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How exposure to metals during pregnancy may affect baby's health

Exposure to metals such as nickel, arsenic, cobalt and lead may disrupt a woman's hormones during pregnancy which may lead to children's later health and disease risks, says a new study.

Exposure to metals has been associated with problems at birth such as pre-term birth and low birth weight in babies, and pre-eclampsia in women.

However, little is known about how metals exposure can lead to such problems.

This new research, published in the journal Environment International, shows that some metals may disrupt the endocrine system, which is responsible for regulating our body's hormones.

These disruptions may contribute to children's later health and disease risks.

"A delicate hormonal balance orchestrates pregnancy from conception to delivery and perturbations of this balance may negatively impact both mother and foetus," said lead author Zorimar Rivera-Nunez, Assistant Professor at the Rutgers University in the US.

The researchers analysed blood and urine samples from 815 women enrolled in the Puerto Rico Test site for Exploring Contamination

A delicate hormonal balance orchestrates pregnancy from conception to delivery and perturbations of this balance may negatively impact both mother and foetus

Threats (PROTECT) study.

Initiated in 2010, PROTECT is an ongoing prospective birth cohort studying environmental exposures in pregnant women and their children around the northern karst zone, which include urban and mountainous rural areas of Puerto Rico.

They found that metals can act as endocrine disruptors by altering prenatal hormone concentrations during pregnancy. This disruption may depend on when in the pregnancy the mother was exposed.

Among pregnant women, metal exposure is higher in those living in Puerto Rico than in those in the continental United States.

"This is important because, compared to the US overall, women in Puerto Rico have significantly higher rates of preterm birth (nearly 12 per cent) and other adverse birth outcomes," Rivera-Nunez said.

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT REGIONAL TRANSPORT OFFICER BUDGAM KASHMIR

NOTICE

Whereas an application has been recieved from one. Shri : Bashir Ahmad Khan S/o: Ghulam Ahmad Khan R/o: Budgam owner of vehicle bearing Registration No: JK04D-1402 for cancellation of hire purchase agreement with M/S J&K State Co-Operative 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 officer ARTO Budgam within a period of 12 days from the date of publication of this notice in the daily newspaper .



No. ARTO/ BUDGAM.1976
Dated 22/12/2020

MCB

Assistant Regional Transport officer
Budgam Kashmir

MISSION DIRECTOR NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION, J&K

Jammu Office: Regional Institute of Health & Family Welfare, Nagrota, Jammu.

Fax: 0191-2674114; Telephone: 2674244. Pin: 181221

Kashmir Office: Block-A, Ground Floor, Old Secretariat, Srinagar. Pin: 190001

E-mail: mdnhmjk@gmail.com

NHM Help Line for Jammu Division 18001800104: Kashmir Division 18001800102

ADVERTISEMENT NOTICE

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for admission to six months Certificate Programme in Community Health for Ayurvedic graduates/ Unani graduates and BSc or GNM Nursing for session January 2021 (In-service Regular/ Contractual candidates are not allowed to apply). The applicants who are willing to serve in rural and hard to reach areas of UT of J&K at Sub-Centre level should only apply. The course shall be conducted through IGNOU for Ayurvedic graduates/ BSc or GNM Nursing in Programme Study Centres at Govt. Hospital Gandhi Nagar, Jammu, District Hospital Udhampur, District Hospital Kathua and District Hospital Rajouri in Jammu Division and District Hospital Anantnag, District Hospital Baramulla and CHC Kupwara in Kashmir Division For Unani graduates the course shall be conducted through Directorate of Lifelong Learning, University of Kashmir in Programme Study Centres at District Hospital Pulwama, District Hospital Kulgam, District Hospital Ganderbal and JLNH Hospital Srinagar. The interested eligible candidates are advised to submit the application forms complete in all respects by or before 01-01-2021 till 4:00 pm in the office of State Health Society, at Regional Institute of Health & Family Welfare, Nagrota, Jammu for Jammu division and Division Office, NHM, Ground Floor, Block-A, Old Secretariat Srinagar for Kashmir division.

Eligibility criteria:-

| S. No. | Name of Certificate Course | Eligibility | Course Duration |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Certificate Programme in Community Health (CPCH) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> BAMS/ BUMS from a recognized Institute/ University and willing to serve in Rural & hard to reach areas of UT of J&K. Staff Nurses with Diploma/ Degree in BSc/ GNM Nursing from a recognized institute and are willing to serve in rural & hard to reach area of UT of J&K. Maximum age limit 45 years as on 01-01-2021 | Six Months |

TERMS & CONDITIONS:

- All shortlisted eligible candidates shall have to appear in the written examination, conducted by State Health Society. The allotment of Programme Study Centre of successful candidates for undergoing the six months Certificate Programme in Community Health shall be prepared on the basis of performance in written test.
- Selection of candidates for undergoing the said course will be as per the district wise merit and the availability of vacancies in the said district. Tentative number of vacancies is mentioned in Annexure A. However, in case of non availability of suitable eligible candidates in any district, State Health Society will consider the candidates of other districts on the basis of Divisional Merit.
- All original documents shall be verified to ascertain the eligibility for appearing in the written examination.
- All the selected eligible candidates shall have to submit a bank guarantee of Rs.60,000/- (Rupees Sixty Thousand Only) duly pledged in favour of Financial Advisor & Chief Accounts Officer (FA&CAO), NHM, J&K for a period of 1(One) Year and will be released only after completion of six months of job tenure at H&WC (SC). The bank guarantee shall be forfeited in case of non joining of a candidate in allotted programme study centre.
- The selected candidates shall also submit an affidavit/undertaking duly attested by First Class Judicial Magistrate to the extent that mere completion of training course shall not vest any right to claim for hiring in the Union Territory on contractual basis under NHM, besides other terms and conditions laid down in the format of affidavit.
- In case a candidate is selected for the CPCH and successfully complete the six (6) months certificate course, he or she may be placed at the identified Health & Wellness Centre-Sub Centre and posting shall be strictly facility based.
- The engagement shall be purely on contractual basis. Initial Contract of hiring shall be up to 31st March of such financial year and further extension shall be subject to the satisfactory performance of the candidates and approval of post by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.
- Application form is available on the official website www.jknhm.com, which is the only authentic source of information with respect to National Health Mission, J&K. This office shall not be responsible for any inconvenience caused to anybody due to misleading/false information received from any other source.

List of documents to be attached with the application:

- Date of Birth Certificate.
- Domicile Certificate.
- Marks certificate of all years/Profs of the requisite qualification.
- Degree Certificate from the recognized University/ Institution.
- Internship Completion Certificate.
- Renewed Registration Certificate from any Board of Ayurvedic and Unani System of Medicine, J&K.
- Diploma/ Degree recognized from State Medical Faculty.
- Renewed Nursing counsel registration Certificate/ SMF registration Certificate.

Applications not falling in the prescribed criteria or without aforesaid documents shall be summarily rejected.

APPLICATION FORM FOR BRIDGE PROGRAMME IN COMMUNITY HEALTH UNDER NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION, J&K.

- Programme applied for _____
- Name of Candidate _____
- Parentage _____
- Date of Birth _____
- Permanent Address _____
- E-mail/ Contact No. _____
- Details of Qualification: (Year Wise) _____

Paste latest
passport Size
Photograph

| Qualification | Board/University | Year of passing | Marks Obtained | Maximum marks | %age |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|------|
| | | | | | |
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| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

- Registration No. _____
- Internship:- _____
- Duration _____ years _____ Months
- I do hereby declare that _____
- The statement in this application is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- I have never been debarred from appearing at any examination/ interview.
- I have never been prosecuted or involved in any criminal case registered by the police or convicted by the criminal court.
- I shall accept the selection for training made by the selection committee, which will be binding on me.

I undertake that any willful concealment of the facts shall result in the cancellation of my candidature and may also result in debarring me from applying for future training .

Signature of applicant.

ANNEXURE "A"

District wise tentative available Vacancy of Health & Wellness Centres- Sub Centres

| Kashmir Division | | |
|------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| S.No | District | No. of available vacancy |
| 1 | Anantnag | 25 |
| 2 | Baramulla | 16 |
| 3 | Kupwara | 81 |
| 4 | Ganderbal | 4 |
| 5 | Bandipora | 5 |
| 6 | Budgam | 23 |
| 7 | Shopian | 18 |
| 8 | Kulgam | 25 |
| 9 | Pulwama | 3 |
| Total | | 200 |
| Jammu Division | | |
| S.No | District | No. of available vacancy |
| 1 | Doda | 20 |
| 2 | Poonch | 25 |
| 3 | Rajouri | 35 |
| 4 | Ramban | 12 |
| 5 | Udhampur | 30 |
| 6 | Samba | 20 |
| 7 | Reasi | 20 |
| 8 | Kishtwar | 8 |
| 9 | Kathua | 30 |
| Total | | 200 |
| Grand Total | | 400 |

Note: The Vacancy shown against each district is subject to increase or decrease.

DIPK-NB-4759/20

Sd/- Mission Director, NHM, J&K.

Government of Jammu & Kashmir

Mechanical Hospital & Central Heating Division, Srinagar

(Phone No: 0194-2496089, www.medkmr.org, e-mail id: xenmhchdk@yahoo.in)

Subject: Supply, Installation, Testing , Commissioning of Air Compressors of Capacity 275 CFM , Screw type along with maintenance for Three years at Govt. Chest Disease Hospital, Srinagar.

References:This office NIT no: MHCHD/TS /2020-21/126/e-tenderingdt: 25.09.2020

CANCELLATION

In view of no response, the above referred subject work issued by this office is hereby cancelled and shall be tendered afresh in due course of time.

DIPK-10767/20

No:MHCHD/TS/7108-12

Date: 21-12-2020

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
MHCHD,Srinagar

Not Wearing A Mask Not An Option Now: Mattu

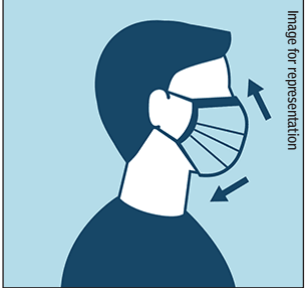
SMC Mayor Enacts Sections Of JK MC Act To Make Wearing A Mask In Public Places Mandatory. Violators To Be Fined Rs 200 On First Violation & Rs 500 On Any Repeat Violations

SRINAGAR: Mayor Srinagar Mr Junaid Azeem Mattu said It is noticed that a large number of people are seen in public places and on public transport without masks.

In a statement issued to news agency-kashmir news service, He said to tackle COVID 19 Pandemic We have come together as a city to combat COVID in the past. There is no room for complacency now.

He said various initiatives have to be taken to resume a mass movement to defeat COVID 19 - together.

The Mayor said that various line departments will have to come together to evolve a joint mechanism to enforce COVID guidelines on ground in Srinagar. "We will involve other departments and their decentralized field workers to



enforce the guidelines added Mayor".

"We will have to pool in and understand that the battle against COVID 19 isn't restricted to jurisdictions or departments but the city will need to come together as a whole" said Mr Mattu.

SMC will take the lead in Srinagar and reach out to other departments. The Police will play a key role as the violation of

COVID guidelines will need to be dealt with sternly under the ambit of law", the Mayor said.

Wearing of face-masks when one steps out of the house is mandatory under COVID19 guidelines.

In this regard a joint, multi-department action-plan will be strategised to enforce adherence he further added.

Mayor further stated that starting from 1st January ,as per sections 43(g),282, 284, 285 1(a)1(b),2 and 287 as a preventive measure to combat COVID 19 pandemic in Srinagar City limits ,not wearing a face mask in Public places will entail a fine of Rs 200.

On first violation Violators will be fined 200 rupees and a fine of Rs 500 will be imposed on any repeat violations added by Mayor SMC.

CBI Arrests Accused In Child Sex Abuse Case

SRINAGAR: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Tuesday claimed to have arrested an accused, resident of Srinagar (J&K) in an on-going investigation of a case over the allegations of running online child sexual abuse racket from India.

"CBI had registered a case under section 67 B of IT Act and Sec. 14 of POCSO Act, 2012 against an accused, resident of Srinagar (Jammu & Kashmir) on the allegations of running online child sexual abuse racket from India, targeting minors living in USA. It was further alleged that the accused uploaded the pornographic videos and images over the dark web for financial gains and also involved in direct communication with many minors in the USA. His wife is living in Washington, USA," a statement said.

It added that the accused was allegedly operating through his wife, who had agreed to be involved in a Master - Slave relationship with the accused and on his direction, she allegedly exploited multiple minors, recorded these abuses and electronically sent the same to him. It was also alleged that when the victims refused to follow his dictate, he shared these videos and images with their family members, the statement said.

According to the statement, the searches were conducted at the premises of the accused at Srinagar which led to recovery of incriminating digital evidence including 3 laptops, 5 mobiles, pen drives, hand written notes etc.

The arrested accused is being produced today before the Competent Court at Srinagar, it said, adding that CBI regularly coordinates with international law enforcement agencies to detect & investigate sexual abuse of minors, especially over the cyber space and also reaffirms its commitment towards promoting co-operation with US Law Enforcement Agencies in combating child sexual abuse in cyber space.

"Consistent and conscious efforts are being made to identify and detain criminals involved in sexual exploitation of minors. CBI had recently traced and arrested an accused, resident of District Chitrakoot (Uttar Pradesh) on 16.11.2020 on the allegations of sexually abusing over 50 children in the Districts of Chitrakoot, Banda and Hamirpur (Uttar Pradesh). During searches, huge material including mobile phones, laptops, web-camera, electronic storage devices, Pen Drives/Memory Cards, several sex toys, emails etc. were recovered," the statement said.

CUK Opens 5 Laboratories For Science Students

GANDERBAL: Central University of Kashmir (CUK) Vice Chancellor. Prof. Mehraj ud Din Mir Tuesday inaugurated five newly established laboratories for the Science students and two-day induction programme cum webinar for the newly admitted students of the Biotechnology, Zoology, Botany and Chemistry in Science campus at Nunar here.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chancellor, Prof. Mehraj ud Din Mir said the laboratories for the departments of Zoology, Biotechnology, Chemistry and Botany are fully equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and instruments which would help the research scholars and students to perform their practical and research work without any hindrance.

Prof. Mehraj ud Din Mir extended a warm welcome to the newly admitted students and said, "The faculty, officers and other allied staff will extend all possible help, support and cooperation to the students to achieve excellence in their respective fields of study," Prof. Mehraj ud Din Mir said the varsity has the distinction of conducting End Semester Examinations on time and declaring the results within the stipulated period. "Despite facing several challenges, both climatic and situational, the university has successfully been able to complete the degrees of the students without any delay," he said. He asked the freshers to seek guidance from the respective faculty members as and when needed.

Prof. Mir asked the students to actively participate in extracurricular activities including debates and competitions organised by the teachings departments and Directorate of Students Welfare to showcase their talent, adding, the students should also participate in the events organised by other higher educational institutions and bring laurels to the varsity. He also had a one-to-one interaction with the freshers in their classrooms and asked them to be innovative.

Addressing the gathering, Registrar, Prof. M Afzal Zargar, said the induction programme gives a detailed insight and introduction to the new students about the functioning of the university, department and the faculty members. He said that despite facing several constraints on the infrastructural front, the university is marching ahead on the academics and have started the programmes in Botany and Chemistry during this session. Prof. Zargar said the newly established laboratories will enable the students to inculcate scientific temper.

Dean School of Life Sciences, Prof. M Yousuf in his address enumerated the functioning of the department and its goals and vision. He asked the freshers to enjoy their stay in the varsity and help in building a better society and serve the community thereafter. He also apprised the participants about the facilities provided by the university and scheme of the courses offered.

Police Seeks Help In Hit And Run Case

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir police has sought help to identify a car involved in hit and run case in the uptown Srinagar on December 17, a police spokesman said Tuesday evening.

He said a car hit and critically injured a pedestrian in the afternoon at 1400 hrs on December 17 at Solina under police station Shergarhi. The car fled away towards Rambagh from the spot after hitting and critically wounding Junaid Ahmad Dar, resident of Kulgam who has been shifted to hospital.

Police has now sought help of general public in identifying the car involved in the accident. Spokesman said on December 17 at 1400 hours, one "White Color DL number Santro Car" having Red Cross Logo on the back side, going towards Rambagh, hit one pedestrian 20-year-old Dar near Sericulture Office Solina and injured him critically.

In this regard Case FIR No. 78/20 U/S 279, 337 IPC stands registered in Police Station Shergarhi and investigation is going on.

In case of any information/clue about the said suspect or the involved Car, Kindly inform Police Station Shergarhi.



AIAZ HUSSAIN, BJP candidate for the District Development Council (DDC) polls shows victory sign after winning DDC seat from the Khonmoh-II constituency in Balhama area of Srinagar outskirts. KO Photo Abid Bhat

JK Bank CMD Hails Police For Swift Cash-Recovery

SRINAGAR: Appreciating the role of police in recent recovery of bank's cash from culprits in shortest possible span of time in Jammu as well as in Kashmir, J&K Bank Chairman and MD Rajesh Kumar Chhibber said that such exemplary acts of police enhance public trust and confidence upon the working of Police and strengthens the people's bond with the department.

The CMD made these remarks in a personal call to the J&K Director General of Police, Dilbag Singh. The two cases of theft involved cash of around Rupees Nineteen lac.

Notably, in Jammu, Gandhi Nagar Police station and Nehru Market Police Post handled the theft case of Rs 10 lacs that had happened at the bank's business unit New University Campus. Acting swiftly on the complaint and with the help of inputs received from branch through installed CC TVs, the Police team led by SHO Gandhi Nagar, Gurnam Singh and Incharge Police Post Nehru Market Sumeet Sharma apprehended the two accused involved in the incident along with the stolen cash from

Kathua within three days only.

In Kashmir, under the supervision of SP West Shahzad Salaria the police team led by SDPO West Muzaffar Jan have recovered Rupees Eight Lakh Ninety Thousand and Six Hundred in cash after arresting the culprit involved in a theft case reported from ATM at Khomeini Chowk. According to the police the cash was recovered from the attic of the bank building as the culprit happened to be working as a security guard engaged by an outsourced security company.

Mehbooba Compliments Parra For Maiden Win

SRINAGAR: People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday complemented party's youth wing president Waheed-ur- Rehman Parra who emerged winner in DDC polls from south Kashmir's Naina territorial seat.

"Couldn't be prouder of PDPs @parawahid who won his maiden election by a huge margin of votes. Despite being arrested on baseless charges right after filing his nomination people have shown their love & trust for Waheed. Hope justice prevails", Mehbooba tweeted.

Notably Parra is currently under NIA's custody into an alleged link with DySP Divinder Singh's militancy related case. The PDP youth leader was taken into custody after a day he filed his nomination papers for DDC polls.

DIAL-EMMA

- TRAFFIC POLICE : 9419993745, 01998-266686
- PCR: 0194-2452092,2455883
- PDD: 0194-2450213
- FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES : 2479488,2452222,2452155
- CAPD: 18001807011
- SMC HEALTH OFFICER: 9469409081

AIRPORTS

SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311 ✈️

RAILWAYS



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

HIGHWAY STATUS

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

This Day in History

- 962 - Byzantine-Arab Wars: Under the future Emperor Nicephorus Phocas, Byzantine troops stormed city of Aleppo, recovering the tattered tunic of John the Baptist.
- 1482 - The Peace of Atracht (now Arras) concluded between Louis XI of France and Maximilian of Austria, ending the War of the Burgundian Succession.
- 1620 - French huguenots declare war on King Louis XIII.
- 1690 - English astronomer John Flamsteed observes Uranus without realizing it's undiscovered.
- 1715 - Russian/Prussian troops occupy Stralsund.
- 1728 - Prussian Emperor Karel VI signs Treaty of Berlin.
- 1899 - Tentative Turkish & German treaty on construction of Baghdad railway.
- 1914 - World War I: Australian and New Zealand troops arrive in Cairo, Egypt.
- 1915 J Kern/S Greene's musical "Very Good Eddie" premieres in NYC
- 1916 - World War I: Battle of Magdhaba - Allied forces defeat Turkish forces in Egypt's Sinai peninsula.
- 1917 - 3 British warships come close to Holland.
- 1919 - 1st hospital ship built to move wounded naval personnel launched
- 1920 - Government of Ireland Act / Home Rule Act passed partitioning Ireland.
- 1933 - Train crash in Eastern Paris; 230 die.
- 1938 - Discovery of the first modern coelacanth in South Africa.
- 1941 - British troops overrun Benghazi, Libya.
- 1941 - Japan begins assault on Rangoon, Burma.
- 1942 - Allies air attack on Den Helder.
- 1947 - Transistor invented by Bardeen, Brattain & Shockley in Bell Labs.
- 1954 - The first human kidney transplant is performed by Dr. Joseph E. Murray at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts.
- 1958 - Abdallah Ibrahim forms government of Morocco.
- 1961 - Fidel Castro announces Cuba will release 1,113 prisoners from failed 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion for \$62M worth of food & medical supplies.
- 1964 - India & Ceylon hit by cyclone, about 4,850 killed.
- 1968 - 1st US case of space motion sickness.
- 1972 - 6.25 Earthquake destroys central Managua Nicaragua, 10,000 die.
- 1982 - The United States Environmental Protection Agency announces it has identified dangerous levels of dioxin in the soil of Times Beach, Missouri.
- 1986 - Experimental airplane Voyager, piloted by Dick Rutan & Jeana Yeager, complete 1st nonstop, round-the-world flight without refueling lands
- 1990 - Slovenians vote to secede from Yugoslavia.
- 2002 - A MQ-1 Predator is shot down by an Iraqi MiG-25, making it the first time in history that an aircraft and an unmanned drone had engaged in combat.
- 2003 - PetroChina Chuandongbei natural gas field explosion, Guoqiao, Kai, Chongqing, China, killing at least 234.
- 2005 - Azerbaijan Airlines Flight 217 from Baku, Azerbaijan, to Aktau, Kazakhstan crashes shortly after takeoff killing 23 people.
- 2012 - 200 civilians are killed by Syrian government warplanes in Hefaya, Syria.



HIJRI
CALENDAR

07

JAMADI
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1442

PRAYERS

FAJR
6: 03
ZUHR
12: 28
ASR
3:49
MAGRIB
5:30
ISHA
6:55

Office Of The Chief Engineer Distribution KPDCL

Electricity consumers of Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Ltd. are requested to avail the 24x7 facility of e-Customer Care for registering of complaints/grievances on the below given numbers. In addition the National Helpline number of 1912/18001807666 is also available for resolution of complaints/bill related issues. Consumers can also register their complaints on Twitter(@KPDCLOfficial) and Official Facebook page of KPDCL.



Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Limited

24X7

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Helpline Nos: 6006613056 ; 6006613057 ; 6006613058 ; 6006613059 ; 6006613060

e-mail Helpline: help.billsahuliya@gmail.com

Twitter: @KPDCLOfficial



DIPK-NB-4747/20

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From KO Archives

Abduction Spree In Sumbal

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: A series of ransom by pro-government gunmen in the Sumbal region of north Kashmir sparked off vehement protests to-day in the area. Thousands of residents demanding action against the gunmen staged a demonstration on the Sumbal Bridge, blocking traffic on the Srinagar-Bandipora highway this morning.

In the latest incident of the kind, gunmen had abducted a student, Ri-yaz Ahmad Rathar of Waskoora, Ganderbal yesterday and sent word to his father, a fruit vendor to pay Rs 2 lakh for his son's release.

Similarly, gunmen are gearing up to extract a hefty amount from the owners of the Showhole floor mill for setting free their employee, Ghulam Muhammad Gojri, kidnapped recently. Sumbal residents said that pro-government gunmen had abducted nearly a dozen traders who frequent the town to reclaim loans.

(Kashmir Observer, 23 December, 2000)

BioNTech says can make mutation-beating vaccine in 6 weeks

Agencies

London: Ugur Sahin, CEO and co-founder of German biotech firm BioNTech, is interviewed by journalists in Marburg, Germany September 17, 2020 Reuters

BioNTech co-founder said tests are being run on the variant, with results expected in two weeks

The co-founder of BioN-



Ugur Sahin, CEO and co-founder of German biotech firm BioNTech, is interviewed by journalists in Marburg, Germany September 17, 2020 Reuters

Tech said on Tuesday it was "highly likely" that its vaccine against the coronavirus works against the mutated strain detected in Britain, but it could also adapt the vaccine if neces-

sary, in six weeks.

"Scientifically, it is highly likely that the immune response by this vaccine also can deal with the new virus variant," said Ugur Sahin.

But if needed, "in principle the beauty of the messenger technology is that we can directly start to engineer a vaccine which completely mimics this new mutation -- we could be able to provide a new vaccine technically within six weeks."

Sahin said the variant detected in Britain has nine mutations, rather than just one as is usually common.

Nevertheless, he voiced confidence that the vaccine developed with Pfizer would be efficient because it "contains more than 1,000 amino acids, and only nine of them have changed, so that means 99% of the protein is still the same."

He said tests are being run on the variant, with results expected in two weeks.

"We have scientific confidence that the vaccine might protect but we will only know it if the experiment is done... we will publish the data as soon as possible," he added.

Earthlings treated to rare alignment of Jupiter and Saturn

The evening sky over the Northern Hemisphere treated stargazers to a once-in-a-lifetime illusion on Monday as the solar system's two biggest planets appeared to meet in a celestial alignment that astronomers call the "Great Conjunction."

The rare spectacle resulted from a near convergence of the

At the point of convergence, Jupiter and Saturn appeared to be just one-tenth of a degree apart, roughly equivalent to the thickness of a dime held at arm's length. In reality, of course, the planets remained hundreds of millions of miles apart, according to Nasa.

A conjunction of the two planets takes place about once every



orbits of Jupiter and Saturn that happened to coincide with Monday's winter solstice, the shortest day of the year.

For those able to observe the alignment in clear skies, the two frozen-gas spheres appeared closer and more vibrant - almost as a single point of light - than at any time in 800 years.

Jupiter - the brighter and larger of the pair - has been gradually nearing Saturn in the sky for weeks as the two planets proceed around the sun, each in its own lane of an enormous celestial racetrack, said Henry Throop, an astronomer at National Aeronautics and Space Administration headquarters in Washington.

20 years. But the last time Jupiter and Saturn came as close together in the sky as on Monday was in 1623, an alignment that occurred during daylight and was thus not visible from most places on Earth.

The last visible great conjunction occurred long before telescopes were invented, in 1226, halfway through construction of the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris.

The heightened brightness of the two planets as they almost merge in the sky has invited the inevitable speculation about whether they formed the "Christmas star" that the New Testament describes as having guided the three wise men to the baby Jesus.

Agencies



Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi (L) meets with his Emirati counterpart, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in Abu Dhabi on December 17, 2020. (Via Twitter)

No Israel recognition until resolution of Palestine issue: Pakistan to UAE

Agencies

Islamabad: Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi says he has informed the United Arab Emirates of Islamabad's "steadfast" policy towards Israel, noting that the country will refuse to recognize the occupying regime until the issue of Palestine is resolved.

"I categorically presented Pakistan's stance on Israel to the UAE's foreign minister that we will not and cannot establish a relationship with Israel until a concrete and permanent solution to the Palestine issue is found," he told reporters in the central city of Multan on Monday.

Qureshi's visited the UAE a few days earlier, amid speculations that Islamabad, under pressure from Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, was on the path to entering normalization with Tel Aviv.

Last week, Israeli news outlets reported that a senior advisor to Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan had secretly traveled to the occupied territories in November - a claim rejected by Islamabad as "fake news."

Khan had earlier revealed that Pakistan was "under pressure from friendly countries to recognize Israel," giving assurances, however, that Islamabad

"will not do so without a fair settlement to the Palestinians."

Many speculated that Khan was actually referring to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

In recent months, four Arab countries — the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco — have established formal diplomatic relations with Israel in deals brokered by the US.

The normalization trend has sparked widespread anger among the Pakistani people, who have strong feelings for the Palestinian cause against the Israeli occupation.

Qureshi rebuffed reports about Islamabad being under pressure to recognize Israel and said, "Number one, there will be no pressure on us nor there is. Number two, we have to make decisions keeping Pakistan's interests in view and not because of any pressure. We have a policy and we are still steadfast on it."

The top Pakistani diplomat also said that he had explained to his Emirati counterpart, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the "depth of emotions and feelings Pakistanis have about Palestine and Kashmir."

The UAE foreign minister, he said, "fully understood our feelings" on both issues.

Qureshi further emphasized that the Pakistani premier had

"time and again clarified there is no pressure on us in this regard."

On December 17-18, Qureshi visited the UAE, where he met with Emirati officials to discuss various matters, including the impasse on the issuance of new visas for Pakistani citizens.

Pakistan is among the 13 mostly Muslim-majority countries, whose citizens have been targeted by the UAE visa ban since November 18.

This is while the UAE is home to the second largest population of overseas Pakistanis in the world.

On Saturday, the UAE foreign minister said the decision to suspend the issuance of visas to Pakistani nationals was made due to the coronavirus pandemic.

He stressed "the temporary nature of the recent restrictions imposed on the issuance of visas due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic," affirming "the depth of the distinguished relations between the two friendly countries and the keenness to enhance and develop further aspects of joint cooperation across all fields."

Appreciating the Pakistani community in the Persian Gulf state, he said more than 1.5 million members of the diaspora enjoy safety and stability in what he called "their second country."

Morocco, Israel to seal normalisation with first direct flight

Rabat, Morocco | AFP

Paris ; Jared Kushner, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and advisor, is due on Tuesday to arrive in Morocco from Israel on the first direct commercial flight between the two countries since they normalised ties.

The flight from Tel Aviv to Rabat is seen as highly symbolic after Morocco announced on December 10 a "resumption of relations" with Israel.

Israeli flag carrier El Al Airlines said on Sunday it would operate the first flight.

The direct flight, LY555, is expected to take six hours.

It also aims to showcase the achievements of the Trump administration in Middle East diplomacy, weeks before Trump is

replaced at the White House by President-elect Joe Biden.

Morocco became the third Arab state this year, after the UAE and Bahrain, to normalise ties with Israel under US-brokered deals, while Sudan has pledged to follow suit.

In return, the US president fulfilled a decades-old goal of Morocco by backing its contested sovereignty in Western Sahara.

The move infuriated the Algerian-backed pro-independence Polisario Front, which controls about one fifth of the desert territory that was once a Spanish colony.

Kushner will be heading an American delegation, and during his visit to Rabat a series of agreements will be signed between Morocco and Israel, according to officials.

The Israeli delegation will be led by National Security Advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat, incidentally a son of Morocco-born Jews.

Speaking at a Jerusalem ceremony alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday, Kushner said normalization with Morocco "will bring about a whole new set of opportunities for northern Africa and the entire Middle East."

"Our collective efforts have led to the birth of a new Middle East, where firsts and breakthroughs are now happening almost every day," Kushner said.

Negotiations leading to Morocco's resumption of ties with Israel included the opening of a US consulate in Western Sahara, and US investments which Moroccan media described as "colossal".

Egypt's Al Azhar bans joining Muslim Brotherhood

Agencies

Abu Dhabi: Al Azhar, the highest authority in Sunni Islamic thought and Islamic jurisprudence in Egypt, said joining the Muslim Brotherhood, which is blacklisted by Egypt, is forbidden according to Shariah law and that Almighty Allah has forbidden division and disagreement.

Al Azhar's renowned fatwa center, in its edict, added Almighty Allah forbids people from pursuing any path that distracts them from following the truth, explaining that keeping to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, in accordance with Shariah, was the only way to please Almighty Allah.

"It is clear to the public what these groups have done in distorting some texts, cutting them out of their context, and using them to achieve personal goals or interests and corrupting the land," the center said in the fatwa.

"Membership in these extremist groups is considered forbidden by Shariah," it added.

Egyptian authorities have labeled the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group since

November 2014.

Hundreds of members and leaders of the organisation are being tried on charges related to inciting or committing violence.

In mid-November, Saudi Arabia's Council of Senior Scholars had also blacklisted the group.

"The Muslim Brothers' Group is a terrorist group and [does not] represent the method of Islam, rather it blindly follows its partisan objectives that are running contrary to the guidance of our graceful religion, while taking religion as a mask to disguise its purposes in order to practice the opposite such as sedition, wreaking havoc, committing violence, and terrorism," the council said.

In 2014, Saudi Arabia and UAE officially designated the group as a terrorist organisation "to keep sedition at bay." Bahrain and Egypt soon followed suit.

The countries have urged the public to stay away from the organisation and not sympathize with its actions.

Khaled Al Jundi, a preacher and member of Egypt's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, said that the Islamic world has long awaited Al Azhar's edict.

Cyberattack hit key US Treasury systems

Agencies

Washington: Hackers broke into systems used by top US Treasury officials during a massive cyberattack on government agencies and may have stolen essential encryption keys, a senior lawmaker said on Monday.

Senator Ron Wyden, who sits on both the Senate Intelligence and Finance Committees said after a closed-door briefing that the hack at the US Treasury Department "appears to be significant."

"Additionally, the hackers broke into systems in the Departmen-



tal Offices division of Treasury, home to the department's highest-ranking officials," said Wyden.

"Treasury still does not know all of the actions taken by hackers, or precisely what information was stolen," he added.

The US government admitted last week that computer systems in multiple departments were penetrated by attackers who hacked in through widely used security software made by the US company SolarWinds.

Members of Congress briefed by US intelligence, as well as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Attorney General Bill Barr, have all said Russians were behind the hack.

So far officials have said the hackers broke into computers at the State Department, Commerce Department, Treasury, Homeland Security Department, and the National Institutes of Health.

But experts have said they fear far more of the government could be affected, including US intelligence bodies, given the ubiquitousness of the SolarWinds security software.

Wyden said that the Internal Revenue Service had said there was no evidence that they had been compromised or data on taxpayers taken.

But he sharply criticized the government for not taking stronger measures to protect its systems.

NEWSMAKERS

Trump orders neo-classical design to be adopted for new federal buildings

Washington: US President Donald Trump, with only a month left in office, issued an order Monday that future federal buildings must be "beautiful" and preferably built in the Greco-Roman classical style.

The executive order stopped short of an earlier draft that drew the ire of some architects in seeking to ban construction not done in the neo-classical style, typified by the White House, Capitol and Lincoln Memorial in Washington.

Instead, the order on "promoting beautiful federal civic architecture" decrees that classical and "other traditional" styles "should be encouraged instead of discouraged."

Trump's order takes aim at federal buildings built



after the 1950s, saying that the capital Washington, now features a "discordant mixture" and that the government has "largely stopped building beautiful buildings."

While Trump's order is welcomed by traditionalists who favor the iconic columned

buildings dotted around Washington and replicated in many states, the American Institute of Architects said it "unequivocally opposes" the initiative.

"Communities should have the right and responsibility to decide for themselves what architectural design best fits their needs," the institute's CEO Robert Ivy said in a statement, vowing to work with incoming President-elect Joe Biden.

"Though we are appalled with the administration's decision to move forward with the design mandate, we are happy the order isn't as far reaching as previously thought."

Trump, a real estate developer before becoming president, is primarily associated with construction of modern buildings using glass, steel, and gold-tinted decor.

Unemployed Kerala man wins USD 1 million in UAE raffle draw

A 30-year-old unemployed Indian man has won USD 1 million in a raffle draw contest in the UAE, according to a media report on Monday.

Navaneeth Sajeewan won the mega prize money in the Dubai Duty Free Millennium Millionaire Draw held on Sunday after he picked the Millennium Millionaire Series 345, the Gulf News reported.

Sajeewan, who has lived in Abu Dhabi for the past four years, had bought the ticket online on November 22.

Sajeewan, a native of Kasargod in Kerala, is presently serving his notice period at his company. He was laid off last month as part of cost measures at his firm in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking to Gulf News, Sajeewan said: It is unbelievable. I feel blessed

and happy. I am sharing the prize with four other colleagues and friends. Still I take home USD 200,000, which is a big



amount."

Sajeewan, who has a one-year-old child, is the 171st Indian national to win the DDF mega prize, the Gulf News article said. Indian expatriates make up the highest number of Dubai Duty Free Millennium Millionaire ticket buyers.

Pakistan activist Karima Baloch found dead in Canada

Karima Baloch, an activist, who had been vocal about Pakistan Army and government atrocities in Balochistan, has been found dead in Toronto Canada, according to Balochistan Post.

Karima was a Canadian refugee and named as one of the world's 100 most "inspirational and influential" women in 2016 by the BBC.

She had gone missing on Sunday and was last seen at approximately 3 pm on the same day. Toronto Police had requested for public assistance in locating her. However, now her family has confirmed that Karima's body has been found.

Karima Baloch, a famous personality in Balochistan, is believed to be the pioneer of women activism there. She has also raised the issue of Balochistan in the United Nations sessions in Switzerland.

Cyberattack Hit Key US Treasury Systems



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But experts have said they fear far more of the government could be affected, including US intelligence bodies, given the ubiquitousness of the SolarWinds security software.

Wyden said that the Internal Revenue Service had said there was no evidence that they had been compromised or data on taxpayers taken.

But he sharply criticized the government for not taking stronger measures to protect its systems.

The government "has now suffered a breach that seems to involve skilled hackers stealing encryption keys from (government) servers," he said.

That has happened despite "years of government officials advocating for encryption backdoors, and ignoring warnings from cybersecurity experts who said that encryption keys become irresistible targets for hackers."

Pak Govt Approves Hindu Temple Construction In Islamabad

Pakistan government has granted permission for the construction of a Hindu temple in Islamabad, nearly six months after the work at the site was stopped apparently because of the pressure from the radical Islamic groups.

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) issued a notification in Lahore on Monday, giving permission for the construction of the boundary wall for cremation ground for the Hindu community in sector H-9/2, Islamabad.

"Permission to construct the boundary wall around cremation ground for the Hindu community in sector H-9/2, Islamabad is hereby accorded in accordance with clause 4.II of Islamabad Capital Territory, Building Control Regulations 2020 ensuring that height of this boundary wall shall not accord 7'-0", says the notification, a copy of which is available with the PTI.

"It may either be a solid wall, or up to one foot it shall consist of solid masonry and remaining portion may be of light material such as fence etc. The height of the enclosure shall not be less than 3'-0" in any case," it says.

Earlier, some hardline clerics had warned the government not to allow the construction of the temple in Islamabad.

The CDA in July stopped construction of the boundary wall on the plot meant for the temple, citing legal reasons.

Religious Affairs Minister Pir Noorul Haq Qadri had forwarded the matter to the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) - Pakistan's state-run council of clerics - for its advice along with a summary for grant of Rs 100 million to the prime minister for construction of the building.



In October, the council, which advises the government on religious issues, said that there are no constitutional or Sharia restrictions on the construction of a temple in Islamabad or any other part of the country.

The decision, signed by 14 CII members, added that Hindus, like all other religious groups in the country, have the constitutional right to a place for last rites according to their faith.

Lal Chand Malhi, a minority lawmaker from the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), in a statement thanked Prime Minister Imran Khan, CII chief Dr Qiba Ayaz and others for granting permission to build the boundary wall.

He said that the minorities in the country enjoy equal rights as promised by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah while lauding the CII for clearing the way for the construction of a temple, a crematorium and community hall in Islamabad.

As per plans, the Krishna temple will come up in a 20,000 sq ft plot in the capital's H-9 administrative division.

The plot for the first Hindu temple in Islamabad was allotted to the Hindu Panchayat by the CDA in 2017. However, the construction work was delayed due to some formalities, including the approval of the site map and documents from the CDA and other relevant authorities.

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif had allotted the land for the temple.



Farmers at the Singhu border, Tribune file

PM Modi Calls AMU 'Mini India', Lauds Varsity's Contribution During Covid-19

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday lauded Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) for its diversity and appreciated the varsity's "unprecedented" contribution to the society during the coronavirus pandemic.

Emphasising on 'sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka viswas', he said that the country's resources belong to each and every citizen and should benefit all.

"People tell me that the AMU campus is like a city in itself. We see a mini India among different departments, dozens of hostels, thousands of teachers and professors. The diversity which we see here is not only the strength of this university but also of the entire nation," he said while addressing the AMU's centenary celebrations.

"The way AMU has helped society during the coronavirus crisis is unprecedented. Getting thousands of people to do free tests, building isolation wards, building plasma banks and contributing a large amount to the PM CARES Fund shows the seriousness of fulfilling your obligations to society. With such organised efforts, India is successfully combating the global epidemic like Corona, keeping the country paramount," he said.

The Prime Minister said that AMU has also worked to strengthen India's relations with many countries of the world in the last 100 years.

"In the last 100 years, AMU has also worked to strengthen India's relations with many countries of the world. The research done here on Urdu, Arabic and Persian languages, research on Islamic literature, gives new energy to India's cultural relations with the entire Islamic world. The University has the double responsibility to further enhance the soft power of the university as well as fulfilling the obligation of nation-building," he said.

The Prime Minister recalled Sir Sayyad's remark that 'the first and foremost duty of one who is concerned about his country is to work for the welfare of all people. Irrespective of the caste, creed or religion.'

He stressed that the country is proceeding on a path where every citizen is assured of his or her constitution-given rights, no one should be left behind due to one's religion and this is the basis of the pledge 'sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka viswas'.

PM Modi gave examples of the government schemes providing

benefits without any discrimination. He said that the country took forward the efforts to build a modern Muslim society by ending the practice of triple talaq.

The Prime Minister said that the AMU has attracted many from its contemporary curriculum in higher education.

"New National Education Policy has interdisciplinary subjects similar to one already taught at the university. The youth of our country is committed to advancing the country with the call of Nation First. This aspiration of India's youth has been given priority in the new National Education Policy," he said.

Education brings employment and entrepreneurship with itself, employment and entrepreneurship bring economic independence, which leads to empowerment. An empowered woman, at every level & in every decision, contributes as much as any other person: PM Narendra Modi "The multiple entry and exit points in the new National Education Policy will make it easier for students to take decisions regarding their education. This will also give the students the freedom to take their decision without worrying about the fees of the entire course," he added.

prevalence states. Also 18.9 per cent respondents perceived COVID-19 as a fatal disease which was more in low prevalence states (29.5%) than other categories of states.

About 8.9 per cent respondents thought coronavirus disease was a rumour and 11 per cent respondents thought it was an exaggerated problem. Another 8.5 per cent thought it was a minor cold, cough and flu only.

Upon asking if people around them wore a face mask while stepping out of their homes, almost 58 per cent said they did so. A higher proportion of respondents in high prevalence states reported that people around them wore a face mask normally all the time when they stepped out in public places than other types of states.

When coronavirus struck India, there was a fear that the virus can be spread through poultry because of which several people stopped consuming eggs and chicken. Poultry business was badly affected.

51% In Rural India Say COVID-19 Is A Conspiracy By China!

More than 51 per cent respondents in rural India perceive the COVID-19 pandemic as a "conspiracy by China".

On being asked how the respondent perceived COVID-19 pandemic, more than 51 per cent said it was a "conspiracy by China".

Through the rapid survey, Gaon Connection tried to find out how rural Indians perceived COVID-19, how they were protecting themselves against the disease, awareness about the disease.

On being asked how the respondent perceived COVID-19 pandemic, more than 51 per cent said it was a "conspiracy by China". Twenty-two per cent said it was the failure of citizens to observe precautions, whereas about 18 per cent saw it as the government failure. In high prevalence states, more proportion of respondents (23%) saw it as governance failure than medium (14.5%) and low prevalence states (16.9%).

Further, the respondents were



asked if they thought the novel coronavirus was still around. Around one-fifth of the respondents said they did not think the coronavirus was still around. Around 15 per cent said they did not know if the virus was still around whereas 1.3 per cent perceived the virus to be a hoax.

To further get perceptions of rural India towards the COVID-19, the respondents were asked if they thought COVID was a real disease or a rumour. Sixty-four per cent of respondents said they thought COVID-19 was a real disease. This opinion was stronger in high prevalence states (74.8%) than other medium or low

Govt Plans To Measure Depth Of Himalayan Glaciers To Assess Water Availability



As global warming affects the Himalayas, the Ministry of Earth Sciences is planning to measure the depth of glaciers in the region to assess their volume and gauge the water available in them, officials said on Sunday.

The project will start next summer, sometime in June-July, said, M Rajeevan, the ministry's secretary.

Ravichandran, the Director of the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), which will execute the project, said the country's remote and high-altitude research centre, Himansh, is also studying the Himalayan climate.

The centre was established in 2016.

"The plan is to first study seven glaciers in the Chandra river basin," he said.

The Chandra river is a major tributary of the Chenab river which itself is a tributary of the Indus.

The Himalayan glaciers are a major source of water for rivers originating from there. The Himalayan rivers are also a lifeline for the Indo-Gangetic plains, home to several million people.

The NCPOR director said while the area of the glaciers is already known with the help of satellites, what needs to be known is the volume.

"The purpose of studying the depth of the glaciers is to understand the volume. This will also help us understand the availability of water and whether the glaciers are increasing or shrinking," Ravichandran added.

He said they will be using a radar technology that uses microwave signals. It can penetrate through the ice and reach the rocks, something which the satellite images cannot do. The signals, after reflecting on the rocks can help understand the depth.

"The US and the UK have the technology. So, we will be taking help of that technology," Ravichandran added.

At first, the plan is to use helicopters that will carry these radars. Once successful, subsequent studies would be carried out in the rest of the Himalayas.

Later, an aircraft or drone could be used depending on the radars for studying other glaciers, Ravichandran noted.

Kuwait Halts Hiring Of Teachers From Abroad



CAIRO: Kuwait has halted recruiting teachers from abroad for the current school year due to restrictions prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, a local newspaper reported Tuesday, citing education sources.

The Education Ministry has decided to make do with local hires until the coronavirus crisis is over, Al Jarida newspaper quoted what it termed as well-informed sources at the ministry.

"Instructions have been issued to the competent sectors at the ministry to work out their plans to offset shortage in educational and administrative specialisations through local contracts with citizens, Gulf

nations, and stateless residents [Bidoons] and expatriates inside the country according to needs," a source said.

No committee has been formed to contract teachers from abroad for the present school year, according to the sources.

Previously, Kuwait used to contract schoolteachers from other countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon to cover its needs for teaching some subjects where there is a shortage in local teachers.

However, the global coronavirus pandemic and related travel restrictions have hampered the dispatch of Kuwaiti contracting committees to those countries.

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NEWS MAKERS

Foot Massages, Tattoos & Dentists For Protesting Farmers

With foot massage machines, a dental surgery, their own newspaper and even a tattoo parlour, it's clear that the thousands of Indian farmers blocking roads into Delhi for almost a month are going nowhere.

The farmers marched on the capital in late November to protest new farm laws they fear will destroy their livelihoods, but police firing tear gas and water cannons stopped them in their tracks.

So now, numbering tens of thousands, they are digging in at several entry points into the city, braving the bitter night-time cold with tents, blankets and fires, as well as hot samosas and sweet chai.

With music blaring from large speakers fitted to tractors, the largest



such site at the Singhu border crossing north of Delhi now resembles a lively — and highly organised — festival.

Sunny Ahluwalia, a dentist, drove his van fitted with two dental chairs and an X-ray machine, all powered by a generator, from his home 250

kilometres away to help.

"We may have become doctors but we are the sons of farmers," Ahluwalia told AFP after scraping one farmer's yellowing teeth, one of around 100 patients he treats for free per day. "It is very unfortunate that our

government isn't ready to accept the farmers' demands. How can the laws be good if they don't like them?"

Tired feet

The main camp snakes back almost a kilometre (half a mile). Tractor trailers are stuffed with bedding, while tents are set up around makeshift stalls offering anything from toothpaste to free medicine.

The makeshift settlement is a hive of activity throughout the day, as the farmers — mostly without Covid masks — weave in and out of the bustling area, chatting and getting free food from community kitchens.

In one tent, volunteers have set up two neat rows of about 20 foot massage machines to put a fresh spring in the step of the many grey-bearded, multicolour-turbaned farmers.

Customer Leaves \$5,600 Tip At US Restaurant

WASHINGTON: A customer left a whopping \$5,600 tip at a restaurant in the US state of Ohio, which allowed the establishment's 28-member staff to take home \$200 each, a media report said.

In a Facebook post, Moussa Salloukh, the owner of Souk Mediterranean Kitchen & Bar in Toledo, said the generosity left staffers crying tears of joy, the Daily Mail said in its report published on Monday.

"This really happened. Last night one of our guests left a \$5,600 tip to be given to all of our staff, whether they were working that shift or not. It meant each of our 28 staff members received a \$200 tip. What an amazing gesture of kindness to my employees," Salloukh wrote in his



post dated December 13.

"Be the reason someone believes in the goodness of people," he said, adding: "With Covid restrictions and guidelines, that was not going to happen for them this year. So this heartfelt generosity was deeply needed and very appreciated."

Along with the post, Salloukh also attached a photo of the receipt that the customer left behind, showing a one penny food purchase

and the handwritten \$5,600 tip.

Speaking to a local TV channel, the restaurant owner said after the customer left behind the tip, his general manager walked up to him with "this look on her".

"I asked if everything was all right and she just kind of showed me the cheque and it was a \$5,600.00 tip," the Daily Mail news report quoted Salloukh as saying.

The massive tip came at a time when pandemic-induced restrictions have led to the closures of indoor dining and restaurants across the country.

There has also been dramatic downturns in earnings, especially during the traditionally busy holiday season.

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K O V I E W

New Virus Strain

Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan has assured the nation that the government was on alert about the new strain of coronavirus that has emerged in the United Kingdom. He has asked people not to panic. The new mutant has prompted several countries including India to stop incoming flights from the UK. In India, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has raised concern, so has Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. The new variant was first detected in the UK in September. By November around a quarter of cases in London were linked to this variant. It has caused 1,100 new infections in 60 areas in Britain. The strain code-named as B.1.1.7 is more than 70% more transmissible than existing strains.

This has also raised questions about the efficacy of the vaccines in infections caused by the mutant. At the same time, the medical experts are still studying the new strain. There is so far no evidence that the new variant causes disease which is any different from that caused by previous variants. Though the mutation in the virus appears to be significant, experts have not found any reason to suggest that it would affect the vaccination. The vaccines, it is said, can be tweaked to be effective on new virus strain.

Unlike countries like the UK, the US and Canada, India has yet to roll out the vaccination on a large scale. On a positive note, the number of infections in India has drastically reduced since the peak of summer when the tally had touched around one lakh. Similarly the mortality rate has gone down in India in the last few days. Some experts are thus even suggesting that India shouldn't be in a hurry to go for vaccination and wait for the virus to self contain itself as is the case now.

That said, the virus mutant remains a cause of global alarm. On Monday, the stock market in India crashed by 3 percent on new virus fears. This was the first such deep correction since the steep fall in March. If the new mutant triggers a fresh wave of infections, which, in turn, could lead to further economic disruption, this could once again lead to a deeper correction in the stock market.

India did well by banning flights from the UK. It is important that this strain remains confined to the Britain and is treated there. World cannot afford a fresh massive wave of the Covid-19 infections and the consequent lockdowns. Much of the global economy is in recession and further disruption will inflict a bigger blow to already battered businesses. More so, at a time when the economy is showing signs of looking up again.

OTHER OPINION

The summer of 36

The summer of 36 will not be forgotten, but will certainly be forgiven. Though the nature of the implosion was shocking for a team of proven pedigree and credentials, and would remain an all-time low, none of the 11 players would be condemned by what would be the equivalent of the devil's number in Indian cricket. It would be a memory that would be tough to erase from the mind of these cricketers as well as the audience, there would be frequent reminders in the form of banter, sledge or genuine malice, but it would cease to be a crushing burden as time rolls on. It would haunt them, but would not define their career or life.

The batch of 36 could take lessons from the class of 42. It was no ordinary batting line-up that England skittled out in London, featuring as it did Sunil Gavaskar, Gundappa Viswanath, Farokh Engineer and Ajit Wadekar. But decades later, when their careers are assessed, that hour of ignominy is seldom recalled. Gavaskar went onto become an all-time great most reputed for his all-condition technique. Viswanath is often remembered as the most aesthetic of Indian batsmen, a match-winner on difficult tracks. Engineer made England his home and went on to become a county legend. Wadekar's leadership skills are still praised and he later enjoyed successful stints as India coach.

Sport, thus, forgets and forgives. It offers a chance for redemption. There are numerous examples. Stuart Broad was struck for six sixes in an over by Yuvraj Singh, yet he is set to end up as one of the all-time great bowlers, scaling more heights than Yuvraj could even imagine. Usain Bolt was eliminated in the first round of the Athens Games, before he clocked the Olympic record in Beijing four years later. Shane Warne was plundered for 150 runs in his debut Test against India, but went on to pick 708 wickets. So India could take lessons from history and fight back.

The Indian Express

SIC's closure makes RTI redundant in J&K

CIC's circuit bench needs to be established on the pattern of CAT



Dr Raja MUZAFFAR BHAT

Government officials are not worried about RTI implementation as the nerve center of this law in J&K was shut down post abrogation of Article 370. By the "nerve center" I mean the J&K State Information Commission (SIC) which was constituted under J&K RTI Act 2009. The JK SIC was shut down when J&K RTI Act 2009 was repealed

Mushtaq Ahmad Lone from a remote Batwoder hamlet in Chadoora tehsil of district Budgam has been trying to access information related to COVID-19 expenses. He used the Right to Information Act (RTI) seeking information from Deputy Commissioner (DC) office Budgam. On September 2nd 2020, he sent the application via speed post, but even after 3 months, Mushtaq hasn't been provided the information which otherwise should have been made available proactively as per the provisions of section 4 (1) (b) of RTI Act 2005. This was not the case more than a year back. Mushtaq says that he would get the response within 30 days only. He now feels frustrated and infuriated. The Assistant Commissioner Revenue (ACR) Budgam, who is the designated PIO in the office of DC Budgam seems to have taken a pledge not to respond to any RTI applicant, says aggrieved Mushtaq. On September 19th this year Mushtaq filed one more RTI application in the same office seeking details related to money spent on the power sector in Budgam. This application was also not responded to by the office of Deputy Commissioner Budgam.

Hiding the facts

With an aim of getting information on Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin (PMAY-G) and Rural Sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Mushtaq filed an application under RTI Act 2005 in the office of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department Civil Secretary Srinagar on September 1st 2020. The PIO in the administrative department also didn't respond to him until Mushtaq filed 1st appeal more than 50 days back. The appeal was also not adjudicated by the First Appellate Authority (FAA). The PIO has only now recently responded to Mushtaq by sending him a rejection letter dated October 8th 2020. The letter sent via ordinary post has been dispatched around December 10th, but with an aim of hiding the facts, the October 8th date has been mentioned in this letter. Mushtaq's RTI application was rejected on the plea that he hasn't paid RTI application fees.

"I had annexed a copy of my BPL ration card with the RTI application and I am exempted to pay the RTI application fees of Rs 10. It seems PIO who is the Deputy Secretary in Rural Development Department Civil Secretariat isn't aware of this. He has sent the letter via ordinary post so as to hide the facts related to date of posting of the letter. They are misleading me but I will knock the doors of Central Information Commission" said Mushtaq

R&B Baramulla

This is not the case with Mushtaq only, who is a noted social activist of his area but there are dozens of such cases wherein Government officers are not responding to RTI applicants. Sirajuddin Salam an anti-corruption crusader from Baramulla has been denied information by Executive Engineer R&B division Baramulla for the last 6 months or more. In spite of the fact that Lt Governor's office and Chief Engineer PWD (R&B) Kashmir directed the Executive Engineer R&B Baramulla to provide the information, the officer who is the designated PIO is adamant on not revealing the facts. Sirajuddin wanted funds spent on construction of a road in the Baramulla town in Shalimar colony. Local residents allege that sub-standard material was used for this road construction early this year, but the details have not been revealed yet.

When I analyze this all, I have come to the conclusion that Government officials are not worried about RTI implementation as the nerve center of this law in J&K was shut down post abrogation of Article 370. By the "nerve center" I mean the J&K State Information Commission (SIC) which was constituted under J&K RTI Act 2009. The JK SIC was shut down when J&K RTI Act 2009 was repealed.

Deprived of SIC

After extending RTI Act 2005 to J&K, we got deprived of the State Information Commission (SIC), like many other commissions, as Union Territories (UTs) are not entitled to have a separate Information Commission. 2nd appeals under RTI Act 2005 are now filed before the Central Information Commission (CIC) New Delhi. All the pending appeals in erstwhile J&K State Information Commission (JKSIC) have been transferred to CIC New Delhi, but in the last 1 year not even a single appeal filed by me and my colleagues has been listed for hearing. This was not the case in the past.

People from far off villages have stopped using RTI. They hardly know how to file an appeal before CIC. The online procedure is very technical and ordinary people can't do this job. Mushtaq has now filed 2nd appeal before the Central Information Commission (CIC). I am sure if Mushtaq had not been associated with Jammu & Kashmir RTI Movement, it would have been impossible for him to file 2nd appeal in CIC as the online appeal process is too technical.

Appeal disposal at SIC

Aggrieved people in Jammu & Kashmir who were not provided a reply or were given incomplete information under RTI Act would get justice from J&K State Information Commission (SIC) within a few

months only. Under RTI Act 2009, the J&K SIC was supposed to dispose off RTI appeals within 60 to 120 days only. Under RTI Act 2005 there is no such legal binding. It takes months and years to get justice from the Central and State Information Commissions in India.

Some months back, RTI activists in Maharashtra served a legal notice to their State Information Commission asking it to lay out a roadmap to ensure timely disposal of appeals. More than 58000 RTI appeals are pending before Maharashtra State Information Commission (MSIC). This was not the case in J&K before 370 abrogation as the time bound disposal of RTI appeals made erstwhile J&K RTI Act 2009 more progressive than RTI Act 2005. For more than a year now, RTI Act 2005 (central law) is applicable in J&K, but as a long-time RTI campaigner, I get regular calls and messages from aggrieved information seekers who complain that Government departments are reluctant in providing information. Ironically, not even a single awareness programme has been held during the last 1 year or more by the Government for the designated officers after they were tasked to implement the new RTI law. Training could have been given through virtual mode also amid COVID 19, but nobody has even thought about it. Under RTI Act 2005 Govt has to create awareness for the citizens, disadvantaged communities as well. Section 26 of RTI Act 2005 explains this in detail but the Government seems to be least bothered about it.

Conclusion

RTI applicants feel disillusioned in J&K post article 370 abrogation. Repealing J&K RTI Act 2009 was like a personal loss for me. I along with my colleagues had worked a lot for its enactment more than 11 years back. Instead of getting empowered with the applicability of RTI Act 2005, information seekers, journalists, RTI campaigners and transparency activists feel people disempowered and demoralized as the institution of RTI has almost collapsed and crumbled in Jammu & Kashmir. SIC's closure has made RTI redundant and the only way out is to establish a Circuit Bench of Central Information Commission (CIC) at Srinagar and Jammu on the pattern of Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT).

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer

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Where's Transparency in J&K Bank Results?

As you must be aware that the results of Examination for Probationary Officer posts advertised vide JKB/HRD/Rectt/2020-27 & 28 Dated 01-06-2020 were declared on Sunday i.e. on 13th December 2020. It was the same exam which numerous aspirants including me had appeared and also passed previously and were forced to reappear afresh for the reasons best known to the Chairman and CEO.

I have been writing to them and their previous incumbents previously

as well and not to my surprise it has landed in deaf ears.

After bragging about high transparency measures and expertise adopted by the bank for the conduct of the said examinations I have the following query.

My query, and I am sure must be of all those who have appeared in the exam which was conducted by the bank with the high expertise of IBPS Mumbai and TCS, is the display of marks secured and the overall cutoffs including sectional cutoffs for differ-

ent sections in the paper, which were not shown to the candidates irrespective of their success or failure in the said exam. The marks and the cutoffs as all of us must be aware are very precisely displayed by IBPS for other exams such as for IBPS PO, IBPS Clerk, IBPS RRB's and all the exams conducted but why not such a display of marks and cut-offs is not possible for PO posts in Jammu and Kashmir Bank. I agree that it must be hectic in case of offline exams but the examination was conducted in Online

mode. If IBPS Mumbai has conducted the exams in the most transparent manner, where are the marks scored by the aspirants? We as aspirants, whether selected or not, have every right to know our performance in the exams which includes the marks secured and the cutoffs.

Where are the marks scored by the candidates? Where is the transparency?

Nazim Humayoun
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Structural Violence: Violence in the normality of things

INAYATULLAH DIN

“We need the term structural violence, to designate forms of injury inflicted in ways that do not meet the criteria of the spectacle and that therefore do not register as violence

The divide between rich and developing countries combined with vociferous social forces in the West, such as the radicalization of black consciousness, the anti-Vietnam movement, student protest, and industrial unrest, which brought in a sharp rise in civil dissent. In the wake of dissatisfaction and frustrations of the sixties, Johan Galtung in 1969 articulated the notion of structural violence. In his seminal article “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” Johan Galtung pitched the term “structural violence” as a counterpart to “direct” and “personal” violence. “Structural violence” is defined as an injury that is not immediately attributable to an acting subject but is “built into the structure” and manifests itself as inequality of power, resources, and life opportunities. Structural violence consists of inegalitarian and discriminatory practices causing human misery like poverty, hunger, repression, and social alienation. Structural violence is apparent social systems maintained by exploitative means. Hoping to overturn conventional thinking, Galtung tried to widen our comprehension of brutality, not to weaken our capacity to consider people liable for their activities, but instead to improve our capacity to recognize all the more unmistakably the manners by which solidness and serenity cover further and more inescapable savagery. This idea gives us an absolutely revolutionary new comprehension of violence. Galtung argues that violence is built into the unequal, unjust, and unrepresentative social structures and should hence be defined as a situation in which actual realizations of human beings are below their potential realizations. He draws our attention to violence in the normality of things, and through Galtung’s analytical lens, peace may very well be sustained by highly destructive forms of structural violence. Johan Galtung describes the mechanisms, and the forms of structural violence, which are: exploitation, penetration, segmentation, marginalisation, and fragmentation. Given its indirect and insidious nature, structural violence most often works slowly in eroding human values and shortening life spans.

Structural violence is a vital idea in the harmony hypothesis. It is ambiguous, no uncertain, and precarious to utilize, yet its focal thought of a savage social request is upheld by overpowering real factors. The term structural violence may be rejected, but its content will reappear under other names: discrimination, exploitation, injustice. In short, the concept of structural violence is intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression. Oppression is a result of many conditions, not the least of which reside in consciousness. We will therefore need to examine, as well, the roles played by the erasure of historical memory and other forms of desocialization as enabling conditions of structures that are both “sinful” and ostensibly “nobody’s fault. Eradicating history is maybe the most well-known logical skilful deception depended upon by the designers of structural violence. Deletion or mutilation of history is essential for the cycle of desocialization, vital for the rise of authoritative records of what occurred and why. Haiti as Mintzas showed, serves as the most painful example of this erasure and why it matters. If we cannot study structural violence without understanding history, the same can be said for biology. The distribution of AIDS and tuberculosis—like that of slavery in earlier times—is historically given and economically driven. What regular highlights support the difficulties of over a wide span of time hundreds of years? Social imbalances are at the core of structural violence. Structural violence is the natural expression of an apolitical and economic order that seems as old as slavery. This social web of exploitation, in its many different

historical forms, has long been global, or almost so, in its reach. Indeed, one could argue that structural violence now comes with symbolic props far more powerful—indeed, far more convincing—than anything we might serve up to counter them; examples include the discounting of any divergent voice as “unrealistic” or “utopian,” the dismal end of the socialist experiment in some (not all) of its homelands, the increasing centralization of command over finance capital, and what some see as the criminalization of poverty in economically advanced countries. Structural violence, measures the distance between an actual society and a potential one, one without structures of violence. With structural violence, there are no. Rather we notice an expansion in futures when we go from the actual to the potential state. The natural measure of structural violence is along these lines the death toll years.

Now it is important to mention the concept of cultural violence and how it legitimizes structural violence in society. In the 1990s, Galtung supplemented his violence typology with another category and introduced the concept of cultural violence. By cultural violence, Galtung means ‘those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence’. The guidelines, regulations, social codes, and standards that together make up the association of social orders, and that are generally underestimated, are naturally violent. They are, however, often not recognized as such. The mind-boggling multifaceted nature of social life, and the person’s double primary function as both player and creator of the game, notwithstanding, implies that the individual is up to speed in a Gramscian authoritative restricted state of focus, where one cannot see out of the box.

Other dimensions of structural violence can be in the form of economic and social violence, the first one is rooted in the structure of the production relationships and its consequences for workers and consumers, and the second one is an important consequence of the abuse of political and economic powers. Systematic structures of society lead to endemic global sexism that is termed patriarchy, which in turn brings in the patterns of violence, discrimination, and exclusion towards women. The linkages between hegemonic masculinity and structural violence may almost be self-evident. Both refer to institutionalized forms of social, cultural, and political dominance, which work to systematically oppress those groups who find themselves powerless in the face of both patriarchal and economic domination.

In spite of the fact that we owe the term to Johan Galtung, this line of thought can be followed back at any rate similar to Karl Marx, who lifted the veil of free and equal exchanges between capital and labour in the marketplace to expose capital’s exploitation of labour in the factory. In a connected vein, Antonio Gramsci featured the assembling of well-known agree to the course forced on society by the fundamental class. Herbert Marcuse investigated the oblivious delights restricting customary individuals to abusive modern social orders, and Frantz Fanon foreseen that the bare savagery of European expansionism would offer an approach to neo-colonial relations between free states. Even Michel Foucault, who repudiated all master/slave and surface/depth dualisms, differentiated between overt and covert strategies of power when he juxtaposed the voluptuous brutality of monarchical sovereign power with modern normalizing practices sculpting responsible selves.

Galtung makes violence rather non-events, and his triadic theory of conflict involves attitudes, behav-

iours, and contradictions: conflict = A (attitudes) + B (behaviours) + C (contradictions). Conflict can begin at any point on the spectrum and can flow in all directions. Aside from Galtung, we have James Gilligan, an American psychiatrist, most popular for his series of books entitled Violence, in his book Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic, defines structural violence as the ‘expanded paces of death and handicap endured by the individuals who possess the base rungs of society, as standing out from the moderately lower demise rates experienced by the individuals who are above them’. Another American psychiatrist Bandy Xenobia Lee with Yale University, her scholarly work includes the writing of a comprehensive textbook on violence. She wrote in her book Violence: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Causes, Consequences, and Cures, ‘structural violence alludes to the avoidable impediments that society puts on gatherings of individuals that compel them from meeting their fundamental necessities and accomplishing the personal satisfaction that would some way or another be conceivable. These constraints, which can be political, financial, strict, social, or lawful in nature, typically start in organizations that control activity over specific subjects.

If we try to connect the concept with the case of India, Akhil Gupta in his book, “Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India”, gives us a sense of the massive and largely underestimated tragedy of poverty in India. Furthermore, in this manner, he puts under investigation and re-examines – in principle, and practice – the function of the state, and of its different mechanical assemblies, in permitting the awfulness of destitution to be depoliticized and to enter the domain of normality. These are some of the ways in which the state apparatus in India perpetrates such forms of violence in the everyday life of the poor. Gupta portrays a system in which violence is constant, rather than episodic, and in which the victims are easily identifiable, while the perpetrators are much more impalpable.

For quite a long time, structural violence characterized southern Kyrgyzstan, where Kyrgyz controlled political assets and Uzbeks controlled monetary assets. This arrangement of fractional control separated when an adjustment in force elements arose as Bakiev presented a forceful Kyrgyz patriot plan that started a flood of political association among Uzbeks. I would also like to connect the concept with the case of Kashmir, the structures of violence in Jammu and Kashmir are a complex interplay of army camps, intelligence agencies, and numerous other armed groups. It is necessary now to understand the violence that is happening in Kashmir, not as sporadic and occasional but as the consequence of an infrastructure. Whether as part of counterinsurgency or otherwise, the violence is deliberate, consistent, and a consequence of a system that is in place.

The ideals of Galtung’s concept of structural violence is that it opens up the category of violence so as to include poverty, hunger, subordination, and social exclusion. We need the term structural violence, to designate forms of injury inflicted in ways that do not meet the criteria of the spectacle and that therefore do not register as violence. Thus, Structural violence is a useful theory to locate the origins of structural violations of human rights, that cause human insecurity, which ultimately leads to crime, military conflict, group violence, non-peaceful transfers of governmental power, diseases, and public health problems, acute environmental disasters, floods, droughts, earthquakes, environmental changes, global warming, water shortage, pollution, and economic crises.

The author is a student of History, currently pursuing a Masters degree at the University of Hyderabad

Explainer: Do New Coronavirus Strains Pose Concern For Vaccines?

Reports from Britain and South Africa of new coronavirus strains that seem to spread more easily are causing alarm, but virus experts say it’s unclear if that’s the case or whether they pose any concern for vaccines or cause more severe disease.

Viruses naturally evolve as they move through the population, some more than others. It’s one reason we need a fresh flu shot each year.

New variants, or strains, of the virus that causes Covid-19 have been seen almost since it was first detected in China nearly a year ago.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced new restrictions because of the new strain. Several European Union countries and Canada were banning or limiting some flights from the UK to try to limit any spread.

Here’s what is known about the situation.

What’s concerning about the recent strain found in England?

Health experts in the UK and US said the strain seems to infect more easily than others, but there is no evidence yet it is more deadly.

Patrick Vallance, the British government’s chief scientific adviser, said that the strain “moves fast and is becoming the dominant variant,” causing over 60 per cent of infections in London by December.

The strain is also concerning because it has so many mutations — nearly two dozen — and some are on the spiky pro-

tein that the virus uses to attach to and infect cells. That spike is what current vaccines target.

“I’m worried about this, for sure,” but it’s too soon to know how important it ultimately will prove to be, said Dr Ravi Gupta, who studies viruses at the University of Cambridge in England. He and other researchers posted a report of it on a website scientists use to quickly share developments, but the paper has not been formally reviewed or published in a journal.

How do these new strains occur?

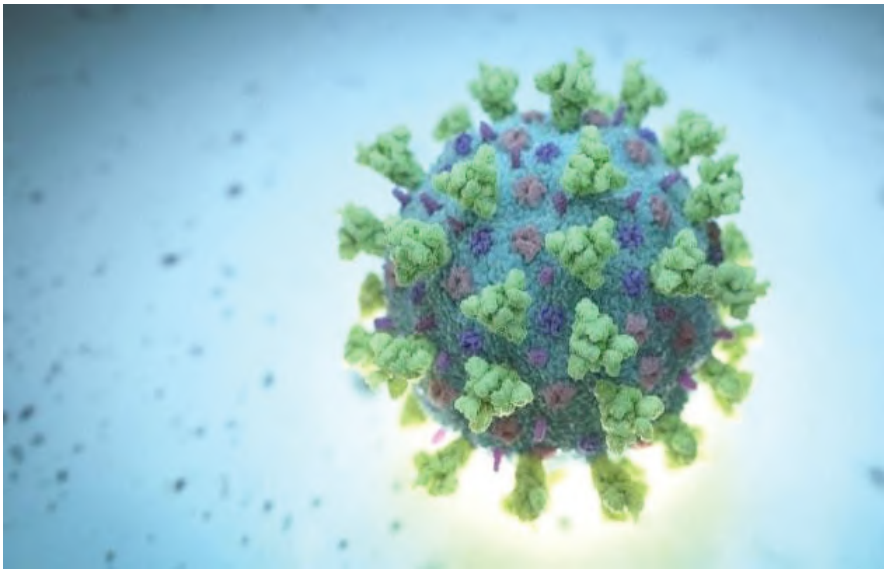
Viruses often acquire small changes of a letter or two in their genetic alphabet just through normal evolution. A slightly modified strain can become the most common one in a country or region just because that’s the strain that first took hold there or because “super spreader” events helped it become entrenched.

A bigger worry is when a virus mutates by changing the proteins on its surface to help it escape from drugs or the immune system.

“Emerging evidence” suggests that may be starting to happen with the new coronavirus, Trevor Bedford, a biologist and genetics expert at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre in Seattle, wrote on Twitter. “We’ve now seen the emergence and spread of several variants” that suggest this, and some show resistance to antibody treatments, he noted.

What other strains have emerged?

In April, researchers in Sweden found



a virus with two genetic changes that seemed to make it roughly two times more infectious, Gupta said. About 6,000 cases worldwide have been reported, mostly in Denmark and England, he said.

Several variations of that strain have now turned up. Some were reported in people who got them from mink farms in Denmark. A new South African strain has the two changes seen before, plus some others.

The one in the UK has the two changes and more, including eight to the spike protein, Gupta said. It’s called a “variant

under investigation” because its significance is not yet known.

The strain was identified in southeastern England in September and has been circulating in the area ever since, a World Health Organisation official told the BBC on Sunday.

Will people who had Covid-19 from an old strain be able to get the new one?

Probably not, former US Food and Drug Commissioner Scott Gottlieb said Sunday on CBS’s “Face the Nation.” “Unlikely,” Gupta agreed.

President-elect Joe Biden’s surgeon general nominee, Vivek Murthy, said Sunday on NBC’s “Meet the Press” that there’s “no reason to believe that the vaccines that have been developed will not be effective against this virus as well.”

Vaccines produce wide-ranging responses by the immune system beyond just those to the spike protein, several experts noted.

The possibility that new strains will be resistant to existing vaccines are low, but not “inexistent,” Dr Moncef Slaoui, the chief science adviser for the US government’s vaccine distribution effort, said Sunday on CNN’s “State of the Union.”

“Up to now, I don’t think there has been a single variant that would be resistant,” he said. “This particular variant in the UK, I think, is very unlikely to have escaped the vaccine immunity.”

Bedford agreed.

“I’m not concerned” because a lot of changes in the genetic code would probably be needed to undermine a vaccine, not just one or two mutations, Bedford wrote on Twitter. But vaccines may need to be fine-tuned over time as changes accumulate, and changes should be more closely monitored, he wrote.

Murthy said the new strain doesn’t change the public health advice to wear masks, wash hands and maintain social distance.

Dawn

Board Exams ...

“Keeping the current situation in mind, it has been decided that the board exams for classes 10 and 12 will not be conducted till February 2021. A decision on the exam schedule will be taken later after assessment of situation and more consultations,” Nishank said in an online interaction with teachers.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had earlier this month announced that board exams in 2021 will be conducted in written mode and not online.

Schools across the country were closed in March to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were partially reopened in some states from October 15.

However, a few states have decided to keep them closed in view of a spike in the number of infections. The board exams had to be postponed mid-way in March. They were later cancelled, and results announced on the basis of an alternative assessment scheme.

The education minister had a live interaction with students on December 10 and answered questions about various concerns regarding the conduct of upcoming board exams.

Guns Roar Again ...

“At about 0930 hours today, Pakistan Army initiated unprovoked ceasefire violation by firing with small arms and intense shelling with mortars along LoC in Mankote sectors in Poonch district”, the spokesperson said.

He said the Indian Army retaliated effectively.

On December 1, Pakistani troops restored to unprovoked ceasefire violation by shelling mortars at forward areas of Rajouri sector along the LoC, killing a BSF sub-inspector.

Two army jawans, Naik Prem Bahadur Khatri and rifleman Sukhbir Singh, were killed when Pakistan Army violated ceasefire in Sunderbani sector of Rajouri district on November 27.

On November 26, Subedar Swatantra Singh was killed and a civilian injured in Pakistan shelling along the LoC in Kirni and Qasba sectors of Poonch district.

An army havildar was killed at Laam sector in Rajouri district on November 21, while 11 people, including five security personnel, were killed after multiple ceasefire violations by Pakistani troops along the LoC in north Kashmir on November 13.

Police Recovers ...

to recover the kidnapped girl and arrested the kidnapper. He has been shifted to police station,” the police spokesperson said.

He said after fulfilling all medico-legal formalities, the girl has been handed over to her legal heirs.

“Investigation into the matter is in progress,” he added.

J&K Logs ...

(37), Samba (37), Poonch (22), Ramban (21), Kishtwar (21), and Reasi (14). Meanwhile, fourteen travellers were among 308 fresh cases detected across J&K in the last 24 hours, officials said. Among them, they said, 174 are from Jammu division and 134 from Valley.

Giving district wise details, officials said, Srinagar reported 65 cases, Baramulla 14, Budgam 21, Kupwara 2, Pulwama 12, Anantnag 4, Bandipora 7, Ganderbal 4, Kulgam 4, Shopian 1, Jammu 99, Udhampur 14, Rajouri 10, Doda 6, Kathua 7, Kishtwar 6, Samba 14, Poonch 2, and Reasi 16.

Moreover, they said, 281 more patients recovered and were discharged from various hospitals—111 from Jammu Division and 170 from Kashmir Valley. (With GNS inputs)

2 Militants ...

“Family members of the trapped militants were also called to the encounter site to motivate and persuade them to surrender. Due to the great efforts of police, security forces and repeated surrender appeals by their family members, eventually they (militants) surrendered,” he said. He identified the duo as Aamir Ahmad Mir of Hatipora, Kulgam and Yawar Ahmad Wagay of Reban Shopian.

“Both the arrested militants were affiliated with LeT. Pertinently, there was a hideout inside the target house which was later on destroyed. One AK-47 rifle, two Pistols and a few grenades besides some incriminating materials were also recovered,” the police spokesperson said.

Praising the state forces for showing utmost patience and exhibiting professionalism thus saving lives of two “misguided” youth, IGP Kashmir Vijay Kumar said that police was committed to provide full support to such militants who lay down their arms and surrender.

Meanwhile, news agency GNS quoting I Kumar as saying that both the militants who surrendered, were involved in killing of PSO of PDP leader in Natipora Srinagar.

Twelve militants have surrendered during live action this year, highest so far in Valley in recent years, the police spokesperson said.

Gupkar Ahead But Independents ...

This is the first election after Jammu and Kashmir’s special status under Article 370 of the Constitution was revoked last year and it was reorganised into a union territory.

A day ahead of the counting, authorities detained several PDP and second rung NC leaders, including Naem Akhtar, Sartaj Madni, Peer Mansoor and Hilal Ahmad Lone. No reason was given for the detentions.

The votes were being counted in Jammu and Kashmir regions amid tight security arrangements. There are 140 DDC seats each in Jammu and Kashmir regions. Both regions have 10 districts each, constituting total 20 districts in the UT. Each district comprises 14 seats, resulting in a total of 280 seats.

This is for the first time the BJP has registered a win in the Valley while facing regional heavyweights like the NC and the PDP.

Highlighting the wins in the Kashmir Valley, BJP general secretary Vibodh Gupta congratulated victorious party candidates, especially those who had won in Kashmir, and said the people of the Valley have exhibited their faith in the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“The people of Kashmir exhibited their faith in Hon’ble PM Narendra Modi’s vision of Naya Kashmir, and sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas,” Gupta, who is also the party’s in-charge for Kashmir, said.

He said the victories mark a “change of wave” in the Valley and added that the maiden victory in Kashmir “speak of two stories — one of a tough fight by the BJP, marking the beginning of a new era in the Valley, and the other of conveying a strong message to Gupkar Gang that the end of their communal and divisive politics is near.”

Senior BJP leader and Union minister Jitendra Singh said,

Three BJP candidates have won from Srinagar. It is testimony to the fact that people of Jammu and Kashmir believe in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision for the development of the Union Territory.

He said the BJP has emerged as a pan-Jammu and Kashmir party after the DDC elections results and it is acceptable to the people of the region.

However, PDP president Mehbooba Mufti and NC vice president Omar Abdullah said the results of the DDC elections have made it clear that the people of Jammu and Kashmir have voted for the Gupkar alliance and rejected the Centre’s decision to abrogate Article 370.

Abdullah was quick enough to counter the BJP’s claims, tweeting, “I understand the temptation to over play the 3 seats the BJP has won in the valley but why underplay the 35 wins/leads of the @JKPAGD in Jammu province.

“We aren’t Kashmir based parties, we are political parties with strong support in both Kashmir AND Jammu,” the NC leader tweeted.

Today’s DDC results have made it clear that people of J&K voted en masse for @JKPAGD thus rejecting the unconstitutional decision to abrogate Article 370. They have overwhelmingly supported @JKPAGD which stands for restoration of J&Ks special status, the PDP president said.

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram said the DDC election results show that the voters of Kashmir valley have firmly rejected the BJP and its “misguided” Kashmir policy.

“Undeterred by the denial of democratic rights, the voters of the Kashmir valley have firmly rejected the BJP and its misguided Kashmir policy. I compliment the voters for their courage and resolve,” he said on Twitter.

Chidambaram also tweeted,

“Even in the Jammu region, a significant number of voters have rejected the divisive and polarising politics of the BJP”. “Both the Congress and the Gupkar Alliance have stood up to the BJP and may win as many seats as the BJP. That is a good sign,” he said.

On August 5 last year, the Centre had revoked the special status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and divided it into union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

BJP’s former minister Shakti Raj Parihar lost election to a National Conference candidate from Gundna segment in Doda district, while former ministers Aijaz Khan (JKAP) and Abdul Gani Malik (NC) emerged victorious from Thuroo constituency and Mahore constituency in Reasi district.

In Doda district, the BJP has so far bagged four seats, Congress two, while one seat went into the kitty of the NC. An independent also has won from a seat. The results of eight out of 14 seats have been declared so far.

As per figures of the State election commission, Parihar lost to NC candidate Asim Hashmi by 1,336 votes. Hashmi polled 7,835 votes and Parihar 6,499, it said.

Hashmi was a candidate of People’s Alliance for Gupkar declaration (PAGD) — an amalgam of several mainstream political parties seeking the restoration of the special status of J-K— which is fighting the polls together.

Parihar, who is the state BJP vice president, is considered a political heavyweight in the region. He was a minister in the previous BJP-PDP government.

Among the prominent loser from Kashmir was Naseer Ahmad Mir, son of state Congress chief Ghulam Ahmad Mir. He lost to an independent candidate Peer Shahbaz Ahmad.

constituency, defeating his nearest rival Mudassir Rashid Mir of Peoples Movement by 35 votes after managing a total of 1,779 votes, while Nisar Ahmad Sheikh (Independent) also registered a win over NC’s Rayees Ul Hassan by 35 votes after getting a total of 1,945 votes.

The winning margin in Srinagar, from where the highest number of seven independent candidates won the DDC polls, was also very low. J&K Apni Party won three DDC seats from the district followed by one each National Conference, BJP and J&K people’s movement.

Independent candidate Mohammad Yaseen Rather got 156 votes and won by 21 votes from Qamarwari constituency, J&K Apni party candidate Shameema Bano polled 213 votes and won by 36 votes and Ali Mohammad Rather (independent) Harwan-II polled 314 votes and won by 96.

For the rest of the winning candidates, the margin was in triple figures as Mohammad Shaban Chopan (independent) won by the highest margin of 521 votes in the

district. He polled 609 against his nearest rival Mohammad Altaf Lali (Independent) who got 88 votes only.

In Jammu region which recorded a high turnout during the eight-phase DDC elections, BJP’s Amit Sharma recorded a win by 47 votes from Majalta segment of Udhampur district against his nearest rival Rajesh Kumar of National Panthers Party. Sharma polled 4,215 votes and Kumar 4,168 votes.

The Majority of the 14 seats in the district witnessed a neck-to-neck fight mostly between the BJP and the National Panthers Party. So far, BJP has won six seats and NPP bagged one.

Hans Raj of Congress defeated BJP’s Sanjay Kumar by 99 votes in Drabshalla-B constituency in Kishtwar district after securing 2,621 votes, while BJP’s Sharda Bhau won from the highest margin of 8,880 votes against Congress rival Anuradha Sharma from Akhnoor constituency of Jammu district. Bhau polled 14,619 votes against 5,739 by Sharma.

HC Dismisses J&K TDC Employees Plea Seeking Pensionary Benefits

SRINAGAR: Employees cannot seek to selectively apply the relevant recruitment rules to their liking, Jammu and Kashmir High Court said as it dismissed a petition by J&K Tourism Development Corporation Employees Union, seeking the same treatment as given to employees of SKICC in the matter of pension scheme.

“The petitioners cannot seek to selectively apply the relevant recruitment rules to their liking. The petitioners are governed by express statutory rules which set out the terms and conditions of the services of employees, including the petitioners, therefore, the petitioners cannot claim for amendment in the service rules through the medium of the instant petition,” said a bench of Justice Ali Mohammad Magrey while responding in negative to the question that despite there being clear rule position with

regard to the services in the Corporation being non-pensionable, can the members of the Union still claim pensionary benefits in their favour on the analogy of other Government Corporations/Departments.

“The petitioners and other employees of the Corporation cannot deviate from the terms and conditions of service upon which they have been appointed.”

The court said that once an employee accepts the terms and conditions governing a particular service at the time of entry in that service, he/she subsequently cannot turn around and contend that the certain portion of the rules governing such service is not tenable. “This Court cannot issue directions to the legislature to enact a particular legislation. Same is true as regards the executive when

it exercises the power to make rules, which are in the nature of subordinate legislation.”

Referring to the law laid down by the Supreme Court, the bench said it is crystal clear that existence of a right is the foundation of the jurisdiction of a Court to issue a ‘Writ of Mandamus’. “In the case on hand, the petitioners have not been able to show as to which of their right has been violated by the respondents (officials) denying them the pensionary benefits, which can be directed to be enforced by way of issuing a ‘Mandamus’ from this Court,” the court said. “In this context, the irrefutable conclusion which can be drawn is that none of the rights of the petitioners stand violated by the respondent Corporation for which a ‘Writ of Mandamus’ can be issued in their favour.” (GNS)

FROM FRONT PAGE

Jailed PDP ...

Para defeated BJP candidate Sajad Ahmad Raina.

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti said she was proud of her party’s youth leader to register a win.

“Couldn’t be prouder of PDP’s @parawahid who won his maiden election by a huge margin of votes. Despite being arrested on baseless charges right after filing his nomination people have shown their love & trust for Waheed. Hope justice prevails,” Mehbooba wrote on Twitter.

Para was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on November 25, a few days after filing nomination papers as a People’s Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) candidate.

The NIA had said Para was arrested in connection with the Naveed Babur Davinder Singh case for supporting Hizbul Mujahideen in conspiracy with the other accused persons.

Para was considered to be a key motivator for youth to join mainstream politics in Pulwama and adjoining Shopian districts of south Kashmir when militancy was raising its head there again.

As secretary of Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council from 2016 to 2018, Para played a major role in organising sporting events in nook and corner of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state which included the Ladakh region.

JKPCC Chief’s ...

Naseer Ahmad Mir, who contested from the Verinag constituency of south Kashmir district, lost to independent candidate Peer Shahbaz Ahmad. Son of the JKPCC president, Naseer Ahmad Mir had plunged into electoral politics for the first time.

His father, a former minister, has been the JKPCC president for two consecutive terms since 2015.

Ghulam Ahmad Mir had also lost his last election when he contested the Parliamentary polls from the Anantnag Lok Sabha constituency. He was defeated by National Conference’s Hasnain Masoodi in the 2019 polls.

Sikh Candidates ...

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Dr Harbakash Singh, popularly known as Shanty defeated his nearest rival Trilok Singh of Congress by a margin of over by 982 votes. A resident of Kavit village in Tral sub-district, Harbakash started his political career as a student and was provincial president of NSUI Kashmir for many years. He has also served as PRO to senior PDP leader and former cabinet minister Naem Akhter for four years during the PDP-BJP coalition government.

Complimenting the Muslim majority for their unwavering support, Harbaksh said that his success in the elections is a tribute to the brotherhood and communal harmony existing between different communities in Kashmir. He said despite ten Muslim candidates in poll fray, the people chose him for the seat.

“It’s a slap on the communal forces who have been defaming Kashmiri Muslims for being communal and driving Hindus out of the Valley,” he said.

Besides Harbaksh, another Sikh candidate, Avtar Singh secured victory in the DDC polls from 5-Dadsara constituency. He defeated his closest NC rival Ali Mohammad Bhat of National Conference by a narrow margin of 3 votes.

Counting Stopped ...

The contestant from Hajin-A, Shazia Aslam is said to be brought up in Muzaffarabad area of Pck, and married to a Kashmiri militant, Mohammad Phapoo who then surrendered and even participated in assembly elections later, reported local news agency GNS.

At the time of acceptance of her nominations, Shazia told reporters that wife of the former militants currently in Jammu and Kashmir, who crossed the Line of Control through a rehabilitation policy, should live their life with peace and dignity.

Meanwhile, authorities stopped

counting for Drugmulla constituency as one of the contestants—Somaya Sadaf—also belongs to Pak and has been married to a local resident. (GNS)

In A First ...

Hussain said the BJP has put up a good fight against the regional parties in the valley who had come together on a single platform -- Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration.

“They all came together against the BJP as they were afraid of it. But, still the BJP won seats from the valley. Now, they should introspect. People want development and this is a vote for development,” he said.

The BJP candidate said the alliance was “spreading communal propaganda”, but this win “shows there is no place for that now”.

“People want development and this win inspires us to work harder for securing seats in the assembly whenever the elections are held in the future,” Hussain said.

The counting for the DDC polls has been completed in Srinagar with the independent candidates winning half of the seats.

“The returning officers in Srinagar district have declared the results of District Development Council elections in all the 14 constituencies and handed over election certificates to winning candidates,” District Election Officer (Deputy Commissioner) Srinagar, Shahid Choudhary said.

He said as per the final results, independent candidates have been declared winners in seven constituencies -- Srinagar-I, Qamarwari-I, Qamarwari-II, Harwan-I, Harwan-II, Harwan-IV and Harwan-VI.

Former finance minister Altaf Bukhari-led Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party (JKAP) candidates were declared winners in three constituencies -- Harwan-V, Khanmoh-I and Srinagar-III.

Four political parties-- BJP in Khanmoh-II, PDP in Khanmoh-III, NC in Harwan-III and JKPM in Srinagar II have won one seat each, Choudhary said. He said the results of the four seats of Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) ward constituencies were also declared.

Eye Opener ...

status by giving a befitting reply to the BJP in the DDC polls.

His remarks came amid counting of votes of the District Development Council (DDC) elections, in which the People’s Alliance on Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) is leading in 81 seats and has won 30 so far whereas the BJP is leading in 56 and has won eight seats till now.

The Congress is leading in 19 seats and has bagged four seats so far.

The results and emerging trends of DDC polls should act as an “eye-opener” for the BJP and “its proxy political party”, Abdullah said in an apparent reference to the Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party.

The trends show that the people have not accepted the government’s unilateral decision of revoking the special status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019, and downgrading it to a Union Territory, the NC leader said.

Abdullah, who is a former chief minister, told PTI that the results and trends are an “important milestone” for the PAGD as they endorse “our view” that revoking of special status was not acceptable to the people.

“Now if the BJP and its proxy political party believe in democracy, as they have stated, they should immediately reverse its decision (abrogation of special status) and respect the verdict of the people of this region,” he said.

Abdullah said that the BJP had flown in a number of Union ministers and central leaders to campaign for the DDC elections. “The BJP is the one which turned these elections as a referendum of its policy of 2019. I hope they have understood the desire of the people,” he said.

The NC leader said that the PAGD, comprising seven mainstream political parties of the Union Territory, had made its stand very clear to the people and also that the alliance would seek

all democratic and legal measures to restore the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir as well as its special status.

“We were not allowed to campaign much but still people showed that they could not be swayed away by the campaign launched by the BJP and its support party,” he said.

The NC and the Mehbooba Mufti-led PDP are among the constituents of the PAGD

Centre’s August 5 ...

decision to abrogate Article 370.

Taking to Twitter, Mehbooba said the cadre of the People’s Alliance for Gupkar declaration (PAGD) -- an amalgam of several mainstream political parties seeking the restoration of the special status of J-K -- worked tirelessly to ensure the success, even as the Centre left no stone unturned to create hurdles for us.

Today’s DDC results have made it clear that people of J&K voted en masse for @JKPAGD thus rejecting the unconstitutional decision to abrogate Article 370. They have overwhelmingly supported @JKPAGD which stands for restoration of J&Ks special status, the PDP president said.

She said the PAGD emerged as a winner despite all the obstacles.

Our win is dedicated to PAGD cadre who worked tirelessly to ensure our success. GOI left no stone unturned to create hurdles for us. Beginning with @parawahid’s arrest a day after he filed his DDC nominations, restricting our movement & not allowing us to campaign.

I was illegally detained thrice over the course of a fortnight. PAGD candidates were locked up in a government building while others barred from canvassing. Despite all these obstacles PAGD emerged as winner. This has been a hard earned victory for all us, she said.

Mehbooba also thanked PDP workers and said they worked hard even after the Centre engineered a split in her party.

Even after a split in PDP engineered by GOI & all the attempts to write us off, my cadre worked day & night to ensure party’s victory. I am extremely grateful to them, she tweeted.

MeT Predicts ...

‘Chillai-Kalan’ is considered the harshest winter period in Kashmir as a cold wave grips the region and the temperature drops considerably leading to the freezing of water bodies including the famous Dal Lake here as well as the water supply lines in several parts of the valley.

The chances of snowfall are most frequent and maximum during this period and most areas, especially in the higher reaches, receive heavy snowfall, the officials said.

While ‘Chillai-Kalan’ will end on January 31, the cold wave continues even after that in Kashmir with a 20-day-long ‘Chillai-Khurd’ (small cold) and a 10-day-long ‘Chillai-Bachha’ (baby cold).

The MET Office has said except for light to moderate snowfall in some areas in the higher reaches of Kashmir, the weather is likely to remain dry and cold till December 26 forenoon.

A spell of light to moderate snowfall at widespread places in the valley is likely from the evening of December 26 to the night of 27, the MET Office said. (PTI)

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Google Invests In Two Indian Startups



NEW DELHI: Google on Tuesday said it has invested in two Indian startups - Glance and VerSe Innovation - as part of its USD 10 billion Google for India Digitisation Fund to enable them to further scale up availability of content in different formats across various Indic languages.

While Google did not disclose details of its latest investments, separate announcements by investee companies stated that Google has participated in Glance's USD 145 million (about Rs 1,071.5 crore) and VerSe Innovation's USD 100 million (about Rs 739 crore) funding rounds.

In July this year, Google chief executive Sundar Pichai had announced a USD 10 billion (Rs 75,000 crore) Google for India Digitisation Fund that will be invested over the next five to seven years to help accelerate the adoption of digital technologies in the country.

In the same month, Reliance Industries had announced that Google will pick up 7.7 per cent stake in Jio Platforms for Rs 33,737 crore.

"We are also eager to support the wider ecosystem in India, particularly local startups innovating in this space. When we shared details of the India Digitization Fund in July this year,

we identified enabling affordable access and information for every Indian in their language, whether it's Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati, and more as a key pillar to drive forward India's digitisation," Google Vice President Caesar Sengupta said in a blog post on Tuesday.

He added that the company has invested in Indian startups - Glance Innobi and VerSe Innovation - to enable them to further scale the availability of relevant and engaging content in different formats across various Indic languages.

"These investments underline our strong belief in partnering deeply with India's innovative startups and our commitment to working towards the shared goal of building a truly inclusive digital economy that will benefit everyone," Sengupta said.

Glance, a part of SoftBank-backed InMobi Group, has closed a USD 145 million investment round from Google and existing investor, Mithril Capital.

VerSe Innovation - which runs Dailyhunt and short video app Jio - has completed an over USD 100 million (about Rs 739 crore) funding round from AlphaWave, Google, and Microsoft, and the funding values the company at over USD 1 billion.

THESE INVESTMENTS UNDERLINE our strong belief in partnering deeply with India's innovative startups and our commitment to working towards the shared goal of building a truly inclusive digital economy that will benefit everyone,"

SKUAST-K Holds 10-Day Skill Development Training On Crop Modelling

SRINAGAR: Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, Kashmir concluded a 10-day skill development course on 'Hands-on Crop Modelling using DSSAT' for the students and scholars of various agricultural universities from across the country.

The training was organised by the varsity's Agromet Unit under World Bank-ICAR funded National Agricultural Higher Education Project for institutional development of SKUAST-K.

Around 95 students and scholars participated in the training program from different Agriculture Universities and ICAR Institutes spread across the country.

Internationally renowned resource persons gave hands-on training to the participants about all the components of Decision-Support System for

Agro-technology Transfer (DSSAT) crop modelling and made them able to run the model during their practical sessions.

Vice-Chancellor SKUAST-K Prof Mushtaq Ahmad, who was the chief guest at the valedictory function, stressed on holding more such programmes in future for the skill development of the students.

Director Planning and PI NAHEP, Prof Nazir Ahmad Ganai, who was the guest of honour at the occasion, apprised the participants about the various initiatives taken for smart agriculture and artificial intelligence under NAHEP at SKUAST-K. A brief overview of the course was given by the Course Director Dr Bilal Ahmad Lone. Dr Saameera Qayoom, incharge head Agromet Unit, coordinated the course and proceedings of the valedictory function.



'Deaths, Morbidity From Air Pollution Led To Loss Of 1.4% Of GDP In 2019'

NEW DELHI: The economic loss due to premature deaths and morbidity from air pollution was Rs 2.6 crore or 1.4 per cent of the GDP in India in 2019, according to a new scientific paper.

It also said that 1.7 million deaths (18 per cent of the total deaths) in the country were attributable to air pollution last year.

According to scientific paper on health and economic impact of air pollution published in Lancet Planetary Health on Tuesday, household air pollution decreased in India resulting in 64 per cent reduction in the death rate attributable to it from 1990 to 2019, whereas the death rate from outdoor ambient air pollution increased during this period by 115 per cent.

The findings highlight that "lost output from deaths and diseases due to air pollution led to a loss of 1.4 per cent of the GDP of the country".

India has a good economic and

development trajectory, which can improve further with the reduction of air pollution, the scientific paper noted.

According to the paper, the economic loss due to air pollution as a percentage of the state GDP was higher in the northern and central India states, with the highest in Uttar Pradesh (2.2 per cent of GDP) and Bihar (2 per cent of GDP).

NITI Aayog member Prof Vinod Paul said the scientific paper presents the latest evidence on air pollution in India, translating the health loss to economic impact.

"India has many ongoing major initiatives to reduce air pollution. This paper provides a robust assessment of the trends and current situation in each state, and highlights that augmenting the existing air pollution control efforts based on the specific situation of each state would be useful.

"Air pollution and its impact is not a matter for the health sector

alone, and the solutions lie in a multi-sectoral approach with a common commitment to reducing exposure to toxic air, which is impacting the health and productivity of Indians," he said.

ICMR Director General Balram Bhargava said various government schemes such as the 'Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana' and 'Unnat Chulha Abhiyan' have aided in reducing household air pollution in the country.

Such success encourages us to enhance efforts to reduce outdoor air pollution as well, he said.

"The findings in this analysis show that while 40 per cent of the disease burden due to air pollution is from lung diseases, the remaining 60 per cent is from ischemic heart disease, stroke, diabetes and neonatal deaths related to preterm birth, thus highlighting the broad ranging impact of air pollution on human health," Bhargava added. PTI

Thomas Cook India Survey Says 89% People Keen To 'Resume Travel'

Travel services firm Thomas Cook India and its Group firm SOTC Travel on Monday said that 89 per cent of respondents in a survey conducted by them across tier-1 and 2 cities in India displayed keen interest to resume travel, revealing resurgence of consumer confidence.

Thomas Cook India and its group company surveyed over 2,700 customers to identify emerging consumer behaviours and trends that will drive travel preferences during the COVID-19 era, a joint survey report, enclosed with a regulatory filing, said.

"A combination of lockdown fatigue and strong pent-up demand, coupled with positive sentiment due to announcements on the vaccine saw 89 per cent respondents displaying keen interest to resume travel," it added. About 67 per cent respondents are willing to travel in the next 6 months while 33 per cent indicated that they would wait for the launch of the vaccine, according to the survey.

"Respondents continue to display an increasing focus on hygiene and safety - with 93 per



cent respondents highlighting this as the most important factor while deciding a holiday," Thomas Cook India said.

Out of the 2,700 respondents across the tier I and tier II cities, 52 per cent stated that they are likely to take a domestic holiday, while 48 per cent of respondents likely to take an international holiday, it added.

With health and safety top-

ping the priority list in travel decisions, 73 per cent respondents said that they are willing to increase spends to ensure higher levels of health and safety on their holiday, the filing said.

In the absence of their annual summer vacation and short breaks this year, Indians are also opting for a longer duration of stay, it added.

JKTPO, DGFT Hosts Virtual Exporters' Registration, Promotion Workshop

JAMMU: Jammu & Kashmir Trade Promotion Organisation (JKTPO), in association with Office of Additional Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), today organised a virtual capacity building workshop on Export Registration.

The aim of the Export Registration Drive was to motivate and train young entrepreneurs for exports.

In all, 115 participants registered for the event, that was attended by Director Industries & Commerce, Jammu, Director(s) Handicrafts & Handloom, Jammu/Kashmir, Director Agriculture Kashmir and other senior officials from DGFT Ludhiana. This is the first ever association between JKTPO and DGFT for a seminar and workshop.

The Exporter Registration Drive gave an overview of import-export procedures, documentation and awareness about the facilities and benefits provided by Foreign Trade Policy of Government of India.

The JKTPO encouraged the entrepreneurs and artisans to get themselves registered on its portal.

Niryat Bandhu is DGFT's initiative for mentoring first generation entrepreneurs in the arena of international business.

The event also witnessed a Question & Answer session.

Earlier Suvindh Shah, Joint Director General of Foreign Trade welcomed J&K Govt. and



JKTPO for joining hands with DGFT to organize this workshop for Export registration and promotion. "This is our first initiative with J&K govt through JKTPO. We ensure more such webinars soon to encourage and help our traders. We also look forward to organise in person sessions in Jammu and Srinagar," he said.

Speaking at the event, Managing Director JKTPO Ankita Kar, hailed DGFT's support in exploring ideas for promotion of trade, of which export promotion is a major part. "In the process we have tried to explore new markets for traditional products of J&K Handicrafts, Handloom, Horticulture and Agriculture sector" she said adding that this is in line to the vision of Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Govt of India.

Inviting the interested traders for guidance, she said the doors of JKTPO are always open to facilitate the queries and handhold our trade fraternity".

Availability Of Spray Oils In J&K Reviewed



JAMMU: Principal Secretary, Agriculture Production and Farmer's Welfare Department, Navin Kumar Choudhary, today convened a meeting to assess and discuss the permission and supply availability of Petroleum Derived Spray Oils in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting was attended by Director Horticulture and Director Agriculture, Kashmir through video conferencing while Director Horticulture and Director Agriculture, Jammu, Director Research SKUAST, Kashmir, Managing Director JKHPMC, Nodal Officer, Atma Nirbhar Bharat, J&K besides representative of concerned oil companies, senior officers of Horticulture and Agriculture attended the meeting here.

Principal Secretary, while reviewing supply and availability of pesticides and insecticides for the upcoming Horticulture, Agriculture season, asked all the stakeholders to work completely as per the prescribed guidelines of

Central Insecticide Act. He said that all the suppliers, registered with the Central Insecticide Board, have to comply with all quality parameters before supplying the pesticide, insecticide to J&K.

Navin Kumar instructed the Director SKUAST to take up random sampling of supplied insecticides and pesticides from the market to check their quality. He also asked the Director Law enforcement to contribute his part in this regard and ensure that pesticides and insecticides of those companies which are not registered with the Central Pesticide Board are not used in the UT.

The Principal Secretary asked the representatives of various companies to register themselves with the Central Insecticide Board for supply of their product in J&K. He instructed the Director Law Enforcement for re-testing of the tested products from the Central Lab Faridabad also to ensure supply of only standard insecticides and pesticides in J&K.

NEWS MAKERS

Gold To Be Investors Focus As Global Uncertainties Continue: Millwood

Investment consulting firm Millwood Kane International on Tuesday said that investments in gold gave gains of nearly 28 per cent in rupee terms during 2020 and will remain in focus for investors in the coming year.

"The yellow metal has had a phenomenal year with gains of nearly 28 per cent in rupee terms. After a double-digit gain in 2019, this will be the second year in a row that gold will be posting a stellar rise," said Founder and CEO Nish Bhatt.

Gold prices posted marginal gains in first two months of the year due to concerns of a slowdown in economic growth. A major uptick was seen in prices of gold from mid-March when COVID-19 hit the stage at a global level.



The gains were more in the month of August when MCX Gold hit an all-time, said Bhatt.

The outbreak of pandemic and a spurt in number of cases led to economic uncertainties. The excess liquidity injected by global central banks to boost growth led to investors flocking to gold which is considered a safe haven.

Bhatt said gold prices have shed nearly 10 per cent gains from their life-high levels as a vaccine was dis-

covered which will help contain the virus and reduce global uncertainties.

"As we approach 2021, gold will remain in focus for investors as central banks across the globe have pledged to keep rates low and ease liquidity to aid growth," said Bhatt.

The latest installment of stimulus package from the US government will add to the existing dollar liquidity in the system and may end up weakening the greenback. A weak dollar may push up gold prices.

"The efficacy of the vaccine, proper implementation of the vaccination process in developing countries, low-interest rate regime, and the global central banks' stance on liquidity will guide gold prices in 2021," said Bhatt.

Adb To Give Rs 2100-Cr Loan To Tripura Govt For Urban & Tourism Development

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is likely to provide a Rs 2,100 crore loan to the Tripura government for the development of urban areas and tourism in the northeastern state that borders Bangladesh, officials said here on Tuesday.

According to Tripura's Urban Development and Tourism Department Secretary Gitte Kiran-kumar Dinkarrao, of the Rs 2,100 crore expected to be provided by the ADB as loan, Rs 1600 crore will be for urban development and Rs 500 crore for the tourism sector.

"Under the loan arrangement, initially ADB would provide Rs 40 crore for engagement of project design and management consultants for urban



and tourism sectors. Once the projects are prepared, ADB would provide Rs 1,600 crore for development works in urban areas and Rs 500 crore in tourism sector over the next three years," Dinkarrao told IANS.

The senior IAS officer said that in the urban sector, all 20 urban local bodies in Tripura would be covered

and in the tourism sector, all tourism destinations, roads leading to them and tourist facilities would be covered.

The Tripura Government has signed the loan agreement with the ADB in New Delhi on Friday.

The state's Resident Commissioner in Delhi Chaitanya Murti signed the "Loan Negotiation documents

of Project Readiness Finance" with ADB's Country Director Takeo Kaniishi in the presence of Additional Secretary to the Economic Affairs Department of the Union Finance Ministry C. S. Mohapatra.

Dinkarrao said that within next 6-7 months, the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) would be ready and for this purpose two renowned consultants are being engaged.

"The ADB fund would be utilised to those areas where no projects not yet undertaken. Development of roads, infrastructures developments for water supply, sanitations, electricity and other required basic facilities would be the focus areas of the ADB funded projects," he said.



SCREEN TIME, MENTAL HEALTH ARE PARENTS CONCERN FOR CHILDREN DURING PANDEMIC

A new national poll gives a glimpse into parents' greatest concerns about their kids in the pandemic-era with the top concerns being screen time, unhealthy eating, and depression.

High on the top 10 list: overuse of social media and screen time, internet safety, unhealthy eating, depression and suicide, and lack of physical activity.

Almost half of the parents also describe Covid-19, the disease itself, as a "big problem" impacting kids, coming in at No.10, according to the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health at Michigan Medicine.

"This is an especially challenging time for families, with many children experiencing significant changes in routine that may negatively impact their health and wellbeing," said Mott Poll co-director and Mott paediatrician Gary Freed, M.D., M.P.H.

"Parents' biggest concerns for young people seem to be associated with changes in lifestyle as a result of the pandemic. COVID-19 has turned the world of our children and teens upside down in many ways and this is reflected in how parents rate health issues in 2020," added Mott.

But there are key racial and ethnic differences among families when it comes to worries about children's health, according to the report.

Black parents rate racism as their No.1 health concern for children and teens, with Covid-19 coming in at No.2. Racism ranks sixth among Hispanic parents, with Covid-19 at No.8.

Racism does not make the top 10 health issues for U.S. children among white parents and Covid-19 much lower on among their concerns.

These differences are likely due to African-American and Hispanic communities being disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 in the U.S., Freed says.

People from minority groups have been more likely to contract Covid-19, gotten sicker and died of the virus at significantly higher rates than white individuals.

Systemic racism has also been a national focus, as massive demonstrations protesting racial injustice swept the country over recent months. Black parents are also the only group that rates gun injuries and unequal access to health care as a top 10 concern. Meanwhile, white parents are the only group to rate lack of physical activity in the top 10.

"Families' backgrounds and experiences likely shape what health concerns

they prioritize as most pressing for American children today," Freed said.

The nationally-representative report is based on responses from 2,027 parents with children ages 18 and under.

A closer look at top health concerns highlighted in the report:

Screen time

Freed says it's not surprising that the top three issues on parents' list of concerns are related to screen use. Children are spending more time online because of virtual school or not being able to spend time with friends in person.

But he says parents should worry less about the amount of time children are using devices and more on how they are using the technology.

"It's important for children and teens to maintain social and family connections that we know are critical for their emotional well-being, especially during a time when they are feeling stressed or isolated," Freed says. "Technology may be an important vehicle for those connections."

Still, parents should set clear ground rules and boundaries about how and when children can use devices to

ensure it's not disrupting sleep habits, replacing healthy habits like physical activity, and that children's privacy is protected. They should also watch for any signs of cyberbullying and other types of online abuse, which also made the top 10 list.

"Parents need to have ongoing conversations with their children and teens to guide them on safe internet practices," Freed says.

Emotional and physical health

Some parents reported great concern about kids experiencing increased negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, or depression, which may be related to or exacerbated by lifestyle changes caused by Covid-19.

"Parents may notice changes, such as increased behavioural issues in younger kids or more moodiness or lethargy from older kids and teenagers," Freed said.

In these situations, parents should encourage children and teens to talk about their feelings, and find healthy outlets to help them cope.

Changes in routine and social isolation from COVID-19 may also affect a

child's physical health. Inconsistent sleep habits may particularly increase the potential for unhealthy eating and reducing outside physical activity—all issues parents identified as top health concerns.

Families should try to maintain routines, especially keeping regular sleep schedules and helping teens resist the temptation to go to bed much later than usual and sleeping in later, Freed said. Mott experts also recommend intentional "unplugged" times to spend together as a family and getting outside daily, even for a brisk walk, as much as possible.

But parents should also look for red flags that kids need more help to manage feelings, such as comments about how they might hurt themselves or experiencing dramatic shifts in usual mood, appetite or sleep. In these cases, families should reach out to paediatricians and consider enlisting the help of therapists or other health professionals.

Children who have lost family members to Covid-19 may also need special attention and mental health services

to help in how to understand and cope with their loss, Freed says.

Racism

Families should recognize the emotional toll of racism on children and teens. The impact of racism may be reflected in physical problems, such as disparities in the rates of diseases among different populations, and also in children's mental health. Children targeted by racism have higher rates of depression, anxiety, and behaviour problems, research shows.

"Although racism directly affects specific populations, its impact on children's health is a societal concern. It's important for parents to recognize the detrimental consequences of racism for children in our communities," Freed said. Finding ways for young people to get involved either through safely participating in protests or supporting groups or causes that aim to fight racism can be valuable, Freed says.

"Racism can instill a sense of helplessness in both children and teens. When young people are empowered to stand up to racism, it can make a big difference by showing them they can be part of a solution," he said.-Agencies

Climate risks to health set to worsen inequity, harm children



Rising global health risks driven by climate change will hit the poorest, most vulnerable people the hardest - and failure to prepare for those threats will mean more deaths and suffering, according to a leading environmental health scientist.

From impoverished families living in flood-prone homes to women whose cultures require them to stay covered in extreme heat, climate impacts on health have "a strong equity component", said Kristie Ebi, a professor at the University of Washington's Center for Health and the Global Environment.

Besides hiking dangers from deadly heat and spreading diseases, climate change will fuel a rise in basic health problems - from diarrhoea to poor nutrition - that will affect the poor most and likely widen global inequalities, she said.

"Future health risks will be determined not just by the hazards created by a changing climate but also by the sensitivity of individuals and communities exposed to these hazards," she noted in an article published this month in the journal Health Affairs.

Many of the biggest health concerns

from climate change "boil down to maternal and child health issues", said Ebi, who has helped countries plan how to adapt to climate-linked health threats from Africa and Asia to the Pacific and Central America. Children face particular risks, she said. Because they breathe in more air for their body size than adults, for instance, they are particularly susceptible to air pollution, such as from worsening global wildfires, she noted.

"They handle it much more poorly than adults do," Ebi told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview. High levels of child stunting and wasting, as extreme weather destroys crops and hits food security for many families, also will drive lasting health problems, she said.

"Without sufficient food, brain development is affected. Children end up learning less and earning less," said Ebi, who has led many national and international climate assessments.

Health issues can feed on each other too, she said, with hunger increasing vulnerability to malaria and more frequent diarrhoea exacerbating malnourishment.

Preparing health services for the

coming threats will be crucial to avoid the worst impacts - but both richer and poorer countries are spending too little on that, she added. Globally, less than 0.5% of international climate finance goes to efforts to address climate-related health concerns, the journal article noted.

The U.S. National Institutes of Health, for instance, spends under 1% of its research budget on climate issues, Ebi said.

"It's laughably small," she said of global funding to research and deal with climate-related health concerns.

Such limited funding means measures that could help stem worsening health risks - from better early warning systems to mental health support for those who suffer catastrophic losses - are not being put in place fast enough.

Progress on tackling shifting health threats is also hampered because experts on related issues - from water and agriculture to nutrition and diseases - do not work together often enough, Ebi said.

"We need people from different fields sitting together and solving problems," she added. "The challenges the world is facing are interconnected." -Agencies

Getting into shape pre-surgery to aid recovery for older patients: Study

Older adults about to undergo elective surgery should undertake a sustained programme of targeted exercise beforehand to counteract the muscle-wasting effects of bedrest, new research suggests.

A study published by researchers in the University of Birmingham's School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences showed that short term 'prehabilitation' strength exercises, undertaken pre-surgery, are insufficient to prevent muscle loss.

In the study, the researchers asked a group of older adults to perform four sessions of weight lifting exercise over one week. The participants did the exercises using only one leg, while the other leg did no exercise at all.

After completing the prehabilitation, the participants underwent five days of bed-rest - a typical length of stay in hospital for an older patient. Although the researchers expected to find that the leg which had undergone the exercise would experience less muscle loss than the other leg, in fact they found muscle loss was about the same in both legs.

The team's detailed analysis showed that, while short-term exercise prehabilitation does enhance the body's muscle-building processes, thigh muscle-wasting was about 3-4 per cent in both legs - roughly equivalent to what older adults would typically lose over 3-5 years of ageing.

The researchers recommend that one approach to protect older muscle from wasting during hospitalisation is to perform longer-term strength exercise prehabilitation beforehand.

"Although short-term prehabilitation offers a cost-effective and easy-to-implement strategy, it does not prevent muscle wasting among older adults undergoing bed-rest," Dr Leigh Breen, the study's corresponding author, said.

"This muscle loss may be extremely

hard to recover from and can lead to long-term health and disease complications," added Breen.

The team recommend that prehabilitation exercise programmes should also

of future health complications. Dr Benoit Smeuninx, now at Monash University in Australia, is lead author on the paper.

"Our study reinforces the need for more research into the benefits of longer term



incorporate aerobic exercise alongside strength training to protect cardiovascular health, and a protein rich diet to increase muscle mass levels in a way that will effectively cancel out the muscle loss that is experienced during bed-rest.

They also recommend that, where appropriate and safe, hospitalised older patients should aim to get back on their feet and mobile again as quickly as possible.

Post-surgery exercise and dietary strategies will also be important to ensure a return to full health and lower the risk

training programmes prior to surgery. In the same was as an athlete would train before a race or a competition, exercise training before hospitalisation is likely to be highly beneficial to older adults undergoing elective surgeries," He said.

The work was completed in collaboration with colleagues within the Medical Research Council Versus Arthritis Centre for Musculoskeletal Ageing Research, which is a partnership between the University of Birmingham and the University of Nottingham. -Agencies



Our study reinforces the need for more research into the benefits of longer term training programmes prior to surgery. In the same was as an athlete would train before a race or a competition, exercise training before hospitalisation is likely to be highly beneficial to older adults undergoing elective surgeries"

Covid-19: Heart disease avoidable deaths caused due to rare hospital visit

A new study led by UCL researchers has found out that during the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, lower rates of hospital attendance for urgent heart problems may have contributed towards avoidable deaths in England.

In this study, published online in the journal Circulation cardiovascular quality and outcomes, researchers at UCL's Institute of Health Informatics estimated the effect of reduced ED visits for suspected cardiac disease on non-Covid-19 related cardiac mortality in England.

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, a marked decline was

observed in visits by patients to the Emergency Departments (EDs) in England and the US, including for people with heart problems.

To quantify the number of excess deaths due to cardiac disease, the team used mortality counts from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) for England. To quantify the change in daily ED visits, researchers used data from the Public Health England (PHE) Emergency Department Syndromic Surveillance System (EDSSS): a network of sentinel EDs across England. To explore how the reduction in ED visits may

have affected cardiac mortality, researchers implemented causal inference methodology.

Lead author Dr. Michail Katsoulis (UCL Institute of Health Informatics) said: "During the initial phase of the pandemic, between March 12th and April 15, 2020, there was an estimated fewer ED visits of 2,750 per week for suspected cardiac disease; this is around a 35% decrease compared to the pre-pandemic period this year.

"Our analysis suggested that one cardiac death might have been prevented or delayed for every additional 12 ED visits for suspected cardiac conditions. We

estimated that the excess cardiac mortality due to non-attendance at EDs, during the initial phase of the pandemic, may have been as high as 232 deaths per week."

Senior author Dr Tom Lumbers (UCL Institute of Health Informatics) said: "While the decline of patients accessing hospital care during the pandemic has been well documented, here we provide an estimate of the health consequences of this change in healthcare utilization.

"The public health messaging to protect the NHS may have led to patients not attending ED out of fear or public-mindedness or difficulty accessing services due

to the pandemic.

"Our results suggest that the pandemic response may have led to the under-treatment of non-Covid-19 diseases, including heart conditions, with important impacts on the excess mortality observed during this period."

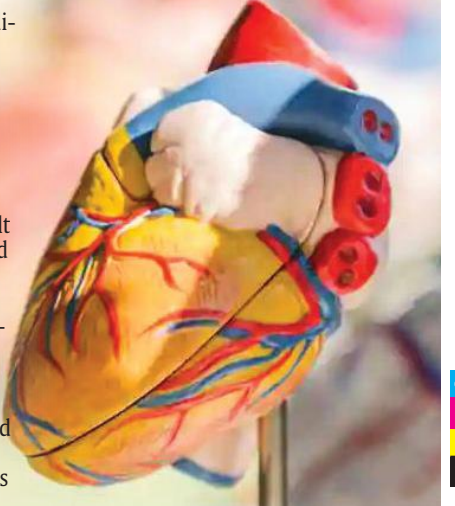
Dr. Lumbers added: "These results provide evidence of the stark indirect effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on mortality in England. There is a need to better understand how the pandemic response resulted in a decline in attendance to EDs with suspected cardiac disease and other serious medical conditions to inform future strategies to

mitigate both the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic."

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The research team's estimates rest upon the assumption that the Covid-19 pandemic only affects excess deaths from cardiac disease through the reduction in ED admissions, and not as a result of other factors, such as increased stress and anxiety.

Another potential limitation of this study is the possible misclassification of cardiac deaths as not related to Covid-19 since SARS-CoV-2 viral infection was excluded on clinical grounds and not through systematic viral ribonucleic acid testing. -Agencies





RIZWAN-INSPIRED

Pakistan Win Third T20 By 4 Wickets, STOP NEW ZEALAND SERIES SWEEP

Mohammad Rizwan smashed a career-best 89 as Pakistan defeated New Zealand by four wickets on Tuesday to avoid a series sweep after the third Twenty20 international in Napier.

Pakistan reached New Zealand's target with two balls to spare, ending on 177 after Iftikhar Ahmed sealed the win with a six in the final over.

But it was Rizwan's 89 from 59 balls, with support from Mohammad Hafeez who scored a quick 41 off 29 deliveries, that provided the inspiration for the victory.

The New Zealanders finished their innings at 173 for seven after losing the toss and being asked to bat, with Devon Conway top-scoring on 63.

Faheem Ashraf was the pick of the Pakistan bowlers, taking three for 20.

"It's a decent total compared to where we were at one point," Conway said earlier.

"We were talking about the 160 mark as somewhere we'd like to get to, and to reach 170-plus is a good total."

Earlier, Pakistan won the toss and elected to bowl. "We're going to bowl first because we've changed the team so we have depth in batting, so we

want to chase," said stand-in captain Shadab Khan.

Shadab had won the toss in the previous two matches of the series, with Pakistan suffering heavy defeats both times.

He said most of his players were unfamiliar with New Zealand conditions.

"For most of them, it's their first tour in New Zealand and the bounce

has affected them," he said. "Hopefully they'll learn from that and do better."

Pakistan brought in Hussain Talat and Iftikhar Ahmed to bolster the batting, along with young fast bowler Mohammad Hasnain.

Abdullah Shafique, Imad Wasim and Wahab Riaz were all dropped, with Haider Ali promoted to open the batting in Shafique's absence.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said his team was unchanged from the side that clinched a nine-wicket win in Hamilton on Sunday.

"We've had a couple of strong performances and it's important we keep looking to back that up," he said. "It's a good surface so hopefully we can make use of that first up and get a competitive total."

Squads:

New Zealand: Martin Guptill, Tim Seifert, Kane Williamson (capt), Devon Conway, Glenn Phillips, James Neesham, Kyle Jamieson, Scott Kuggeleijn, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Trent Boult.

Pakistan: Mohammad Rizwan, Haider Ali, Shadab Khan (capt), Mohammad Hafeez, Hussain Talat, Iftikhar Ahmed, Khushdil Shah, Faheem Ashraf, Harris Rauf, Shaheen Afridi, Mohammad Hasnain.

India Vs Australia: After Adelaide Debacle, Steve Smith Advises India 'Let It Go And Move On'

Australian batting star Steve Smith has no time to think about how India might plot revenge in the second Test here this weekend but he does have a word of advice for the visitors jolted by the first game's battering -- "Let it go and move on". The Australian trio of Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood produced one of the finest fast bowling performances in recent times to dismiss India for their lowest Test score of 36 in the opening day-night Test here.

Australia won by eight wickets and the series will now move to Melbourne for the Boxing Day Test starting December 26.

"Look, the other day we just saw some pretty incredible fast bowling. It is probably the best I've seen our bowlers bowl collectively for about five years I think," Smith said in a virtual media conference facilitated by series' official broadcaster Sony Network.

"The lengths they were hitting were just impeccable. Sometimes that happens, you get a good ball



and you nick it...You got to let it go and move on and try and keep yourself in a positive mindset," the 31-year-old added.

Asked what he feels would be the Indian mindset after such a huge defeat, he said: "Again every individual is different, the way they take their dismissals, how they think about the game after it's finished."

"It's important to keep moving forward, look at yourself individually,

what you could have done better."

Star pacer Mohammed Shami's fractured wrist has dealt a double blow to India as talismanic skipper Virat Kohli will be on paternity during the last three Tests.

"Not thinking too much about India and how they're going to come back. For us, it's just about doing the things we need to do well. It's about just executing what we need to do out in the middle and doing it to the

best of our ability," Smith said.

On Shami's absence, Smith said India still have some quality bowlers in Navdeep Saini and Mohammed Siraj.

"I think they're two quality bowlers who can have some good Test careers. Obviously they are missing Ishant (Sharma) as well, which is a big loss for them in terms of experience."

Smith was out for one, deceived by a beautiful Ravichandran Ashwin delivery, in the opening Test and asserted that he has learnt his lessons.

"The spinners that do well here generally those who get over the top of the ball and beat you with more bounce or in the air as opposed to ones that come around the ball."

"It's about finding a way to adapt and that's what the best players do around the world. I'll hopefully learn something from that, move forward and play a little bit better in the next game," he explained.

On the next match, the star batsman said he gets shivers down the spine from the thrill of batting in a Boxing Day Test.

Since his first Boxing Day Test appearance in the Ashes 2010-

Waqar Younis To Return Home After First Test Against NZ

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Tuesday announced that bowling coach Waqar Younis will return home after the Boxing Day Test against New Zealand to be with his family.

The 49-year-old will rejoin the national side in time for the home series against South Africa, which starts with the first Test in Karachi on January 26.

"Waqar had requested the team management to be granted leave so that he can spend additional time with his immediate family, which will be in Lahore before returning to Sydney, Australia, on 17 January," PCB said in a media release.

Pakistan are scheduled to play a two-match Test series against New Zealand from December 26-30 and January 2-7 in Mount Maunganui and Christchurch respectively.

"Considering Waqar has not seen his family since June and that our home series against South Africa, which follows the series against New Zealand,



doesn't finish until 14 February, we ... have allowed him to return home early so that he can spend additional time with his wife and children," Pakistan manager Mansoor Rana said.

"If he had returned to Lahore with the side after the second Test, he would have only got a week to spend with them. For all of us, families always come

first and we have in the past made similar exemptions so that our team members are able to achieve the correct work-life balance," he added.

Regular skipper Babar Azam and opener Imam-ul-Haq have been ruled out of the first Test.

In Babar's absence, wicket-keeper Mohammad Rizwan will lead Pakistan in the first Test.

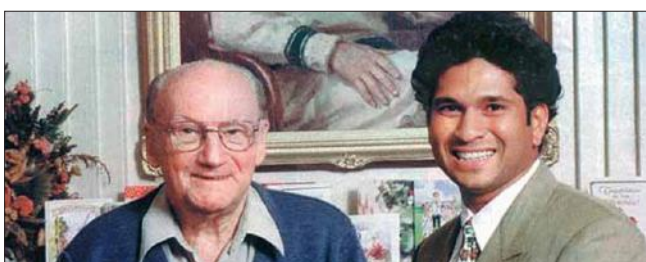
Cricket Legend Donald Bradman's Test Cap Auctioned For \$340,000

An Australian businessman has purchased Donald Bradman's first baggy green test cap for 450,000 Australian dollars (\$340,000) at auction, the second-highest price paid for a piece of cricket memorabilia.

Peter Freedman, the founder of Rode Microphones who earlier this year paid 9 million Australian dollars (\$6.8 million) at an auction for a guitar used by Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain, plans to tour Bradman's test debut cap around Australia.

The price for Bradman's 1928 Australia cap sits behind the \$1,007,500 (\$760,000) paid at auction for Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne's test cap earlier this year -- the world-record price for an item of cricket memorabilia, auction officials said.

Bradman represented Australia for 20 years, playing 52 test matches from 1928 to 1948, and is



generally regarded as the world's best-ever cricketer.

Knighted for his services to cricket in 1949, he retired from test cricket with a batting average of 99.94, making his test batting achievements nearly twice that of the nearest batsman in the longer version of the game.

"Sir Don Bradman is an Aussie legend," Freedman said on Tuesday.

"Not only as one of our greatest talents on the sporting field and one of the most revered athletes of

all time, but as an icon of Australian fortitude and resilience."

"I have some exciting plans for the baggy green that will see it travel the country and shared with sports fans and cricketing communities."

The reason for the auction was related to criminal activity.

The cap was presented to Bradman before his test debut against England in November 1928 in Brisbane. Bradman gave the cap to a family friend, Peter Dunham, as a gift in 1959.

Messi Says He Would Rather Win La Liga Again Than Be Top-Scorer

Barcelona captain Lionel Messi was presented with the Pichichi trophy for a record seventh time on Monday, but the star striker has said that he would rather win the La Liga again than be the top-scorer in the league.

The Pichichi trophy is given each season to the player who scores the most number of goals in the La Liga. Messi has now won the award more than any other player in the league. He scored 33 goals in the 2019-20 season.

Previously, Cristiano Ronaldo and Messi had competed for the trophy on a regular cycle when the former was with Real Madrid. Since Ronaldo's move to Juventus, Messi has won the award since 2018.

"An eighth Pichichi? I don't know, nor am I thinking about it, it is not something I am worried or obsessed about," Spanish



newspaper Marca which awards the Pichichi trophy, quoted the

Argentine as saying. "I would prefer to win La Liga before getting the Pichichi, we are fighting towards that," Messi said.

Real Madrid won the La Liga title for a record 34th time in the 2019-20 season, which also marked Barcelona's first season without a title since 2007-08.

"We are slowly growing. We struggled to get going in the league, nor did we deserve to drop all those points, we could have won several of those games, like at Alaves, Getafe, Real Madrid..."

"We created a lot of chances, that would have changed the situation, but we have to put together a run of good games to get ourselves back at the top," the six-time Ballon d'Or winner said.

Barca are currently trailing La Liga toppers Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid by eight points.

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