inquiry at around noon, and promised to send him back by 4:00 in the evening."

She waited for him till 5:00 pm that day, before plunging into the never-ending search campaign

for her better half. Even after losing her youth, possessions and comfort, she's still waiting for his homecoming.

Muskaan helped her mother as she struggled to explain the exact chronicle of the ill-fated day that haunts them even after twenty-two years. The memories of that fateful day in 1998 are still fresh in Habla's mind.

"Three to four uniformed personnel had come to our house and asked my father to accompany them to the police station," Muskaan translated for her mother. "When he asked for the reason, those men blindfolded him and took my father to an undisclosed place in their van."

Habla searched for her husband for years, running from

»PAGE 02

COVID-19 Claims 13 More; J&K Toll 206

Agencies

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir Wednesday recorded 13 more deaths due to the COVID-19, in a single day, taking the number of total fatalities to 208.

Eleven patients died at SKIMS Soura while one each died at GMC Anantnag and SMHS Srinagar, according to officials.

The patients who died at SKIMS included a 60-year-old man from Saida Kadal Srinagar, a 70-year-old man from Illahi Bagh Srinagar, a 52-year-old man from Lal Bazar Srinagar, 60-year old female from Buchpora Srinagar, a 77-year-old man from New Colony Pulwama, a 60-year-old woman from Sopore, an 85-year-old man from Ladoora, a 60-year-old man from Hathlango Sopore, 70-year-old patient from Rathuna, Budgam while a 60-year-old man from Khrewan, Malpora died at GMC Anantnag and 62-year-old male died at SMHS Srinagar.

Dr G H Yattoo, Nodal Officer for Covid-19 at SKIMS said that a 60-year-old man

»PAGE 02



SKIMS Cancels Vacations, Sanctioned Leaves

In view of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the authorities in Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) on Wednesday said that the institute has cancelled summer vacations as well as leaves sanctioned to the staff

»P-02

Govt Appeals Public To Wear Masks

The government on Wednesday said that recent studies have shown that use of masks has been the most effective way to reduce person-to-person spread of coronavirus. Advisor to Lieutenant Governor, Baseer Ahmad Khan appealed to people asking them to wear masks in

»P-02

Defence Minister, Army Chief To Visit Ladakh Again

NEW DELHI: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will visit Ladakh on Friday to take stock of the country's military preparedness and review the overall situation, government sources said on Wednesday, as India and China move to finalise a framework for a complete disengagement at friction points on their border.

Mr Singh will be accompanied by Chief of Army Staff Gen MM Naravane and it will be his first visit to Ladakh after the stand-off between the armies of India and China on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) began on May 5.

Singh's trip comes days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise visit to Ladakh

»P-02

Jailing Kashmir Bar Chief After Expiry Of PSA Order:SC Seeks Explanation

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court Wednesday asked the Jammu and Kashmir administration to explain the basis for detaining high court's bar leader Mian Abdul Qayoom who has challenged his detention under Public Safety Act (PSA) since August 7 last year.

The top court asked it to take into consideration various aspects including Qayoom's age, expiry of detention period and the COVID-19 pandemic.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Indu Malhotra posted the matter for July 23 after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for J-K, said that he needs 10 days time to consider various aspects.



We want to know on what basis you (J-K administration) would like to detain him in Delhi's Tihar Jail. Moreover, his detention as per order has already expired," the bench said.

At the outset, Mehta said he had not received the copy of the plea and sought time to reply to it. Senior advocate Dushyant

»PAGE 02

Police Rescues Abducted BJP Worker

Omar Raises Questions

BARAMULLA: Police On Wednesday said it "rescued" BJP's Vice President Municipal Committee Watergam Baramulla, Meraaj Din Malla who was allegedly abducted by some unknown persons in the north Kashmir district.

"The person has been rescued by police," Inspector General of Police Vijay Kumar said. However, he declined to divulge further details. A police official said that details would be revealed after Malla's interrogation.

Earlier a senior police officer said that Malla was bundled into a Santro vehicle by the 'unknown persons' while he was walking on a road to meet his friend.

»P-02

HC Asks SASB To Urgently Decide On Amarnath Yatra

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir High Court on Wednesday asked Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) to take an urgent decision on holding the annual pilgrimage to the cave shrine, located in the higher reaches of South Kashmir, keeping in mind the threat of COVID-19.

A 23-page order issued by a division bench comprising Chief Justice Gita Mittal and Justice Sanjay Dhar directed the SASB to convey their decision to amicus curiae Monika Kohli and the petitioner.

The court directed the Jammu and Kashmir administration to place the July 10 status report on holding Amarnath Yatra this year and other relevant material before

the SASB for its consideration.

"The Shri Amarnath Shrine Board and the respondents (JK government) shall urgently take all decisions regarding the yatra while complying with the order of the Supreme Court" of July 13 and the several concerns pointed out by the amicus curiae and the petitioner before the court, it said.

Asking them to take the decision, the court also directed that while taking a final call they should ensure compliance of all healthcare protocols, Standard Operating Protocols notified by the Centre as well as by the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, guided by the principles laid down by the apex court that the right to health of every person has to be placed at the highest

»PAGE 02

JK Bank Jumps To 4Th Place In Digital Transactions

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: J&K Bank has scaled to number four position among all the banks in India in achieving targets in digital payment transactions up to July 14 of the current financial year surpassing many other top players in the market. The bank has shown strong digital footprints in continuation of its mission towards helping the 'Digital India' mission.

The data available from 'Digital India Dashboard' platform of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India (GoI) reveals that the bank has captured 1.83 crore digital payment transactions in the first quarter of the current financial year.

Commenting on this feat, J&K Bank Chairman and Managing Di-



rector, Rajesh Kumar Chhibber said, "In line with our envisioned path and expected objectives, we are in sync with the larger national vision of digital transformation as the initiatives taken in the direction of digitalization have started to give perceptible results."

Notably, the bank has put in place robust technological infrastructure and digital banking platform which offers mobile banking facilities through Mpay, e-Banking, Unified Payment Interface (UPI),

»PAGE 02

UN Body Concerned Over Criminal Proceedings Against Kashmiri Journalists

KO Web Desk

SRINAGAR: The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has made public its letter to the Government of India, voicing "strong concern at the criminal proceedings and investigations initiated" against the four Kashmiri journalists.

David Kaye, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion, in a detailed letter has expressed concern over the police action against four Kashmiri journalists Naseer Ganai, Gowhar Geelani, Peerzada Ashiq and Mas-



rat Zehra. The letter condemns the alleged harassment meted out to these journalists.

Leigh Toomey, Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and Mark Lawlor, Special

Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, are the two other signatories to the letter.

According to the letter there is a "pattern of silencing independent reporting on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir through the threat of criminal sanction." The letter further says that "In this regard, we recall that the penalisation of a journalist solely for being critical of the government or the political social system espoused by the government is incompatible with the State's obligation under international human rights law."

The UN Special Rapporteurs have written their letter

»PAGE 02

JAMMU: The Government on Wednesday informed that 493 new positive cases of novel Corona virus (COVID-19), 57 from Jammu division and 436 from Kashmir division, have been reported today thus taking the total number of positive cases in Jammu and Kashmir to 11666. Also 11 COVID-19 deaths have been reported from Kashmir Division.

Moreover, 114 more COVID-19 patients have recovered and discharged from various hospitals, 14 from Jammu Division and 100 from Kashmir Division.

According to the daily Media Bulletin on novel Corona virus (Covid-19), out of 11666 positive cases, 5123 are Active Positive, 6337 have recovered and 206

COVID-19: J&K Reports 493 New Positive Cases

have died; 18 in Jammu division and 188 in Kashmir division.

The Bulletin further said that out of 474149 test results available, 462483 samples have been tested as negative till July 15, 2020.

Additionally, till date 320657 travelers and persons in contact with suspected cases have been enlisted for surveillance which included 37940 persons in home quarantine including facilities operated by government, 13 in Hospital Quarantine, 5123 in hospital isolation and 45704 under home surveillance. Besides, 231671 persons have completed

their surveillance period.

Providing district-wise break-up, the Bulletin said that Bandipora has 419 positive cases (including 18 cases reported today) with 120 Active Positive, 296 recovered (including 01 case recovered today) and 03 deaths; Srinagar has 2086 positive cases (including 153 cases reported today) with 1488 Active Positive, 549 recovered (including 19 cases reported today), 49 deaths; Anantnag district has 933 positive cases (including 72 cases reported today), with 280 Active Positive, 638 recovered (including 41 cases

recovered today), 15 deaths; Baramulla has 1381 positive cases (including 44 cases reported today) with 766 Active Positive, 572 recovered, 43 deaths; Shopian has 930 positive cases (including 03 cases reported today) with 206 Active Positive, 707 recovered (including 08 cases recovered today) and 17 deaths; Kupwara has 815 positive cases (including 10 cases reported today) with 282 Active Positive, 522 recovered (including 16 cases recovered today) and 11 deaths; Budgam has 628 positive cases (including 42 cases reported today) with 282 Active

Positive and 331 recovered cases (including 11 cases reported today) and 15 deaths; Ganderbal has 211 positive cases (including 06 cases reported today) with 107 active positive cases and 100 recoveries and 04 deaths; Kulgam has 1076 positive cases (including 47 cases reported today), with 374 Active Positive and 679 recoveries (including 01 case recovered today) and 23 deaths and Pulwama reported 742 positive cases (including 41 cases reported today) with 359 active positive cases and 375 recovered (including 03 cases recovered today)

and 08 deaths. Similarly, Jammu has 539 positive cases (including 15 cases reported today) with 184 active positive cases and 344 recoveries and 11 deaths; Udhampur has 304 positive cases (including 01 case reported today) with 24 active positive cases, 279 recovered (including 03 cases recovered today) and 01 death; Samba has 293 positive cases (including 24 cases reported today) with 148 Active Positive and 144 recoveries and 01 death; Rajouri has 288 positive cases (including 03 cases reported today) with 189 active positive cases and 98 recovered (includ-

ing 05 cases recovered today) and 01 death; Kathua has 326 positive cases with 96 Active positive and 229 recovered and 01 death; Kishtwar has 58 positive cases (including 03 cases reported today) with 31 active positive cases and 27 recovered; Ramban has 277 positive cases (including 06 cases reported today) with 68 active positive and 209 recoveries; Reasi has 60 positive cases with 21 active positive and 39 recovered; Poonch has 148 positive cases (including 01 case reported today) with 26 active positive and 121 recoveries and 01 death while Doda has 152 positive cases (including 04 cases reported today) with 72 active positive cases and 78 recoveries (including 06 cases recovered today) and 02 deaths.

Hoping Against Hope: Half...

police stations to the district court but her pleas went unheard.

"I begged at the doors of every authority promising me his return, but till date he's yet to come back home," said Habla in a bland tone.

After militancy erupted in Kashmir in 1989, thousands were killed and disappeared in the region. Kashmir has been classified as the world's most militarised zone. Many commentators call the conflict zone as a chamber of secrets, buried with mysteries and tears of women whose sons, husbands and brothers have vanished without a trace.

"My five children would wait for me the entire day, while I went out in search of my husband," Habla continued to voice her anguish.

"On most days, I would return at night. We've spent days without eating as my husband was the only earning member of our family."

Habla like many other half-widows is not educated enough. She has spent most of her life running from one jail to another trying to find answers for which she has only received false hopes as a consolation. She eventually became the sole bread-earner with sudden responsibilities of bringing up her children.

After her father's disappearance, Muskaan's uncle sold off their plywood machine to help Habla financially. One by one they started selling off all the other items of their house.

Habla's son, now 26, had to leave his studies and work in warehouses to help his mother.

But all these years, Habla has gone through a lot of struggles. She did everything she could to help her kids. She got her elder daughters married and continued financing Muskaan's studies. She doesn't want Muskaan to face difficulties like she has been facing due to lack of education.

On her part, Muskaan didn't know about her father's fate until she was 15. Whenever she asked about his whereabouts, her mother would tell her that Abdul is working somewhere outside Kashmir. "I lived with this false belief for a long time," the daughter said.

But Habla's guarded secret eventually ended when her daughter returned tearful from her school one day. "Tumhaare Abbu ka intakaal hogaya hai, woh kabhi nahi aeyenge wapas (Your father won't come back. He has died)," she was told by her friend.

That day, heartbroken Muskaan demanded answers from her mother.

Habla then narrated the entire unfortunate incident, and said that as a mother, she was just trying to protect her.

Muskaan doesn't even remember her father. Had she been told the truth, her mother said, she would've lived in trauma like thousands of other children in Kashmir.

But now, the sensible daughter wants to be her mother's support. Years of search for her husband has made Habla physically weak, yet she's the strongest woman Muskaan has ever seen in her life.

Habla hasn't still given up on her fight. With a lump in her throat, she hoped that her Abdul will return to her someday.

When I asked her why she didn't remarry, she instantly responded, "I got many proposals after my husband went missing, but I rejected each one of them. I was concerned whether my next husband would accept my children or not."

Many of these half-widows do not remarry in the hope that their husband will return someday.

"Inshallah," Muskaan said, her voice quivering with excitement, "one day I'll be able to see my father's face and cook for him."

According to rights bodies, 8,000-10,000 Kashmiris have been subjected to enforced disappearance in Kashmir since 1989. Among them is Hafeeza Begum's Ghulam Nabi.

Before becoming a battered widow, Hafeeza was a 20-year-old shy bride, when her husband disappeared in Punjab during a trade trip.

Years of struggle has taken a toll on her. To feed her children, she kept working in fields and financed her daughter Tabassum's education. In lockdown, the family today is silently suffering.

Earlier, some NGOs would help Hafeeza's family financially, but since last Eid, her family hasn't received any help.

"This time I took a loan from a neighbour to submit my MA fees," said 27-year-old Tabassum. "Ammi remains ill most of the times. I don't know what has happened to her. She's mostly tired now."

Behind her falling health is her years of agonized search and wait for her husband Ghulam Nabi Baba, a cloth merchant from Kupwara.

In November 1992, he disappeared in Punjab. And later, the family was told he died in a "cross-firing".

Even Kupwara police informed Hafeeza about Ghulam Nabi's death after a few days of the dreadful incident.

At that time Hafeeza was pregnant with Tabassum. She ran from one police station to another, filed an FIR, but all in vain. Hafeeza waited for her husband's body but never received it.

All these years, however, she hoped that maybe, one day, her husband will return and see his younger daughter's face.

With time as Tabassum learned about her father from her relatives, her mother fought hardships, battled depression and yet never gave up her hope. Like others in her conflict-torn tribe, she mostly found herself alone in her struggle. Her agony, however, doesn't end there.

Since half widows can't prove the death of their husband, they remain ineligible for widow welfare pension scheme. They face enormous financial difficulties, as they're ineligible for ration cards and the bank accounts of their husbands. Disappearance of their husbands marginalised their economic status even more.

"Ammi is very strong, she never gave up on Abbu, she still awaits his return," Tabassum continued. "I'm waiting for the day my father will return, that will make me the happiest person on this earth. I've never seen him. I don't even know how he looks. Hum har din khuda se dua karte hai ki hamari musibat khatam hojaye (We beseech Allah every day to end our agony)."

But as there're often no records of such cases, many half widows of Kashmir grapple with a host of issues. Over the year, however, Kashmiri women have overcome the trauma and risen like a phoenix — like Nagina Begum.

Nagina's son Firdous was 7 when his life was disrupted after his father was subjected to enforced disappearance in 2006. His father was a special police officer (SPO) in Kashmir police.

14 years ago, Nagina's husband got a call from some army officers, she said. He followed the order and left home.

That was the last time Nagina saw her husband. After that, she searched for him everywhere — from the DC office to army authorities but of no avail.

"Army ke log bolte thhe ki police ke paas jao, aur police ke log bolte thhe ki army ke paas jao (Army men would ask me to go

and enquire about your husband from police and police would ask me to check with army)," recalled Nagina.

When his father disappeared, Firdous was studying in an army school and staying in the boarding facility. For a week, no-body informed him about his father's disappearance.

"I never imagined that our happy life would suddenly come to an end," Firdous said. "We slowly lost everything."

From Gulmarg, they shifted to Latifabbad, a small village near Baramulla.

Nagina would spend her day and night in search for her husband and simultaneously look after her six children. She didn't lose her hope and will. She fought in court and kept on banging the doors of authorities and asked for justice.

"I still believe my father will return," Firdous said. "I was really young when I last saw him." And soon he had to leave his school to support his family.

Firdous sometimes works at an apple orchard or in warehouses. The perks they used to enjoy were snatched from them in one swipe.

"My mother doesn't get any pension," he said. "So I would mostly work at an orchard, but due to the pandemic lockdown, the business has come to a halt which has affected us tremendously. Now, my uncle helps us at times."

Today, even as lockdowns are escalating trouble for these conflict-torn families of Kashmir, their resolve for the reunion remains their lasting hope.

"I still look through my window in hope that someday I might catch a glimpse of my loved one," Nagina concluded.

COVID-19 Claims 13 More;...

from Saida Kadal, Srinagar who was admitted on July 14 died at SKIMS at 8:30 am.

"He was tested positive after his death and was suffering from multiple ailments," he said.

He said that 60-year-old male from Buchpora Srinagar who was admitted on 08 July died at SKIMS at 4 pm. "Patient was suffering from bilateral pneumonia and other ailments," Dr Yattoo said.

Prof Farooq Jan, Medical Superintendent at SKIMS said that a 70-year-old man from Illahi Bagh, Srinagar who was admitted on July 05 died in infectious disease block at midnight.

"Patient was suffering from hypertension, bilateral pneumonia, shock and MODS," he said.

Prof Jan said that a 77-year-old man from new colony, Pulwama who was admitted on July 11, died at 12:30 am. He said the patient was suffering from Community Acquired Pneumonia.

Dr Jan added that a 52-year-old man from Lal Bazar, Srinagar who was admitted on 13 July died at 2:00 am. "Patient was suffering from bilateral pneumonia with ADRS," he said.

He added that a 60-year-old woman from Sopore who was admitted on July 13 as a case of Subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH) died at 4 am.

Prof Jan further added that an 85-year-old male from Ladoora, Baramulla who was shifted from GMC Baramulla to SKIMS for ventilator support died at SKIMS at 6:30 am.

"Patient was suffering from Cardiovascular disease, Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and bilateral pneumonia," he said.

He further added that a 60-year-old man from Hathlango, Sopore who was admitted on 05 July died at 7 am. "Patient was suffering from hypertension, hypothyroid, bilateral pneumonia and other ailments," he said.

Officials from Budgam said that a 70-year-old patient from Rathsuna Budgam was tested positive after death.

According to Dr Majid Mehrab, Medical Superintendent at GMC Anantnag a 65-year-old male from Khrewan village of southern Kashmir who was admitted on 04 July died last night.

Dr Nazir Ahmad Choudary, Medical Superintendent at SMHS said that a 62 year old male from Baramulla who was admitted on 09 July died at SMHS on Wednesday. Patient was suffering from bilateral pneumonia, diabetes and other ailments, he said. With 11 more deaths, the toll in J&K has reached to 206 including of which 188 are from Kashmir division and 18 from Jammu division. With inputs from KNO

SKIMS Cancels Vacations,...

members.

"It is communicated to all faculty and staff members of the SKIMS that in view of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all leaves of any kind sanctioned to the staff members except leave sanctioned on medical grounds/maternity leave shall stand cancelled," a SKIMS statement said.

It added that the summer vacation of all departments w.e.f 16.07.2020 to 29.07.2020 (1st half) and 01.08.2020 to 14.08.2020 (2nd half) stand cancelled. "As such it is impressed upon all the faculty and staff members to remain available at their places of positing in their respective departments," it added.

Govt Appeals Public To...

public places and observe social distancing norms.

He said that in view of the recent spike in number of Covid-19 cases across J&K it is obligatory for all irrespective of age, gender and profession to wear masks and religiously follow medical advisories regarding social distancing and sanitization measures that are being issued by the administration from time to time.

Emphasizing the use of masks at all public places, the Advisor said that recent studies have shown that use of masks has been the most effective way to reduce person-to-person spread of coronavirus.

He said that it has been found that people showing laxity in taking preventive measures are falling prey to this pandemic. He appealed to the public to observe social distancing norms and cooperate with the government in checking the spread of coronavirus.

Gag Order For Sharing ...

Mission for as compilation and preparation of the reports." (GNS)

SC Refuses To Entertain Plea...

of the law which says that only domicile of the state shall be eligible for appointment to any post was violative of Article 16 (3) of the Constitution which guarantees equal opportunity in

employment.

The plea further said that the reservations contemplated in Article 16 should not exceed 50 per cent.

In March, the government issued the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (Adaptation of State Laws) Order 2020 which notified changes in the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Decentralization and Recruitment) Act.

Section 5A of the Act stated that Level 4 posts will be reserved for domiciles.

In August last year, parliament abolished Article 370 , which had provided special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and then divided the state into two UTs which were Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

HC Asks SASB To Urgently...

pedestal.

The decision should also address the concerns of health of security personnel, healthcare personnel, priests, pilgrims and of the officials involved in the arrangements and conduct of the yatra besides the residents of the Union Territory.

In the decision making, the board shall ensure consideration of the welfare and support of all people, especially the members of the communities who provide the porterage/ pithoos, palkis; mules and horses and who provide services during the pilgrimage.

Consideration would also need to be accorded to the welfare of the animals (mules, horses, ponies etc.) involved and measures needed for the same, it said.

Police Rescues Abducted ...

The officer said that searches were launched to trace him. Asked whether the alleged abductors were armed, the officer had said: "It is a matter of investigation."

Malla had won unopposed from Marazigund (A and B) wards as a BJP candidate in last Municipal elections which were boycotted by mainstream parties leaving BJP without any rival.

Union Minister and senior BJP leader Jitendra Singh expressed relief on Malla's return. "Relieved to learn that our colleague in #BJPMehrajudin Malla who was abducted in Sopore this morning, is back home safe.While Security forces and @jmuKmrPolice deserve all appreciation,where are the #Kashmir Apologists who lose no time in making unsubstantiated charges against," Singh wrote on Twitter.

BJP leader Ram Madhav also put out a tweet in this regard. "J&K Police say they rescued BJP's Vice President Municipal Committee Watergam Baramulla, Merajudin Malla who was allegedly abducted by some unknown persons in the north Kashmir district," Madhav wrote.

However, former Chief Minister and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah raised a volley of questions after police claimed his rescue.

"Rescued from where? Who abducted him? Was he given personal security & if he was then how was he abducted? How was he rescued without a shot being fired? Did the abductors just dump him & run when the police rescued him? This abduction & rescue raises more questions than answers," he tweeted.

Jailing Kashmir Bar Chief...

Dave, appearing for Qayoom, said the detention order was for a limited period, for around one year.

The bench said that was the reason it has issued notice on the plea during the last date of hearing.

Dave replied that he understands why the Solicitor General was uncomfortable and complained that the present matter was not listed despite specific directions of the court.

Justice Kaul told Mehta that firstly his detention period has expired and secondly his ideology remains the same.

Dave pointed out that Qayoom is 73 years old and should not be kept in Tihar jail.

In the current scenario of COVID-19 would you like to keep this petition pending, the bench told Mehta, who said that Qayoom's ideology remained the same.

The bench said it understands all these issues but sometimes there are compulsions which need to be complied with.

It told Mehta that he should respond by next date considering Qayoom's age, expiry of his detention order and the COVID-19 times.

On June 26, the top court had issued notice to the J-K administration and sought its reply on Qayoom's plea challenging his detention order.

Qayoom has also sought a direction to shift him from Tihar jail here to central jail in Srinagar on medical ground.

He has challenged the May 28 order of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court rejecting his plea against his prolonged illegal detention under the PSA in jails outside the UT.

He said he is a Senior Advocate with more than 40 years' standing at the Bar and has served as President of the J&K High Court Bar Association for many terms, including from 2014 till the present day.

Qayoom said he was detained on the intervening night of August 4th and 5th, 2019, under the provisions of Jammu and Kashmir Code of Criminal Procedure and thereafter, an order of detention under the PSA was passed against him on August 7, 2019.

He said that on August 8 he was taken to Central Jail, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, without any prior notice of intimation, where he was kept in solitary confinement.

He said the high court's May 28 order is ex facie unsustainable in law as it is premised on "stale, irrelevant, remote, vague, imprecise and deficient" grounds of detention.

The impugned judgment and order concluded that most of the grounds in the detention order are somewhat clumsy which implies that the High Court too found them wanting. Placing reliance on the doctrine of severability as enunciated by this Court in Gautam Jain versus Union of India...the High Court then proceeds to uphold the detention order solely on one ground, his appeal said.

He said the high court makes it abundantly clear that the detention order has been upheld solely on one ground — the four FIRs dating back to 2008 and 2010, as enumerated in the detention order.

These FIRs are stale, irrelevant and have no proximate, pertinent or live link to the present, and are thus superfluous and extraneous to the satisfaction required in law qua the tendency or propensity to act in a manner prejudicial to public order. Per-

tinently, even in the said decade old 4 FIRs, the Petitioner was neither arrested, nor any charge sheet ever filed by the police against the Petitioner, he added in his plea.

Qayoom said he had already been detained in 2010 on the basis of the said FIRs under the PSA, and the said detention was subsequently revoked.

Thus, the same FIRs cannot be used to pass another order of detention under the PSA, as held by this Hon'ble Court , his plea said.

Qayoom said he is suffering from serious health ailments and is at a high-risk vulnerability for COVID-19 due to his co-morbid conditions.

The Petitioner has numerous serious medical conditions for which he has been receiving treatment for the last 25 years under the care and supervision of his doctors in Srinagar, Kashmir. The Petitioner is also dependent on his family for ensuring the regular and daily intake of medicines and regular injections, he added.

As an interim prayer, he sought his transfer to Central Jail, Srinagar, during the pendency of the present petition, ensuring that all necessary medical precautions are taken qua COVID-19.

Defence Minister, Army Chief

on July 3 during which he also addressed troops and signalled the country's firmness in dealing with the India-China border row.

The sources said Mr Singh will carry out a comprehensive review of the security situation in the region with Gen Naravane, Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Yogesh Kumar Joshi, Commander of the 14 Corps Lt Gen Harinder Singh and other senior Army officials.

From Ladakh, the defence minister will travel to Srinagar where he will hold a high-level meeting with senior military officials on Saturday to review the situation along the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan, the sources said.

Mr Singh was originally scheduled to visit Ladakh on July 3 but it was deferred.

Indian and Chinese troops were locked in a bitter standoff in multiple locations in eastern Ladakh for over eight weeks since May 5.

The tension escalated manifold after the violent clashes in Galwan Valley in which 20 Indian Army personnel were killed.

However, following a series of diplomatic and military talks, the two sides began a mutual disengagement process on July 6 and withdrew troops from most of the friction points.

On Tuesday, senior commanders of the the two armies held a fourth round of talks during which the Indian delegation conveyed a "very clear" message to the Chinese army that status quo must ante be restored in eastern Ladakh and China will have to follow all mutually agreed protocols for border management to bring back peace and tranquillity along the LAC, government sources said.

During the course of the intense and complex negotiations that lasted nearly 15 hours, the Indian delegation apprised the Chinese Army about the "red lines" and conveyed that the onus was largely on China to improve the overall situation in the region, the sources said.

The key focus of the talks was learnt to be on rolling out the phase two of the disengagement process besides firming up modalities for withdrawal of forces and weapons from the rear bases in a time-bound and verifiable manner, the sources said, adding they were aimed at further de-escalation of the situation at various friction points.

ACB Initiates Legal Action...

details are prominently displayed on the website of Anti Corruption Bureau," it added.

It is to inform any person not to be deceived by such posts. The matter has been referred to Inspector General of Police, Kashmir for taking legal action into such post as per IT Act, the ACB said.

UN Body Concerned Over...

on May 12 this year. Under a UN protocol, the letter is made public only when the concerned country fails to respond within 60 days. "We would appreciate receiving a response within 60 days. Thereafter, this communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting website," the letter reads.

The letter mentions the chronological sequence of all four cases in detail and reminds Government of India that "journalism constitutes a necessary service for any society, as it provides individuals and society as a whole with the necessary information to allow them to develop their own thoughts and to freely draw their own conclusions and opinions (A/HRC/20/17 para 3. A free, uncensored and unhindered press and other media constitutes one of the cornerstones of a democratic society (CCPR/C/GC/34/ para. 13."

The letter also expresses the "lack of regard for the rights" of the four journalists. "We also express concern at the apparent disregard for the prohibition of unlawful and arbitrary interference in the private life of individuals, and the journalistic privilege."

The letter makes a reference to the allegation that Naseer Gana'i's computer and mobile phone was searched without a warrant, and that, in the case of Peerzada Ashiq, that he specifically was requested to reveal the sources of a news item published. It also says that neither Gowhar Geelani nor Masrat Zehra were informed of the charges against them.

The UN Special Rapporteurs also want Gov to "ensure the right to effective remedies, including the investigation violations to the rights of the journalists mentioned in the letter."

JK Bank Jumps To 4Th Place...

Point of Sale (PoS) terminals, credit/debit cards, mobile wallets etc. for increased convenience of customers and greater transactional security.

"It is heartening to note that pursuing an national annual target of 8 crore digital transactions for the financial year 2020-21, the bank is well on track to achieve the said objective", the Chairman and MD added.

Pertinently, to monitor the growth of digital payments, MeitY has developed 'Digidhan Dashboard', a platform for accurate reporting, monitoring and analysis of all digital payments transactions occurring in India.

KASHMIR OBSERVER

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School Fees

In Kashmir, running a school is considered one of the best businesses, something that is risk-proof, come hell or high water. No matter, how long there has been a shutdown or a lockdown, and how much as a consequence economy has been affected, private schools will charge their full fees. It also doesn't matter how many people have lost their livelihoods and how many businesses have been wound up. In 2016, private schools claimed their full fees during the six month long shutdown and also during the many preceding unrests, and they are displaying the same behaviour in the middle of a pandemic.

To be fair to them, Private Schools Association of J&K recently announced fee waiver to the students whose families have been hit financially due to the COVID-19 lockdown. This is first time that the Association has done so and it should be welcomed. The waiver, however, will be offered to the families whose income during the lockdown has either reduced to zero or has been drastically hit. The Association hasn't made it clear how much loss of income will it consider enough for the student to get fee waiver or a concession. While on its face it seems a good step, it isn't. Truth is other than government employees, the incomes of all others have been badly hit. It is a reality that the Valley has been under a lockdown for the past twelve months that has hit the businesses hard, leaving lakhs of people unemployed. And there is nothing that can compensate their losses.

It is nobody's case that private schools shouldn't get their fees. They depend on the fees to run their affairs and pay their staff. But it is also true that other than a brief period of a fortnight or so, the schools have been shut. And in this period they have saved on all the expenditures other than the salary of their staff, which some reports have pointed out has often been delayed or reduced. The teachers have delivered online classes and which too haven't been up to the mark considering the lingering curbs on the internet and the lack of the training of their staff to deliver online lessons. So, the schools can't charge a full tuition fees, let alone transportation fees for a service they have largely been unable to offer over the past year. Or resort to blackmail to extract it like some elite schools are doing. They are holding online exams and not allowing some students to appear unless their parents pay up.

True, it is not the fault of the schools for not being able to teach, but similarly it is not the fault of the hundreds of other businesses who have suffered. And if they have taken their losses on the chin, so should private schools. In Tamil Nadu, the state government has asked the private schools to just charge 70 percent of the tuition fees. It is time the local administration passes a similar order here.

OTHER OPINION

Sachin Autopilot

In 2018, after the Congress won underwhelmingly in Rajasthan, scraping past the halfway mark in a state where anti-incumbency sentiment was strong against the BJP's VasundharaRaje government, Ashok Gehlot was made chief minister and Sachin Pilot his deputy. That was clearly not the end of the leadership tussle in the Congress. It was, in fact, only the beginning of a new phase of the attrition within. For that persistent unease in one of the few states where the Congress still has a government, both Gehlot and Pilot are to blame — Gehlot more, given that as the head of government, the buck stops with him. But Pilot isn't the innocent victim done in by a wily superior. If the No. 2 job, as it was defined, was too small for him, he should not have taken it. Sulking about the CM when you are his deputy in the government is neither good politics nor smart governance. But this time, Gehlot must take responsibility for the extraordinary sequence of events — a bizarre notice issued to Pilot, among others, by the Rajasthan Police's Special Operation Group, to record their statements in connection with the arrest of two BJP leaders allegedly conspiring to topple the Congress government. After that, an all-too-familiar political brinkmanship has played out in a Congress government still to turn two years old — MLAs openly divided into camps, being ferried in buses with tinted windows into fortress-like resorts. All this, even as the other staple of an Opposition government in crisis in recent times — income tax raids — takes place, apparently coincidentally.

But if Gehlot must own the larger share of the blame for the Congress unravelling in Jaipur, it is the party high command that is most answerable. If it knew of the patchy peace between the warring CM and his deputy — and how could it not — the question is: What did it do to resolve the resentments? What mechanisms did it put in place to prevent a breakdown like this one? There is no evidence that either Sonia Gandhi or Rahul Gandhi addressed themselves to the task in Rajasthan with any urgency. Like much else in the Congress, the CM vs Deputy CM conflict in Jaipur was left unattended, and allowed to fester and grow. The organisational listlessness that has marked the Congress ever since the Modi BJP laid it low has contributed to the implosion in Rajasthan — just as it led to the collapse, earlier, of the Kamal Nath government in Madhya Pradesh after the exit of JyotiradityaScindia and subsequent cross-over to the BJP. The irresoluteness at the centre of the party, if it continues, could well stoke other simmering factional resentments in other state units, jeopardising more Congress governments.

Whichever way the Gehlot vs Pilot face-off goes, this much is clear: The Congress needs to get a grip on itself and that process must start with filling the apparent leadership vacuum at its centre. It cannot keep deferring important decisions indefinitely. This is a vital necessity for the Congress, if it wishes to survive. It is also necessary for the polity to have a coherent and healthy national party of the Opposition

Indian Express

Why Lockdown?

The alarmists including a group of doctors are creating more panic in Kashmir for reasons known to them alone and in turn further crushing the Valley's economy already shut for one year

Let us face two simple facts: One, the novel Coronavirus is an irrefutable reality. It is no conspiracy theory. It is a no brainer either that the threat posed by the tiny virus is real. Two, the parallels that are being drawn between Kashmir and Wuhan are erroneous, misleading and alarmist.

In Maharashtra alone, the number of positive Coronavirus cases is touching the 300,000-mark with nearly 11,000 deaths. In contrast, the number of those infected due to the virus in Jammu and Kashmir is under 11,000, of which over 6,000 individuals have already recovered. The recovery rate is fast. And it should have been packaged as a good piece of news to avoid psychological burden on the hearts and minds of the people. Thankfully, the death toll also is below 200. But the alarmists are creating more panic in Kashmir for reasons known to them alone.

Most of those supportive of Lockdown 2.0 speak from the point of privilege. No matter what, the government employees will receive their monthly salaries. What about the fruit vendors, daily wagers, transporters, masons, carpenters, painters, salespersons, shopkeepers and others who have to go to work to put the food on the table?

The focus should have been on creating more awareness with regards to preventive measures like wearing masks, strictly following physical distancing norms, maintaining cough etiquette and washing hands regularly with soap or a hand sanitizer. In Kashmir, the virus is being treated as a law-and-order problem. All the blame is squarely put on the local population when the bank employees, doctors, members of the police department and paramilitary forces are infected in huge numbers.

Why was an order issued by the J&K administration to force all the government employees to report to their offices in full strength? Why is the focus not on the WFH (Work from Home) culture to avoid overcrowding at the offices? Why hasn't the rotation roster policy been adopted? Why can't only 25 per cent staff be present in all important offices and banks on a policy of rotation? How are the people responsible for the mess created by a 'chosen' few?

Why is it that the J&K administration on July 8 decided to throw open parks and gardens for the public and then in a volte face on July 12 issued another order to re-impose lockdown and severe restrictions in many "containment zones"? Had the tiny virus gone on vacation on July 8 and it resumed its duties on July 12? Why is critical thinking being criminalised in Kashmir?

In another bizarre move, the J&K administration issued yet another order to allow tourist activities in the region from July 14 besides giving a go-ahead to the holy Amarnath pilgrimage as a fortnightly affair while limiting the number to 500 pilgrims for a single day. The message telegraphed is that the virus somehow differentiates between the visiting tourists/ pilgrims and



the native population. Does the virus become hyperactive when it comes to dealing with the local population and goes into hibernation mode with respect to the visitors and pilgrims? Why can't these questions be asked? Has the critical thinking in Kashmir been quarantined or put in isolation? Or, may be, declared a "containment zone"?

What is also intriguing is that a few (not all) doctors refuse to apply their independent mind or critical thinking to question the weird orders. Instead, a few become mouthpieces of the administration. It is understood that in government service they have certain limitations. But why lend support to stupidity? Silence is also an option.

If the virus or the spike in the COVID19 infection curve is the reason, it is absolutely fine and justified to place a blanket ban on all social, religious and political gatherings in J&K. Obviously, it is for the betterment of the region and its people. By avoiding crowded and packed places the community transmission of the deadly virus can be stopped. Many precious lives can be saved. There are no two opinions about it.

But how is it justified to allow a pilgrimage of one community and ban all sorts of gatherings of another community? How is it just to force the natives indoors while leaving the field open for visiting tourists and pilgrims?

It is precisely because of such inherent contradictions that many people in Kashmir become sceptical of the administration's moves. That is why many conspiracy theories and speculations fly thick and fast in all directions. That is why many in Kashmir see political and other possible ulterior motives behind the weird orders issued in haste.

The influential trade body Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industries (KCCI) has in its detailed preliminary report as-

sessed the colossal losses to local economy and businesses in the Kashmir Valley since last August when the restive region lost its semi-autonomous status and statehood in a unilateral and undemocratic decision. Going by their report which estimated the loss of INR 18,000 Crore to Kashmir economy between August and November, the loss could have exceeded INR 55,000 crore by now.

Several business houses in Kashmir are on the verge of a collapse. Young entrepreneurs have lost their savings and investments. Since the 2008 summer uprising the Kashmir economy has been under tremendous stress. The shopkeepers, transporters, tourism players and those associated with hospitality and IT-sectors have been at the receiving end. Prolonged shutdowns, curfews, internet blockades in 2008-09-10-16-19-20 and disturbances caused due to the devastating floods of 2014 have not given a breathing space to the economy.

Kashmir's traders, vendors, daily wagers, hoteliers, shikarawallahs, ponywallahs, houseboat owners, salespersons, transporters and others have suffered losses since August of last year. Most of them stand crushed because of the two lockdowns of different nature. The first one related to the August 5 decision and the second one due to the pandemic.

Most of those supportive of Lockdown 2.0 speak from the point of privilege. No matter what, the government employees will receive their monthly salaries. What about the fruit vendors, daily wagers, transporters, masons, carpenters, painters, salespersons, shopkeepers and others who have to go to work to put the food on the table? Should they be left to die of poverty before the coronavirus gets them?

In such a scenario the decision to reintroduce restrictions and re-impose lockdown is ludicrous.



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All letters intended for publication must include the writer's name and address, even if a pseudonym is used. Letters are edited as clarity, space and accuracy of expression require. Our publishing a letter does not mean we agree with everything or even anything in it. -EDITOR

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LalKoul: The lost treasure

LalKoul is a canal that flows from Bumhama through Drugmulla, Shalpora, Keegam and many other villages. There was a time when this canal was an important source of irrigation for thousands of kanals of paddy fields. During summertime, children would bathe in the canal to relieve themselves from the heat. Women used to frequent the LalKoul. It provided the crucial resource of water.

When we were children, the LalKoul was full of crystal clear water. The human settlements around the water drank from it.

But since the past several years, communities nearby have witnessed the LalKoul undergoing tremendous change and a steep decline in the quality of its water. Even the reduced flow is strikingly visible to the ones acquainted with its past glory.

As changes in climatic conditions continue to surprise old-timers, the growing temperatures in the valley have caused the water of the canal to evaporate, affecting water levels and on the contrary, resulting in the formation of marshy margins that create

spaces filled with floating algae and other weeds.

The new construction projects along the banks of the LalKoul is squeezing it further.

In addition to that, the human settlements on the periphery of the canal ironically cause the most damage to the natural body. Sewage belonging to these settlements is discharged into the canal directly. Mixed solid waste including vegetable scraps, polythene bags, papers, etc. is dumped into it. A lot of public latrines, which are frequented by locals, have been built along the banks of the canal.

The water which was once sweet and pure, is now poisonous and choked with plastic dump. Commuters deal with bad odour and dirt while walking along the bank of the LalKoul.

The garbage on its edges has become the centre for the development of germs and diseases. A lot of stray dogs roam around these spots for food and carry the infectants with them to the villages.

Owing the contamination in the water body, farmers are not able to irrigate their paddy fields. This is also

resulting in a lot of agrarian and economic losses.

Albeit the people of the land are facing many problems, they are completely oblivious to the rot in their backyard. The LalKoul is in a pathetic condition and it is extremely urgent that the irrigation department and the civic administration find a joint solution to save the canal from dying. It is the responsibility of the irrigation department but it is sad that the concerned authority is lax in initiating steps for its proper and rightful maintenance. There are some rumours in the villages that the irrigation department wants the civic administration to take over the maintenance of the canal as it flows through more than one village.

Even though it is expected of the people to properly dispose of their waste and avoid using the canal as their personal dumpyard, the authorities need to be pulled up for forcing the commoners to treat the LalKoul as the only space of dumping. There are hardly any dustbins around the area and the concept of scientific waste management is non-existent. The civic body

has done very little to nothing for installing dustbins along the crossroads.

The villagers must also be cognizant about the God gifted treasure they have had the privilege to enjoy and share. The communities need to come together to preserve and protect their canal from further deterioration and slowly restore its original majesty.

The civic administration needs to fulfil its basic duty by installing dustbins every 200 metres along the flow of the canal.

Every individual in the community should help in minimizing pollution by practising waste management at their homes.

The old glory of the canal can never be retrieved but we suggest that the restoration work be handed over to an independent agency which has the complete knowledge of water bodies and their ecology. The work must be allowed to progress without political interference.

Aamir Altaf

Nisar Wani

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We All Need A Little Magic In Our Lives

Who could fail to fall in love with a life filled with magic?

FEBY IMTHIAS

Children are almost always pleasant and in their tiny worlds, virtually anything is possible. They play to the end of their strength and fall asleep suddenly amid their enjoyment and merrymaking. Their days are always well spent. I believe there is magic in babies till they turn 4 or 5.

Summer is here. It is the balm of the year. It is a time of young people and June roses. It creates feelings of positivity and brightness as summer sets in strongly. The breeze has the aroma of warm and delicious butterscotch cake baking in the oven.

Walking in the park asks for a renewed bout of energy as the summer heat conceals you in its cover. The golden hue of the sun kissing the steely face of skyscrapers renders a divine glow to the surroundings every morning. The magic of life unfolds in the form of a bright fiery red sunrise early on.

Today morning, my glasses took a deep dive from the dressing table to the ice like floor and decided to end its eventful life from the edge of my nose.

I believe there is magic in babies till they turn 4 or 5. Little elves enter their tiny brains and lace every activity with sparkles of magic dust that they see goodness and delight in everything. That magic is named innocence

I was at the mercy of my spare glasses which did not have the rosy pink tint of my erstwhile glasses. My 13-year-old skipped around my work desk, placed a peck on my nose that had the steely spare grey glasses, and said, “Mumma, actually this glass suits you better!”

There is magic in little pecks from little girls who build fairy villages on their study table and imagine nonexistent slides on the wings of a rainbow splashed on blue skies. Sometimes love is all the magic that you ever need.

The mystical elixir of youth

I have a short name. I talk too fast and far too willingly. People automatically see the childish side. Bluntness has been my second nature. I keep reminding them that I am on the wrong side of age and laugh heartily at their quizzical stares.

They dismiss me as if I am a minor seeking to grab attention by either laughing a little longer or talking too much. Every day should be saturated with smiles and laughter. It’s truly said that a smile is a curve that sets everything straight. People who smile a lot somehow magically look younger.

Laughter is indeed the world’s best medicine. There is nothing called laughing too much. In a school in a remote village, the authorities implemented a rule that everyone should wear a smile to school and it should start with the teachers.

It was a new identity card. In any case, for most of us school is a memory that never fails to make us



smile. And then the principal must have believed, ‘Why wait till the children leave school after grad, let them get their happy places in the present!’

Kudos to a principal, who did not see laughter as a sign of mischief and disorder. A simple, hearty laugh must be the magical oil for childlike mirth, albeit now with a mask in order. But laugh, all you can!

A tiny slice of happiness

Children are almost always pleasant and in their tiny worlds, virtually anything is possible. They play to the end of their strength and fall asleep suddenly amid their enjoyment and merrymaking. Their days are always well spent.

I believe there is magic in babies till they turn 4 or 5. Little elves enter their tiny brains and lace every activity with sparkles of magic dust that they see goodness and delight in everything. That magic is named innocence.

Long back, I read the story of a magic bus in a digest magazine. In an overbooked crowded overnight bus, people who had reserved seats stood up after 2 hours and offered their seats to give the weary standing passengers a gentle respite.

One gentle soul started the kind gesture and soon it spread like a chain reaction. Before long every stand-

ing passenger got a chance to rest their fatigued feet for a while.

The bus suddenly transformed into a lit cuboid on wheels and filled their hearts with the light of shared camaraderie. Sometimes kindness was all the magic that ever was.

A few days back a Facebook post asked, “Name a trait of your most favourite person.” ‘Understanding without words’ was a desired answer.

Life would be a gift if such people existed in your life. It could be your partner, parent, sibling, child, or best friend. Think of the innumerable times you failed miserably while trying to explain yourself in a misunderstanding. It brings me straight back to Keats, “Heard melodies are fresh, but those unheard are sweeter.” This sort of understanding between loved ones is purely magical.

Paulo Coelho said, “There is a language that is beyond words. If I can learn to decipher that language without words, I will be able to decipher the world.”

Let’s weave magic into our spells. Let’s make our magic count. We all need a little magic in our lives.

Feby Imthias is a freelance writer based in Abu Dhabi. Twitter: @Feby_Imthias

Finding Humour Even In Shaky Times

2020 is half-spent in counting horror stories of all kinds

LALIT RAIZADA

Gulf News

It was not in jest. I meant it when during an informal gathering in our housing complex the other day, I suggested to my co-residents to go to bed properly clad. I told them, “Earthquake comes unannounced. You never know when it might drive you out to an open area.”

Rushing out wearing minimal clothing might cause embarrassment in a mixed gathering of men, women and children. I said I was saying this because of the frequency of tremors that have been jolting people in various parts of the country — from Jammu & Kashmir in the north to Punjab, Haryana, Delhi; Rajasthan, Gujarat to Maharashtra in the West. It hit Mizoram in the east four times in a week, once with a magnitude of 5.6 on the Richter scale. Otherwise, the tremors have fortunately been of low to moderate intensity, causing little damage.

The fact that the quake occurred 17 times in a month (June 2020) continues to raise apprehensions bordering on genuine fears among the people. Nobody knows what is in store for the morrow. So better be on guard always.

The year 2020 is half-spent in counting the horror stories of all kinds that continue to bombard us, sending chills down our spine every now and then. However, during the light-hearted conversation, a young neighbour wondered what he would do if he were in the loo during an earthquake.

Earthquake is a serious matter, but sometimes, it creates comical situations in high-rise buildings.

As we sat imagining and smiling at his predicament, he shyly disclosed that during the last quake sometime ago, he was literally caught with his pants down in the washroom. As the building shook suddenly, he was in a bind; to rush out in ‘as is where is’ position or move out after completing the ablution process.

We all laughed out loud and despite requests to tell us what eventually happened, he refused to disclose the state in which he came out.

In earlier times, earthquakes did not evoke much concern. This was because most dwellings were single-storeyed and had expansive courtyards to rush to. There was no pressure on space. And the two or three-storeyed ones were in most cases conjoined with neighbouring houses insulating each other against the tremors. But today’s multi-storeyed structures, notwithstanding architectural safeguards, have their own merits and demerits.



People move out of their apartments and compounds to an open area following an earthquake, in Ahmedabad, on June 14, 2020.

Comic tragedy

Earthquake is a serious matter, but sometimes, it creates comical situations in high-rise buildings. I am reminded of one night when our building started shaking and rumbling at 2am. Those living on the first and second floors did not have any problem but others faced awkward moments. So many persons, old and young, coming down the stairs with the speed of a youngster, presented a typical scene. But the cynosure of all eyes was a person who kept struggling hard to tie up the lungi (a long piece of fabric worn as a loincloth) around his bare body in the midst of the crowd.

Another male neighbour, clad in his bare essentials, clutched his toddler in his right arm and held his wife’s hand from the other one. This must have been a tough exercise while rushing down the staircase from the seventh floor. It was only when they reached the lawns, where everyone had assembled,

that he realised he had forgotten to wear clothes.

Another lady evoked peals of laughter even in that situation when she came down wrapped in a bedsheet, which she hastily picked up from her bed. Obviously, there was little time to get properly clad at that unearthly hour. The embarrassment was writ large on her face but later even she joined in laughing with us.

Later, I learnt that in one apartment, the quake had made a housewife lash out at her spouse for disturbing her by recklessly shaking their bed at that odd hour.

It seems that earthquakes have become the order of the day the world over. It makes all sense to be battle (quake) ready all the time — day or night.

— Lalit Raizada is a journalist based in India.

In earlier times, earthquakes did not evoke much concern. This was because most dwellings were single-storeyed and had expansive courtyards to rush to. There was no pressure on space. And the two or three-storeyed ones were in most cases conjoined with neighbouring houses insulating each other against the tremors.

“BECAUSE WE MISSED OUR SPRING, SUMMER isn't really summer because it only comes after a complete spring,” says Stuart Patterson, chairperson of the Shimer Great Books School at North Central College. “The only opportunity to reset is next spring. Everything else we're doing this year is going to be drained of significance because they don't have the proper sequence.”

2020 Is Not Cancelled, It's An Awakening As We Look Forward To 2021



Agencies

This was supposed to be the year of the comeback for Boysie Dikobe, a South African dancer recovering from his second hip replacement and gearing up to get back on stage when the coronavirus hit.

Dikobe, a 29-year-old dancer who performs with a travelling drag ballet troupe that tours globally, says his first thought was: “2020 is cancelled.”

It's barely halfway over, and Dikobe is part of a global choir wishing for 2020 to end. No Olympics, no awards shows, no weddings, no summer camp, no graduations. Nothing to look forward to except a new Netflix show or your newfound love of regrowing scallions or baking bread.

Now it's all about 2021 — the year when everything, and maybe nothing, happens.

The coronavirus pandemic

has brought tectonic change to almost every part of life — how we live, where we live, where we work, what we do for work, what it means to be a kid, what family means, what is important. There was a months-long moment where the world was on pause, causing many to dig into existential questions: What is my purpose? Where do I belong?

That's what Dikobe found himself doing as he quarantined in his small New York apartment contemplating his future — both personal and professional. Would he ever perform on stage again, or would he have to retire before an opportunity arrived? The more he considered it, the more he found himself thinking: “2020 is not cancelled, actually. It's an awakening.”

Leslie Dwight, a 23-year-old writer, wondered the same thing in a poem she wrote that was endlessly shared on social media about a week after the May

25 death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police. “2020 isn't canceled, but rather, the most important year of them all,” she wrote.

But why do we even say things like “2020 is cancelled” and “New year, new me”? Experts who study human behaviour say the human desire to pin failures, hopes and dreams on a period of time like a calendar year has primitive roots connected to our attachment to routine.

“Because we missed our spring, summer isn't really summer because it only comes after a complete spring,” says Stuart Patterson, chairperson of the Shimer Great Books School at North Central College. “The only opportunity to reset is next spring. Everything else we're doing this year is going to be drained of significance because they don't have the proper sequence.”

It's like when Hamlet declares that “time is out of joint,” Patterson says.

son says.

How do we measure a year — a question about the passage of time that has a whole song devoted to it in the Broadway musical Rent? With seasons, milestones, rituals, events. So when a year is stripped of all of those moments, people feel lost and put hope in the future to manage expectations, psychologists and social scientists say.

Every calendar year brings a cycle of hope. January is when we'll finally commit to our diet, quit smoking, become the person we always wanted to be. We believe in the power of change and promise ourselves: “This is our year,” as one reveler proclaimed just after the ball dropped in Times Square.

Some people admit defeat by January's end, while other ambitions continue for a few more months. In April, many start focusing on summer. By November, most have thrown in the towel,

vowing that the upcoming year is actually their year.

But that hope never fully dies out. It just gets recalibrated and refocused on a new target and soars again. “Hope,” the poet Emily Dickinson wrote, “is the thing with feathers.”

If not for hope, why would data show that most of the 6,253 respondents to a recent WeddingWire survey have postponed their planned 2020 nuptials to next year, but only 7% have cancelled their wedding? Weddings are different from holidays in that, for many, it is an event that only happens once. Thus an even greater emphasis on making it special.

Like millions of other couples planning to get married this summer, Kerry Anne Perkins and Michael Gordon were devastated as March slouched into April. They realized they would have to cancel their dream wedding on Memorial Day weekend, which

marked five years since the Philadelphia couple first met.

“Every day felt heavier and heavier and heavier,” Perkins recalls, saying she had frequent breakdowns and couldn't bring herself to officially cancel the wedding.

They wound up having a microwedding June 6. As they did their first look, a massive Black Lives Matter demonstration arrived at Philadelphia's Logan Square. Photos of the couple holding hands, fists raised, with thousands of people surrounding them went viral.

“We were really just a symbol of the things the world needs more of, especially in 2020,” Perkins says. “There's a pandemic and all of the changes and the things that we're hearing and seeing, people need hope. People need love. And people need unity.”

While Gordon says he knows they were lucky, he has advice for others planning milestones: Take

a breath, think about what's really important and find the special.

“In my mind, it has to get better,” Perkins says. “I'm hopeful. I think 2021 is going to be a year of rebirth.”

Deborah Serani, a psychologist in the New York City area, said hope has disappointed many this year but will help us endure the pandemic and thrive. “Hope,” she says, “requires us to look at the present situation and regard it for what it is, and plan for its betterment.”

No one knows what 2021 will bring. Nobody knows what the “new normal” will look like. Will there be wedding ceremonies featuring every person a couple has ever met, packed stadiums, concert venues with thousands of people crooning the same tune? Will the now-2021 Summer Olympics happen? Will awards shows be back? Will we even care?

There are no clear answers. But there is hope.

Covid-19 May Attack Patients' Central Nervous System, Cause Depression, Anxiety

Agencies

Depressed mood or anxiety exhibited in COVID-19 patients may possibly be a sign that the virus affects the central nervous system, according to an international study led by a University of Cincinnati College of Medicine researcher.

These two psychological symptoms were most closely associated with a loss of smell and taste rather than the more severe indicators of the novel coronavirus such as shortness of breath, cough or fever, according to the study.

“If you had asked me why would I be depressed or anxious when I am COVID positive, I would say it is because my symptoms are severe and I have shortness of breath or I can't breathe or I have symptoms such as cough or high fever,” said Ahmad Sedaghat, MD, PhD, an associate professor and director of rhinology, allergy and anterior skull base surgery, in the UC College of Medicine's Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery.

“None of these symptoms that portended morbidity or mortality was associated with how depressed or anxious these patients were,” said Sedaghat, also a UC Health physician specializing in diseases of the nose and sinuses.

“The only element of COVID-19 that was associated with depressed mood and anxiety



was the severity of patients' loss of smell and taste. This is an unexpected and shocking result,” added Sedaghat.

Sedaghat conducted a prospective, cross-sectional telephone questionnaire study which examined characteristics and symptoms of 114 patients who were diagnosed with COVID-19 over a six-week period at Kantonsspital Aarau in Aarau, Switzerland.

Severity of the loss of smell or taste, nasal obstruction, excessive mucus production, fever, cough and shortness of breath during COVID-19 were assessed. The findings of the study are available online in The Laryngoscope.

First author of the study is Marlene M. Speth, MD, and other co-authors include Thirza Singer-Cornelius, MD; Michael Oberle, PhD; Isabelle Gengler, MD; and Steffi Brockmeier, MD.

At the time of enrollment in the study, when participants were experiencing COVID-19, 47.4 percent of participants

reported at least several days of depressed mood per week while 21.1 percent reported depressed mood nearly every day. In terms of severity, 44.7 percent of participants reported expressing mild anxiety while 10.5 percent reported severe anxiety.

“The unexpected finding that the potentially least worrisome symptoms of COVID-19 may be causing the greatest degree of psychological distress could potentially tell us something about the disease,” said Sedaghat.

“We think our findings suggest the possibility that psychological distress in the form of depressed mood or anxiety may reflect the penetration of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, into the central nervous system,” added Sedaghat.

Sedaghat says researchers have long thought that the olfactory tract may be the primary way that coronaviruses enter the central nervous system. There was evidence of this with SARS, or severe acute

respiratory syndrome, a viral illness that first emerged in China in November 2002 and spread through international travel to 29 countries.

Studies using mouse models of that virus have shown that the olfactory tract, or the pathway for communication of odors from the nose to the brain, was a gateway into the central nervous system and infection of the brain.

“These symptoms of psychological distress, such as depressed mood and anxiety are central nervous system symptoms if they are associated only with how diminished is your sense of smell,” said Sedaghat.

“This may indicate that the virus is infecting olfactory neurons, decreasing the sense of smell, and then using the olfactory tract to enter the central nervous system,” added Sedaghat.

In frequent but severe central nervous system symptoms of COVID-19 such as seizures or altered mental status have been described, but depressed mood and anxiety may be the considerably more common but milder central nervous symptom of COVID-19, explains Sedaghat.

“There may be more central nervous system penetration of the virus than we think based on the prevalence of olfaction-associated depressed mood and anxiety and this really opens up doors for future investigations to look at how the virus may interact with the central nervous system,” said Sedaghat.

This Is Why Memories Attached To Emotions Are So Strong

Agencies

Memories linked with strong emotions often become seared in the brain, according to a recent study.

“It makes sense we don't remember everything,” said Rene Hen, PhD, professor of psychiatry and neuroscience at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons.

“We have limited brainpower. We only need to remember what's important for our future wellbeing,” Hen added.

Fear, in this context, is not just a momentary feeling but a learning experience critical to our survival. When a new situation makes us fearful, the brain records the details in our neurons to help us avoid similar situations in the future, or use appropriate caution.

What's still a mystery is why these memories, recorded by the brain's hippocampus, become so



strong. To find out, Hen and Jessica Jimenez, an MD/PhD student at Columbia, placed mice into new, frightening environments and recorded the activity of hippocampal neurons that reach out to the brain's fear centre (the amygdala).

The neurons' activity was also recorded a day later when the mice tried to retrieve memories of the experience.

Unsurprisingly, neurons that respond to the frightening environment send that information to the brain's fear centre.

“What was surprising was that these neurons were synchronized when the mouse later re-

called the memory,” Hen said.

“We saw that it's the synchrony that is critical to establish the fear memory, and the greater the synchrony, the stronger the memory. These are the types of mechanisms that explain why you remember salient events,” Jimenez added.

How and when synchronization occurs is still unknown, but the answer could reveal the inner workings of the brain that create lifelong memories and lead to new treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder.

“In people with PTSD, many similar events remind them of the original frightening situation, and it's possible that synchronization of their neurons has become too strong,” Hen said.

“We're really trying to dig into the mechanisms of how emotional memories form to find better treatments for people with PTSD and memory disorders in general,” Hen noted.

People With High Cholesterol Should Eliminate Carbs, Not Saturated Fat, Study Suggests

Agencies

Following a study on hypercholesterolemia, researchers have suggested that people with the condition should eliminate carbohydrates from their diet instead of fats.

Familial hypercholesterolemia is a genetic disorder that causes people to have cholesterol levels 2-4 times higher than the average person. Organisations, including the American Heart Association, have suggested they avoid eating food from animal sources, such as meat, eggs, and



cheese, and to avoid coconut oil.

An international team of experts on heart disease and diet, including five cardiologists, reviewed dietary guidelines for people with familial hypercholesterolemia. They say they couldn't

find any justification for health experts to recommend a low saturated fat diet, said lead author David Diamond, professor and heart disease researcher at the University of South Florida.

“Our study showed that a more 'heart healthy' diet is one low in sugar, not saturated fat,” Diamond added.

Diamond and his co-authors say following a low-carb diet is most effective for people at increased risk of heart disease, such as those who are overweight, hypertensive and diabetic.

World Population In 2100 Could Be 2 Billion Below UN Projections: Study

Earth will be home to 8.8 billion souls in 2100, two billion fewer than current UN projections, according to a major study published Wednesday that foresees new global power alignments shaped by declining fertility rates and greying populations.

By century's end, 183 of 195 countries – barring an influx of immigrants – will have fallen below the replacement threshold needed to maintain population levels, an international team of researchers reported in The Lancet.

More than 20 countries – including Japan, Spain, Italy, Thailand, Portugal, South Korea and Poland – will see their numbers diminish by at least half.

China's will fall nearly that much, from 1.4 billion people today to 730 million in 80 years.

Sub-Saharan Africa, meanwhile, will triple in size to some three billion people, with Nigeria alone expanding to almost 800 million in 2100, second only to India's 1.1 billion.

"These forecasts suggest good news for the environment, with less stress on food production systems and lower carbon emissions, as well as significant economic opportunity for parts of sub-Saharan Africa," lead author Christopher Murray, director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, told AFP.

"However, most countries outside of Africa will see shrinking workforces and inverting population pyramids, which will have profound negative consequences

for the economy."

For high-income countries in this category, the best solutions for sustaining population levels and economic growth will be flexible immigration policies and social support for families who want children, the study concluded.

"However, in the face of declining population there is a very real danger that some countries might consider policies that restrict access to reproductive health services, with potentially devastating consequences," Murray cautioned.

- 866 million people over 80 -

"It is imperative that women's freedom and rights are at the top of every government's development agenda." Social services and healthcare systems will need to be overhauled to accommodate much older populations.

As fertility falls and life expectancy increases worldwide, the number of children under five is forecast to decline by more than 40 percent, from 681 million in 2017 to 401 million in 2100, the study found.

At the other end of the spectrum, 2.37 billion people – more than a quarter of the global population – will be over 65 years old by then. Those over 80 will balloon from about 140 million today to 866 million.

Sharp declines in the number and proportion of the working-age population will also pose huge challenges in many countries.

"Societies will struggle to grow with fewer workers and taxpayers," noted Stein Emil Vollset, a professor at the IHME.

Trump Says 'More White People' Killed By Police Than Black People

Agencies

Washington: President Donald Trump has downplayed police violence against Black people in the United States, saying "more white people" are killed by police officers.

During a CBS News interview that aired on Tuesday, the Republican president was asked why Black people were still dying at the hands of law enforcement.

"And so are white people, so are white people. What a terrible question to ask. So are white people. More white people, by the way. More white people," Trump responded.

According to a Washington Post analysis updated on Monday, nearly half of the people killed by police are white, while 23 percent are Black. But Black Americans, who account for only 13 percent of the population, are shot at a disproportionate rate compared with white Americans, who make up 60 percent of the population, according to the analysis.

The May 25 killing of 46-year-old George Floyd, a Black American man, while in police custody in Minneapolis sparked protests across the US under the banner of the Black Lives Matter movement and led to an increased focus on police violence against Black people.

Responding to Trump's remarks, American Civil Liberties Union's Jeffery Robinson said in a statement that his comments were racist.

Robinson said Trump's answer "not only ignores the fact that per capita Black and Brown people are disproportionately killed by police, it provides the foundation for the dangerous and unconstitutional police practices that result in the deaths of Black people with regularity".

"Trump's racism is so absolute that he continues to refuse to give even a tacit acknowledgment to the epidemic of police violence against Black people in America," he said, accusing him of "using the violence and suffering perpetrated against Black communities as a white-supremacist dog whistle ahead of the coming election".

Speaking to reporters at the White House, Trump defended police departments, saying they "do an incredible job", adding: "You can have a rogue, terrible cop, on occasion like you do in any industry, any business, in any profession."

Already accused of not taking a clear stance against systematic racism and police brutality, Trump has escalated his rhetoric against the Black Lives Matter movement in recent weeks, focusing his comments on violence that breaks out occasionally on the fringes of peaceful demonstrations.

The recent nationwide protests have added prominence to a long-running debate about the flying of the Confederate flag in parts of the country and whether statues honouring Confederate leaders during the US Civil War should be removed from public view.

Asked by CBS if the flag should be "taken down," Trump responded: "I know people that like the Confederate flag, and they're not thinking about slavery."



Firefighters battling blaze on board USS Bonhomme

Iran-China Deal to Ditch Dollar, Bypass US Sanctions

Agencies

TEHRAN: A top aide of Iran's supreme leader said on Wednesday that the roadmap for strategic partnership between Iran and China is to help ditch the dollar in bilateral trade and bypass unilateral US sanctions.

Ali Aqa-Mohammadi an advisor to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said the 25-year document is more than an "agreement" which usually encompasses just a certain issue.

The official said the partnership roadmap solidifies the two countries' economic and defensive cooperation by protecting their dealings from "third-party intervention," Press TV reported.

It would "close up and eliminate the key spots," where sanctions, including those targeting defense cooperation between the two countries, could be implemented, he said.

"This document upsets the sanctions and the Iran-China roadmap disarranges many of the

US plans," he said.

Washington reimposed the sanctions in 2018 after leaving a landmark nuclear deal with Iran despite its ratification by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

"Coordination of Iran and China can take the region out of the US' hands" by pushing Washington aside, breaking its sprawling regional network apart, and frustrating its attempts at isolating Tehran, Mohammadi, who is also a member of Iran's Expediency Council, stated.

The roadmap, therefore, translates into "such defeat for the US, which will be unprecedented in the region," he added.

On Sunday, The New York Times reported Iran and China were nearing the conclusion of strategic partnership in defiance of the US, saying the deal foresees "a sweeping economic and security partnership."

According to The New York Times, the document also de-

scribes deepening military cooperation in a region that has been a strategic preoccupation of the United States for decades. It calls for joint training and exercises, joint research and weapons development and intelligence sharing.

India Bypassed

Meanwhile the Iran-India Chabahar port deal has run out of fuel. Iran has reportedly expelled India from the Chabahar rail project according to a report by The Hindu.

The railway project was meant to be part of India's vow to the trilateral deal between India, Iran and Afghanistan to develop an alternate trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing a hostile Pakistan.

With India-Iran relations touching an all-time low, the West Asian country has shown the door to India for two key projects – the second phase of Chabahar Port and development of Farzad-B block.

US calls China 'new East India Company' at sea

Agencies

WASHINGTON: A senior US official on Tuesday likened China's state enterprises to Britain's colonising East India Company as Washington takes a tougher stance against Beijing in the dispute-rife South China Sea.

A day after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo branded most of Beijing's claims in the sea illegal, his top aide for East Asia denounced a proliferation of rigs, survey ships and fishing boats sent by Chinese state-run companies.

Assistant Secretary of State David Stilwell said that oil major CNOOC and other firms were serving as "battering rams" to intimidate other nations.

"In all our societies, citizens deserve to know the differences between commercial enterprises and instruments of foreign state power," Stilwell said at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

"These state enterprises are modern-day equivalents of the East India Company," he said.

The British East India Company seized control of



most of the Indian subcontinent in the guise of trading in tea, cotton, spices and other goods before Britain formally took charge in the mid-19th century.

The reference is especially loaded due to the East India Company's role in smuggling opium into China, culminating in Britain's 1843 colonisation of Hong Kong – the start of what Beijing calls a century of humiliation.

China has recently triggered international

outrage by clamping down on freedoms promised to Hong Kong before Britain handed back the financial hub in 1997.

In the latest rift between the United States and China, Pompeo on Monday sided with the Philippines, Vietnam and other Southeast Asian nations in rejecting China's vast claims in the South China Sea.

Airlines Down On Knees Pleading For Help From Passengers

Agencies

Paris: Airlines are pleading for help from their clients as they face paying customers back for flights cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic that could starve them of cash, the industry said Wednesday.

"We are asking passengers for help... that's true, and we're doing it on our knees," the head of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), Alexandre de Juniac said on French TV and radio station BFM Business.

Coronavirus lockdowns forced most flights to remain grounded and air travel is recovering slowly, putting airlines in perilous financial shape.

Airlines operating flights to and from Europe are supposed to reimburse passengers for cancelled flights within two weeks under EU law, but with the sup-

port of France and a number of other countries, airlines are offering vouchers or making clients wait sometimes much longer to get their cash back.

Consumer groups have cried foul and the European Commission has opened a case against 10 EU member states including France for failing to enforce the regulations.

De Juniac said the industry was still trying to convince the European Commission to allow it use vouchers or give it more time to reimburse passengers.

"Why are we asking for this? Not for fun. Our business is more to pamper passengers than to pose problems for them, in particular financial problems," he said.

But "the cash flow of airlines is in an apocalyptic situation," he added. IATA said last month it expected the world's airlines to suffer \$84 billion in losses this year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Qatar wins air blockade case at UN court

Agencies

THE HAGUE: The UN's top court on Tuesday backed Qatar in a bitter row with four Middle East nations that imposed an air blockade against Doha after accusing it of backing militants and Iran.

The decision by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) covers a key part of the acrimonious standoff that erupted three years ago pitting Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against Qatar.

Qatar said after the decision that its rivals would "face justice". "We welcome today's decision by the ICJ that will see the blockading states finally face justice for violating international aviation rules," Qatar Minister of Transport and Communications, Jassim Saif Ahmed al-Sulaiti, said in a statement.

The president of the ICJ, Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf, said The Hague-based court unanimously "rejects the appeal" by the rival states against a deci-

sion by the world civil aviation body in favour of Qatar over sovereign airspace.

The court also "holds that the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has jurisdiction" in the case, by 15 judges to one, Yusuf said.

The ICAO in 2018 ruled it had the jurisdiction to handle a dispute brought by Qatar, which accused its neighbours of violating a convention that regulates the free passage of its passenger planes through foreign airspace.

But the four allies disagreed, saying the ICAO was not the right body to judge in the dispute and that its decision to do so was "manifestly flawed and in violation of fundamental principles of due process and the right to be heard". They had asked the ICJ to declare the aviation body's ruling "null and void and without effect". The Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and other allies abruptly severed ties with Qatar in June 2017, accusingly "rejects the gas and oil-rich country of backing militants and Iran.

انتقال پُر ملال

یہ خبر انتہائی دکھ اور افسوس کے ساتھ دی جاتی ہے کہ فدا حسین آخون ولد حاجی غلام محمد خون ساکنہ چک باغ این آئی ٹی حضرت بل سرینگر مورخہ 4 جولائی 2020ء بروز منگلوار وارکو اس دارفانی سے رحلت کر گئے۔ مرحوم شریف انفس، بلندسار، ہر ولعزیز اور صوم و صلوات کے پابند تھے۔ اللہ تعالیٰ مرحوم کو جنت الفردوس نصیب کرے۔ مرحوم کی انتہائی فاتحہ خوانی مورخہ 17 جولائی 2020ء بروز جمعہ المبارک صبح 6 بجے اُن کے آبائی مقبرہ واقع حسن آباد سرینگر میں انجام دی جائے۔ جس کے بعد دن بھر اُن کے آبائی گھر واقع چک باغ میں تعزیتی مجلس منعقد ہوگی۔

سگواراں

حاجی غلام محمد خون (والد)

تصدق حسین آخون (برادر)

INFO

Government of Jammu & Kashmir
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER R&B DIVISION PULWAMA
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS

E-NIT No.Fresh-67/EFP/RNB/2019-20/2287-97 **DATED. 13/07/2020**

For and on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor, Union Territory of J&K e-tenders are invited on **item rate basis** from approved and eligible Contractors registered with UT of J&K Government ,CPWD, Railways and other state/Central Governments 'For each of the following works'-

S.N o	Name of Work	Est. Cost (Rs. in Lacs)	Cost of T/Doc. (Rs.)	Earnest Money (Rs.)	Time of Completion In days	Time & Date of Opening of Bid	Class of Contractor	Major Head of Account
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	Survey, Design, Supply of Traffic Hardware, Installation Commissioning, operation and Maintenance of Traffic Signalling System (in standalone Mode) in Pulwama Town.	20.00	800/-	40,000/-	60 days	25/07/2020	OTHERS	14 th FC

Position of AAA/TS = Accorded
Position of funds = Available

1. The Bidding documents Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the departmental website www.jktenders.gov.in as per Schedule of dates given below:-

1.	Date of Issue of tender Notice	15/07/2020
2.	Period of downloading of bidding documents	16/07/2020 10:00 AM to 24/07/2020 04:00 PM
3.	Bid submission Start date	16/07/2020 10:00 AM
4.	Bid submission End date	24/07/2020 04:00 PM
5.	Date and time of opening of Bids (online)	25/07/2020 11:00 AM

2. Bids must be accompanied with cost of Tender document in shape of Valid Treasury Receipt/e-Challan under Major Head 0059 Revenue in favour of **Executive Engineer R&B Division Pulwama (tender inviting authority)** and Earnest money /Bid security in shape of CDR/FDR pledged to **Executive Engineer R&B Division Pulwama (tender receiving authority)**

3. The date and time of opening of Bids shall be notified on website www.jktenders.gov.in and conveyed to the Bidders automatically through an e-mail message on their e-mail address. The **bids of responsive bidders** shall be opened online on same web site in the office of the **Executive Engineer R&B Division Pulwama (tender receiving authority)**.

All other terms and conditions shall be available in website www.jktenders.gov.in

Head Draftsman	DIPK-3001/20	Technical Officer
		Executive Engineer, R&B Division Pulwama

Department Of Urban Local Bodies Kashmir Office Of The Executive Officer Municipal Commttee Budgam

Subject: Removal of unipoles in Town Budgam

NOTICE

This office is in receipt of an application from an agency (Uncle Advisers Huzooribagh Srinagar) having reference No: UN-A/3012 Dated: 23/12/2019 for removal/ Uninstalling of hoarding structure and Unipoles within the limits of Municipal Committee Budgam, which were installed in the Year 2010-11 If anybody is having any objection with regard to the same he may approach with a written application to the office of undersigned within seven (07) days positively

No: MC/Bud/2020/1450-52
Dated: 13-02-2020

IPK-NB-1381/20

Executive Officer
Municipal Committee Budgam

Stop Accepting BJP ‘Hospitality’, Come Back, Surjewala Tells Pilot



JAIPUR: Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala said on Wednesday if dissident leader Sachin Pilot is not joining the Bharatiya Janata Party, he should stop accepting that party's "hospitality" in Haryana.

The reference was to reports that MLAs close to the rebel leaders are holed up in hotels in Gurugram in Haryana, where the BJP is in power.

He also repeated the party's

appeal to Pilot, asking him to "come back to the family".

"I have seen Pilot's statement in the media that he will not join the BJP. If you do not want to go to the BJP, stop accepting the hospitality of the BJP immediately," he said.

He told reporters that Pilot should free the Congress MLAs who are staying in two luxury hotels and under the security of the Haryana police.

Surjewala said the party leadership spoke to Pilot several times but he and the other Congress MLAs did not come to attend the Congress Legislature Party meetings.

Pilot was sacked Tuesday as Rajasthan's deputy chief minister and the president of the state unit of the Congress. PTI

Rahul Gandhi Has Lost Both His Arms In Scindia And Pilot: Nitin Patel

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has lost both his arms in Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot, Gujarat deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel said on Wednesday and added that a weaker Congress is good for the BJP.

"We all saw what had happened in Madhya Pradesh. Now, it's happening again in Rajasthan. There seems to be some fault in the functioning of the Congress leadership," Patel told reporters in Gandhinagar.

Scindia's exit from the Congress in March this year along with 22 MLAs had led to the collapse of then Kamal Nath government in Madhya Pradesh.

Pilot, who fell out with Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot and is leading a group of dissident MLAs,

was on Tuesday sacked as state Congress president and deputy CM.

He has ruled out joining the BJP.

"These two young leaders (Pilot and Scindia) were like right and left hands of Rahul Gandhi. Now, he has lost both his arms," Patel said.

He said even senior Congress leaders have expressed concern over the fate of that party.

"However, a weaker Congress is always good for the BJP," he added.

Patel also took a dig at the state Congress over appointment of quota leader Hardik Patel (26) as its working president in Gujarat.

"We do not have any objection if Congress goes one step ahead and appoints him as its national president. It's

Buddhist Monks Demand UNESCO Excavation Of Ram Janmabhoomi

NEW DELHI: Buddhist monks staged a sit-in and fast in Ayodhya on Tuesday, claiming that the Ram Janmabhoomi premises was a Buddhist site and demanded that the excavation of the place should be done by UNESCO.

At the protest outside the office of the Ayodhya district magistrate, the Buddhist monks demanded that those items found during the levelling of the land of the Ram Janmabhoomi site must be made public.

A shivalinga, seven black touchstone pillars, six red sandstone pillars, a "flower pinnacle" and four broken idols of gods and goddesses were found in May during the levelling of the site for a Ram temple, the trust charged with its construction had said.

The Buddhist monks demanded that the excavation of the site must be done by UNESCO, claiming that the items recovered belong to Buddhist culture.

They demanded that the construction work of the Ram temple must be stopped immediately.

The followers of Buddhism consider Ayodhya as the ancient city of Saket that was the centre of Buddhism in ancient times.

"We have sent our memorandums to the president, chief justice of India and also to other government agencies through the Ayodhya administration," a Azad Baudh Dharm Sena member said.

"If the construction of the Ram temple is not stopped within a month and the premises not assigned to the UNESCO for excavation, then we will again start our movement," he said.

"We have received the memorandum of Buddhist leaders and we will be sending it to the persons addressed," Faizabad City Magistrate S.P. Singh said. "On our assurances, the Buddhist community has called off its sit-in and fast."



REPORTERS undergoing tests for Covid-19 at GMC Srinagar. KO Photo Abid Bhat

...BHOPAL SEX RACKET Main Accused Arrested In Srinagar

BHOPAL: Bhopal-based newspaper owner Pyare Miyan (68) who was on the run after five girls and a woman accused him of rape was arrested in Srinagar on Wednesday, the city police said here.

Earlier in the day, the police claimed to have seized porn CDs, high-end cars, liquor bottles and bones of wild animals among other things during raids on his properties.

"We had information from sources that he was in Srinagar. He was arrested in coordination with local police," said Superintendent of Police (Bhopal South) Sai Krishna Thota.

Thota, who is heading the special investigation team which is probing the case, said a team had been sent to Srinagar and Miyan was likely to be brought here by Thursday morning.

Apart from a case of rape under

the Indian Penal Code and offences under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), the police also invoked the Excise Act and Wildlife Act following seizure of liquor, an antler and bones of wild animals from his flats.

Sections of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act were also invoked as two of the minor girls belong to these communities, the police said.

"CDs, DVDs, pen drives and hard disks containing pornographic material were seized from five properties of Miyan in Bhopal and Indore in the last two days. These also include child pornographic content," Thota told PTI. The complainants had told the police that Miyan used to show them porn videos, he said. The seized vehicles included an Audi and a Pajero, the SP said, adding that these vehicles

were used to ferry girls to Miyan's flats. One of the flats was also found to have a dance floor and a large bar, according to police sources.

"Four minor girls and a woman have filed complaints of rape against Miyan. The latest complaint was lodged by a minor girl at Koh-e-Fiza police station on Tuesday," Thota said. During the last two days, the Bhopal administration razed a marriage hall and an apartment built illegally on government land by Miyan. On Sunday, the police booked Miyan's accomplice Sweetie Vishwakarma (21) after five girls were found roaming around in inebriated state. The girls allegedly told the authorities that Miyan had invited them to a birthday party on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday in a flat in Shahpura area.

Meanwhile, the allotment of a government accommodation to Miyan has been cancelled, an official said. PTI

'India's Global Strategy In Tatters,' Says Rahul Gandhi On Iran Railway Project

NEW DELHI: [India], July 15 (ANI): After Iran announced that it will be going ahead with Chabahar-Zahedan railway project on its own, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi slammed the Central Government saying India's global strategy is in tatters.

"India's global strategy is in tatters."



We are losing power and respect everywhere and GOI has no idea what to do," he tweeted.

Notably, China and Iran have reached a \$400 billion strategic partnership deal. The project aimed to connect Chabahar to Zahedan (the capital city of southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province). (ANI)

Verizon, Airtel Partner To Bring Grade Bluejeans Video Conferencing To India

SRINAGAR: Bharti Airtel Ltd. ("Airtel"), India's largest integrated telecom company, and Verizon, one of the largest communication technology companies in the world, today announced a strategic alliance to bring secure, world-class video conferencing solutions to businesses in India.

As part of this partnership, Airtel will offer secure enterprise-grade video conferencing solutions under the brand name - Airtel Bluejeans - to enterprise customers in India. Bluejeans, Verizon's enterprise-grade video conferencing service, helps people communicate and collaborate across mobile, desktop, browser and conference rooms and has a long-standing history of providing simple, reliable and trusted solutions, while meeting the stringent security needs of banks, healthcare providers and other organizations.

The offering includes a cloud point of presence in India enabling low latency and improved quality of service for India-based customers. The technology will be fully integrated with Airtel's network, including its data centers, to ensure

that customers are offered a state of the art, reliable and secure customer experience. Airtel Bluejeans will offer an integrated audio solution, giving its customers convenient dial-in options to join the meetings. India, along with the rest of the world, is witnessing a massive surge in demand for enterprise grade video conferencing tools as Work From Home and virtual meetings become the new normal. This alliance in India will bring Airtel and Verizon together to address the need for seamless and secure business collaboration as organizations move from office-based work to work from anywhere.

"Companies of all sizes around the world have seen the requirement for reliable, high-quality video conferencing services and require trusted partners to ensure the highest level of security," said Hans Vestberg, Chief Executive Officer of Verizon. "We are proud to come together with Airtel to help more Indian organizations benefit from our world-class communication product during this work-from-home era and beyond."

Airtel has always partnered with the best to deliver world-class services to

its customers," said Gopal Vittal, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer of Bharti Airtel. "We are delighted to collaborate with Verizon to bring Airtel Bluejeans to enterprise and SMB customers in India. Airtel Bluejeans is a highly differentiated video conferencing solution that sets the benchmark with its high levels of security and ease of use. We look forward to building a deep partnership with Verizon to serve the needs of emerging digital India." Bluejeans' enterprise-level security features include meeting lock, secure transmission and storage, randomized meeting IDs, participant passcodes, fraud detection, and a variety of authentication options. The platform uses open, proven standards for security as well as the WebRTC and HTML5 standards for browser-based access, enabling users to participate in meetings and events without requiring software downloads, a key requirement in some secure environments.

The agreement initially covers Bluejeans Meetings, Bluejeans Events, Bluejeans Rooms and the Bluejeans Gateway for Microsoft Teams.

Many COVID-19 Deaths Go Unreported In Kashmir: DAK

SRINAGAR: Doctors Association Kashmir (DAK) on Wednesday said the actual number of COVID-19 deaths in Kashmir is higher than what is reported.

"Many COVID-19 deaths go unreported in Kashmir," said DAK President and influenza expert Dr Nisar ul Hassan in a statement.

"The official count of Covid-19 deaths in the valley is an underestimate and only provides a snapshot of the true death toll virus has taken," he said.

Dr Nisar said many people with Covid symptoms don't get tested for the virus because of the fear of stigma and quarantine of family members. "Social stigma makes people hide their illness and keep them away from seeking health care," he said.

Dr Nisar said people fear that if they die of Covid-19, they will not get a decent burial and few will come to their funeral. "As a result, people are choosing to die at home, unrecorded," he said.

"Another apparent deterrent to testing is widespread conspiracy theories about the virus. People believe that

Covid is a hoax and the virus is fabricated," he added.

Dr Nisar said while elderly people have the highest rates for hospitalization and death, many are not tested for Covid in hospitals. "Older people don't develop typical Covid symptoms. In them, feeling weak or confused may be the only sign of having the infection," he said.

"When patients lack classic signs, health professionals are less likely to think of the diagnosis. This means many patients die undiagnosed," he added. Dr Nisar said many Covid deaths are hidden among other diseases.

"Many patients with heart or lung disease die of Covid, but their death is attributed to their underlying condition," he said. Dr Nisar said more than 30 per cent of the positive cases may be missed by the RT-PCR test which is used to identify people infected with Covid infection.

"Inappropriate sample collection, taking the sample too early or too late during infection and late processing of the sample can give rise to false negative results," he said.

Air India To Send Certain Employees On Leave Without Pay For Upto 5 Years



NEW DELHI: Air India has started the process of identifying employees, based on various factors like efficiency, health and redundancy, who will be sent on compulsory leave without pay (LWP) for up to five years, according to an official order.

The airline's board of directors have authorised its Chairman and Managing Director Rajiv Bansal to send employees on LWP "for six months or for a period of two years extendable upto five years, depending upon the following factors - suitability, efficiency, competence, quality of performance, health of the employee, instance of non-availability of the employee for duty in the past as a result of ill health or otherwise and redundancy", the order said on Tuesday.

The departmental heads in the headquarter as well as regional directors are required to assess each employee "on the above mentioned factors and identify the cases where option of compulsory LWP can be exercised", stated the order dated July 14.

"Names of such employees need to be forwarded to the General Manager (Personnel) in headquarter for obtaining necessary approval of CMD," the order added.

In response to queries regarding this matter, Air India spokesperson said, "We would not like to make any comment on the issue."

Aviation sector has been significantly impacted due to the travel restrictions imposed in India and other countries due to the coronavirus pandemic. All airlines in India have taken cost-cutting measures such as pay cuts, LWP and firings of employees in order to conserve cash flow.

For example, GoAir has put most of its employees on compulsory LWP since April. India resumed domestic passenger flights from May 25 after a gap of two months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

However, the airlines have been allowed to operate only a maximum of 45 per cent of their pre-COVID domestic flights. Occupancy rate in Indian domestic flights has been around 50-60 per cent since May 25.

Scheduled international passenger flights continue to remain suspended in India since March 23.

The passenger demand for air travel will contract by 49 per cent in 2020 for Indian carriers in comparison to 2019 due to COVID-19 crisis, said global airlines body IATA on Monday.

NEWS MAKERS

SC Extends Protection To TV Anchor From Coercive Action In Defamation Cases

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court Wednesday extended the protection granted to TV news anchor Amish Devgan against any coercive action in connection with cases lodged over his alleged defamatory remark against Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti during a show telecast on June 15.

A bench headed by Justice A M Khanwilkar asked the respondents, including the states where cases have been lodged and those who had lodged complaints against Devgan, to file their affidavits on the plea and posted the matter for hearing on August 5.

"As prayed, one week's time is granted to the counsel for the respondents to file affidavits/ further affidavits, and thereafter, one week's time is granted



to the counsel for the petitioner (Devgan) to file rejoinder affidavit, if any. List the matter on August 5," said the bench, also comprising Justices Dinesh Maheshwari and Sanjiv Khanna.

"Ad-interim relief to continue till then. It is made clear that the matter may proceed for final disposal on the next date," the bench said in its order.

The apex court had earlier granted interim relief to Devgan and also stayed the probe in the cases related to the June 15

telecast against the journalist.

The bench was hearing a plea file by Devgan who has sought stay on the probe in these criminal cases besides seeking their quashing.

The bench, while referring to the July 14 office report, noted in its order on Wednesday that one of the respondents has refused to accept service and matter would be proceeded ex-parte against him, if he does not wish to appear on future dates.

Indoor Stadium Coming Up In Budgam Soon

BUDGAM: Secretary Youth Service and Sports (YSS), Sarmad Hafeez, Wednesday inspected construction works being executed in the indoor stadium, adjacent to sports ground Budgam and asked the concerned authorities for expeditious completion of this prestigious project.

District Development Commissioner Budgam, Shahabaz Ahmad Mirza and Secretary Sports Council J&K Dr Naseem Choudhary besides other concerned officers were present on the occasion.

While taking stock of progress on several works being executed in the stadium, the Secretary directed the concerned executing agency and J&K Sports Council to accelerate the pace of work by further adding to the existing manpower and machinery so that all works get completed in time.

During the inspection, Secretary was apprised that the project is coming at the cost of Rs 4 crore and the work on it was resumed recently after ease of restrictions in the wake of COVID-19.

Secretary was informed that playfields at Kralpathri and Sikanambal shall be completed soon as work on these stadiums is in full swing. Besides, synthetic courts for sports like Volleyball, Basketball and Badminton located at different places shall be completed within one month.

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