



P6 LIFE & TIMES

HEART DISEASE NOW KILLING MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER BEFORE: WHO

Heart disease, which has remained the leading cause of death at the global level for the last 20 years, is now killing more people than ever ...

P4 EDIT PAGE

DISOWNING OUR WOMEN -AGAIN

When it comes to feeling collectively enraged on the issues of sexual assault and violence against women ...



P8 OBSEVER OUTPOST

LAUNCH SURGICAL STRIKE ON CHINA, PAK IF THEY'RE BEHIND FARMERS' STIR: SANJAY RAUT



Wisdom Quote!

"You cannot teach a man anything, you can only help him find it within himself."
—Galileo

news DIGEST

Misfire Injures Cop In Sopore

SRINAGAR: A Jammu and Kashmir Police constable posted on security duty outside a polling station in Tujjar Shareif area of Sopore in north Kashmir was injured on Thursday after his service weapon accidentally went off, officials said.

Constable Ashraf sustained an injury in his foot after his service weapon accidentally went off outside the polling station for the District Development Council elections, the police officials said. He was taken to SKIMS hospital here for treatment, they said.

Grenade Hurlled On CRPF Camp

SRINAGAR: Suspected militants on Thursday lobbed a grenade towards a CRPF camp located in Nehama area of South Kashmir's Gulgam district.

Unidentified militants lobbed a grenade on the CRPF camp of 18 Battalion in Nehama, however, no loss of life or injury was reported in the incident, local news agency KNO reported while quoting a senior police officer. The report said that soon after the attack, the area was cordoned off to nab the attackers.

Jaish Militant Held In Budgam: Police

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir Police arrested a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militant in central Kashmir's Budgam district, officials said.

Tariq Ahmad Bhat was arrested during a 'naka' checking late on in Goripora area of Budgam on Wednesday night, the police officials said.

They said a pistol and some incriminating material were recovered from his possession. Bhat had reportedly joined militant ranks in September this year.

Drone Movement Seen Along IB: BSF

JAMMU: A drone was spotted flying over the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir's R S Pura sector, BSF officials said on Thursday.

Alert BSF troops guarding the IB at a border outpost fired on the drone Wednesday night, forcing it to return back, the officials said.

On November 29, security forces deployed on the International Border (IB) with Pakistan spotted a drone in Arnia sector of Jammu district.

On November 21, drone movement was noticed in Mendhar sector along the Line of Control (LoC) amid a surge in ceasefire violations by the Pakistani Army, according to sources.

Two drones were spotted and crossed the IB in Samba sector on November 20.

On June 20, a Pakistani drone loaded with a sophisticated rifle and seven grenades was shot down by the Border Security Force along the International Border in Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said.



DDC POLLS

51% Turnout Recorded In 5th Phase: SEC

JAMMU: The fifth phase of District Development Council (DDC) elections held across 37 constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir recorded over 51 percent voter turnout, State Election Commissioner (SEC), K K Sharma said Thursday.

Talking to media persons here after the voting ended, Sharma said that polling was peaceful and people participated enthusiastically despite

severe cold conditions in Kashmir division and some hilly areas of Jammu division. He said polling was peaceful in the 37 constituencies of DDC including 17 in Kashmir division and 20 in Jammu division and the turnout was recorded 51.20 percent.

He also said that polling was held in 2104 polling stations including 1190 from Kashmir

Authorities 'Helping' BJP: PAGD

SRINAGAR: The neutrality of authorities in the district development council elections in Jammu and Kashmir has come under sharp criticism on Thursday from the PAGD leaders, who alleged that the administration was helping the BJP.

The accusations stemmed from several incidents late on Wednesday and on Thursday -- including the reported beating up of three journalists in south Kashmir while covering

the polls, detention of a Congress leader's relative in Uri and a cordon-and-search operation by the Army in Shopian, allegedly to stop people from voting.

The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) is an alliance of several mainstream political parties, including National Conference, the PDP, People's Conference and the CPI(M), which are contesting the DDC polls together in order to keep the BJP and its allies out.

Kashmir Braces For Another Snow Spell



SRINAGAR: The minimum temperature across Kashmir, except in the famous ski-resort of Gulmarg, remained above the freezing point on Thursday even as the valley is bracing up for another wet spell from Friday.

At minus 5.4 degrees Celsius, Gulmarg in north Kashmir was the only place in the valley which recorded sub-zero minimum temperature on Thursday, Met officials said.

They said all the remaining weather stations in the valley, including Pahalgam,

recorded the minimum temperature above the freezing point. The night temperature in Srinagar settled at a low of 3.9 degrees Celsius, the officials said.

The night temperature across the valley was above the normal for this part of the season, they said. The Met office has forecast widespread moderate rain and snow at isolated places.

The rain and snow is likely to continue for two days after which the weather is likely to remain mainly dry for a few days, the officials said. (PTI)

Take Call On Review Pleas On Dec 21: SC Tells J&K HC

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Jammu and Kashmir High Court to decide on December 21 the pleas seeking review of its verdict scrapping the Roshni Act which conferred proprietary rights to occupants of State land.

A bench headed by Justice N V Ramana considered the oral assurance of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who appeared for the Jammu and Kashmir administration, that no coercive action will be taken against those petitioners who have approached the top court in the matter as they are not "land grabbers or unauthorised people".

The bench, also comprising justices Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose, said that



it will hear in January last week the appeals filed before it challenging the October 9 verdict of the high court.

Mehta apprised the apex court that the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir has already filed a review petition in the high court and said that the authority is "not against bonafide and common people who are not land grabbers".

The bench said that pendency of appeals before the apex court would not come in the way of the high court in deciding the review petitions pending there.

The Jammu and Kashmir

High Court had on October 9 declared the Roshni Act "illegal, unconstitutional and unsustainable", and ordered a CBI probe into the allotment of land under this law.

The Roshni Act was enacted in 2001 with the twin objective of generating resources for financing power projects and conferment of proprietary rights to the occupants of State land.

During the hearing conducted through video-conferencing, the apex court said that to avoid conflicting orders, the petitioners should go to the high court for review.

"All petitioners should approach the review bench and all of them should be heard by the high

3 Reporters Covering DCC Polls 'Beaten' By Cops

SRINAGAR: Three journalists were allegedly thrashed by police personnel while they were covering the District Development Council (DDC) polls in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday.

Fayaz Lolu, Mudasir Qadri and Junaid Rafiq also claimed that their equipment was seized by the policemen who took them to a police post after physically assaulting them.

KPC Condemns Assault

SRINAGAR: The Kashmir Press Club (KPC) has condemned the thrashing of three freelance journalists, who work as stringers for various news organisations, by the police in south Kashmir's Anantnag district on Thursday.

According to a statement, the KPC said that the incident happened when these individuals were covering the

KEG Concerned At Recurrent Attacks On Media Persons

SRINAGAR: Kashmir Editors Guild (KEG) has expressed its serious concern over the use of force against three freelance reporters, contributing to three TV channels, while covering the DDC polls in Anantnag. Three TV freelancers Fayaz Lolu (ETV Bharat) Mudasir Qadri (News 18 Urdu) and Junaid Rafiq (TV 9) alleged that they were beaten in Srigufwara in presence of the SSP. They said their equipment was

Judge Alleges Influence In Bail Application Case

SRINAGAR: A senior judge here has complained that an attempt to influence him was allegedly made on behalf of a high court judge in a matter of a bail application, following which he expressed his inability to hear the case.

In a written order, Srinagar Principal Sessions Judge Abdul Rashid Malik alleged that the secretary to a judge of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court had telephoned him to convey the directions of the judge to make sure that no bail was granted to an accused, who had been arrested in a serious criminal case.

Malik, thereafter, expressed his "inability to hear the matter" and said in an order dated December 7 that "this application is submitted to learned Registrar Judicial, High Court of Jammu and Kashmir with the request that the same may be placed before



Hon'ble the Chief Justice as the matter involves the liberty of the person".

The matter was heard by the registrar of the high court who directed the second district and sessions judge to hear the bail application, a state law officer said.

He added that the accused was granted bail in the matter on Wednesday. (PTI)

8 More Covid-19 Deaths In J&K, 366 New Cases

SRINAGAR: At least eight more people died of coronavirus in Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday while 366 fresh cases of Covid-19, including seven BSF personnel were detected across the Union Territory during the last 24 hours, officials said.

Among the victims, five were residents of Kashmir Valley and three others from Jammu division, taking the total number of fatalities since the outbreak of pandemic in J&K to 1775, they said. In Valley, the five victims included a 75-year-old man from Avantipora, a 70-year-old man from Budgam, a 75-year-old man from Anantnag, a 70-year old man from Zakura, and an 80-year-old woman from Hawal here.

Regarding the deaths from Jammu, officials said, two were reported from the winter capital of the J&K and one

HAAJ-2021

Last Date For Submitting Forms Jan 10

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir Hajj Committee on Thursday announced extension in the last date of submitting application forms for Hajj-2021 till January next year.

As per a notification issued here, the Executive Officer, J&K Haj Committee has hereby informed the intending Haj pilgrims that in pursuance of Circular issued by Haj Committee of India, the last date for Submission of Haj Application Forms is hereby extended upto 10th January, 2021, an official spokesperson said.

He said that the notification further informs that the applicants possessing machine readable valid Indian International Passports issued on or before 10th January, 2021 and valid up to 10th January, 2022 will be eligible to apply for Haj - 2021.

Shopian Lawyer Held For 'Ferrying Militants'

SRINAGAR: Police on Thursday arrested an advocate and slapped him with unlawful activities prevention act (UAPA) for allegedly ferrying militants in Shopian district of south Kashmir.

Gowhar Ahmed Wani of Imamsahab Shopian, who was allegedly held while ferrying militants on December 7, was arrested and booked under UAPA, news agency GNS quoted an unnamed police officer as saying.

Quoting sources, the report said that forces had inputs that militants were traveling in a car and when 44 RR of Army intercepted it at Baba Khader Rampura

Covid Ending 'Trust' Of Dark Eyes In Kashmir

ZAID BIN SHABIR

Before Covid changed the pulse of life in the valley, Mohammad Ashraf Wani was busy organizing psychiatric counseling sessions for pellet survivors of Kashmir grappling with the post-traumatic stress disorder.

These sessions helped these survivors to read just among the normal working class without calling themselves "victims".

"To organise these sessions, our Pellet Victims Welfare Trust (PVWT) would collect funds from public during

Friday congregational prayers," Wani, himself a pellet survivor, said.

"But after Covid, neither we could collect funds nor organise counselling sessions for our distressed pellet brethren."



M. ASHAF WANI (R) WITH PELLET VICTIM

BEGINING OF THE TRUST

It was five months after he suffered a pellet barrage on his body including in his eyes that Wani was provoked to change his tribe's traumatic lives.

"I remember it was March 2017," the 24-year-old pellet survivor from Rahmoo Pulwama said. "Before walking inside the SMHS Hospital's Patient-Centred Care Room that day, I saw familiar and friendly faces of six pellet

survivors waiting for their turn."

They were anxious, their bodies were shaking bodies, Wani, wearing black glasses, face mask, and mint green Khan dress, recalled.

"Their plight set me thinking," he continued. "We were strangers, yet a family sharing the same torment."

After his fifteen-minute-long consultation, Wani stepped out of the room and saw all the six

obscure-looking faces gone. He couldn't make sense of their sudden disappearance.

"Later that evening," Wani recounted, "I received a call. And what I learned shook me. Those six pellet survivors were planning a mass suicide in Srinagar that day!"

Wani was told that the financial crisis, societal indifference, family pressure, and the mental constraints had coerced those six eldest sons of their families towards that extreme step.

On his part, Wani had nothing to offer except his consoling

Before injury, my financially-weak family was dreaming to see me a KAS officer one day"

FROM FRONT PAGE

8 More Covid-19 ...

With these deaths, the total fatality count in the Valley has reached 1141 and 634 in the Jammu region. Srinagar district with 430 deaths tops the list followed by Jammu (320), Baramulla (165), Budgam (105), Pulwama (87), Kupwara (87), Anantnag (82), Doda (58), Bandipora (56), Udhampur (53), Kulgam (52), Rajouri (50), Kathua (44), Ganderbal (40), Shopian (37), Samba (34), Poonch (22), Ramban (21), Kishtwar (20), and Reasi (11).

Meanwhile, the Union Territory reported 366 new cases of Covid-19 on Thursday, including seven BSF men, taking the total number of infected people across J&K to 114773.

Giving district wise details, the officials said, Srinagar reported 63 cases, Baramulla 29, Budgam 28, Kupwara 20, Pulwama 19, Anantnag 11, Bandipora 11, Ganderbal 8, Kulgam 5, Shopian 2, Jammu 99, Udhampur 12, Rajouri 15, Doda 10, Kathua 6, Kishtwar 9, Samba 7, Poonch 1, Ramban 6 and Reasi 5.

Moreover, 526 more patients have recovered and discharged from various hospitals including 331 from Jammu Division and 195 from Kashmir Division (With GNS inputs).

Take Call On ...

court. We will direct accordingly," the bench observed.

Mehta said that Jammu and Kashmir administration has made it clear that encroachers and land grabbers cannot claim to be exempted from the high court order.

"Land grabbers cannot be spared and simultaneously, the lawful owners have to be saved," he told the bench.

At the outset, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for one of the petitioners, told the bench that the high court "was wrong in scrapping the Act" and a number of Roshni Act beneficiaries have not even been heard by the high court.

"Are you aware that some reviews petitions are pending in the high court and some of them have been protected there," the bench said. The solicitor general sought one-week time from the bench to respond to the appeals.

"The high court has listed the reviews petitions on December 21. And status quo ante has been restored by the high and then the high court has listed the review petitions," the bench said, asking "how can two parallel proceedings be conducted?"

"The high court is seized of the review petitions," it said.

The apex court observed that the Union Territory's administration has also filed a review petition and it has divided land owners in two categories -- illegal encroachers and real owners.

Rohatgi told the bench that the "idea behind this appeal was not to throw out the lawful owners from the possession of land".

Senior advocate Arvind Datar, appearing for one of the petitioners, said the verdict does not talk about the authorised owners.

Senior advocate Kailash Vasudev, representing another petitioner, said that the review is limited to a few people and the apex court should keep this matter in abeyance and "let the review be decided there".

"We are directing the high court to take up the review petitions pending there," the bench said.

The top court, while saying that it would list the matter in January, told Mehta that till such time there should be no coercive action.

"I am before the lordships and no coercive action will be taken," Mehta said while requesting that no order to this effect be passed.

"Any such order will create confusion," he said, adding that "kindly have it (hear the matter) on Monday".

"I will take instructions. Have it on Monday and I will place the factual position," Mehta said.

Rohatgi said, "The statement of the solicitor general is good enough for me".

The apex court, however, said it will hear the matter in the last week of January.

On December 7, the high court had adjourned till next week the hearing on a petition filed by the administration seeking a review of its earlier order scrapping the Roshni Act in totality.

The petition, filed by Special Secretary in Revenue department Nazir Ahmad Thakur on December 4 for modification of the nearly two-month-old judgment, has pleaded that a large number of common people would suffer unintentionally including landless cultivators and individuals who are themselves residing in dwellings on small areas.

It has said there was a need to distinguish between the common people and the wealthy land grabbers among the beneficiaries, and favoured that landless labourers or those with one house in personal use be allowed to keep the allotted land.

The Roshni Act initially envisaged conferment of proprietary rights of around 20.55 lakh kanals (102750 hectares) to the occupants of which only 15.85 percent land was approved for vesting of ownership rights.

Shopian Lawyer ...

Chowk in Trenz area on December 7, the militants escaped and left vehicle near Pargachoo.

They said that Gowhar had jumped out of the vehicle when the car was intercepted and had said that he was a victim. Gowhar was later questioned and was formally arrested today, they added.

51% Turnout ...

"Jammu division recorded an average voter turnout of 66.67 per cent with Poonch district recording the highest percentage of 71.62 per cent followed by Doda district with 70.95 per cent and 70.83 per cent voting recorded in Rajouri district. The lowest turnout in Jammu division was in Jammu district which recorded 60.24 per cent," the SEC said.

"Kashmir Division recorded 33.57 per cent average voter turnout with Bandipora district recording the highest polling at 56.40 per cent followed by Kupwara District at 52.35 per cent and Budgam with around 45.65 per cent polling," he added.

Giving district wise details, SEC said that in Kashmir Division the polling percentage recorded in Ganderbal was 37.47 per cent, Baramulla 44.31 per cent, Anantnag 21.89 per cent, Kulgam 26.94 per cent, Pulwama 8.12 per cent and 5.52 per cent polling was registered in Shopian.

"Similarly, in Jammu division poll percentage of 64.71 per cent was recorded in Samba, 69.47 per cent in Udhampur, 68.27 per cent in Kishtwar, 67.11 per cent in Ramban, 69.15 per cent in Reasi and 62.36 per cent in Kathua," Sharma said.

Further, the SEC said that counting of votes for Sarpanch and Panch constituencies which went to poll in the 5th phase is being conducted immediately after the close of poll and results shall be declared.

Authorities 'Helping' ...

NC vice president and former chief minister Omar Abdullah alleged that the keepers of the law were more than happy to become lawbreakers "if it serves their interest of cosying up to the BJP & it's offshoots in Kashmir".

"The entire machinery of the administration has taken upon itself the responsibility of helping the BJP in the DDC polls," Abdullah tweeted.

NC spokesperson Imran Nabi Dar said his party leaders were being prevented from campaigning for the DDC polls over the past few weeks in the name of security.

"Our public meeting scheduled for today (Thursday) at Behibagh in Kulgam district was to be addressed by party general secretary Ali Mohammad Sagar and provincial president Nasir Aslam Wani but it was not permitted in the name of security," Dar said.

PDP president and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti, who was prevented from leaving her house on the previous two days, alleged that armed forces were being used to rig the elections.

"Security forces have cordoned Matribagh in Shopian and are not allowing people to come out to vote under the pretext of inputs about presence of militants," Mufti tweeted.

"In a brazen display of power, armed forces are being used to rig this election and favour a particular party," she said, tagging the Election Commission and the Indian Army.

Mufti also lashed out at the authorities in south Kashmir over the alleged thrashing of three journalists by police while they were covering the elections.

"Three journalists thrashed by security forces in South Kashmir today after interviewing a PAGD candidate who wasn't allowed to cast his vote," she said. "Everything and anything that involves stating the truth is being criminalised in J&K."

People's Conference president Sajad Lone urged State Election Commissioner K K Sharma to investigate the case of alleged money distribution by a relative of a candidate in Uri.

According to reports, a close relative of a Congress leader was detained by police on Wednesday evening while he was on his way to a village in Uri.

"Please investigate the case of money distribution in URI. The report sent by police to the DC (deputy commissioner) almost exonerates the accused," Lone tweeted.

He said it was the moral duty Sharma to ascertain the facts, adding that the police should explain why the accused was questioned and being let off now.

Earlier, Lone had tweeted late on Wednesday night about the "attempts to hush up a case involving distribution of money in Parenpeela Uri DDC constituency".

"The LG has a moral duty to ascertain who all r (are) behind attempts to hush up the case," Lone, who is also a PAGD spokesperson, had said.

KEG Concerned ...

seized and they were taken to the local police post.

The Guild is surprised over the reason that the cops resorted to force when everything around was normal. The three TV reporters revealed that they had recorded a political activist's complaint about the polling and were told by a duty officer that the SSP was on way and wanted to give his version.

As the officer's vehicle reached the spot, he avoided giving them a bite and instead started beating them. They said they were taken to the police station and their equipment was seized. During their stay in the station, one of them had a panic attack and was taken to hospital.

By now, the equipment has been returned to them and they have been sent home.

KEG is concerned over the recurrence of these incidents in which reporters are being subjected to violence while discharging their professional duties. Apparently, there is no reason for today's incident to happen. Why should a reporter be beaten when the officer has the right to not respond to a question? KEG hopes the LG Manoj Joshi administration will look into the incident and ensure that this practice of abuse of authority is put to an end.

3 Reporters ...

"SSP Anantnag Sandeep Choudhary objected to our coverage of polling station, where people complained that voting has not started even after the scheduled time. When we reminded the officer that we were just doing our duty, he slapped me and my two other journalist friends," Qadri said.

He said that he and two other journalists Junaid Rafiq of TV 9 and Fayaz Lolu of ETV Bharat were bundled in a gypsy and whisked to Srigufwarwa police station.

"It all happened after we interviewed PAGD candidate Nisar Ahmad and other voters at the polling station. Polling had not started even an hour and a half after the scheduled time," Qadri said.

He said he and two other scribes were detained at the police station for over 90 minutes during which all their equipment, including cellphones were confiscated by the police.

At the police station, he said, another journalist Junaid Rafiq complained of breathlessness following which he was shifted to a local hospital where his oxygen saturation was reading below 64.

Lolu, who works as a stringer with ETV Bharat told journalists that he and two other scribes were beaten up by police while they were discharging their professional duties at a polling station in Lever area of Anantnag on Thursday morning.

Meanwhile, the alleged beating of journalists has evoked sharp condemnation from media fraternity, social and political parties of the Valley.

KPC Condemns ...

ongoing DDC elections in Srigufwarwa area of Anantnag district this morning.

In a distress call to the club Fayaz Lolu who works as a stringer with ETV Bharat stringer told the KPC management that he along with two other Journalists Mudasir Qadri (stringer with News 18 Urdu) and Junaid Rafiq (TV 9) were "beaten" today while covering the ongoing DDC elections in Srigufwarwa area of South Kashmir.

He according to KPC also said that their news gathering equipments were also seized by the police. Fayaz Lolu alleged that it was when the SSP of Anantnag arrived on the spot that they were beaten up ruthlessly and taken to the nearest police post. Fayaz further stated that Junaid has been injured and was in hospital.

The KPC terms this incident unfortunate and calls for a thorough inquiry into the incident. We hope strict action against is taken against those found guilty in this act perpetrated in utter disregard of the freedom of the press. The KPC further urges the Chief Electoral Officer to take note of such incidents and initiate action against the concerned police official.

The KPC further urges that the authorities should ensure that an enabling atmosphere is created for the free and fair functioning of the media in Kashmir.

Covid Ending ...

After a four-hour-long motivational conversation, his words did the trick.

"Those six survivors," he said, "gave up the idea of suicide forever."

However, Wani said, they were not the only ones in desperate need of support. Many 'silent types', like Adil Hussain Dar of Shopian, needed the same treatment.

The 22-year-old was called the "Tendulkar of welding" for his monumental work. But during the 2016 protests, Dar lost his eyesight to pellet assault. There was no end to his miseries, as he was forced to halt work, which created family crisis for him.

"The medical expenses put the pellet victims' family in such deep debt that it forces them to give up on their own children," Dar lamented over his fate.

As the majority of the pellet survivors in Kashmir belong to humble families, they often gave up on their medical treatment as the sense of failure in fulfilling their family obligation takes a mental toll on them.

A RAY OF HOPE

These crisis-ridden cases eventually motivated Wani to institutionalize Pellet Victims Welfare Trust (PVWT) on August 25, 2017. And since its inception, the trust has already helped the survivors in overcoming their traumatic behaviours.

"I established the trust with the support of five other survivors," Wani said. "I was hit by a bullet in the back which pierced my liver and came out through the chest and then after 2 months I was fired 635 pellets. My conscience wasn't allowing me to let anybody else experience the same mental stress that I did after all these injuries."

Currently, some 1200 pellet survivors, including Shabroza from Rahmoo Pulwama, are registered with Wani's PVWT.

A DISARRAYED DREAM

The 18-year-old class topper was preparing for her board exams when the deadly pellets pierced her left eye during 2016 protests.

"Before injury, my financially-weak family was dreaming to see me a KAS officer one day," Shabroza said. "But that dream will only stay a dream now."

It was Wani's Trust, which became a much-needed moral support for Shabroza during her distress.

"Pellet survivors aren't always in dire need of financial assistance," she said. "They mostly need some moral support to cope up with injury."

And this is where Wani's Trust was chipping in with aid and assistance until pandemic came as a spoiler.

Showing receipt of the last received fund of Rs 200 on February 2020, Wani said, his Trust has not received any penny since March.

As the crippling covid has seized all the financial support and mental supervision for these pellet victims, Wani and his team are on the verge of shutting down the Trust that once visioned to provide a peaceful life to thousands of dark eyes in Kashmir.

Last Date ...

"Furthermore, the approximate estimated cost of Hajj- 2021 for Aziziya Category in respect of Srinagar Embarkation point has been reviewed by HCOI and shall be Rs. 3, 61, 927.40," he added.

Financial Commissioner Launches J&K Bank's Scheme For Hospitality Sector

J&K Bank's Progress Linked With Business Community: JKB CMD

SRINAGAR: Giving a big financial push to the UT Government's resolve to revive tourism sector in the region, J&K Bank on Thursday launched special scheme titled 'Business Support Loan Scheme 2019-20 for Hotels and Guest Houses'.

The scheme was unveiled through virtual mode from Jammu by Financial Commissioner, Finance Department, J&K UT government Dr.A K Mehta (IAS) in presence of Chairman & MD R K Chhibber and Chairman J&K Hoteliers Club Mushtaq Chaya.

Executive Presidents of the bank Arun Gandotra, G N Teli and Sunil Gupta, Presidents Rajni Saraf, Ashraf Ali and Chetan Paljor, Special Secretary to CMD Karanjit Singh, Vice Presidents, office bearers of hoteliers' associations and other officers of the bank were also present on the occasion.

The hoteliers were represented by Chairman TCI Shafi Ahmad Trambo, Chairman Hattrick Group Showket Ahmad Choudhary, Chairman Gulmarg Hoteliers Club Mukhtar Shah and General Secretary Gulmarg Hoteliers Club Akib Chaya.

The scheme has been tailored after incorporating the valuable inputs from the hoteliers and related businessmen to provide requisite finances to the hotels and guesthouses for meeting their infra-structural and dailyrunning costs.

Speaking on the occasion, CMD R K Chhibber said, "Progress of the J&K Bank is linked to the progress of the business community. J&K Bank has been playing very pro-active role in reviving different sectors of J&K economy especially during the ongoing pandemic. Soon after the initial pandemic-related restrictions were eased, we engaged with all the stakeholders in local economy while devising our plans for effective financial intervention. The scheme to support the business of hotels and guest houses is one of the outcomes of those engagements. It is also in line with UT Government's

vision to achieve the tag of India's most preferred tourist destination by providing the world-class tourism infra-structure and enhanced hospitality facilities across the region. Both Honble Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and Financial Commissioner Dr. A K Mehta have been closely following J&K Bank's plan to support the tourism sector I am happy we have come up with a scheme that will provide relief and liquidity to the hospitality sector", the CMD said.

"The inclusion of the accounts that were affected by 2014-floods and 2016 disruptions and the 5% interest subvention to the borrowers affected by the Covid in the Revival Package for the business community of the UT of J&K announced by J&K UT government-led by the hon'ble Lt Governor Manoj Sinha – has significantly helped the business community and has brought in a much needed relief to the business community", he added.

He further added that only a few days back the progress on the revival package was undertaken by the Chief Secretary Subrahmanyam Swami from Financial Commissioner A K Mehta separately and they appreciated the progress achieved by the J&K Bank in the implementation of the package.

Executive President Arun Gandotra while presenting various features of the scheme said, "We know the cash flow of the hotel sector has been severely affected by the Covid 19 Pandemic. Keeping in view the challenges faced by the industry, we devised this scheme accordingly and only after incorporating the inputs from the industry players so that J&K bank could contribute its bit to get the industry back on its feet. We will be funding the hoteliers so that they are able to meet their expenditure towards salaries to staff and other fixed costs", he added.

The hoteliers' team led by Chaya hailed the J&K Bank management-led by the CMD R K Chhibber for the

hospitality sector-friendly scheme.

"The scheme is historic in more than one ways. It is surely going to lift the spirit and business of the hotel industry up. We are thankful and grateful to Chhibber Sahab for ensuring that the scheme was pro-hoteliers and a game changing one for the industry. We have lot of expectations from J&K Bank, and the premier institution of the UT has never disappointed us. They have always supported us through thick and thin, and, businessmen have always prospered from their relationship with the bank," Chaya said.

The role of staff both at offices and business units was hailed by the hoteliers' team saying, "J&K Bank has the best staff in the banking industry. Their dedication is unmatched. We want the institution to prosper and believe that I will contribute to our progress in days ahead also."

Vice President Manzoor Hussain ended the function with vote of thanks.

Notably, the Scheme shall remain valid till February 28, 2021 with the quantum of finance ranging from Rs 32.40 lac for twelve-room hotel/ guest house to Rs 495 lac for sixty and above rooms depending upon the category of the hotel/ guest house. Having an attractive interest rate, the repayment period for the scheme is 48 months after initial moratorium period of 12 months (in respect of principal amount only) from the date of first disbursement of the loan.

All the hotels and guest houses registered and recognized by the government, availing loan facilities from the bank (standard as on February 29, 2020 (which includes SMA-0, SMA-1 & SMA-2), & continue to be classified as standard as on date of disbursement of facility are eligible under the scheme, besides those accounts holders who are not availing any loan facilities from any bank/financial institution, which makes it unique across the industry.

Cong Bats For Early Assembly Polls

JAMMU: If District Development Council (DDC) polls can be held in times of COVID-19, Assembly elections can too, Jammu and Kashmir Congress in-charge Rajni Patil said on Thursday as she demanded for an elected government in the union territory.

She said the BJP ferried dozens of Union ministers, national leaders and film personalities to campaign in Jammu and Kashmir as it feared it would lose in these local elections.

Flanked by state unit president Gulam Ahmed Mir, Patil also hit out at the administration for withdrawal of security and vehicles of Congress leaders, claiming the move was aimed at stopping them from campaigning for the DDC polls.

"If they (government) can hold DDC elections during the Covid times, I appeal and demand holding of assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir soon, and put in place an elected government. They should do it. It is our demand," Patil told reporters here. Patil is the only national leader of the Congress to have hit the campaign trail for the DDC elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

She criticised the government for holding the polls at a time when the COVID-19 situation is still not under control. "They took a wrong decision to hold these polls now. Our several top leaders were infected with COVID-19, including youth and women Congress unit heads and former ministers. It is difficult to campaign," Patil said.

On the withdrawal of security and vehicles of several Congress leaders including himself, Mir said, "Life and death is in the hands of Almighty. They withdrew the security of our leaders, former ministers and former legislators during this period. It is clear that they want us restricted to our homes."

Commercial Building At Rajbagh

HC Appoints Expert On Permissibility, Impact On Environment



SRINAGAR: Observing that environmental concerns cannot be ignored or compromised in any manner, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court has appointed a Delhi-based expert on the permissibility of the multi-storey commercial building which is coming up between 10 to 15 feet from the banks of the River Jhelum in Rajbagh area here.

"In eco-fragile territories as that of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, environmental concerns cannot be ignored or compromised in any manner. River Jhelum is an essential natural feature in the Valley and its protection and preservation has to remain of primary and utmost concern," said a division of the court said while hearing a petition.

"We hereby appoint Ms. Sunita Narain, Director General, Centre for Science & Environment, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi as the Expert/Local Commissioner to assist the scrutiny by this Court," the division bench said.

Ms. Sunita Narain, the court said, shall examine and give expert opinion on the permissibility of the construction being raised at the site, its impact from every angle on environment and ecology, its impact on the protection of River Jhelum.

"Ms. Sunita Narain shall also examine the river management policy schemes, practices of Jammu and Kashmir; the status of the rivers, give

expert opinion regarding protection and preservation of the rivers, the effect of construction along the rivers, impact of release of sewage into rivers, impact of dumping of garbage on river banks and rivers."

The court directed that the Government shall examine the recommendations and take urgent steps to implement the same. "Ms. Sumita Narain shall be assisted by Ms. Sushma Chouhan, DC, Jammu, in the above exercise to be undertaken."

The DC Jammu has been asked to examine the documents relied on by the builder, trace the title chain and submit a report, the court said further. "Ms. Chouhan shall also examine the records relating to the land, its usage etc and submit a report to Ms. Sunita Narain."

The court directed that the entire record of the case, including the revenue records, sale deeds, applications for non objection certificates filed, records relating to their processing and sanction accorded be placed before Ms. Sunita Narain for examination.

"Ms. Sunita Narain shall carefully scrutinize the same and submit a report to this court on the issues noted by us in the order dated 10th November 2020 and the present order," the court said. The court also ordered the continuation of the prohibition on any construction imposed by it on November 10 till further orders. (GNS)

SAVE PRECIOUS LIFE

A person has been diagnosed with the failure of both the kidneys the financial condition of the person is worst and is not able to best the expense for her kidney treatment so it is requested to all those who have the means to donate for this noble cause so that the precious life could be saved Name **Shafiq Bano W/o** Imtiyaz Ahmad Dar R/o Buchpora Dar Mohalla Srinagar



A/C No: 0173040150000537 J&K BANK
Branch Anchar Buchpora IFSC CODE JAKAO ANCHAR
CONTACT NO: 9797665000, 9419378547

Justice Magrey for prioritizing old cases

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Justice Ali Mohammad Magrey, Administrative Judge for District Srinagar held a video conference with the Judicial Officers posted at District Headquarter Srinagar on Thursday.

He emphasized upon the Judges to ensure disposal of old cases on priority, so that there is no long wait for the litigants who are seeking justice.

Justice Magrey urged upon the judges to be fearless in delivering justice so that the confidence of the common man on Justice Delivery System is strengthened as the people have great trust and confidence in the Courts.

To be fair and honest is the basic virtue of judge as the process of delivery of justice is divine in nature and has to be pure and unadulterated, he added.

While appreciating the Judicial Officers for their hard work and maintaining the decorum and dignity of the Court, Justice Magrey sought weekly performance reports from the Judicial Officers so as to ensure that priority is given to the old pending cases.

Abdul Rashid Malik, Principal District and Sessions Judge Srinagar briefed Justice Magrey about the functioning of the Courts at Srinagar and also highlighted the infrastructural requirements. The Administrative Judge issued on the spot directions to the concerned to ensure no difficulty in operating different mechanical services including heating system in the Court Complex and other facilities should occur during winter.

Dwivedi reviews status of power supply to Industrial Estates

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Commissioner Secretary, Industries and Commerce, Manoj Kumar

ready been released to GM DIC Shopian for clearing the work done liability.

Commissioner Secretary directed officers to



Dwivedi, today chaired an officers meeting to review the status of power supply to various Industrial Estates (IE) in Kashmir Valley at Civil secretariat, Srinagar.

The meeting was attended by Director Industries and Commerce, Mehmood Ahmad, MD JKP-DCL, Kashmir, Ajaz Assad and Chief Engineer Power Distribution, Kashmir, Ajaz Ahmad.

Threadbare discussion was held on electricity supply to various IEs including IE Aglar Shopian, IE Vessu Anantnag, IE Khrew Pulwama, IE Wuyun Pulwama, IE Mehmoodabad Dooru Anantnag, IE Ashmuji Kulgam, IE Malwan Kulgam, IE Kugam and IE Gagan Shopian.

It was informed that electric works of IE Aglar Shopian are in progress and the requisite funds have already been released to GM DIC Shopian for clearing the work done liability.

complete the electric works being executed in the upcoming and existing industrial units at IE Aglar.

Regarding IE Vessu, it was appraised that power transformer has been commissioned besides up gradation of existing electric infrastructure of IE Gagan Shopian is in progress.

The meeting also discussed the progress on completion of DPR and allotment of funds for electric works in Khrew, Wuyun and Mehmoodabad Industrial Estates taken up under languishing projects.

Commissioner Secretary asked the officers to ensure completion of electrification works being executed in all the estates by the end of current financial year so the prospective entrepreneurs are able to take up construction of units.

No electricity: Zakura locals 'seizes' PDD vehicle

Srinagar: Locals virtually seized a vehicle belonging to Power Development Department because of non-availability of electricity in Zakura area of Srinagar outskirts on Thursday.

Local sources told news agency that locals in Zakura Srinagar halted and seized a PDD vehicle in the area to demonstrate the anger against the non-availability of electricity from past one week.

They said that area

is reeling under darkness while authorities have miserably failed to mitigate the sufferings of the people. "There are pesky power cuts sometimes while most of the time there is no electricity," they said.

The locals blocked the road and hijacked the PDD vehicle for hours together.

Sources said that the vehicle was released only after the assurance from the higher ups that matter will be looked into. (KNT)

Gulmarg hotels to witness 100% bookings on New Year

Raises hopes among tourism players

Agencies

Srinagar: There is good news for the tourism sector as tourism has started picking up in Kashmir and has raised high hopes among tourism players.

Tourism sector has been badly hit since August 5 last year due to restrictions imposed by the government after New Delhi abrogated Article 370 and then COVID-19 lockdown.

As per figures of the Tourism Department, 43000 tourists visited Kashmir between August and December last year. While in 2020, only 16,000 tourists visited Kashmir till August. However, since the lockdown has been lifted there has been an increase in the number of tourists.

More than 6000 tourists visited the valley in September and October.

"On Christmas and New Year, all rooms have been booked either by tourists or by locals," an official of the Tourism Department told the news agency.

The government in Kashmir is also organizing food festivals where dishes of various countries and local dishes of various states are available for tourists.

Director, Tourism Kashmir, Nisar Ahmad Wani has kick started the winter sports activities at

Early snow has come as a blessing and we are ready to host tourists and winter enthusiasts in Kashmir Valley in general and Gulmarg in particular.

the world famous Ski Resort of Gulmarg.

"Early snow has come as a blessing and we are ready to host tourists and winter enthusiasts in Kashmir Valley in general and Gulmarg in particular," Wani said.

He said this season a number of Ski courses for young boys and girls are slated to be organized for which a large number of applications have already been received. He said initially, four groups from within J&K and two groups from outside will undergo Ski courses in coming weeks. Two groups are exclusive for girls. He said other departments like Youth Services and Sports Department are also organising Ski courses.

Director Tourism urged the

young boys and girls to come forward, actively participate and enjoy the winter games at Gulmarg.

Tariq Ahmad Ganie, who is General Secretary J&K Hotels, said the tourism sector was shut since August 5 last year.

"But there has been a good response from tourists for the last few weeks. There is 100 percent booking of hotels at Gulmarg on Christmas and New Year. At present, there is 50 percent booking to hotels," Ganie said.

He also appealed to the government to extend the lease period of hoteliers so they can run their hotels smoothly.

There are 70 hotels at Gulmarg and 110 hotels at Pahalgam.

A hotelier at Gulmar said there is 100 percent booking of hotels on Christmas and New Year.

"We have suffered heavy losses since August last year. A lot of domestic tourists have shown willingness to visit Kashmir.

A tour operator said for the first time since August last year, they are receiving a good number of bookings.

"Tourists have shown willingness to visit here, because of a ban on international travel due to COVID-19 and weather as Kashmir received snowfall," he said. (KINS)

DIAL-EMMA



- TRAFFIC POLICE : 9419993745, 01998-266686
- PCR: 0194-2452092,2455883
- PDD: 0194-2450213
- FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES : 2479488,245222,2452155
- CAPD: 18001807011
- SMC HEALTH OFFICER: 9469409081

AIRPORTS

SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311



RAILWAYS

- SRINAGAR: 0194-2103259
- ANANTNAG: 01932-228243
- BARAMULLA: 0194-102029
- BIJHERA: 01932-228243
- PAMPORE: 01933-294132
- PATTAN: 01954-293507
- QAZIGUND: 01951-296153



HIGHWAY STATUS



- Sgr-Jammu highway - (Open)
- Mughal Road - (Open)
- Srinagar- Leh- (Open)



HIJRI
CALENDAR
25 Rabi-us-Sani
1442

PRAYERS

FAJR	5: 54
ZUHR	12: 22
ASR	3:45
Magrib	5:25
ISHA	6:50

This Day In History

- 359 - Honoratus, first known Prefect of the City of Constantinople, takes office.
- 384 - St Damasus I dies and ends his reign as Catholic Pope. Began reign 366
- 1282 - Llywelyn ab Gruffydd/Llywelyn the Last, last native Prince of Wales is killed at Cilmeri, near Builth Wells, south Wales. Reigned from 1259.
- 1395 - John "Eleanor" Rykener, a male cross-dressing prostitute, is brought to court in London for "committing that detestable unmentionable and ignominious vice" in late medieval England's only recorded case on same-sex intercourse (verdict unknown)
- 1419 - Heretic Nicolaas Serrurier exiled from Florence
- 1477 - Duchess Maria of Burgundy ends the 'Great Privilege' in states of The Netherlands
- 1572 - Spanish troops begin siege of Haarlem
- 1602 - Surprise attack by forces of the Duke of Savoy and his brother-in-law, Philip III of Spain repelled by citizens of Geneva. Commemorated since as Fête de l'Escalade
- 1618 - Russia & Poland signs Peace treaty of Dailino
- 1917 - German-occupied Lithuania proclaims independence from Russia
- 1931 - Japan leaves the Gold Standard
- 1937 - Italy withdraws from League of Nations.
- 1940 - Russian general Georgy Zhukov warns of German assault
- 1941 - Australian state cricket associations, South Australia, Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales decide at meetings with new Prime Minister John Curtin to abandon all interstate first class matches for the duration of WWII
- 1946 - Spain suspended from UN
- 1946 - UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) established (Nobel 1965)
- 1950 - British Physicist Cecil Frank Powell awarded Nobel Prize in Physics for his study of nuclear processes and the discovery of the pion
- 1959 - Emilio G. Segrè publishes his discovery of the antiproton, a sub-atomic antiparticle for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1959
- 1964 - Che Guevara speaks at the United Nations General Assembly in New York City. An unknown terrorist fires a mortar shell at the building during the speech.
- 1967 - People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) established
- 1969 - Libya adopts constitution
- 1972 - Astronauts Cernan & Harrison become 11th & 12th people on the Moon
- 1977 - Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, leaders of the group 'Peace People' (an organisation dedicated to encouraging a peaceful resolution of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland) receive the Nobel Peace Prize
- 1981 - Spacelab 1 arrives at Kennedy Space Center
- 1990 - US 69th manned space mission STS 35 (Columbia 11) returns from space
- 1994 - Russian troops enter Chechnya
- 2006 - International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust is opened in Tehran, Iran by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
- 2012 - 125 people are killed and 200 are injured by bombings in Aqrah, Syria
- 2012 - British physicist, Stephen Hawking, wins the \$3 million Fundamental Physics Prize, the most lucrative academic prize in the world
- 2014 - CIA Director John Brennan defends interrogation methods used after 9/11 but admits some methods were "abhorrent"
- 2015 - Unrest in Burundi leads to clashes between authorities and protesters in Bujumbura, killing at least 87.
- 2016 - Kyrgyzstan votes in a referendum to change the constitution to give the government more power
- 2017 - Saudi Arabia announces an end to its 35 year ban on cinemas
- 2017 - US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand calls for the resignation of President Donald Trump given 16 women have accused him of sexual harassment
- 2017 - Rahul Gandhi, son of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, is elected leader of the Indian National Congress

From KO Archives

American FBI team arrives in Sgr

Observer News Service

NEW DELHI: A two-member team of US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) today left for Srinagar in connection with the mysterious disappearance of the four foreigners kidnapped in 1995, official sources said.

The sources said this was a routine visit by the FBI officials as per the requirement of the United States laws where they have to submit a report every quarter.

Six foreigners — John Childs and Donald Fred Hutchings (both US nationals), Paul Wells and Keith Mangan (UK nationals), Dirk Hasert (German) and Hans Christian Ostro (Norwegian) — had been kidnapped in July 1995 from Pahalgam hills in South Kashmir.

The group responsible for kidnapping identified itself as Al-Faran. While Childs managed to give a slip to his abductors, the head of Norwegian abductee was found severed near Anantnag in August 1995.

The fate of other four hostages despite hectic search operation carried by the government and later by German and British police remains unknown.

(KASHMIR OBSERVER, 11 DECEMBER, 2000)

Office Of The Assistant Regional Transport Officer Budgam Kashmir NOTICE

Whereas an application has been recieved from one. Shri : Mohammad Rafiq Ganaie S/o: Ghulam Ahmad Ganaie R/o: Ganai Mohalla Budgam owner of vehicle bearing Registration No: JK04E-8067 for cancellation of hire purchase agreement with M/S J&K Bank B/U Budgam. Now therefore it is notified for the information of the general public that objections if any to the proposed cancellation of hire purchase Agreement shall be filed in writing in the office of the Assistant Regional Transport office ARTO Budgam within a period of 12 days from the date of publication of this notice in the daily newspaper . No. ARTO/ BUDGAM.1952 Dated 10-12-2020



Assistant Regional Transport officer
Budgam Kashmir

MCB

Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir

Office of the Executive Engineer, Estates Division Srinagar.

SHORT TERM NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

FRESHNIT No:-95/e-tender/estates/2020-21 of 12/2020

Executive Engineer, Estates Division, Srinagar on behalf of the Lt. Governor Union Territory J&K, invites by E-tendering on item rate basis from approved and eligible Registered Approved Suppliers & Dealers with Union Territory J&K /CPWD/Railways and other State/Central Governments for the following works:-

S. No	Name of Work	Est. Cost (Rs. In Lacs)	Cost of T/Doc. (Rs. In Lacs)	Earnest Money (Rs. In Lacs)	Time of completion	Class of Contractor
1	2	3	4	5	6	8
1	Supply of inverter batteries for use of different Quarters/ Bungalows of Estates Division, Srinagar.	13.50 lacs	800/-	27000/-	As and when required for the Current Financial Year 2020-21	Registered Dealers & Suppliers

Position of AAA

1. The Bidding documents Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Drawings, 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.jk-tenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given below:-

1.	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	09-12-2020
2.	Period of downloading of bidding documents	From 09-12-2020 (03:30 PM) to 15-12-2020 (4.00 PM)
3.	Bid submission Start Date	09-12-2020 (03.30 PM)
4.	Bid Submission End Date	15-12-2020 (4.00 PM)
5.	No Hard copy is required but in case of any ambiguity found, the original documents may be demanded after opening of online tenders	
6.	Date & time of opening of Bids (Online)	15-12-2020 (4.05 PM) In the Office of the Executive Engineer, Estates Division, Srinagar.

- Bids must be accompanied with cost of Tender document in shape of G.R to be remitted in Treasury under Major Head: 0216-Housing and Earnest money / Bid security in shape of CDR / FDR/ B.G pledged to Executive Engineer, Estates Division, Srinagar.
- The date and time of opening of Bids shall be notified on Web Site 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 Executive Engineer, Estates Division, Srinagar. (tender receiving authority)
- The bids for the work shall remain valid for a period of 120 days from the date of opening of Technical bid
- All other terms conditions are as per PWD Form 25 (Double agreement Form)

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Estates Division, Sgr.

No:-XEN/EDS/20/3092-01/T-1
Dated: - 09-12-2020

DIPK-10228/20

KASHMIR OBSERVER

Printed & Published by Sajjad Haider on behalf of the
Kashmir Observer LLP
Published from: # 5- Boulevard, Srinagar-190001
Printed at: KT Press Pvt. Ltd, Rangreth Ind Area, Srinagar.
RNI Registration No: 69503/98
Postal Registration No-L/159/KO/SK/2014-16
Editor-in-Chief : Sajjad Haider
Legal Counsel: Tasaduq Khwaja
Switchboard: (0194) 2106304
Editorial: (0194) 2502327
Email editorial: editor@kashmirobsvserver.net

K O V I E W

Address Fears Of Farmers

Protests by farmers in the country is showing no signs of ending with successive talks between the government and farmers' leaders leading nowhere. The farmer unions have rejected the latest proposal by the government to amend controversial new farm laws and have warned they will intensify their protests if their demand for rollback of the new farm laws was not met. The centre on Wednesday had sent a written proposal to the unions, laying out a series of amendments including written assurances for Minimum Support Price (MSP), one of the key demands of protesting farmers. The government had also proposed the scrapping of the Electricity Amendment Bill opposed by farmers. Besides, the agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar also held out assurance that the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Mandis will not be dismantled.

But the farmers are not ready to budge. They want the three farm laws passed by the union government that deregulate crop pricing withdrawn. They argue that the laws will only hurt their livelihoods and will only benefit large corporations. The situation remains deadlocked. The farmers, meanwhile, have laid a siege to New Delhi, blocking its main entry points. The government, it seems, has now fewer options left but to accede to farmers' demands. If this happens this will be the first time that the Modi government will be forced to withdraw any of the laws it has passed so far.

One of the biggest charge against the BJP-led union government is that it is unilaterally passing the far-reaching laws with a bearing on the lives of the millions of people. This started with sudden demonitisation of Rs 1000 and Rs 500 notes in November 2016 that plunged the country into a virtual chaos. People thronged the banks to either exchange or deposit their old currency. Long queues of people, a significant number of them senior citizens, appeared outside the banks and ATMs to deposit their cash. Scores lost their lives in the process. Then followed the GST reform which crushed the small businesses. This was followed by the revocation of Article 370 that granted J&K its semi-autonomous status within Indian Union. The move's disruptive fallout is still playing out in J&K and Ladakh, the former parts of J&K state, now downgraded into two union territories. Following this, the centre came up with Citizenship Amendment Act that ensured that only non-Muslim refugees from the neighbouring countries are entitled to Indian citizenship. Though the CAA was also resisted by people, the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic ended the protest. Now the farmers protest is taking place despite the pandemic. And it remains to be seen how the central government responds to it. The best course for the government is to address the anxieties of the farmers and do everything to assure them that their livelihoods will not be threatened.

OTHER OPINION

Honey trap

Sweetness can leave a bitter taste in the mouth. Researchers from the Centre for Science and Environment have alleged that the honey produced by major Indian brands is adulterated with sugar syrup. That is not all; there appears to be a discrepancy in the results of different tests geared towards the same purpose. The environment watchdog had selected 13 popular honey brands to assess the purity of the product. Curiously, while the samples of almost all the big brands tested at the Centre for Analysis and Learning in Livestock and Food in Gujarat were found to be 'pure', 10 of the same brands failed the Nuclear Magnetic Resonance test, which is conducted by a specialized laboratory in Germany and is used globally to check for the use of modified sugar syrups. It stands to reason that assessment standards vary. If the NMR test detected adulteration that the checks in Gujarat could not identify, ought not the Central government to adopt the more stringent assessment model for domestic testing since the matter concerns public health?

Making the waters murkier are revelations of the import and use of Chinese sugar syrups that are 'designed' to avoid detection in tests. The CSE has said that its investigators received a shipment of samples containing syrup from a Chinese company that sought to evade the honey testing protocols mandated by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. In the wake of the recent border hostilities, the Union government tom-tommed its ban on a series of Chinese mobile apps as an economic 'surgical strike'. Yet, it is evident that Chinese syrups continue to be imported by firms; traders even claim that Chinese companies have helped set up sugar syrup factories in India. It appears that the Centre's economic surgical strike against China may have missed a few targets. The main worry, however, concerns regulatory oversight. The history of weak implementation of adulteration laws in India does not help either; Maggi was banned by the FSSAI in 2015 for allegedly selling lead-laced instant noodles before the government allowed the brand to return to the market. The battle against food fraud must be fought on two fronts. First, there is a case for raising public awareness so that citizens know that the products they are consuming are safe; second, institutional assessment protocols must be uniform to avoid conflicting results. There is also the additional imperative of assisting beekeeping communities — the maulis of the Sunderbans are an example — whose livelihoods have been decimated by the pandemic.

Telegraph India



Disowning Our Women – Again

AHYMON AYOUB

“Patriarchal structures are impartial to gender differences when it comes to fuelling and enforcing silences yet women in our society are at a particular disadvantage given the complex and intersectional positions they are placed at

When it comes to feeling collectively enraged on the issues of sexual assault and violence against women, we have developed an infamously thick culture of silence.

The recent rape case of a 21 year old woman who eventually succumbed to her injuries has yet again resurfaced our criminal culture of silence. The 21-year-old, breathed her last on November 27 after being abducted and raped by two men in an orchard in Ashmuji village of Kulgam. The woman fought grave injuries at the hospital for over a month, but could not make it. The Doctors said she was badly injured. As the initial report goes, she was hit on her head which caused traumatic brain injury. She had strangulation marks on her neck. The final autopsy report is yet to come, yet the level of violence inflicted on the deceased is harrowing.

As per the statement given by the deceased's aunt, she was not only raped but ruthlessly tortured. The skin around her eyes was found torn, she had marks around her neck suggesting that the culprits attempted to choke her to death.

No matter how graphic the details of the case are, our society has decided to stay firmly indifferent on the matter. As in this case, rape is often accompanied by assault and violence wherein use of sharp objects is made to inflict additional pain. While psychoanalysts would read such violent behaviour as a form of 'womb envy', it is also reflective of how toxic masculinity is emboldened by our collective silence.

While we as a society should be protesting against such crimes and demanding punishment for the culprits, we rather choose to dig our heads into the sand. "Social fabric" and "righteousness" in other words, are kept intact by choosing the easy path of denial. No wonder

the brutal rape case has failed to shake the spirits of the valley. The criminal culture of silence and the doctrine of denial have thankfully fortified our collective conscience from the bruises of guilt and freed us from the responsibility to act. The rightful sentiment of informed rage is insanely and maddeningly absent in our context.

The whole process begins with a misplaced assumption that we inhabit the Reshi Waerr / Land of Sufis and therefore are immune to aberrations on these lines. If at all any such aberrations do take place they are immediately attributed to "foreign influences" on "indigenous" culture.

Both the statements do hold an element of truth but are largely redundant and evasive since, yet again, there is no space left for collective introspection and interrogation of structures that lead to crimes against women. Such thinking imagines the members of society as passive adherents absolving them of any action. Evil has always formed an integral part of every society and shying away from recognising it is a bigger evil.

Unknowningly, our indifference and our unwillingness of engagement with the issues related to sex education sets a cycle of violence into motion which engenders more violence at each level. Such topics are deemed downright subversive to collective piety and social equilibrium.

The incident serves as a reflection of how patriarchal systems are inherently disempowering and limiting, particularly for women. When the entire society should be up in the arms against the culprits, it strictly adheres to its notion of taboo.

Stigmatisation is yet another criminal factor attached. Culprits may be recognised and may face collective ridicule from the society, yet the victim is put under unbearable pressure. Victim-blaming is still a norm. This results in shrink-

ing spaces for reporting the rape cases which further emboldens the criminals and sponsors silence.

Even as there is still disagreement over how rape culprits must be dealt with. One view is that violence cannot be stopped by inflicting more violence. Therefore, the paths of re-socialisation and counselling should be taken on board in dealing with the culprits. While such debates will continue to happen, steps for the security of women must be taken right from the beginning.

We must realise that even as we may debate and discuss the merits and demerits of retributive justice, it is also important to see how our own society feeds rape culture. An inconsequential nostalgia is rarely the way forward. Until and unless, we see women as agential beings and do not reduce them to objects, violence against women is inevitable. We need to acknowledge how rape is not merely a sexual crime but a crime that emanates from a position of power.

When we "reason" with rape, it only promotes rape culture. Our discussions about rape and how to avoid them need to shift the entire focus to grooming potential culprits rather than bickering about all that's wrong with women which is nothing but rape apology.

Patriarchal structures are impartial to gender differences when it comes to fuelling and enforcing silences yet women in our society are at a particular disadvantage given the complex and intersectional positions they are placed at. The fact that our society has forgotten and disowned its women perhaps serves as pointer of who the real culprits are when such dehumanising crimes take place.

The author is a Master in Sociology from University of Kashmir and is a freelance researcher interested in issues related to Islam and Gender



OBSERVER MAIL

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

MAIL YOUR LETTERS

P.O.Box # 337, GPO, Srinagar-190 001
email: editpage.ko@gmail.com

2G Kashmir in a 5G World

Internet services were snapped last year with the abrogation of Article-370, only to be resumed after months at 2g speeds. Different sectors including health, education and businesses which are in this age heavily dependent on internet suffered severe losses. While the internet services were resumed at throttled speeds, Covid-19 outbreak engulfed the entire state like any other part of the world invoking a lockdown by the authorities. It caused educational institutions to suspend their operations, businesses were shut and offices started working from home through internet meetings. In any other part of the world, it could've been convenient but in Jammu and Kashmir people suffered again.

Students, businessmen, and everyone dependent on internet suffered due to an internet speed which rarely operates anywhere else apart from our region.

During the time of Covid-19 lockdowns, the governments around the world were offering free internet as well as access to entertainment platforms for free. On the other end, in Jammu and Kashmir it felt like we were taken out of one coop to be locked into another. The classes of our students went online and they faced severe problems to attend and understand lectures through a pathetic internet which is being provided. Our students had to face national level examinations like NEET/IIT-JEE with fewer and constrained resources, which encompasses the equilibrium

of equity by huge margins.

Apart from that, we also saw that internet was used as a combative tool by WHO to educate and enlighten people about the corona virus. However, in this part of the world we were still kept deprived from it.

Since the world is already moving towards 5g, it's primitive to keep a huge section of people deprived of their access to high speed internet. The world has already been accustomed to new working models which are heavily based on internet usage. Going with the tradition of moving forward, instead of going back in time, it becomes imperative on the authorities to lift the constraints on high speed internet.

The telecommunication companies have been charging for 4g plans

from the customers while providing them with 2g services. This is an open fraud being practiced in a broad daylight with no accountability and transparency at all. They've already earned more than what they deserved to be paid.

The resumption of high speed internet should be considered by the authorities as the continuous bar on it makes it a case of abject discrimination against Kashmiris. In this world where every field has a cut throat competition going on, our people can't be provided with an uneven field and then expected to go and compete with those who are provided with all the necessities and amenities.

Sadam Sahaf
SadamSh@rediffmail

A Special Mother

ZAHRA SAJAUD

Disability is more of a dysfunction of society collectively, rather than just the impairment or sickness of a person. We have to realise what actually makes a person disabled is the lack of acceptance and inclusivity from society

An eleven-year-old child, Yafi, comes running towards the spot where I had kept my mobile phone, ignoring my greetings and wishes for his birthday which I had come to know from his mother Rosy (name changed) just minutes before visiting her maternal home.

Despite meeting me for the first time, Yafi didn't hesitate to place his head in my lap comfortably, pulling my fingers indicating to unlock the phone for him. As I did, he tapped the screen several times until I heard videos playing on YouTube. Well, it's a norm for children born in 2000s but, not for children like Yafi.

Yafi is a child with disability. While he was busy playing the loop, his mother Rosy with all smiles tells me he is a music lover.

Rosy is a woman in her forties and a mother of two children. She looked pale and flushed as she had recently lost her mother. While lamenting the sudden demise of her mother, I couldn't stop my memories travel back to my college days when she had been my English teacher. She used to be so vibrant and cheerful that it seemed almost impossible for me to recognise her now. She looked totally strange and different now.

Being a mother of a special child, parenting has been quite toilsome for her. "Most of the time, child is not cooperative", says Rosy when asked about her experience as a special mother. "They need more care and attention than a normal healthy child. I have to take care of everything, even simple task like wiping his nose. As a mother I know it's not his fault, he has this condition".

Yafi's disorder was detected late. A family friend, doctor by profession, had suggested to undergo certain tests as he observed some dimorphic features in the child.

She began to recall the day when reports confirmed her child with disability. "My whole world imploded. What is more painful for a mother than knowing that her child is not so-called normal!"

With Yafi in her lap, she had cried and wailed while sitting on a footpath. At that moment, her child had passed her an innocent smile. "That smile gave me strength to get up and work for his well-being".

Life for Rosy and Yafi was not the same after the diagnosis. Apart from frequent visits to doctors, attitude of society and people around also began to change. Different tags were attached, mostly, from her own relatives.

As such, her child showed delayed development milestones. She felt disheartened seeing her son unable to walk while other children of his age had begun to run. She chose not to sit and curse her fate. But rather work for her child's betterment.

However, being a teacher it was difficult for



her to manage work as well as a child who needed special attention. But somehow, not losing her will-power, she gave exercising sessions (as prescribed by the doctors) to Yafi before and after leaving for work. And her hard work paid off. Her eyes welled up with tears recalling the moment when Yafi took his first step at the age of 6. "What a moment it was, I can hardly describe that happiness and bliss when I saw him walking", says Rosy.

She says raising a special child, indeed, is a very challenging task. But, being a mother she doesn't have an option to give up. "If I would, who else would take care of him".

Well, the person before being disabled is a human being and hence, an integral part of the society. Therefore, disability is a responsibility of a society as a whole and not of a parent or family associated. He/she is also entitled to the rights and privileges society assures to everyone. Why do we make disability an exception? What if we try to mitigate the gap just by a single gesture of acceptance?

More than reservations, now the society has to realise that we have to become more inclusive towards them and widen their sphere. Let them also

go to school, have more accessibility, more choices and above all, a good satisfied life.

Let us include them, and not dictate them to do things in our way. Let them do things in their own way. Let us be compassionate enough to give them space and support.

As Rosy says, apart from parenting, society is a big challenge for us. Where the world has started to create avenues for their inclusivity, Kashmiri society is still far behind terming the lot as me'at (insane), out of ignorance.

Disability is more of a dysfunction of society collectively, rather than just the impairment or sickness of a person. We have to realise what actually makes a person disabled is the lack of acceptance and inclusivity from society. And it can be done by assuring basic ADL (activities of daily living) to build whole infrastructure, assuring dignified lives for persons with disability.

The author is pursuing Masters in Social Work, University of Kashmir. She can be reached at sajaudzahra@gmail.com

Parenting Styles

MONIQUE ROBINSON



It used to be said that the difficulty with parenting is that no-one gives you a manual, but you could argue that adage is no longer true.

From "tiger mums" to "attachment parents", countless manifestos offer advice on how to successfully raise a child. In fact, there's so much parenting advice around that first-time parents (in particular) can struggle to trust their own instincts and knowledge.

While book sales may be up, is there any scientific evidence to suggest better outcomes for children raised in any of these pop-culture parenting styles?

Hovering around

Most parenting research centres on "helicopter" parenting. Helicopter parents are so named because they hover above their children at all times, regularly swooping in to protect them from challenges and harm.

Become a monthly donor and support independent media in Australia.

Anecdotes and media data don't always present helicopter parents in the most flattering light, and the limited scientific research available appears to confirm this view.

One study found that, by adulthood, children of helicopter parents perceived poorer quality of communication with their parents compared with those whose parents were less helicopter-like. It also found these children had a heightened sense of personal entitlement.

Another study of college students found that those who reported helicopter parenting had lower levels of overall well-being and were more likely to be medicated for anxiety or depression, or both.

In contrast, a third study of young adults found the children of overly involved parents had better well-being scores than others. But their parents reported reduced life satisfaction due to their now-grown children still requiring intensive support.

Ploughing through

A close relative of the helicopter parent is another piece of parenting heavy machinery, the "snowplow" parent. This parent diligently removes all obstacles from their child's path, eliminating challenge and hardship as best they can.

The idea is that by removing all obstacles, the child is free to focus on success and not be inhibited by

failure. While the helicopter parent operates out of fear of something happening to their child, the snowplow parent just wants to make their child's path in life easier.

There appears to be no empirical research on snowplow parenting yet, but both parenting styles could be defined as versions of over-protective parenting, about which there is some evidence.

Protection and over-protection

Research shows that children of over-protective parents are shyer toddlers, have more behavioural problems in childhood, higher depression scores in adolescence, and increased anxiety in adulthood.

Research also points to helicopter and over-protective parenting as being symptomatic of a family unit that is

otherwise experiencing problems, which could include communication problems and broader unhappiness within the home.

A propensity to over-parent is associated with higher maternal anxiety; it can mean that the long-term relationship between parent and child can be damaged due to constant intrusion; and it may be difficult to sustain a healthy relationship between parents when so much focus is on the child.

Although this all sounds fairly dismal, it's important to note that helicopter and snowplow parents behave in the way they do because they want the very best for their child. And this is a vitally important element of child development and well-being.

It's just that, in their anxiety to ensure their child's future success,

these parents end up doing everything for their children instead of allowing them to develop independence and autonomy by doing tasks themselves.

Free ranging

If all this over-parenting sounds a little too intense, the "free range" parenting style may be the one for you. This is the parenting philosophy coined by Lenore Skenazy, who became known as "America's Worst Mum" after publishing an opinion piece disclosing that her nine-year-old son was allowed to catch the New York subway on his own.

Like their chicken counterparts, free range kids are allowed to roam, unsupervised and outdoors. Skenazy argues that we live in safe times, the potential for harm to our children is far less than we perceive, and that it's

important for children to learn responsibility and independence early.

So at what age can children safely play outside alone? Answering that question gets to the heart of the difficulty with all these parenting styles and philosophies.

Every child is different, and each will develop requisite responsibility at a different rate. Each parent is different, and some will feel at home with their children playing somewhere down the street where others will only feel comfortable when they can see their child at all times.

There's no universal rulebook but the basic theory of child development suggests that, at some point, the gradual development of autonomy and independence is one of the keys to a higher level of social and emotional well-being and future success

There's no universal rulebook but the basic theory of child development suggests that, at some point, the gradual development of autonomy and independence is one of the keys to a higher level of social and emotional well-being and future success. How and when that happens is up to each individual parent.

*By arrangement with
The Conversation*

Heart disease now killing more people than ever before: WHO

Heart disease, which has remained the leading cause of death at the global level for the last 20 years, is now killing more people than ever before, according to the World Health Organization.

The WHO said diabetes and dementia are also among the world's top 10 causes of death.

The WHO's 2019 Global Health Estimates, released on Wednesday, said non-communicable diseases now make up 7 of the world's top 10 causes of death, an increase from 4 of the 10 leading causes in 2000. The new data cover the period from 2000 to 2019.

"Heart disease has remained the leading cause of death at the global level for the last 20 years. However, it is now killing more people than ever before," the organisation said.

Heart disease now represents 16 per cent of total deaths from all causes and the number of deaths from heart disease increased by more than two million since 2000 to nearly 9 million in 2019. Diabetes and dementia enter the top 10 causes of death.

Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia are now among the top 10 causes of death worldwide, ranking 3rd in both the Americas and Europe in 2019. Women are disproportionately affected: globally, 65 per cent of deaths from Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are women.

Deaths from diabetes increased by 70 per cent globally between 2000 and 2019, with an 80 per cent rise in deaths among males. In the Eastern Mediterranean, deaths from diabetes have more than doubled and represent the greatest percentage increase of all WHO regions.

The WHO said the estimates reveal trends over the last 2 decades in mortality and morbidity caused by diseases and injuries, clearly highlighting the need for an intensified global focus on preventing

and treating cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases, as well as tackling injuries, in all regions of the world, as set out in the agenda for the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

"These new estimates are another reminder that we need to rapidly step up prevention, diagnosis and treatment of non-commu-



nicable diseases," Director-General of WHO Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"They highlight the urgency of drastically improving primary health care equitably and holistically. Strong primary health care is clearly the foundation on which everything rests, from combatting non-communicable diseases to managing a global pandemic."

While more non-communicable diseases are now causing deaths worldwide, there has been a global decline in deaths from communicable diseases, which however still remain a major challenge in low- and middle-income countries.

In 2019, pneumonia and other lower respiratory infections were the deadliest group of communicable diseases and together ranked as the fourth leading cause of death.

However, compared to 2000,

lower respiratory infections were claiming fewer lives than in the past, with the global number of deaths decreasing by nearly half a million, WHO said adding that this reduction is in line with a general global decline in the percentage of deaths caused by communicable diseases.

HIV/AIDS dropped from the 8th leading cause of death in 2000

including malaria (6th), tuberculosis (8th) and HIV/AIDS (9th).

Meanwhile, in recent years, the WHO reports highlight an overall concerning slow-down or plateauing of progress against infectious diseases like HIV, tuberculosis and malaria.

The new projections state that people are living longer – but with more disability.

The estimates further confirm the growing trend for longevity: in 2019, people were living more than 6 years longer than in 2000, with a global average of more than 73 years in 2019 compared to nearly 67 in 2000. But on average, only 5 of those additional years were lived in good health. Disability, however, is on the rise.

"To a large extent, the diseases and health conditions that are causing the most deaths are those that are responsible for the greatest number of healthy life-years lost. Heart disease, diabetes, stroke, lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease were collectively responsible for nearly 100 million additional healthy life-years lost in 2019 compared to 2000," WHO said.

Injuries are another major cause of disability and death, with the African region recording a significant rise in road traffic injuries since 2000.

Globally, deaths from road traffic injuries are 75 per cent male.

Assistant Director-General for the Division of Data, Analytics and Delivery for Impact at WHO Dr Samira Asma said robust health data are critical to address inequalities, prioritize policies and allocate resources to prevent disability and save lives.

"We call upon governments and stakeholders to urgently invest in data and health information systems to support timely and effective decision-making," Asma said. -PTI

Study suggests exercise may protect bone health after weight loss surgery

Although weight loss surgery is a highly effective treatment for obesity, it can be detrimental to bone health. A new study published in the Journal of Bone and Mineral Research suggests that exercise may help address this shortcoming.

The study randomised 84 patients undergoing weight loss surgery to an exercise group or a control group for 11 months. The exercise group performed a high impact, balance, and resistance exercises three times per week. Twelve months after surgery, participants in the exercise group had higher bone mineral density measurements at the lumbar spine and the forearm compared with those in the control group. Also, participants who attended at least half of the exercise sessions had higher bone mineral density at the femoral neck than those in the control group. "These findings showed that a



structured exercise program may be a valid treatment option to minimize weight loss surgery-induced bone loss, which may be particularly important since many patients undergo surgery in early adulthood or even at pediatric ages," said lead author Florencio Diniz-Sousa, MSc, of

the University of Porto, in Portugal. "As stated in recently released World Health Organization physical activity guidelines, regular exercise should be a priority for everyone, including patients who have undergone weight loss surgery." -Agencies

New smartphone-based COVID-19 test gives results in less than 30 minutes

Scientists have developed a novel technology for a CRISPR-based COVID-19 diagnostic test that uses a smartphone camera to provide accurate results in under 30 minutes.

amplification steps, using CRISPR to directly detect the viral RNA, they said.

"One reason we are excited about CRISPR-based diagnostics is the potential for quick, accurate results

In the new test, the Cas13 protein is combined with a reporter molecule that becomes fluorescent when cut, and then mixed with a patient sample from a nasal swab, the researchers said.

The sample is placed in a device that attaches to a smartphone. If the sample contains RNA from SARS-CoV-2, Cas13 will be activated and will cut the reporter molecule, causing the emission of a fluorescent signal, they said.

The smartphone camera, essentially converted into a microscope, can detect the fluorescence and report that a swab tested positive for the virus, according to the researchers. They say that the assay could be adapted to a variety of mobile phones, making the technology easily accessible.

When the scientists tested their device using patient samples, they confirmed that it could provide a very fast turnaround time of results for samples with clinically relevant viral loads. The research found that the device accurately detected a set of positive samples in under 5 minutes.

For samples with a low viral load, the researchers said, the device required up to 30 minutes to distinguish it from a negative test. -PTI



According to the research published in the journal Cell, the new diagnostic test can not only generate a positive or negative result, it also measures the viral load – the concentration of virus – in a given sample.

All CRISPR diagnostics to date have required that the viral RNA be converted to DNA and amplified before it can be detected, adding time and complexity, the researchers said.

In contrast, the new approach skips all the conversion and

at the point of need," said Jennifer Doudna, a senior investigator at Gladstone Institutes in the US.

"This is especially helpful in places with limited access to testing, or when frequent, rapid testing is needed. It could eliminate a lot of the bottlenecks we've seen with COVID-19," Doudna said.

Doudna won the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for co-discovering CRISPR-Cas genome editing, the technology that underlies this work.

Studying individual differences in language skills



Although most people learn to speak their mother tongue fluently, native speakers differ in their ability to use language. Adult language users not only differ in the number of words they know, they also differ in how quickly they produce and understand words and sentences. In a recent study, researchers find how do individuals differ across language tasks and what are individual differences in language ability related to general cognitive abilities.

Such questions can only be answered by testing large numbers of individuals on a large number of language and cognitive tests. Lead author Florian Hintz and his team designed such a test battery, with the aim of using it in a larger study. In the larger 'Individuals' study (funded by the Language in Interaction consortium), the team will be combining test performance data with DNA from a thousand

participants. In addition, the brains of about 300 of the 1,000 participants will be scanned. However, the authors first needed to pilot the test battery with a smaller number of participants. "Previous individual-differences studies have often focused on a limited set of skills," says Hintz. "The present dataset goes one step further and provides a comprehensive overview of language users' linguistic and non-linguistic skills, with multiple tests per skill". The researchers invited 112 participants with ages ranging from 18 to 29 and mixed educational backgrounds to the lab in Nijmegen. Participants completed the battery of 33 tests twice, to establish the reliability of the new measurements, with one month in between test sessions. Testing took about eight hours per participant.

The battery included three types of tests: (1) tests of linguistic experience

such as vocabulary size, (2) tests of general cognitive skills such as processing speed or working memory capacity, and (3) tests of linguistic processing skills, measuring production and comprehension of words and sentences. Apart from well-known standardised tests (such as Raven's matrices), the battery included newly developed tests (such as a test on idiomatic expressions and a test on normative rules of Dutch grammar).

The majority of the tests proved to be reliable and suitable for the Individual main study, which is currently ongoing. The team is still recruiting participants for the main study, so native Dutch speakers (between 18 and 30) are invited to take part.

The authors decided to share the data from their pilot study, which is freely available at the UK Data Service data archive. The team encourages other researchers to use the database for new analyses. "Individual-differences studies are rarely conducted, as these studies are time-consuming and expensive," says Hintz. "Especially in the current situation, where in-person testing isn't always possible, this resource may provide alternative routes for conducting research".

"The database is valuable to any researcher, clinician, or teacher interested in investigating the relationships between linguistic skills, non-linguistic skills and linguistic knowledge", Hintz concludes. "Ultimately, using this dataset, one may take a first step towards addressing the question 'What makes someone a good language user?' -Agencies

How much plastic are you eating?

What's for dinner? Lego sushi, credit card burgers, or a well-done piece of PVC pipe?

These examples may sound extreme, but can easily represent over time the cumulative amount of microscopic pieces of plastic we consume every day.

People could be ingesting the equivalent of a credit card of plastic a week, a 2019 study by WWF International concluded, mainly in plastic-infused drinking water but also via food like shellfish, which tends to be eaten whole so the plastic in their digestive systems is also consumed.

Reuters used the findings of the study to illustrate what this amount of plastic actually looks like over various periods of time.

In a month, we ingest the weight of a 4x2 Lego brick in plastic, and in a year, the amount of plastic in a fireman's helmet.

This may not sound like much, but it can add up. At this rate of consumption,



in a decade, we could be eating 2.5 kg (5.5 lb) in plastic, the equivalent of over two sizable pieces of plastic pipe.

And over a lifetime, we consume about 20 kg (44 lb) of microplastic.

Plastic production has surged in the last 50 years with the widespread use of inexpensive disposable products. As plastic is not biodegradable, but only breaks down into smaller pieces, it ultimately ends up everywhere, cluttering

beaches and choking marine wildlife, as well as in the food chain.

Standing on the shoreline of a wildlife-protected saltmarsh in southern England, Malcolm Hudson, a professor of environmental science at the University of Southampton, shows Reuters small, bead-like plastic pellets that permeate the marsh.

Hudson says that most research has been done on these microplastics, but there are increasing amounts of even smaller particles called nanoplastics in the environment that are far more difficult to detect, which we are likely ingesting as well.

"It could pass into our blood or lymphatic system and end up in our organs," said Hudson.

"Those plastic particles are little time bombs waiting to break down small enough to be absorbed by wildlife or by people and then potentially have harmful consequences." -Agencies

HIGH COURT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR AT JAMMU

(Office of the Registrar General)

NOTIFICATION

No:526

Dated:10.12.2020

It is for the information of all those candidates who have appeared in the online Computer Based Test for the posts of Jr. Assistants, Data Entry Operators and Computer Operators held from 04-12-2020 to 07-12-2020 pursuant to advertisement notifications no. 01/2018 dt.18.04.2018 (Jr. Assistants), 03/2018 dt.10.09.2018 and 107 dt.13.04.2009 (Data Entry Operators); 03/2018 dt.10.09.2018 and 554 dt. 29.09.2009 (Computer Operators) that they can view their question paper and answers given by them for individual assessment of their performance on the following link:-

<https://online.cbexams.com/jkhquestionkey/login.aspx>

The link is also provided on the official website of the High Court <https://ikhighcourt.nic.in>. The link shall be active up to 14-12-2020 till 6.00 p.m.

By Order

Jawad Ahmed
Registrar General

No: 2018-125/RG/NG
Dated: 17.10.2020.

DIPK-10270/20

Government of Jammu & Kashmir

Office Of The Executive Engineer Horticulture P&M Const.Div.Sgr.

NOTICE INVITING TENDERS
NIT No.43 of 2020 -21DATED:10-12-2020

For and on behalf of the Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor, J&K UTenders are invited by Executive Engineer, Horticulture (P&M) Rajbagh by e-tendering mode on item rate basis from approved and eligible Contractors registered with J&K UT Govt. CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Governments for the following works:-

S. No	Name of work	Adv cost (Rs. in lacs)	Earnest Money	Class of contractor	Cost of Tender documents	Time of completion
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Construction of Shatter House/ Shed for farm Machinery Fruit Plant Nursery Zawoora	8.50 lac	Rs. 17000	C&D	RS.400	25Days

Position of AAA/TS:-Accorded.
Position of Funds:-Assured.

Note:- In case the offered bids are unbalanced the contractor will upload scanned copy of additional security deposits in the shape of CDR/FDR as per condition of e-Nit at Sr. No.16.9 pledged to Executive Engineer HPM in addition to 2% EMD of Advertised cost, failing which the bids shall not be accepted.

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 www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given below:

1.	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	10-12-2020
2.	Period of downloading of bidding documents	10-12-2020
3.	Bid submission Start Date	10-12-2020
4.	Bid Submission End Date	15-12-2020 up to 4:00 Pm
5.	Date & time of opening of Bids (Online)	16-12-2020 at 11:00 Am

DIPK-10266/20

No.EE/Horti/P&M/2020-21/3834-36
Dated:-10-12-2020

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Horticulture (P&M) Rajbagh

UK Issues Allergy Warning On Pfizer Vaccine After Adverse Reactions

Agencies

London: Britain's medicine regulator said anyone with a history of anaphylaxis to a medicine or food should not get the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, giving fuller guidance on an earlier allergy warning about the shot.

Starting with the elderly and frontline workers, Britain began mass vaccinating its population on Tuesday, part of a global drive that poses one of the biggest logistical challenges in peacetime history.

The Medicines and Health-

system, which the National Health Service describes as severe and sometimes life-threatening.

The fuller guidance, clarifying that the main risk was from anaphylaxis specifically, was issued after consulting experts on allergies. The MHRA had initially advised anyone with a history of a "significant allergic reaction" not to take the shot.

Pfizer and BioNTech said they were supporting the MHRA's investigation.

Last week, Britain's MHRA became the first in the world to approve the vaccine,



care Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said there had been two reports of anaphylaxis and one report of a possible allergic reaction since rollout began.

"Any person with a history of anaphylaxis to a vaccine, medicine or food should not receive the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine," MHRA Chief Executive June Raine said in a statement.

"Most people will not get anaphylaxis and the benefits in protecting people against COVID-19 outweigh the risks... You can be completely confident that this vaccine has met the MHRA's robust standards of safety, quality and effectiveness."

Anaphylaxis is an overreaction of the body's immune

developed by Germany's BioNTech and Pfizer, while the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and European Medicines Agency (EMA) continue to assess the data.

A top U.S. official said on Wednesday that Americans with known severe allergic reactions may not be candidates for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine until more was understood about what had happened.

Canada's health ministry said it would look at the reported adverse reactions in Britain, but said adverse events were to be expected and would not necessarily change the risk/benefit of the shot, after the country approved the vaccine.

Pak , China Began Joint Air Exercise Shaheen (Eagle)-IX On Wednesday

Press Trust of India

Islamabad: The air forces of Pakistan and China on Wednesday commenced a joint exercise designed to deepen practical cooperation and improve the actual-combat training level of the two sides.

The joint air force exercise "Shaheen (Eagle)-IX" started on Wednesday at an operational air base of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) in Sindh province.

A contingent of the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), comprising combat pilots, air defence controllers and technical ground crew, participated in the exercise, the PAF said in a statement.

The opening ceremony of the exercise was jointly witnessed by Deputy Chief of Air Staff (Operations) Air Vice Marshal Waqas Ahmed Suleh-

ri and Assistant Chief of Staff, PLAAF, Major General Sun Hong, it said.

"The joint exercise will improve the actual level of combat training and strengthen practical cooperation between the two air forces," Major General Sun Hong said.

Welcoming the Chinese contingent, Air Vice Marshal Sulehri said, "The joint exercise will provide an opportunity to further enhance interoperability of both the air forces, thereby fortifying brotherly relations between the two countries."

Shaheen-IX is the ninth in the series of Joint Air Exercises which is conducted each year in both countries on alternate basis. The first such drill was held in Pakistan in March 2011.

China and Pakistan share close military ties. China helps Pakistan to jointly produce JF-17 fighter jets and other armaments.



ICC Drops Probe Into Alleged UK War Crimes In Iraq Despite 'Reasonable' Evidence

AGENCIES

Baghdad: Despite finding "reasonable basis" for allegations of war crimes against British soldiers in Iraq, an International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor dropped a preliminary investigation, citing the UK's own efforts to investigate the conduct of its troops in the war.

In a statement released on Wednesday, prosecutor Fatou Bensouda acknowledged the fact that the probe did not lead to the prosecution of any suspects, but stressed that the outcome of the investigation does not mean war crimes did not occur.

"There is a reasonable basis to believe that members of the British armed forces committed the war crimes of willful killing, torture, inhuman/cruel treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, and rape and/or other forms of sexual violence," Bensouda said.

"The Office [of the Prosecutor] has identified a confined number of incidents to reach this determination

which, while not exhaustive, appear to correspond to the most serious allegations of violence against persons in UK custody."

The ICC statement also refuted claims that legal proceedings made on behalf of Iraqi victims of alleged war crimes were all "vexatious" or spurious, as stated by former British Prime Minister Theresa May and other UK government ministers.

The UK's Service Prosecution Authority threw out hundreds of claims brought on behalf of Iraqis against the UK Ministry of Defence for alleged abuses.

"The Office has found untenable the proposition that these various processes all arose from vexatious claims," the ICC prosecutor said in her statement, adding that the lack of prosecutions "has deprived the victims of justice".

Rupert Skilbeck, director of legal firm Redress, which brings legal cases on behalf of victims of torture, said: "Survivors of torture and ill-

treatment will be profoundly disappointed that the ICC Prosecutor will not now be pursuing her investigation against the UK.

"The prosecutor is clear that there was strong evidence of war crimes - including the use of the 'five techniques' [of physical and psychological abuse] - and identifies numerous concerns with the UK investigations, not least that there were no prosecutions despite such a large number of accepted claims."

In an accompanying report, the prosecutor detailed alleged incidents committed by UK armed forces against "civilians or hors de combat" at detention facilities in Iraq between 2003 and 2009.

The report speculated that the Iraq Historic Allegations Team (IHAT) and later the Service Police Legacy Investigations (SPLI) - which led internal UK probes - did not press charges against soldiers because of a lack of evidence or because they were not confident in securing convictions.

Iran Afghanistan inaugurate crucial rail project

SYED ZAFAR MEHDI
ANADOLU AGENCY



TEHRAN : Iran and Afghanistan on Thursday inaugurated the Khaf-Herat 220-kilometer (136 miles) railroad project, in presence of the presidents two countries.

As part of the large east-west railway corridor extending to China and Europe, this new railway track connects Iran's eastern city of Khaf with Afghanistan's western city of Ghorian.

During the virtual inauguration ceremony, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani termed it a "historic day" in the relations between the two neighboring countries.

He said the rail route, which is Iran's sixth border railroad with neighboring countries, will "strengthen the bond" between Iran and Afghanistan.

ghanistan for a meeting.

According to Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami, the railroad can transport one million passengers and six million tons of goods a year.

Rouhani, speaking through video link, said the culture and history of the two countries are intertwined, so the economy and markets should also be linked.

"Our victory is your victory and your happiness are our joy," he said, addressing the people of the neighboring country.

"We are proud to have hosted millions of Afghans over the past 40 years," he added.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in his speech expressed happiness over the operationalization of what he described as a "historic and vital project." He hoped the project will lead to an "economic leap" of the region.

US Senate backs massive arms sales to UAE after Trump veto threat

Agencies

Washington: The United States Senate has defeated an effort to block the Trump administration's sale of \$23bn in advanced fighter jets and drones to the United Arab Emirates.

President Donald Trump had issued a formal threat to veto congressional efforts to block the planned weapons transfer, which is tied to the UAE's normalisation of ties with Israel under the "Abraham Accords".

Two procedural votes failed to gain a majority of the 100-member Senate, effectively stopping the effort to block the sale of advanced F-35 fighter jets and Reaper drones.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said the resolutions seeking to block the arms sale fell far short of the two-thirds support that would be needed to overcome a presidential veto.

"It's a little baffling to suggest that, now of all times, a protest gesture with no chance of obtaining a veto-proof majority is a valuable use of the Senate's time," McConnell said in Senate floor remarks.

Backers of the sale described the UAE as an important US partner in the Middle East. Opponents criticised the UAE for its involvement in the war in Yemen, a conflict described by the United Nations as one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters.

The Trump administration told Congress on November 10 that it had approved the sale to the UAE of weapons made by General Atomics, Lockheed Martin Corp and Raytheon Technologies Corp.

The deal includes the F-35, the world's most advanced fighter jet; more than 14,000 bombs and munitions; and the second-largest sale of US drones to a single country.

The White House said the sales directly support US foreign policy and national security objectives by "enabling the UAE to deter increasing Iranian aggressive behaviour and threats" in the wake of its recent deal with Israel.

The veto threat was expected. US law requires congressional review of major arms deals, and lets senators force votes on resolutions of disapproval.

Facebook Faces US Lawsuits That Could Force Sale Of Instagram, WhatsApp

Agencies

Washington: Facebook Inc could be forced to sell its prized assets WhatsApp and Instagram after the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and nearly every U.S. state filed lawsuits against the social media company, saying it used a "buy or bury" strategy to snap up rivals and keep smaller competitors at bay.

With the filing of the twin lawsuits on Wednesday, Facebook becomes the second big tech company to face a major legal challenge this year after the U.S. Justice Department sued Alphabet Inc's Google in October, accusing the \$1 trillion company of using its market power to fend off rivals.

The lawsuits highlight the growing bipartisan consensus to hold Big Tech accountable for its business practices and mark a rare moment of agreement between the Trump administration and Democrats, some of whom have advocated breaking up both Google and Facebook.

The complaints on Wednesday accuse Facebook of buying up rivals, focusing specifically on its previous acquisitions of photo-sharing app Instagram for \$1 billion in 2012 and messaging app WhatsApp for \$19 billion in 2014.

Federal and state regulators said the acquisitions should be unwound - a move that is likely to set off a long legal challenge as the deals were cleared years earlier by the FTC.

"For nearly a decade, Facebook has used its dominance and monopoly power to crush smaller rivals, snuff out competition, all at the expense of everyday users," said New York Attorney General Letitia James on behalf of the coalition of 46 states, Washington, D.C. and Guam. Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and South Dakota did not participate in the lawsuit.

James said the company acquired rivals before they could threaten the company's dominance.

Facebook's general counsel Jennifer Newstead called the lawsuits "revisionist history" and said antitrust laws do not exist to punish "successful companies." She said WhatsApp and Instagram have succeeded after Facebook invested billions of dollars in growing the apps.



NEWSMAKERS

China Tells Airline Crew To Wear Diapers On Risky Covid Flights

China's aviation regulator is recommending cabin crew on charter flights to high-risk Covid-19 destinations wear disposable diapers and avoid using the bathroom to reduce the risk of infection.

The advice comes in a 38-page list of guidelines for airlines to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The sixth edition echoes similar instructions in previous, less lengthy versions.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China said the recommendation applies for charter flights to and from countries and regions where infections exceed 500 in every one million people.

The diaper advice is in a section on personal protective equipment, which also recommends the following



for cabin crew:

Other advice for the flights includes dividing the cabin into "clean area, buffer zone, passenger sitting area and quarantine area," separated by disposable curtains. The last three rows should be designated as an emergency quarantine area, said CAAC. CAAC declined to disclose any more details on the

guidelines.

China's aviation market was hit hard at the onset of the outbreak in Wuhan and subsequent spread around the country. But it has recovered - on the domestic front at least - to close to pre-pandemic levels, while other regions such as Europe and the U.S. struggle to bring Covid-19 under control.

"Heads Will Roll": Russia Investigates "Doomsday Plane" Robbery

Moscow: The Kremlin on Wednesday sounded the alarm over the theft of sensitive equipment from a secretive "doomsday plane" designed for the country's top command in event of a nuclear attack.

The interior ministry said police in the southern city of Taganrog had been alerted that 1 million rubles (\$13,600) worth of equipment was stolen from an Ilyushin Il-80 plane at an airfield.

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov described the breach as an "emergency situation" and vowed that "measures will be taken to prevent this from happening in the future."

The interior ministry did not specify what was stolen but said that investigators had been dispatched to the scene.

The port city of Taganrog, more than 1,100 kilometres (700 miles) south of Moscow, is home to Beriev Aircraft Company, a struggling state-controlled enterprise.

Both the interior ministry and Beriev declined to comment when reached by AFP.

But the Kremlin-friendly REN-TV tele-



vision channel reported earlier this week that radio equipment was taken from an Il-80 plane that was undergoing maintenance at Taganrog.

Thieves opened the aircraft's cargo hatch and shoe and fingerprints were found inside the aircraft, the channel said, adding that Beriev reported the theft to police last week.

The channel said that 12 people had been questioned as part of the probe that was made public on Wednesday.

Citing a source, it said officials with access to the airfield could be behind the high-profile theft.

Turkish series Ertugrul star in Pakistan on short visit

The leading actor of Resurrection: Ertugrul, a popular Turkish TV series, arrived in Lahore, Pakistan on a short visit on Thursday.

"#ErtugrulGazi (Dirili Ertu rul) lead actor/hero Mr. Engin Altan Düzyatan just landed at Lahore Airport for a short visit to Pakistan at the invitation of a private business company," Pakistan embassy in Ankara tweeted.

According to a report on the Urdu website of Turkish public broadcaster TRT, he will sign an agreement with the Lahore-based Chaudhary group of industries as a brand ambassador.

However, due to a surge in coronavirus cases in the country, he may not be able to meet his fans.

The Turkish production earned heroic status in Pakistan after state television broadcast a version dubbed in Urdu.

Within days of the first telecast, the fan following for the series and its actors surged, especially Duzyatan.

'Atmanirbhar Parliament similar to Pentagon': Why Congress MPs are unhappy



At the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the new Parliament building on Thursday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared the building would "witness India becoming atmanirbhar (self-reliant)".

The Central Vista project, of which the new Parliament is a key part, has been a major project of the Narendra Modi government. Not surprisingly, it has been opposed bitterly by opposition parties such as the Congress. The current Parliament, built by the British, was inaugurated in 1927.

Congress MP Jairam Ramesh was seemingly not impressed by the design for the new Parliament. Ramesh tweeted it bore an "eerie likeness" to the Pentagon, the US Department of Defense's headquarters.

Ramesh, a Rajya Sabha MP, tweeted, "Well, the existing Parliament building built by the Brits bears a remarkable similarity to the Chausath Yogini Temple in Morena in Madhya Pradesh, while the new 'atmanirbhar' Parliament building bears an eerie likeness to the Pentagon in Washington DC."

Manish Tewari, a Congress Lok Sabha MP, tweeted, "Why has the new Parliament building been modelled on the Pentagon? Coincidence -deliberate or default?"

However, Ramesh himself was questioned by some Twitter

users who pointed out the proposed Parliament had a triangular shape.

For instance, Savio Rodrigues, the editor of Goa Chronicle, tweeted, "Jairam, it is my honest advice because you are normally intelligent, please get your eyes checked. Pentagon is a Pentagon structure, in what way does the new Parliament building look like a Pentagon. In fact, the structure is more in keeping with our Vedic structures."

The Congress party's opposition to the new Parliament extends to more than just aesthetics. Senior Congress spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala tweeted, "Dear PM, Parliament is not mortar & stones, it envisions Democracy. It imbibes Constitution, It is Economic-Political-Social Equality. It is Compassion & Camaraderie. It is aspirations of 130 Cr Indians. What would a building built upon trampling of these values represent?"

The Congress party's official Twitter handle alleged the Modi government's decision to build a new Parliament stemmed from "deep-seated insecurity".

The Congress tweeted, "This desperate desire to build bigger & scream louder comes from a deep-seated insecurity that one will never live up to great leaders & govts of the past that helped mould the incredible democracy being torn apart today."

iphones Vivo One Plus Realme Mi Accessories TV's

All kinds of mobile phones & accessories are available

Contact: **Khalid Bashir Gilkar**

788 977 1147 962 243 7762



Will block train tracks if demands not met: Farmer leaders

Farmers agitating against the Centre's new agri laws on Thursday said they will block railway tracks if their demands are not met and will announce the date soon.

Addressing reporters at the Singhu border where they have been protesting for almost

two weeks to demand a rollback of the law, the farmer unions also reiterated that they will intensify their agitation and start blocking all highways leading to the national capital. "We will block railway tracks if our demands are not met. We will decide on the date and announce it soon," farmer leader

Boota Singh said at the press conference.

"Centre has admitted that laws have been made for traders. If agriculture is a state subject, Central govt does not have right to make laws on it," added Balbir Singh Rajewal, another leader.

Thousands of farmers have been

protesting at various border points for almost two weeks seeking a repeal of the new laws, which they claim were aimed at benefitting corporates by weakening the mandi system and the minimum support price (MSP) regime for procurement of farm produce. —PTI

Launch surgical strike on China, Pak if they're behind farmers' stir: Sanjay Raut



"If a Union minister has information that China and Pakistan have a hand behind farmers' agitation, then, the defence minister should immediately conduct a surgical strike on China and Pakistan. The president, PM, HM and chiefs of the armed forces should discuss this issue seriously"

Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut highlighted a statement from a Union minister who claimed China and Pakistan were behind the farmers' protests.

Union Minister Raosaheb Danve told a gathering in Maharashtra's Jalna district on Wednesday, "The agitation that is going on is not that of farmers. China and Pakistan have a hand behind this. Muslims in this country were incited first. What was said [to them]? That NRC is coming. CAA is coming and Muslims will have to leave this country in six months. Did a single Muslim leave?"

Danve added "Those efforts didn't succeed and now farmers are being told that they will face losses. This is the conspiracy of other countries." Raut was quoted

by ANI as saying on Thursday that the claim by Danve was "serious" and demanded a "surgical strike" against China and Pakistan.

"If a Union minister has information that China and Pakistan have a hand behind farmers' agitation, then, the defence minister should immediately conduct a surgical strike on China and Pakistan. The president, PM, HM and chiefs of the armed forces should discuss this issue seriously," Raut claimed.

Last month, Danve had courted controversy when he claimed the Uddhav Thackeray government in Maharashtra would fall and the BJP would form a new administration in three months. Raut had then declared opposition leaders were speaking out of frustration.

Following India protests closely, says UK after Boris Johnson gaffe

PM had 'clearly misheard' a question in Parliament: Foreign Office



London: The UK Foreign Office is closely following the protests by farmers in India, a government spokesperson said on Thursday as it clarified that Prime Minister Boris Johnson had "clearly misheard" a question in Parliament when he responded with Britain's stance on the India-Pakistan dispute instead.

The gaffe occurred during the weekly Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) session in the House of Commons on Wednesday, when Johnson reiterated that any dispute between India and Pakistan was for the two countries to settle bilaterally in response to a question by Opposition Labour MP Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi about conveying British Sikh "anxieties" over the ongoing protests against agricultural reforms in India.

A UK government spokesperson said: "The Prime Minister clearly misheard the question in Parliament. The Foreign Office are following the issue of protests in India closely."

Dhesi, who has been very vocal on the protests by farmers against India's agricultural reforms, had raised the issue of the footage of "water cannons, teargas and brute force" being used against the peaceful protesters.

"So, will the Prime Minister (Johnson) convey to the Indian Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) our heartfelt anxieties, our hopes for a speedy resolution to the current deadlock and does he agree that everyone has a fundamental right to peaceful

protest," he questioned Johnson.

The British Prime Minister, in his brief response, seemed to be addressing the Kashmir dispute instead.

"Our view is that of course we have serious concerns about what is happening between India and Pakistan but these are pre-eminently matters for those two governments to settle and I know that he appreciates that point," said Johnson.

A perplexed Dhesi took to social media immediately to brand Johnson as "absolutely clueless" and was joined by scores of fellow Labour politicians and others in expressing shock at the gaffe.

"The incompetence from this government continues. The foreign secretary Dominic Raab has failed to brief the PM on one of the largest protests the world has seen," said fellow British Sikh Labour MP Preet Kaur Gill.

"It would seem our Prime Minister (and former Foreign Secretary) doesn't know the difference between Punjab and Kashmir. Why are we not surprised," added Emily Thornberry, Labour MP and former shadow foreign secretary.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has refused to be drawn into British politicians' representations seeking UK government intervention in the matter, stating that "the police handling of protests are a matter for the government of India".

Thousands of farmers are currently staying put

at Delhi's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in protest against the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

They have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporations.

However, the government has maintained that the new laws will bring farmers better opportunities and usher in new technologies in agriculture.

There have been multiple rounds of talks between representatives of the protesters and the government but the logjam continues. PTI

"It would seem our Prime Minister (and former Foreign Secretary) doesn't know the difference between Punjab and Kashmir. Why are we not surprised,"

added Emily Thornberry, Labour MP and former shadow foreign secretary.

Jharkhand Woman Allegedly Raped By 17 Men, Women's Panel Seeks Report



NEW DELHI: Expressing serious concern over the alleged rape of a woman by 17 men in Jharkhand's Dumka district, the National Commission for Women (NCW) today asked the state police to complete the probe in the case within two months.

According to reports, the woman was raped and her husband held

hostage by 17 men when the couple was returning home from a market on Tuesday night.

The woman told the police the accused were drunk, the reports said.

In a statement, the National Commission for Women said it is seriously concerned about the reported incident and has taken suo motu cognisance of the matter.

"Chairperson Rekha Sharma has written to Director General of Police, Jharkhand seeking adherence to guidelines of Ministry of Home Affairs of completing probes in two months in cases of sexual assault," the National Commission for Women said. The commission said it has also sought a detailed action taken report in the matter from the police.