



P3 CITY

**MINI-PASSENGER VEHICLES PLYING ON CITY ROUTES OVERCHARGE PASSENGERS**

Residents of various areas of city outskirts including Harwan, Nishat and Shalimar Monday alleged that Taxi Drivers Union in New Theed Harwan is displaying a 'fake' rate list and...

P7 THINK

**BADAM VAER ALMONDS AND AURA**

THE other day I cannot believe that after 14 years I am finally back and trying to settle down at my native place. It was an amazing experience to see the better and bitter side of life. It provided me an opportunity...



P11 SPORTS

**PUNJAB FC DEFEAT REAL KASHMIR 1-0 IN I-LEAGUE**

Chencho Gleytsehn's 37th minute strike helped Punjab FC register a hard-fought 1-0 win over Real Kashmir FC in an I-League match at the Kalyani Municipal...

**Quote!**

No people who are ignorant can be truly free.

—Thomas Jefferson

**NEWS DIGEST****J&K Reports 132 New Cases**

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir recorded 132 fresh COVID-19 cases, including 28 travellers, taking the infection tally to 1,28,679 on Monday, even as no new death due to the virus was reported in the past 24 hours, officials said. Out of the fresh cases, 28 were **More On P10**

**Lecturer Held For Issuing Fake Orders**

JAMMU: The Crime Branch of Jammu and Kashmir Police on Monday said a lecturer was arrested for allegedly issuing fake appointment and transfer orders. Arfat Ahmad Khan, a resident of Assar area of Doda, was working in the school education department for the past two-and-a-half **More On P10**

**Teacher Found Dead In Sopore**

SRINAGAR: A teacher on Monday was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Sopore area of Baramulla district. 35-year-old Ghulam Mohammad Wani of Daragam village of Pattan was found lifeless by the locals near an auto stand in Tarzoo area of Sopore, an official said. A police team, he said, reached the spot after being informed by the locals. **More On P10**

**Boy Charred To Death In Samba**

JAMMU: A 12-year-old boy was charred to death in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district when a temporary wooden shed he lived in caught fire apparently due to an electrical short circuit, officials said. Khalid got trapped inside the "Kulla (temporary shed mostly made of wood)" in Chak Manga Gujra village on Sunday after it **More On P10**

**Burglars Loot SBI ATM, 6 Shops**

SRINAGAR: Burglars decamped with cash from an ATM of State bank of India in Shopian district of south Kashmir, officials said on Monday. They said that the unidentified thieves also looted six shops—two at the old bus stand, adjacent to four-way; two near Batho Chowk and three others at Gole Chakri area. A police officer **More On P10**

**Soldier Shoots Self Dead In Jammu**

JAMMU: A 26-year-old soldier shot himself dead inside a camp in Jammu, officials said on Monday. They said Nitish Mishra, a resident of Madhya Pradesh, used his service rifle and shot himself dead while he was posted at the sentry duty at his Raipir camp in Belicharana area late Sunday night. The soldier died instantly and his **More On P10**

# 4 Militants Killed In Shopian Encounter: Police

Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR: Four militants who police said were associated with the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) were killed in an encounter with state forces on Monday in Shopian district of south Kashmir.

State forces launched a cordon and search operation in Manihal area of the district around midnight, following information about the presence of militants there, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Vijay Kumar said.

He said the militants refused repeated offers of surrender and opened fire at the forces.

"We appealed to them to surrender and brought their families, including wife and a



File Photo: Abid Bhat

four-year-old child of a militant, to appeal to them to surrender. But they refused," he said.

Kumar said after the militants opened fire at the state forces, there was a gunbattle in which

four militants were killed.

"All the four were categorised militants belonging to LeT outfit. Although, they call themselves as Lashkar-e-Mustafa, they are **More On P10**

## Stone Pelting More Serious Problem Than Militancy: IGP

Agencies

SRINAGAR: Inspector General of Police Vijay Kumar on Monday termed stone pelting more serious problem than then the militancy and reiterated to book those indulging in such incidents under Public Safety Act.

"When firing starts, we evacuate people and some people, miscreants among



them resort to stone pelting. People from other village don't **More On P10**

**Assures Incident Free Amarnath Yatra**

Fool-proof security arrangements, including round-the-clock monitoring using CCTV cameras and drones, will be in place for the Amarnath Yatra this year to ensure an incident-free pilgrimage, police said on Monday. Addressing a press conference here, Inspector **More On P10**

**HC Upholds J&K Bank's Notification For Filling 1850 Vacancies**

Agencies

SRINAGAR: The J&K High Court on Monday dismissed petitions challenging Jammu and Kashmir Bank's fresh notification for filling up of 350 probationary officers and 1500 banking associates' vacancies.

The petitions were filed by at least 288 aspiring candidates who had participated in the selection process pursuant to a notification on 6 October 2018 and had challenged the bank's 15th April 2020 announcement cancelling the whole selection process.

Subsequently, the bank had issued an advertisement notice (no. JKB/HR-Rectt-2020-27 & 28) on 1 January 2020, inviting applications from the de-sirous candidates for the posts of Probationary Officers and Banking Associates.

"It needs no reiteration that since the **More On P10**

## MeT Predicts More Downpour Today



KO Photo: Abid Bhat

**Upper Reaches Of Kashmir Receive Snow, Rains Lash Plains**

Agencies

SRINAGAR: Valley's upper reaches on Monday received fresh snowfall while rains continued in plains dipping the day temperature sharply, even as the weather department has forecast more downpour on Tuesday. **More On P10**

**Highway Closed For Traffic**

Jammu-Srinagar highway, the only surface link connecting Kashmir Valley with the outside world, has been closed and shall remain shut on Tuesday, officials said on Monday. **More On P10**

## Why People Take 'Secret Bath' In This Kashmir Village On Nauroz?

Umer Ahmad

In the dead of the night haunted by canine howling, Javed Ahmad suddenly rises from his warm bed and ventures into darkness.

His dazed state makes him appear a sleep walker. And yet he warily walks out of his courtyard as a solitary man. With that nocturnal move, he embarks on an eerie expedition.

Despite Kashmir nights silenced by strife scare, Javed walks unperturbed by the side of weeping willows and watchtowers. He soon steps on the bank of a river meandering through his village.

What he does next looks suicidal. He jumps into the frozen water

body, and comes out after sometime, with a new spirit.

"This sounds crazy, isn't it?" Javed says with a beaming face.

"But that's how we celebrate the arrival of Nauroz here."

Marking the start of spring in a unique way, people of Mujhpathri in Central Kashmir's Budgam district leave their home before the first light of the day for rivers, brooks and streams, to take what they call a "secret bath". Residents of neighbouring Raithan village equally seem keen about it.

But while the idea of bathing with cold water can send chills down one's spine, the villagers embrace this age-old ritual wholeheartedly.

"I'm taking these **More On P10**

## Pandey Warns Action Against Plagiarist, Irregular Newspapers



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: In a stern warning to the newspapers practicing plagiarism and publishing irregularly with suspension and de-empanelment, the Director Information and Public Relations, Rahul Pandey said on Monday that those newspapers

need to be encouraged which run on professional lines and maintain the desired standards.

Chairing a meeting here with the officers of divisional office at Directorate of Information & Public Relations Srinagar, Pandey emphasized that department needs **More On P10**

## UAE Brokering Secret India-Pak Peace Talks: Report

Agencies

NEW DELHI: About 24 hours after military chiefs from India and Pakistan surprised the world last month with a rare joint commitment to respect a 2003 cease-fire agreement, the top diplomat of the United Arab Emirates popped over to New Delhi for a quick one-day visit.

The official UAE readout of the Feb. 26 meeting gave few clues of what Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed spoke about with Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar,



noting they "discussed all regional and international issues of common interest and exchanged views on them."

Yet behind closed doors, the India-Pakistan cease-fire marked a milestone in secret talks brokered **More On P10**

**INDUS WATER TREATY Pak Delegation Arrives in India**

A seven-member Pakistani delegation led by the country's Indus Commissioner Syed Muhammad Meher Ali Shah arrived here Monday for the annual Permanent Indus Commission meeting during which he will hold talks with his Indian counterpart, an official said. The Indus commissioners of the two countries will hold the annual dialogue on March 23-24. The Indian delegation will be led by PK Saxena **More On P10**

## J&K Aims Rs 24485 Cr Revenue In Next Fiscal

Agencies

SRINAGAR: Jammu & Kashmir has estimated to generate revenue of Rs 24,485 crore during the next financial year.

Documents reveal that tax revenue of J&K is projected at Rs

16, 276 crore in 2021-22, while non-tax revenue is estimated to be 8209 crore during the fiscal.

"The committee sought to know about the quantum of revenue generated by UT of J&K by their own resources. The administration of the **More On P10**

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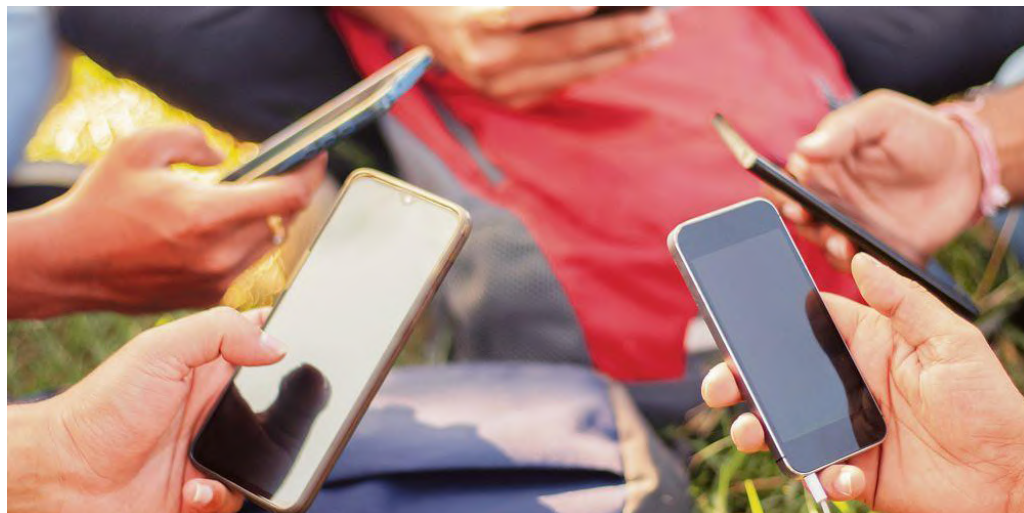
No 5- Dal Lake Boulevard Srinagar, 190001, Kashmir

# 'Mindless' Scrolling On Your Phone Getting In The Way Of Sleep?

## Agencies

Sleeping post 10 p.m. is clinically declared as an inappropriate time to go to sleep and it triggers a change in the sleeping pattern that leads to sleep deprivation.

This is irrespective of the number of hours of sleep. However, a recent study has revealed that although a majority of Indians are aware that sleeping at 10 is an ideal time, they tend to give excuses when it comes to actually following it. A study conducted by Godrej Interio across 1,000 Indians living across the metros found that seven out of every ten respondents cites 'binge watching' as an excuse to not sleep on time.



Around 56 per cent of the respondents admitted that "work for home" which includes the household chores could be delaying their sleep

time while 80 per cent of the respondents said they do not sleep on time due to mindless scrolling on smart phones. The ideal sleep time would be

around 10 p.m.

Commenting on the findings, Anil Mathur, COO, Interio Division, said, "We at Godrej Interio are committed towards health

of the nation and 'Sleep at 10' is an initiative which promotes right sleeping habits which is beneficial for overall health and productivity. The study was conducted to emphasise on how health is becoming more important and how sleeping on time is quintessential to leading a healthy life."

According to the sleep data, collected by the survey 20 per cent respondents indulge in mindless texting on smart phones. Similarly, 29 per cent cites 'pajama partying' as an excuse to not sleep on time. Also, 44 per cent respondent's mentions "work from home" which includes the official work as the primary reason to not sleep on time.

## New study reveals anti-inflammatory therapies prevent heart disease in elderly

### Agencies

Therapies that soothe inflammation could be an effective way to prevent heart disease in people with a common age-related blood condition, according to a new study from researchers at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Their study was published in the journal Nature.

The researchers identified how the blood condition, called clonal hematopoiesis, worsens atherosclerosis, and their findings suggest that an anti-inflammatory drug previously tested in a wider population of people with cardiovascular disease may have potential if used only in those with clonal hematopoiesis.

"The main message from our research is that anti-inflammatory therapies for atherosclerotic heart disease may be particularly effective in patients with clonal hematopoiesis," says Alan Tall, MD, the Tilden Weger Bieler Professor of Medicine, the study's co-senior author with Nan Wang, MD, associate professor of medical sciences (in medicine).

Although great strides have been made in re-



ducing atherosclerotic heart disease with therapies such as statins that reduce cholesterol, many people still have increased disease despite these current treatments.

"Over the years, researchers have learned that the ageing process itself is a major contributor to cardiovascular disease," says Trevor P. Fidler, PhD, an associate research scientist in medicine, the study's first author. "But how ageing itself can lead to heart disease—and how it could be prevented—is not well understood."

In the new study, the researchers took a close look at a common blood condition, called clonal hematopoiesis, that is associated with ageing. Clonal hematopoiesis is thought to occur in roughly 10% of people over age 70, and most people have no symp-

toms. But researchers recently realized that the condition—for unknown reasons—raises the risk of heart disease by 40%. Clonal hematopoiesis occurs when hematopoietic (blood) stem cells acquire mutations. As people age, each hematopoietic stem cell acquires genetic mutations, though most of these mutations have no impact. But in clonal hematopoiesis, some mutations supercharge the stem cell so that it produces a greater number of blood cells compared with other stem cells. Clonal hematopoiesis usually arises when one of four specific genes is mutated. The Columbia team looked specifically at JAK2, which imparts the strongest risk of premature coronary artery disease.

In atherosclerosis, white blood cells called macrophages accumulate in

plaques and proliferate as the plaque grows. In studies of mice, the researchers found that the JAK2 mutations led to a number of changes in macrophages that increased macrophage proliferation, increased inflammation in the atherosclerotic plaques, and enhanced the plaque's necrotic core.

"We know in humans that such regions are associated with unstable plaques, which can rupture, causing heart attacks or strokes," Fidler says.

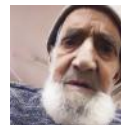
The researchers also traced the molecular mechanisms that led to these changes, including increased activation of the AIM2 inflammasome, a complex of proteins that induces inflammation.

Inhibiting various components of the inflammasome improved the stability of the plaques, as did inhibition of IL-1ss, a product of the inflammasome.

Though an IL-1ss inhibitor called canakinumab reduced cardiovascular events in a clinical trial, the drug was associated with a small risk of infection and has not been marketed to reduce cardiovascular disease.

## Sad Demise

We inform you the sad demise of Abdul Gaffar Kathjoo R/o Mir Mohalla, Malarata Srinagar who passed away on 22-03-2021. His Taziyat will be only for 3 days



### BEREAVED

**Mohammad Sultan Katjoo (Brother Deceased)**  
**Abdul Qayoom, Shabir Ahamd, Mohammad Iqbal, Manzoor Ahamad (Sons)**

## PRESS RELEASE

A meeting was held in the office of the 'Holding Hand Society Anantnag' on 19/03/2021 which was presided over by Chairperson Bisma Mushtaq.

All the members were present during the meeting. It was unanimously decided that two members namely Sameer Manzoor/ S/O Manzoor Ahmad Ahanger R/O Sheerbag Anantnag and Sabia Jan D/O Gh. Rasool Sofi R/O Khanabal Anantnag should be disengaged from the organisation as they cannot continue due to health problems. The Chairperson has thus decided to disengage them with immediate effect.

mja Chairperson Bisma mushtaq

## PUBLIC NOTICE

I am applying for issuance of Fertilizer Licence under title name "Bhat Fertilizers Bandpawa Shopian". If any body having any objection may contact Chief Agricultural Officer Shopian within a period of 7 days from the date of publication of this notice. After that no objection shall be entertained

**Sartajul Islam Bhat**  
**S/O Mohd Amin Bhat**  
**Residence Bandpawa Shopian**

tas

## PUBLIC NOTICE

I have lost all documents of Vehicle JK22 8387. Now I am applying for its duplicate of the same if any body having any objection may contact A.R.T.O Shopian within a period of 7 days from the date of publication of this notice. After that no objection shall be entertained.

**Khurshid Ahmad Dar**  
**S/O Abdul Salam Dar**  
**Residence Maldeera Shopian**

TAS

## OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT REGIONAL TRANSPORT OFFICER ANANTNAG

Date:-22/03/2021

### NOTICE

Whereas joint application has been received by this office from Mr.Nazir Ahmad Shah S/O Ab Majeed Shah R/O Phalgam Anantnag (Party No.1st) as Transferor, (Seller) Owner of the Vehicle Bearing Regd. No.JK03C-0791(Commercial/ Non-Commercial) covering under R/P No.N/A. and Mr.Ghulam Mohd Dar S/O Ali Mohd Dar R/O Reshipora Baramullah (Party No.2nd) as Transferee (Purchaser) requesting for transfer of R/C & R/P of the above noted Vehicle from party No 1st and 2nd. And Cancellation of hire purchase agreement with Nill.

Before the case is disposed off on its merit, anybody have any objection regarding the proposed transfer Amy file his objection within (7) days from the publication of this notice to the office of the undersigned. No any representation / objection shall be entertained after stipulated period.

mja Assistant Regional Transport Officer Anantnag

## OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT REGIONAL TRANSPORT OFFICER ANANTNAG

No.101/5603/MVD/ANG Date:-22/03/2021

### NOTICE

Whereas joint application has been received by this office from Mr.Mohammad Imran Dar S/O Mohd Afzal Dar R/O Waghama Bijbehara Anantnag (Party No.1st) as Transferor, (Seller) Owner of the Vehicle Tipper Bearing Regd. No.JK03G-7006(Commercial/ Non-Commercial) covering under R/P No.330/HMV/ GP. and Mr.Manzoor Ahmad Dar S/O Ghulam Rasool Dar R/O Dagripora Awantipora Pulwama (Party No.2nd) as Transferee (Purchaser) requesting for transfer of R/C & R/P of the above noted Vehicle from party No 1st and 2nd. And Cancellation of hire purchase agreement with JK Bank Marhama.

Before the case is disposed off on its merit, anybody have any objection regarding the proposed transfer Amy file his objection within (7) days from the publication of this notice to the office of the undersigned. No any representation / objection shall be entertained after stipulated period.

mja Assistant Regional Transport Officer Anantnag

## OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT REGIONAL TRANSPORT OFFICER ANANTNAG

No.101/5607/MVD/ANG Date:-22/03/2021

### NOTICE

Whereas joint application has been received by this office from Mr.Nisan Ahmad Ganie S/O Ab Salam Ganie R/O Wandevellgam Anantnag (Party No.1st) as Transferor, (Seller) Owner of the Vehicle Tata Sumo Bearing Regd. No.JK03D-2453(Commercial/ Non-Commercial) covering under R/P No.4427/MC. and Mr.Malik Ishfaq Ahmad S/O Malik Ghulam Mohammad R/O Malikpora Verinag Anantnag (Party No.2nd) as Transferee (Purchaser) requesting for transfer of R/C & R/P of the above noted Vehicle from party No 1st and 2nd. And Cancellation of hire purchase agreement with Anantnag CCo. Bank Bidder.

Before the case is disposed off on its merit, anybody have any objection regarding the proposed transfer Amy file his objection within (7) days from the publication of this notice to the office of the undersigned. No any representation / objection shall be entertained after stipulated period.

mja Assistant Regional Transport Officer Anantnag

## University of Kashmir, Srinagar

### Notice

The candidate whose particulars are given below has reported to the University that he / she has lost his/her University Certificate/s and has applied for issuance of duplicate certificate/s:

Name: Arshad Rashid Shah  
Parentage:- Dr Abdul Rashid Shah  
Registration No : 16216-A-88  
Certificate/s lost:- B. E Degree Certificate  
Roll No/s:- 8851  
Session/ Year Aug-Sept 1993



Before University will consider issuance of Duplicate Certificate/s in favour of the candidate, any person having any objection shall report to the undersigned within one week from the date of issuance of this notice.

The original certificate/s issued to the candidate be treated as cancelled

No: F(Duplicate - Degree) Certs/KU/21 ) Assistant Controller of Examinations, Certificate  
Dated: 22-3-2021

## PUBLIC NOTICE

I have lost my Leaving, Provisional And Character Certificates. Now I am applying for the duplicate of the these certificate. Anybody having any objection in this regard he /she may file his/her objection in the office of the Govt Boys Hr. Sec. School Magam within a period of seven days from the date of publication of this notice. After that no objection will be entertained.

**Tasaduq Yousuf Wani**  
**S/O Mohammad Yousuf Wani**  
**R/O Checki Kawoosa**

BMG

## The Jammu And Kashmir State Board Of School Education, BRANCH OFFICE SOPORE

The candidates whose photograph is published in this notice is claiming to have lost the original marks certificate of 10th under Below mentioned particulars

Name Haroon Ramzan War  
Fathers Name Mohammad Ramban War  
Mothers Name Raja Begum  
Roll No 3159321  
Session /Year Annual -Regular 2014



Now the candidate has applied for Duplicate Marks Card. Anybody (if) having any objection may file the some before undersigned with (07) Seven days from the date of publication of this notice. Besides, the original marks card is teated as cancelled.

ams Sd/ Assistant Secretary Sub Office Sopore

## Office Of The Assistant Regional Transport Officer Kashmir

### NOTICE

Whereas an application has been received from one. Shri : Malik Mohammad Ashfaq S/o: Ali Mohammad Malik R/o: Daharmunah Budgam owner of vehicle bearing Registration No: JK04E-8659 for cancellation of hire purchase agreement with M/S Mahindra & Mahindra Finance Services Ltd 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.3097  
Dated 20/03/2021

mcb Assistant Regional Transport officer Budgam Kashmir

## Office of The Regional Transport Officer Kashmir

### NOTICE

Where as an application for transfer of ownership has been received from Khurshid Ahmad Dar S/o Bashir Ahmad Dar R/O Habba Kadal Sgr (Transferor) of Alto UXIT bearing registration No. JK01AN- 2849 chasis No: 17765 Engine No: 636368 Model 2020 in favour of Faheem Abbas Zakir S/O Gh Mohammad Zakir R/O Zari Mohalla Lal Bazar Sgr (Transferee).

Now, therefore, it is notified for the information of the general, public that representation/ Objection, if any in connection with proposed transfer will be received within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice in the daily newspaper Kashmir Observer to the address of undersigned.

No. representation/ objection shall be considered unless it is made writing it is made in the aforesaid period.

NOJK-RTOK 8090 Sd/-  
Dated: 22/03/2018 Regional Transport Office,  
fko Kashmir



## DLSA Srinagar Observes ‘World Water Day’

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Srinagar in collaboration with Ehsaas Trust International Monday observed the World Water Day at ADR centre District Court Complex Mominabad here.

The function on the occasion was organised under the chairmanship of Abdul Rashid Malik, Chairman DALSA/Principal District & Sessions Judge Srinagar.

In his keynote address, Malik impressed on valuing water which is important as a basic necessity of life. He also added to report to the concerned authorities wherever we see a faulty water resource which we usually ignore. He impressed upon more awareness among the masses for water harvesting which can help us to save water for our future generations.

## Tulip Garden To Be Thrown Open For Visitors on Thursday

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Asia's largest Tulip Garden, situated on the bank of Dal lake is all set to be thrown open on March 25 subject to the weather conditions.

Director Floriculture, Farooq Ahmad said that they have decided to throw open the famous Tulip garden on March 25 (Thursday).

He said that a record number of Tulip's will bloom this year and all the arrangements have been finalised for opening the garden.

In wake of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the director said adequate measures have been taken and it has been decided that no visitor shall be allowed to enter the garden without mandatory face masks. He said that they will ensure that all the Standard Op-

erating Procedures (SOP) will be followed in letter and spirit. He also added that thermo scanners, sanitisers and other things have also been put in place for the visitors to ensure that the virus is prevented from spreading.

Farooq said that for the first time, water ATMs and ROs have been made available for the people this year. “We appeal to the visitors not to bring polythene and other eatables with them as these things will not be allowed inside the garden premises,” he said, adding that the garden is polythene free zone and nobody will be allowed to violate the norms.

He said people visiting the garden can eat foodstuff outside the garden, but won't be allowed inside garden premises.

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# Mini-passenger Vehicles Plying On City Routes Overcharge Passengers

## Commuters Seek Intervention Of Authorities

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Residents of various areas of city outskirts including Harwan, Nishat and Shalimar Monday alleged that Taxi Drivers Union in New Theed Harwan is displaying a ‘fake’ rate list and charging passengers at will.

They accused Taxi Drivers Union of overcharging of fares from the passengers on different routes in Shalimar, Harwan and Nishat.

The commuters alleged that public transporters plying on link roads interior routes are overcharging fares and violating the fare rates fixed by the government through Transport Commissioner.

They urged authorities to implement proper transport fare rates across Srinagar city so that commuters do not get fleeced any more.

“When I asked about the authenticity of the rate list from a

transporter at ‘Faquiruddin Muhammad Taxi Drivers Union’, he claimed it is a genuine rate list, uploaded by Regional Transport Office on its official website.

RTO Kashmir, Ikramullah Tak said that they haven't issued any rate list yet, though an increase of 20% in transport fare has already been announced. “We will send a team there to ascertain the facts,” he said adding that a revised rate list will soon be made public. (KNT)

## COVID Vaccination Drive Held At High Court Srinagar

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: COVID vaccination drive was Monday conducted at Srinagar wing of J&K High Court under the guidance of Chief Medical Officer Srinagar.

During the drive, a large number of lawyers and officials of the High Court were vaccinated. The judicial fraternity welcomed the move and appreciated the Health department for organising the drive at High Court premises.

The vaccination team was headed by District Immunisation Officer, Dr Night and included several doctors and other paramedical staff.

## On-spot Tests Conducted, Fine Imposed On Covid-19 SOP Violators In Srinagar

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The district administration of Srinagar on Monday conducted on spot testing in every Tehsil of Srinagar including the markets and private schools and also fine was imposed on people found violating covid 19 SOP's.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Srinagar, Syed Hanief Balkhi said that teams visited various places throughout the day including the commercial Hub Lal Chowk.

He said the officers besides visiting the markets in every Tehsil of Srinagar, also visited the private schools where testing was conducted and fine was also imposed from those who were found violating the norms.

Balkhi also added that awareness about wearing face masks were also created among the general public during the day, saying

that the drive would continue.

“All those who undergo COVID testing today were tested negative,” he said, adding that they instead of focusing towards imposing fine are trying to create awareness among the masses about the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), saying that the administration wants everyone to follow the COVID protocol in letter and spirit to prevent the deadly virus from spreading.

“Tomorrow, a meeting of health officials and others, will be chaired by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar wherein enforcement of the protocol will be discussed further. We have been taking early steps to ensure that the previous situation is prevented,” he said.

About schools, he said, all the private as well as the government educational institutions have been following the protocols in letter and spirit—(KNO)

## Free Medical Camp Organised In Srinagar

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Mayor Srinagar Junaid Azim Mattu Monday inaugurated a Free Medical Camp organised by 23 Battalion Central Reserve Police at Shutra Shahi Neelam Chowk under Police Station Shaheed Gunj Srinagar.

The program was inaugurated in presence of Udai Pratap Singh Commandant 23 Battalion.

Free medical checkup and medicines were distributed among locals of the area, a statement said.

“At least 430 locals attended the said apart from free medical consultation/examination, needy patients were also provided with free of cost medicines.”

While hailing the efforts of 23 Battalion Central Reserve Police, Mattu said that it is the great step of reaching out to the General Public by organising medical check-up and medicine distribution camps providing treatment, medicines for common and seasonal diseases etc. (KNS)

# Five-day Online Faculty Development Program Begins At NIT Srinagar

Observer News Service

Srinagar: A five-day long online Faculty Development Programme (FDP) on ‘Outcome Based Education for All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) approved Institutions of UTs of J&K and Ladakh’ began at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Srinagar on Monday.

The inaugural session of online training programme was presided by Director NIT, Dr. Prof. Rakesh Sehgal who was chief guest on the occasion. He said such sessions will be highly useful for faculty members who are participating in the course. There are revolutionary changes taking place in the paradigm of the teaching-learning process across the globe,” the Director said.

Dr. Sehgal said resource persons from reputed academic institutions including IITs, NITs, Jamia Millia University, BIT Sindri, who specialised in the field of data science, will interact with participants during training sessions. Their experience will help them positively,” he said.

Director NIT stressed that it is essential for teaching fraternity to hone the existing skills, develop new skills, and learn nuances of art, philosophy, and science of

teaching. Due to which teaching-learning process will become more enjoyable, creative, and productive, he said.

On the occasion, NIT Registrar, Prof. SK Bukhari said there is a need for FDP's so that our faculty will be more professional. Apart from one life skills session, designed to give exposure to the participants, he said.

The five-day long course is sponsored by AICTE (Faculty Development Cell) and is convened by HoD-Information Technology Dr. Shabir Ahamad Sofi. While Dr. Obbu Chandra Sekhar, Head-Training and Placement, Dr. Harveer Singh Pali, Mechanical Engineering and Dr. Amandeep Singh, E&C Engineering are the course coordinators for the program.

On inaugural day, around 100 participants from J&K, Ladakh, and other parts of India participated in the virtual program.

During the inaugural session, Dr. Arshad Noor Siddiquee Professor Mechanical Engineering, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi delivered a lecture on ‘Role of Outcome-Based Education’ and enlightened participants about program curriculum and teaching-learning processes.

“There is a need to connect three vital elements of education, faculty, student

and the process for evolving the right mix of solutions among a variety of approaches which significantly vary in different ambience,” he said.

Dr. Siddiquee said there is a need to enhance the knowledge about the latest Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and is open for Faculty members of AICTE approved engineering colleges.

On the second day Dr. Chandan Kumar, BIT Sindari, Dhanbad will be delivering a very inspiring talk on ‘Faculty Contributions in Teaching & Learning. On the third and fourth days, Prof. Shreepad Karmalkar, IIT Chennai, and Prof. Edamana Prasad, IIT Chennai will deliver lectures on ‘How Teachers can make a difference in outcome-based education.

On concluding day, Dr. A. S. V Ravi Kanth NIT Kurukshetra will be discussing ‘Documentations and Quarries at the NBA visit’. During the program, all the participants will be benefited in respect of the content, delivery, and presentations of all the topics during the program. The content of the invited talks during the program will cover a wide paradigm of Outcome-based Education. (KNS)

Workshop on theatre as a tool in communication concludes

# Workshop On ‘Theatre As A Communication Tool’ Concludes At KPC

## 40 participants learn techniques for focus, calmness and observation

Observer News Service

Srinagar: A two-day workshop on theatre as a tool in communication organised by the Kashmir Press Club concluded Monday in which around 40 participants, including the journalists took part.

Renowned theatre playwright Junaid Rather, who is also a student of National School of Drama (NSD), made participants learn about the techniques for focus, calmness, observation and memory. The resource person also demonstrated how an artist can make use of five resonators for voice and speech, and techniques used for storytelling and creating still images using body parts.

On the first day of the two-day workshop on the theme Theatre As A Tool In Communication, organised by Kashmir Press Club (KPC), renowned theatre director and playwright Mohammad Amin Bhat shed light on various evolutionary stages of theatre in Jammu and Kashmir. Bhat, who is also President of literary organisation Adbee Markaz Kamraz, in his opening address, said that theatre as an art form and storytelling device is very powerful.

Junaid also practically demonstrated various techniques including the Nav Ras (nine emotions) involved in theatre performance on stage. He explained the various techniques and spoke about the

beauty of this medium.

In the post-lunch session, Rather worked with a closed group of 18 participants, which was further divided into three separate groups, who performed impromptu on stage after conceiving a novel idea.

Gowhar Geelani, senior journalist and executive member KPC, as coordinator formally threw open the workshop while laying emphasis on capacity building of aspiring journalists to write reviews besides developing skill set to critically appreciate and report theatre as a form of storytelling.

“There is a good response to these workshops. We will try to hold more such workshops in days to come. The

effort is to try and build capacity of our young friends in media and students”, Shuja-ul-Haq, President, KPC said.

Ishfaq Tantry, general secretary KPC, informed the participants about organizing two separate workshops on theatre. He also thanked resource persons and hoped that such endeavours would encourage more and more youngsters to develop interest in theatre.

Those present on the occasion included Shuja ul Haq, President KPC; Farooq Javed, Treasurer KPC; senior journalists Riyaz Masroor, senior journalists Bashaarat Masood and Irfan Hakeem, and several aspiring journalists and theatre enthusiasts.

### 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
- BUBHERA: 01932-228243
- PAMPORE: 01933-294132
- PATTAN: 01954-293507
- QAZIGUND: 01951-296153



### HIGHWAY STATUS



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



**HIJRI**  
**CALENDAR**  
**06 SHABAN**  
**1442**

### PRAYERS

FAJR	5: 08
ZUHR	12: 40
ASR	4:58
Magrib	6:48
ISHA	8:08

## This Day In History

- 1919 - 8th Congress of the Russian Communist Party re-establishes a five-member Politburo
- which becomes the center of political power in the Soviet Union. Original members Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Joseph Stalin, Lev Kamenev and Nikolai Krestinsky
- 1920 Perserikatan Communist of India (PKI) political party forms
- 1921 - Germany announces it will be unable to meet its Great War reparation payments
- 1931 -Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev embrace the gallows during the Indian struggle for independence. Their request to be shot by a firing squad is refused.
- 1933 - Enabling Act: German Reichstag grants Adolf Hitler dictatorial powers
- 1936 - Italy, Austria & Hungary sign Pact of Rome
- 1936 - Physician Joseph G. Hamilton injects a leukemia patient with a sodium radioisotope, the
- first intravenous injection of a human with a radioisotope
- 1940 - All-India-Muslim League calls for a Muslim homeland
- 1940 - The Lahore Resolution (Qarardad-e-Pakistan or the then Qarardad-e-Lahore) is put forward at the Annual General Convention of the All India Muslim League.
- 1942 - Japanese forces occupy Andaman Islands in Indian Ocean
- 1942 -US move native-born of Japanese ancestry into detention centers
- 1943 - German counter attack on US lines in Tunisia

## From KO Archives

### Govt nod for Mughal Road

Srinagar- The resident!! of Kashmir have expressed their happiness over the government's go ahead for the repair of the old Mughal Road that once linked Poonch district of Jammu with the Kashmir Valley.

The government has decided to resume work on the aforesaid alternative road project that will link the Kashmir Valley with Jammu -the state's winter capital. The road is called as Mughal road as it was the route toed by the Mughal's to visit India during the 17th and the 18th century. A sarai (resting place) at Shadimarag is still witness to the grandeur of Mughal caravans passing through this road.

By now, the lone. 300-kilometre national highway was the only link between Jammu and Srinagar, which often gets blocked due to frequent snowfall and landslides.

More than 350 people died this year when the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, the main lifeline, was cut off from the rest of the country due to the worst snowfalls in several decades.

The government has now given go ahead to the Mughal Road, which once completed will link Poonch district of Jammu with the Kashmir Valley.

"This road should be constructed. It will greatly help us. It takes us two-three days for us to reach Srinagar. We can reach Srinagar the same day once this road is completed. I am very thankful to the government," said Abdul Rashid at Thanamandi.

Mukhar Ahmed, another local, said, "Once the road is completed, business activity will also pick up. Roadside hotels will come up as more passengers will come here. Moreover, it will take much less time to reach Kashmir Valley."

Work on the road was stopped due to security concerns, as the army feared that the road may enhance the mobility of the militants in the militancy infested Poonch district.

The 89-kilonietre stretch was first taken up for execution in 1979 when there was no sign of militancy in the state. The construction of the road was simultaneously started from two sides- Shopian on the Kashmir side and Bafliaz on the Poonch side. However, the construction was not completed.

Five hundred years ago, Mughal emperor Akbar's legions marched down this road to defeat King Yousuf Shah Chak and integrate Kashmir with the rest of his empire. Now the state is looking again to the 84-km-long Mughal Road for much the same reasons.

The urgency of the Mughal road comes because of the unpredictability of the Jammu-Srinagar highway.

"Unpredictability" is actually a mild term for the vulnerability of the Jammu-Srinagar highway. Scanty rain or heavy snowfall, the sole roadlink between Kashmir and the rest of the country is known to collapse at the least provocation But the death of more than 200 villager in settlement barely two hours away from the snowed-up highway has perhaps driven home the urgency of the situation like little else could have.

Running past fields of maize, pine groves, lush meadows and gushing streams. 84 km of the Mughal Road will reconnect Shopian in Kashmir to Bafliaz in the Poonch district of Jammu, cutting travel time considerably. At present the road, which cuts through the Pir Panjal mountain range, is motorable upto Sarbal. 20 km from the apple-rich belt of Shopian. While the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway is 300 km long, the Mughal Road between Jammu and Srinagar stretches 190 km.

The Mughal Road apart from shortening the distance of journey between Jammu & Srinagar would also create an environment, which would help in, greater Inter Regional Culture and Economic exchanges. The geographical isolation of the specific areas, which discouraged people to people contacts, will end and greater economic activity between the regions would follow

(Kashmir Observer, 23 March, 2005)



## Supreme Leader Ushers in Iranian New Year With Message of Hope

Agenceis

**TEHRAN:** IRAN'S Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei welcomed the Iranian New Year as one of "production, support and removal of barriers" in a live televised speech on Saturday.

"There is good ground for a production leap," Khamenei said, adding the government needed to get rid of any legal obstacles to higher output and growth as the economy suffers under U.S. sanctions.

The army fired gun salutes at Tehran's Azadi Square to usher in Nowruz - New Day in Persian and the most important date in the Iranian calendar, marked at the spring

Trump who reimposed sanctions.

The United States and the other Western powers which originally signed up to the 2015 deal appear to be at an impasse over which side should return to the accord first, making it unlikely U.S. sanctions that have crippled its economy can be quickly removed.

In a separate message, President Hassan Rouhani said he was hopeful the new year will see the end of the sanctions.

"We will defeat the sanctions ... I am more hopeful than eight years ago", Rouhani said, referring to when he was elected for his first term.

Rouhani is barred from standing for a third term and the slate of



equinox - and the beginning of the year 1,400, which is celebrated in a dozen countries stretching from the Caucasus to central Asia.

In Washington, U.S. President Joe Biden issued a Nowruz message calling for peace, prosperity and understanding.

"That is the message and the joy of Nowruz that we are honouring ... This year, perhaps more than ever, that message is badly needed," Biden said in a White House statement.

Biden's administration is exploring ways to restore the 2015 nuclear deal that Iran signed with major world powers, but which was abandoned in 2018 by President Donald

presidential candidates has yet to be finalised.

Iran's headlines say the U.S. sanctions are proof Rouhani's policy of reaching out to the country's enemies was a failure. A delay in progress on returning to the nuclear deal could hurt the chances of a moderate succeeding Rouhani, although the final decision on any diplomatic initiative would be taken by Khamenei rather than the elected president.

Khamenei said on Saturday that the June election will likely bring to office "new managers who most probably will be energetic and strongly motivated".

## Saudi-Led Coalition Intensifies Yemen Air Raids, Hits Grains Port

Agenceis

**T**he Saudi-led military coalition has carried out dozens of air raids against what it said were Houthi military targets in Yemen's north, including the capital Sanaa and the port of Salif on the Red Sea coast.

The coalition, which intervened militarily in 2015 months after the Iran-aligned Houthi group captured large parts of northern Yemen including Sanaa, said it struck a missile and drone assembly plant in the Yemeni capital.

The United Nations said air raids also hit the Houthi-controlled Salif grains port, north of Hodeidah, and two projectiles hit a warehouse and the living quarters of a food production company.

"Local authorities and company management stated that six injured workers were transferred to local medical facilities for treatment," the UN mission in Hodeidah, UNMHA, said in a statement on Monday.

The port of Salif is part of a UN-brokered neutral zone on the Red Sea, according to an agreement signed in 2018 in Stockholm be-

tween Yemen's warring parties.

Nearly 80 percent of Yemen's nearly 30 million people depend on foreign aid as large parts of the country have been devastated by the six years of violence that have resulted in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian disaster.

The Houthi-controlled ministry of commerce and industry said attacks on the port were part of the "economic warfare against the Yemeni people".

The Sanaa-based Al Masirah television channel also reported other air raids in Marib, where heavy fighting has raged over the last few months amid a Houthi offensive to take the gas-producing region.

It added that other attacks hit Hajjah province overnight.

The Saudi-led coalition started bombing campaign in Yemen in March 2015 after the internationally recognised government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi was overthrown by the Houthis in late 2014.

The war, which has been a military deadlock for years, has killed tens of thousands of people and left millions on the brink of famine.



## COVID's Lost Learning: 70 Million Children Face Reading Crisis

Agenceis

**M**ore than half of the world's 10-year-olds could be unable to read and understand a sentence by the end of the year, according to a new analysis by the ONE campaign.

The anti-poverty organisation warned on Monday that 70 million children could be affected in 2021, according to calculations based on figures released by the World Bank, UNESCO and UN population data.

According to the report, the pandemic contributed 17 percent to the total number of children falling victim to a global learning crisis that could hamper the potential of a generation.

Schools around the world have been closed for extended periods during the past year, as governments imposed restrictions on populations in an attempt to contain the spread of the coronavirus. According to UNESCO, the education of 1.7 billion children in 188 countries was heavily disrupted in 2020.

The closures have forced classes online, but the rise of remote learning has been uneven across the globe, with ac-

cess to technology and a lack of infrastructure hindering some students' ability to take part. The UN estimated that nearly 500 million children, especially those in poorer countries or rural areas, have been excluded from remote education.

According to the ONE campaign analysis, the learning crisis is expected to hit Africa and Asia particularly hard, with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for 40 percent of children at risk.

Urgent action needed

By 2030, the number of children lacking basic literacy by the time they turn 10 could rise to 750 million, or approximately one in 10 people globally, the group warned.

David McNair, executive director for global policy at The ONE Campaign, told Al Jazeera that children's ability to understand a sentence by the age of 10 was an important milestone.

"[This] kicks off a whole lifetime of self-directed learning and innovation and has implications for their ability to get an education, innovate, get a job, earn and so on," he said.

"Unless we take urgent action, the legacy of the pandemic could be millions more children

denied the chance to understand words on a page," he said.

As a response to this crisis and before the G7 Sherpa meeting, the organisation has urged governments to commit at least \$5bn to fund the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), arguing that it will enable 175 million girls and boys to learn between 2021-2025.

It has also called on governments to support developing countries' finances with a stimulus package and an extension of repayment deadlines, so countries can use those resources to invest in schools and education.

"I believe this is the absolutely right thing to do," McNair said. "It's unfair that if you are born in a particular part of the world, your options to fulfil your potential are curtailed by just not getting the right education at the start of life."

"If you don't invest in these problems early then they can come back to be more costly and problematic. If we had, before this pandemic, fully implemented the protocols on pandemic preparedness, if we had invested more in health systems across the world, then we wouldn't be in this situation," he added.

## Asia Accelerates AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine Rollouts, Even As Trust Plunges In Europe

Agenceis

**CANBERRA:** Many Asian countries are accelerating the rollout of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine after confidence in its safety was hit, following reports that the shot was linked to rare blood clots in Europe earlier this month.

After briefly halting its use, many European countries have resumed using the shot in their inoculation programmes after a regional regulator said it was safe, while several country leaders are also taking the vaccine to boost confidence. The AstraZeneca shot was among the first and cheapest of the COVID-19 vaccines to be developed and launched at volume and is set to be the mainstay of vaccination programmes in much of the developing world.

But its brief suspension raised concerns that a slowdown in vaccination rollouts could hurt the global fight against the pandemic, as coronavirus cases surge in some countries, overwhelming healthcare systems and hurting economies.

"I have just finished getting the (AstraZeneca) injection, there is no pain at the injection site, and there is no soreness of the body," Taiwan Premier Su Tseng-chang told reporters as the island launched its inoculation campaign on Monday.

Thailand's prime minister also became the first person in the country to be inoculated with the AstraZeneca vaccine after its rollout was temporarily put on hold over safety concerns, while Indonesia began using it on Monday after suspending it last week. But Indonesia's Food and Drug agency has warned against its use on people with blood clotting disorders.

South Korean President Moon

Jae-in, 68, plans to get the shot on Tuesday after the government said it could be used on older people.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson received his first dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine on Friday, saying he "did not feel a thing." The European Medicines Agency regulator said on Thursday the vaccine is effective and not linked with a rise in the overall risk of blood clots.

Yet a survey released on Monday showed that people in seven European countries were more likely to see the vaccine as unsafe than as safe.

Many Asian countries heavily rely on the AstraZeneca vaccine to end the pandemic, as the shot is being used in inoculation programmes in Australia, South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and India.

Some countries could face supply issues.

## In Kabul, Pentagon Chief Speaks Of 'Responsible End' To War

Press Trust of India

**U**S Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, on his first visit to Afghanistan as Pentagon chief, said Sunday that the Biden administration wants to see a responsible end to America's longest war, but the level of violence must decrease for fruitful diplomacy to have a chance.

With questions swirling about how long US troops will remain in the country, Austin said that in terms of an end date or setting a specific date for withdrawal, that's the domain of my boss.

He said his stop in Kabul, the capital, where he met with military commanders and senior Afghan government officials, including President Ashraf Ghani, was intended to let him listen and learn and inform my participation in reviewing the future of the American force.

President Joe Biden said last week in an ABC News interview that it will be tough for the US to meet a May 1 deadline to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. But Biden said that if the deadline, which is laid out in an agreement between the

sustain Afghanistan's National Security Forces. The Taliban warned America against defying the May 1 deadline, at a news conference in Moscow, the day after meeting with senior Afghan government negotiators and international observers to try to jumpstart a stalled peace process to end Afghanistan's decades of war.

Washington has given both the Taliban and the Afghan government an eight-page peace proposal, which both sides are reviewing. It calls for an interim peace government that would shepherd Afghanistan toward constitutional reform and elections.

Ghani has resisted an interim administration causing his critics to accuse him of clinging to power. He says elections alone would be acceptable to bring a change of government.

Both the US and Kabul have called for a reduction in violence leading to a cease-fire. The Taliban say a cease-fire would be part of the peace negotiations. The insurgent movement has not attacked US or NATO troops since signing the agreement.



Trump administration and the Taliban, is extended, it wouldn't be by a lot longer. Austin, who arrived after a visit to India, said: There's always going to be concerns about things one way or the other, but I think there's a lot of energy focused on, you know, doing what's necessary to bring about a responsible end, a negotiated settlement to the war.

The Taliban on Friday warned of consequences if the United States doesn't meet the deadline. Suhail Shaheen, a member of the Taliban negotiation team, told reporters that if American troops were to stay beyond May 1, it will be a kind of violation of the agreement. That violation would not be from our side... Their violation will have a reaction.

A statement released by the presidential palace on the Ghani-Austin meeting said both sides condemned the increase in violence in Afghanistan. There was no mention of the May 1 deadline. Washington is reviewing the agreement the Trump administration signed with the Taliban last year and has been stepping up pressure on both sides in the protracted conflict to find a swift route to a peace agreement.

"It is obvious that the level of violence remains pretty high in the country," Austin said. "We'd really like to see that violence come down and I think if it does come down, it can begin to set the conditions for, you know, some really fruitful diplomatic work."

In a sharply worded letter to Ghani earlier this month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said it was urgent to make peace in Afghanistan and that all options remained on the table. He also warned that it was likely the Taliban would make swift territorial gains if US and NATO troops withdrew.

The US spends \$4 billion a year to

But US military commanders and NATO leaders have argued that the Taliban have not lived up to their part of the peace agreement, which includes a reduction in violence and a separation from al-Qaida and other terrorist groups.

Austin said he was confident in the ability of Gen. Austin Miller, the commander of US forces in Afghanistan, to accomplish his mission with the resources he has and to protect American troops.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said last month that the alliance will only leave when the time is right and when conditions have been met.

The main issue is that Taliban has to reduce violence, Taliban has to negotiate in good faith and Taliban has to stop supporting international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda, he said.

Austin has said little on the record about the stalemate. After a virtual meeting of NATO defence ministers, Austin told reporters that our presence in Afghanistan is conditions based, and Taliban has to meet their commitments.

Austin's stop in Afghanistan was his first return to a US war zone in the Middle East since taking the Pentagon post. But he spent a great deal of time in the region during his service as an Army commander.

Austin, a retired four-star general, served in Afghanistan as commander of the 10th Mountain Division. From 2013-2016 he was the head of US Central Command, which oversees the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan visit comes at the end of Austin's his first overseas trip as secretary. After a stop in Hawaii, he went to Japan and South Korea, where he and his team met with their defence and foreign counterparts.

### NEWS MAKERS

## COVID-19 Takes Spring Out Of Japan's 'Hanami' Season

**TOKYO:** Cherry blossom viewing, called "hanami" in the Japanese language, is one of the most iconic and beloved traditions of the East Asian nation, but this year the continuing COVID-19 pandemic is putting a damper on this year's festivities.

The custom is believed to have taken root in Japan about 1,200 years ago, and today viewing the sakura, or cherry blossoms, is one of the most eagerly awaited periods of the year.

News reports about when and where the pale pink flowers will emerge from the branches are zealously followed by many Japanese - peak hanami is forecast to take place in Tokyo on March 22 this year - and numerous local artistic motifs are built around the arrival of spring and what is seen as a joyous season.

While hanami is certainly an effective symbol of Japanese cultural refinement, it is also a time when families and friends gather outside to enjoy themselves amid the blossoms.

In major parks in Tokyo and other urban areas, hanami zones are often overrun with visitors during the high season. Picnic blankets cover the grass, and loud drunken



conversations fill the air among the massed crowds. Nearby rubbish bins overflow with the unsightly leftover packaging of boxed lunches, plastic cups, and much more.

Given the continuing outbreak of the coronavirus, the authorities, worried about the potential risk for further spread, have tried to establish firm limits on the celebrations this year.

Earlier this month, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike declared, "I'm very sorry about this year's hanami, but I'd like to ask people to go without it."

The main thrust of the governor's policy is to implement a ban on people eating and drinking in public parks during the hanami season although there is some variation in how the policy is being enforced.

Tokyo's Yoyogi Park has blocked off all public access for nearly a month to its sakura garden and its central square area while Ueno Park has established barriers creating one-way lanes for pedestrians. Visitors are welcome to enjoy hanami, but only if they keep walking.

Similarly, the more suburban Inokashira Park has strung up bright orange barriers to keep people away from the benches and the most scenic spots along its lake, lest the ocular delights tempt rebellious souls to linger too long.

Noriko Naito, a general manager and public relations officer for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, told Al Jazeera English that this year "many more people will be enjoying hanami at their homes by buying cherry blossom bonsai," referring to the traditional potted, miniaturised trees common in Japan.

She also said that people do not really need to go to the parks to see the blossoms since they are all over Japan.

"Even at the entrance of my apartment there is a very large cherry blossom tree," she observes.

Much of the general public seems ready to comply. An opinion poll conducted by the firm, Kakuyasu, and published last week, found that while about 72 percent of the respondents say they usually or always enjoy hanami in the spring season, this year only 32 percent are planning to stick with their custom.

## Thirty Years On, Women-Only Village Inspires Land Equality In Rural Kenya

**UMOJA:** When Jane Nolimongen's husband banished her from their family home in northern Kenya after discovering she had been raped by a British soldier, she went somewhere she knew she would be safe: a village entirely run by women, where men are not allowed.

For the past 30 years, Nolimongen has lived in Umoja village in Samburu County, supporting her eight children and working land she could soon own, in defiance of a culture in which women are considered the property of their fathers and husbands.

"The village has been a source of support for me, because we have worked together to make progress in our lives and teach each other the importance of women's rights," said Nolimongen, 52, as she lit a fire to make some tea.

"Among the Samburu, we, as women, are just like rubbish to our husbands," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Nolimongen was among the first residents of Umoja, which was founded in 1990 as a refuge for Samburu women who have suffered sexual assault and been cast out and stripped of any claims to their property or children, as well as those fleeing child marriage or female genital mutilation (FGM).

Today, the women are on the brink of being granted the title deed to a tract of grazing land by the county government - a right they never would have had outside the village - and are motivating nearby communities to also start giving land rights to women.

"In (Samburu) community, that was not possible for a woman 30 years ago. She would not be allowed to own land and other property because the husband would not allow her," Nolimongen said.

Umoja was created by Rebecca Lolosoli, who was thrown out of her community and beaten by a group of men for speaking out

against the practice of FGM.

While recovering in hospital, she came up with the idea to start a village where men were banned.

Umoja, which means 'unity' in Swahili, started with 15 women - at its peak, the population grew to about 50 families, explained Nolimongen.

Now there are a total of 37 women and their children living in the village, which is made up of homes the women have constructed for each other and a school, all surrounded by a fence of thorny branches.

The women make money selling honey and handmade beads to tourists, although travel restrictions to curb the coronavirus pandemic mean they currently have no income, Nolimongen noted.

"After this disease came, (tourists) no longer come, and we have to think of other ways to survive," she said. "If someone has savings, that is what they use now until we can sell the beads again."



## Dilapidated Khrew-Balhama Road Irks Residents, Commuters

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** The dilapidated condition of Khrew-Balhama road in South Kashmir's Pulwama district is irking the residents and commuters while the local administration has failed to repair the road for the last two years.

"Unfortunately all roads leading to our area are in worst condition despite being the largest contributor to public exchequer due to the Cement factories operating in the area," said Mohammad Akram Bhat Chairman Auqaf Islamia Khrew.

The locals said the condition of road has deteriorated further after the snowfall this winter. They said that due to dilapidated condition of the road they face several problems.

"It is damaged and the dust that emanates from it has made our life difficult," said Shamim Ahmad Bhat, a resident. He said that the children who are now going to schools are also facing a tough time as they pass through the road.

"The things become difficult in case of any medical emergency, particularly, when pregnant women are taken to the hospital; it is a nightmare as it takes half an

hour to pass the damaged patch of the road," the residents said.

"The road is mostly damaged in Zaffran colony area which is full of potholes" they added.

The road connecting Khrew main town is just 8 kilometers away from City centre Srinagar and is considered as the largest Cement Producing area of J&K as the area is rich in Limestone reserves, however, the locals said that it appears that they are living in some far off area that is inaccessible to the administration.

"It is a one-kilometre patch of the road which is in bad shape and needs immediate attention of the concerned department so that the problems faced by the locals due to its dilapidated condition are solved," the residents said.

The inhabitants said that they have been appealing the R&B Department for last one year to carry out the necessary repairs of the road but they have been turning a blind eye towards the issue. They appealed the district administration and senior officials of the R&B Department to address the issue without any delay.

The concerned official of the R&B Department could not be contacted despite repeated attempts. (CNS)

## Police Probing 'Attack' On Gujar Family In Samba

Press Trust of India

**JAMMU:** Jammu and Kashmir Police have started investigation into an alleged attack on a family, belonging to the minority Gujar community, in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district, officials said on Monday.

A man and his family members were allegedly attacked by some unidentified people after he resisted their attempt to molest his young daughter in a village, resulting in injuries to him, the officials said.

He was shifted to the Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital Jammu for treatment. The officials said police have started investigations to bring the culprits to book.

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti highlighted the incident and requested immediate intervention of the Inspector General of Police, Jammu zone, Mukesh Singh.

"A Gujar family was brutally attacked in Samba yesterday. The culprits tried to abduct their daughter,

the family resisted and were beaten up. The father has been admitted to GMC. The goons later set their sheds ablaze. Request @mukesh\_ips-jk ji to look into this immediately," the former chief minister said in a late Saturday tweet.

Responding to the request, the IGP said police have already taken cognizance of the incident and an FIR under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) including 307 (attempt to murder), 341 (wrongful restraint), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) was registered at Samba police station.

However, he said no sheds were burnt and the deputy superintendent of police, headquarters, reached the GMC to record the statement of the injured. "Cognizance taken. FIR no.90/2021 u/s 307/341/323/354 IPC lodged at p/s Samba. Injured shifted to hospital. No sheds were burnt. DSP hqr reached GMC to record the statement of injured," the IGP said in his tweet.

## ACB Registers Disproportionate Assets Case Against Chief Engineer PDD

Observer News Service

**JAMMU:** The Anti-Corruption Bureau has registered a disproportionate assets case against Chief Engineer (Projects), PDD (JPDC), Manhar Gupta, son of Atma Ram Vaid, a resident of Sainik Colony, Jammu.

A spokesperson of the agency, in a statement said, the instant case has been registered on the outcome of a Preliminary Enquiry conducted to look into allegations that Manhar Gupta had amassed huge assets disproportionate to his known sources of income.

He said during the course of Preliminary Enquiry, Manhar Gupta was found to have acquired numerous immovable as well as movable assets in his name as well in the name of his family members. Besides this, huge deposits in bank accounts, investment in Insurance Companies, gold/silver in bank locker belonging to him and his family members were also discovered. He has been found to have incurred huge expenditure on education of daughter.

"The assets acquired as well as possessed and expenditure incurred by Manhar Gupta and his family were found disproportionate to his known source of income which constitute offences punishable u/s 5 (1) (e) r/w section 5 (2) of JK PC Act Svt. 2006. Accordingly, case FIR No. 09/2021 was registered in PS ACB Jammu."

He said the investigation of the case is going on.

## Kupwara Admin For Strict Enforcement Of Covid-19 SOP's

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** The Jammu and Kashmir Government on Monday directed all Tehsildars and Block Development Officers (BDOs) to ensure usage of face masks in areas of their jurisdiction and penalty of Rs 500 for first offence and Rs 1000 for repeat offence and credit the same to District Red Cross Society under proper receipt.

In the said order the government has enjoined upon all the Additional Deputy Commissioners (ADCs) and Sub Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) to monitor the entire exercise through field inspections on a routine basis and upload photographs on the official WhatsApp group of district administration. (KNS)

## LG Seeks Participation Of People In Rainwater Harvesting And Water Conservation



Observer News Service

**JAMMU:** With an aim of taking water conservation to grass-roots level through people's participation across the country, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi Monday launched 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain' Campaign on the occasion of 'World Water Day'.

Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha presided over the UT level event held at Convention Centre, Jammu to mark the occasion. He called for active participation of elected representatives and people of J&K in rainwater harvesting & water conservation activities.

In order to augment water supply across the UT, the Lt Governor also e-inaugurated and laid e-foundations for various Water Supply Schemes, Irrigation Schemes and Projects worth Rs 117.49 crores.

Speaking on the occasion, the Lt Governor underscored the significance of Jal Shakti Abhiyan campaign for water conservation and administered a pledge for judicious use of water, saving water bodies and harvesting rain water.

Terming Jan Bhagidari as a key component of the campaign, the Lt Governor called upon public rep-

resentatives and the people of J&K to come forward, recognise their responsibilities to complement government's efforts, and actively participate in rainwater harvesting and other water conservation activities using new techniques as well as traditional methods to revive water bodies.

"Our existence and prosperity is connected to water which is a great gift of nature. Our ancestors have done significant work in the past to harvest rain water and store it. Now, it is the responsibility of the new generation to work for the revival of traditional methods of rain water harvesting," the Lt Governor maintained.

He said there is a need to implement interventions for water conservation like mapping of water resources, preparing water conservation plans through Gram Sabhas, cleaning traditional water bodies, removing encroachments and obstructions in water channels to achieve the desired results on the ground, he added.

He also suggested for organising competitions on Rainwater Harvesting to acknowledge the efforts put in at Panchayat and Block level for promoting rainwater harvesting.

Emphasising on preparing integrated plan for water stressed areas and to tackle challenges of the climate change, the Lt Governor asked for establishing Rain centres for technological guidance on rain water harvesting and Jal Samitis in every Panchayat to support rain water harvesting initiatives.

Laying special emphasis on preserving water bodies, the Lt Governor suggested for developing Mobile Application for monitoring of water bodies health and seeking feedback from the public so that administration and people can work together to save and revive the water bodies and wet lands, rejuvenation of small rivers, and conservation of water resources, with maximum involvement of youth.

The Lt Governor stressed on focusing rainwater collection, storage, afforestation, check dams, raising awareness on the importance of freshwater availability, conservation of water resources and ill-effects of degraded and depleting water resources.

The Lt Governor asked the concerned departments to maintain close synergy and undertake timely initiatives for effective execution of water conservation activities.

## In A First, Four Kishtwar Villages To Get Regular Power Supply

Observer News Service

**JAMMU:** The Power Development Department Monday connected four habitations Pethgam, Bungam, Chinab Dindoo and Watsar of the mountainous sub division Chatroo of Kishtwar district to the Electricity Grid. The Deputy Commissioner Kishtwar, Ashok Sharma formally declared the villages 100 percent electrified by switching on

the light in the presence of local residents. Although these habitations were getting limited power from DG sets provided by the department, yet their connectivity to the grid would mean that these habitations would see power in its truest sense for the first time since independence.

All of these villages are located in a difficult terrain and receive heavy snowfall during winter mak-

ing them practically inaccessible and unapproachable, a government statements aid.

To complete the electrification project of all four habitations, the power department had to create new power infrastructure including a distribution transformer of 25 KVA capacity in each habitation and about 13.5 km HT line and 3.3 km LT line costing nearly Rs 60.32 lakh, the statement said.

## Workshop On Forest Rights Act Organised In Budgam

Observer News Service

**BUDGAM:** District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Budgam in collaboration with Jammu & Kashmir RTI Movement Monday organised a workshop cum legal awareness camp on Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA) at Goggee Pathri Nilnag.

A statement said that the aim of the programme was to create awareness about this law among scheduled tribe (ST) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD) communities who under FRA are now supposed to get various entitlements. The lawyers and para legal volunteers of DLSA Budgam and activists of RTI Movement threw light on various aspects of FRA.

Chairman RTI Movement Dr

Raja Muzaffar Bhat said that FRA was not a land distribution law but legislation to rectify the historical mistakes committed by Government in past as ST's and OTFD were denied various rights. He said that nobody would get individual forest rights if he or she is not dependent on the land which is claimed to be under their possession. He also told the gathering that new Kothas can't be constructed under the garb of FRA only those damaged will be allowed to be repaired.

Advocate Feroz Khan from District Court Budgam spoke in detail about the Juvenile Justice Act. He urged locals to utilise services available under the Legal Services Authority Act like free legal aid.

## Fresh Snowfall Shuts Bandipora-Gurez, Kupwara-Karnah Roads

Agenceis

**BANDIPORA:** After continuous rainfall in plains and fresh snowfall in upper reaches, the Bandipora-Gurez road has been closed for vehicular movement on Monday.

A traffic department official said that Kupwara-Karnah road has also been closed for traffic after fresh snowfall.

He said that the snowfall start-

ed Sunday evening as predicted by the weatherman and it has enveloped the Gurez valley.

A light snowfall was also witnessed in other hilly areas of Bandipora district.

Additional Magistrate Gurez confirmed that the Bandipora-Gurez road has been closed due to snowfall as Gurez Valley plains have received at least three inches of snowfall. (CNS)

## Night Flights Will Increase Tourist Footprints In J&K: Hafeez



Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Secretary Tourism Department Jammu and Kashmir Sarma Hafeez Monday said administration is keen to involve local communities, creating sustainable tourism and addressing the needs of tourists for revival of tourism.

Speaking to a local news gathering agency Kashmir News Service, regarding the expectations and preparation for the tourism season, Secretary Tourism said, "We have joined hands with travel agents and others associated with the trade to invite more and more people to Jammu and Kashmir. We have got a good response and people want to come here and experience the Kashmiri hospitality which is known world over."

He said that Covid19 has impacted travel of millions of Indians who would visit different tourist destinations and it is opportunity for J&K tourism to invite and aware people about our own beautiful destinations.

"We did lot of events, festivals in Gulmarg which is one of the best destinations in the world and obviously best in India. We invited people from all over India to come there.

Recently we started Badamwari festival and now we are going to organise Tulip festival."

"These tulips are attractive.

Our tulips are more beautiful than Holland tulip gardens. We along with Travel associations did lot of road shows, invited people, launched advertising campaigns, social media promotional campaigns. We are hopeful to witness great footfall of tourists."

He also said that night flights, introducing direct flights from different states will help in bringing more and more tourists in Jammu and Kashmir.

On being asked whether sky-rocketing airfare is playing a spoilsport, he said, "There are some complaints about it. We constantly talk to civil aviation ministry about it particularly when our road gets closed. I guess the problem has decreased now. I am sure more and more flights are coming and the issue will get resolved. We are taking to civil aviation ministry to resolve this issue on regular basis."

On being asked how Tourism Department will manage the flow of tourists when Covid19 cases are again increasing, he said, "Capacity Building of service providers has been done who are to be in contact with tourists. We gave them training in Covid protocol. Tourists are also requested to follow protocol and moreover testing is also done to all the people entering J&K." (KNS)

## Himalayan Brown Bears Kill 16 Pashmina Goats

Observer News Service

**DRASS:** Himalayan Brown bears killed 16 Pashmina goats in Drass Sub-Division of Kargil.

Officials said that Himalayan Brown bears after hibernation strayed into the Troungjen Drass village from a nearby forest and entered the livestock shed of Mehrajuddin during the intervening night of March 21-22.

"We were scared at the presence of three bears. Efforts to chase them away through fire crackers didn't materialise. They killed 16 pashmina goats and dragged them away," Mehrajuddin said, adding that massive snowfall was going on when the incident occurred.

He said there was blood everywhere and his family was frightened. "We were so scared that we thought brown bears might attack our children," he said.

He said authorities instead of consoling them are demanding bodies of dead goats. "Where from we will get the bodies?" he questioned and thanked Wild Life Department for sending a team and expressing grief over the huge loss of livestock which is the only means of sustenance for them.

The official said that wildlife warden has been directed to assess the livestock loss for giving timely compensation and a corral pen to the family for protecting the remaining livestock. (KNT)

## COVID-19 Rules Violation: Over 9000 People Fined In Jammu

Press Trust of India

**JAMMU:** Over 9000 people have been fined so far in Jammu district for violating COVID-19 guidelines by not wearing masks and Rs 45 lakh recovered from them, officials said on Monday.

Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday recorded 158 fresh coronavirus cases, including 34 travellers, taking the infection tally to 1,28,547.

Officials said, "During the drive against violators of COVID-19 guidelines, more than nine thousand persons have been fined for not wearing face masks during the year 2020-21".

A total fine imposed on them amounted to Rs 45 lakh, they said.

Those found violating the COVID-19 guidelines in the district will be strictly dealt with under the law, police said.

## NC Will Continue Its Fight For Restoration Of People's Rights: Omar

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** National Conference (NC) Vice President Omar Abdullah Monday welcomed the restoration of the ceasefire pact on LoC, IB between India and Pakistan. Addressing the Provincial review meeting of the Party's Parent, YNC, Women's Wing, and segment in charges at party headquarters, he said the measures will prove more beneficial to the people of Jammu and Kashmir than to anybody else.

He said the measure should act as a stepping stone for greater interaction between the two neighboring countries for the resolution of all impending issues between them.

Omar said the idea of the struggle for restoration of rights of the people

of Jammu and Kashmir will continue to guide the party's steps in the future as well. "We will fight politically, legally and most importantly peacefully keeping up with the founding principles of our party, which throughout the breadth of its being has not let violence, prejudice overwhelm it," he said.

He said enemies of Jammu and Kashmir didn't leave any chance to weaken the National Conference since it has been guarding the culture, identity and distinctive political character of Jammu and Kashmir zealously. "Party is determined to fight for the rights of people of Jammu and Kashmir and will continue to strive for strengthening bonds of brotherhood among people and bringing about overall development in the region," he added.

## J&K Bank Observes World Plantation Day, Organises Reunion Of Retired Executives

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Jammu and Kashmir Bank Monday observed 'World Plantation Day' with its Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) R K Chhibber planting a sapling at Bank's Corporate Headquarters in Srinagar in presence of Executive Presidents, Presidents and Vice Presidents besides retired management executives of the bank, who were also invited as guests-of-honour on the occasion.

Two of the senior most retired management executives Rouf Fazili and Peerzada Lateef Ahmad, who had retired as Executive Director and Chief General Manager of the bank respectively, also planted saplings in the bank's well-maintained park.

Speaking on the occasion, the CMD R K Chhibber said, "Being conscious of the importance of green and clean environment is significant part of our institutional legacy. Plant-



ing a sapling today symbolises our consciousness about ecology while primarily contributing towards economic well-being of the people."

"It was precisely due to this social sensitivity towards ecology and environment that we undertook the huge responsibility of adopting, developing and maintaining some of the most important and historical public parks of the region during the last two decades. The results of such un-

dertaking are there for everybody to see in the form of Almond Alcove (Badamwari) in Kashmir or Rajinder Park in Jammu, besides other parks", he added.

Commenting on the reunion with some of his former colleagues, he asserted, "As almond blossom heralds the arrival of spring and fills our hearts with joy and colour so does the get-together like this one wherein, after quite long time, we meet our

friends and colleagues with whom we have spent precious time of our lives. The feeling of togetherness becomes more meaningful when we see the institution - we all have nurtured sincerely for decades together - moving ahead confidently and successfully."

The former officers of the bank expressed their gratitude to the CMD and management for the invitation which, according to them, gave them an opportunity to refresh their past and relive those golden moments of their association with this premier financial institution. "We have spent pristine time of our lives working hard for J&K Bank during our service and it is very heartening to see its march towards newer heights. We might have retired from active service of the bank but our hearts and prayers are very much with the bank, its management, its growth and prosperity", they said.



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## K O V I E W

## Fresh Covid spike

**L**ike the rest of the country, Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed the fresh surge in coronavirus cases. The total tally has now gone past 1.28 lakh infections. Active Covid-19 cases in the union territory has already crossed 1,000 again. The death toll has reached 1,977. Srinagar continues to lead with upwards of 50 cases daily.

The renewed spike has come after the numbers had drastically declined by the end of last year. Coupled with increase in number of recoveries, the active cases had plunged below 1000 mark by January 28.

The government is trying to combat the fresh spread by vaccinating more and more people. So far nearly 4.40 lakh people have been administered jabs. This includes 77 per cent of the healthcare workers, 78 per cent of the frontline workers and 12.28 per cent of the elderly population and patients with comorbidities. The effort is to extend the administration of the vaccine to the remaining healthcare and frontline workers. And to this end, the number of COVID Vaccination Centres (CVCs) has also been gradually increased to 3,034, including 34 private facilities. The government is developing vaccination capacity of three lakh doses per day, with the jabs being administered for free at all government CVCs and against the payment of Rs 250 per dose at private centres.

According to AIIMS director Randeep Guleria the vaccine should be able to give protection from the infection for eight to ten months. Guleria also said that no major side effects of the vaccine have been recorded so far.

But the problem is also that the supply of vaccines is still very limited and so the government needs to prioritise. The groups most at risk like healthcare and frontline workers, and also elderly people with comorbidities have the first right on vaccines. The highest mortality was seen among people with comorbidities and older age groups.

As for the rest, it will take time to extend the vaccine coverage. So, people need to exercise caution and observe Standard Operating Procedure. According to experts, the biggest reason for the surge in cases is that people feel the pandemic is over and they are not following COVID-appropriate behaviour. People have been asked to put off non-essential travel for some more time. Also, the government has to get strict with the people who don't wear masks. A better enforcement of the SOP and the cooperation by the people shall go a long way to curb the spread of fresh infection. And with vaccination also available now, the situation can be brought under control sooner.

## O T H E R O P I N O N

## Deepening ties

**T**he visit of the US Defence Secretary, General Lloyd Austin, to Delhi so early in the tenure of the Biden Administration, and the NDA government's enthusiastic reception, underline the urgency in both capitals to elevate the bilateral defence partnership. Driven by shared threats from a rising China and united by a new geopolitical perspective on the Indo-Pacific, Delhi and Washington appear set to expand the scale and scope of the security partnership. Engagement between the Indian and American military establishments began in the early 1990s, soon after the Cold War came to an end. Security relations got their first political boost in Washington under President George W Bush (2001-09). Since he came to power in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shed many of Raisina Hill's entrenched ideological reservations on defence cooperation with the US. As China's aggressive tactics in the Great Himalayas and the Western Pacific began to strain Beijing's ties with both Delhi and Washington, it was inevitable that India and America would tighten their defence embrace.

The powerful dynamic in favour of the India-US defence partnership faces some political headwinds. There is the looming prospect of legally mandated US sanctions on India triggered by the purchase of the S-400 advanced air-defence missiles from Russia. Austin said he had not talked about sanctions, since India is yet to acquire the missiles. Delhi will hope that President Joe Biden will waive the sanctions when Delhi begins to receive the S-400 system. But the anti-Russia mood is hardening in Washington and has the potential to harm US-India defence relations. In response to a question on human rights, Austin told the press that he discussed the subject in his talks with the Indian ministers. South Block has clarified that the issue came up only as an affirmation of shared democratic values. What matters, though, is not the specific remarks Austin may have made, but the current negative narrative in Washington about Indian democracy taking an illiberal turn. It may not be a problem today, but could become one later

Indian Express

India's Importance  
in Indo-Pacific

The importance attached by the US to the Indo-Pacific, places India at an advantageous position, both in defence and economic sectors

Asad Mirza

**W**hile the world was combating the Covid pandemic, the international leaders were also busy in realigning the world as per their country's priorities and goals. One region, which has emerged on the top of this new realignment, is the region of the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific comprises the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Ocean, and the seas connecting the two oceans around parts of Indonesia. The term "Indo-Pacific" gained usage in geopolitical discourse after 2011. It is also described as a substitute for "Quad" or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, an informal grouping of like-minded democracies in the region, comprising Australia, Japan, India, and the United States.

Historically, "Indo-Pacific" was first used by the German geo-politician Karl Haushofer in the 1920s in his academic work "Indopazifischen Raum". But its security aspects emerged in the early 2000s, when the analysts began to observe the 'security' linkage between the two Oceans. In this context, the term was first used in an article authored by Gurpreet Khurana, carried in the January 2007 issue of the Strategic Analysis journal titled "Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation". The author refers to the 'Indo-Pacific' as the maritime space stretching from the littorals of East Africa and West Asia, across the Indian Ocean and western Pacific Ocean, to the littorals of East Asia.

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expanded on the spirit of the term in his speech to the Indian Parliament in August 2007 when he talked about the "Confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans" as "the dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity" in the "broader Asia".

## American push for the Quad

Quad was first floated in 2004 to manage disaster relief after the Tsunami. Later, Dick Cheney tried to redefine it as a military club, to counter Chinese influence, but was abandoned in 2010 as India and Australia didn't want to ruffle the Chinese feathers. The Trump administration revived the regional grouping in 2017, ostensibly to counter China in the region, particularly in the South China Sea, where the Chinese have continually challenged the Japanese and Americans.

US under Trump wanted to shape the Quad into an Asian NATO, a point that has been raised and challenged by the Chinese again and again, as they see it as a potential defence deterrent in the region. The importance being attached to this by the original members, and the recent desire expressed by the British and French to join also underlines both its economic and defence utility. Though the Biden administration wants to position it as an American outreach on trade, immigration, public health, climate change, yet its security aspect can't be overlooked.

To give a boost to the alliance, the leaders of

**It seems that the US wants to promote bilateral ties by bolstering India at the Quad, and also focussing on more areas of cooperation, which were ignored during the Trump regime. The recent visit of the US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin to India demonstrates both these aspects**

the Quad met on March 12, 2021 through a virtual summit. The summit and the joint statement issued highlights the evolution of the grouping and its agenda made clearer and resolve by the member states to sustain the momentum.

At a White House press conference following the summit, the U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan noted that each of the four leaders present had described the meeting as "historic."

Quad talks were elevated to the ministerial level in 2019 with foreign ministers from all four countries holding a meeting on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly session in New York in September that year. Since then, Quad foreign ministers have met twice: in-person in Tokyo in October last year, and virtually last month.

President Biden has zealously endorsed the "free and open Indo-Pacific" jargon favoured by his predecessor, contrary to apprehensions that he would seek to adopt a softer line toward China and that the Indo-Pacific paradigm would not be so significant for the new administration.

However, the reality is that the Quad, in essential sense, is not a formal alliance, yet. The recent summit concentrated primarily on urgent global catastrophes comprising coronavirus and the climate emergency and tried not to ruffle feathers or cause undue apprehensions in the regional countries, particularly ASEAN member states. A joint statement after the assembly noted that the four nations would collaborate to increase Covid vaccine production, in which India would be helped financially by other members to boost its vaccine production base. But differences remained among the member states on how to handle China.

## India's future in the Quad

The moot question is whether Quad in essen-

tial sense would be transformed into a real regional alliance or will it continue to serve some countries only, to use it as and when required as per their necessity.

Though one country, which seems poised to gain most out of Quad is India. Due to its vast market potential and also as a counter to China in the region, most western powers attach great importance to it in the region. Indian leaders also realise this besides the fact that to transform into a regional power it has to pursue a geopolitical strategy, which maximises its economic interests and security.

The Indian Prime Minister has spelled out the Indian vision of Indo-Pacific as an enabler for "a common pursuit of progress and prosperity... not directed against any country... (albeit based on) our principled commitment to rule of law."

India's role at the Quad seems central to the Biden administration's plans for the region and the quest to counter China. US initiatives so far suggest the Biden administration is serious about its stated intention to counter China through alliances, based on shared values, and that it sees the Quad and India as central to that. At the same time, the US seems ready to moderate India's feeling of insecurity in regard to be part of a binding alliance along with its ambition to emerge as a dominant regional player, while downplaying China.

It seems that the US wants to promote bilateral ties by bolstering India at the Quad, and also focussing on more areas of cooperation, which were ignored during the Trump regime. The recent visit of the US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin to India demonstrates both these aspects.

With Tony Blinken at the State Department and Jake Sullivan at the National Security Council, as well as Mr Biden himself, the current US administration possesses more experience of dealing with India than any of its predecessors. It also highlights its resolve to make Indo-US relations as central to its plans. With China as a common denominator, the relationship holds more chances of being robust and fruitful for both. And the key role, which the US wants India to play at the Quad, is more apparent now. It may also open the doors for increased bilateral cooperation and sale of more American military hardware to India besides economic benefits.

*Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer*

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## Surge in Covid Cases

**T**he rapid surge in covid cases has posed a conundrum for the government, it has an onus to ensure citizens' health and economic security, it is faced with a daunting challenge to safeguard both. The situation seems to be sliding back to what it was a year ago when things went haywire. The daily case records have risen and the rise in numbers is worrisome. Unfortunately, this comes at a time when some semblance of normal life was returning. The sud-

den rise in covid cases may prompt the government to impose stringent restrictions or perhaps a lockdown. A total lockdown will be devastating for the economy which has just begun to spring back but it will be the only option left with the government if the situation becomes progressively worse. The government should not wait to take action when the push comes to shove, it will be prudent to impose some restrictions now, to prevent the situation from deteriorating. Non-essential travel

has mainly contributed to the spike, while it is essential for restoring economic growth but some restrictions must be imposed to keep the cases under control. The occupancy in hotels, cafes, and restaurants must be slashed to 50%. Restricting travel will eliminate the risk of a disastrous surge without crippling the economy. It is important to understand this virus will not vanish into thin air, a complete lockdown is not an option, it will destroy livelihoods, a vaccine shot is not a remedy

as well, though it will play a huge role in mitigating the severity of the virus, it doesn't eliminate the possibility of its contraction and transmission. As stated by the WHO chief Antonio Guterres, we must learn to live with this virus, complying with the SOP's and refraining from carelessly venturing out will keep the virus at bay.

.....  
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# BADAM VAER Almonds and Aura

Riyaz Kazmi

**T**HE other day I cannot believe that after 14 years I am finally back and trying to settle down at my native place. It was an amazing experience to see the better and bitter side of life. It provided me an opportunity to know the world far and beyond. I cherished every moment with my colleagues and friends who belonged to different countries. There is everything which one can wish for but I never felt I belong to that place. Something was missing. I felt deep emptiness and dissatisfaction all those years. Whether one is settled in Delhi or Dubai, Switzerland or Saudi, UK or USA or any other part of the world, deep down our hearts we always wish to come back and stay among our people. No matter wherever we are, on purpose, to study, to work or to establish our business we will always miss 'Naseeme Sabah' (Morning breeze) of our valley.

When we are determined, we will definitely find a way but remember, it's not going to be an easy task to accept new ways of life. I was mentally prepared for the tough life ahead. And of course, there are a lot of things on which one has to compromise. Once we embark on a new journey, very often we compare and think about our fabulous past. Either one should never leave his native place or if he has done so he shouldn't come back to a place where he can't avail luxuries of life. We should be very much clear about our goals otherwise our impulsive choices are going to hurt and haunt us till the end.

After my return to my homeland, the journey was also full of obstacles but I never gave up on my self belief. My definition for success is 'Simple' be at peace with whatever Allah (SWT) has blessed me. I'm trying to find positives in every situation and remain anchored to enjoy present moments. Life goes on but there are certain things which one cannot forget and stop doing. After spending so many years outside the valley, few things have become inevitable for me. After a hectic day, I used to attend free yoga classes at the Sharjah chorniche or Al Nahda Park Dubai, sometimes swim at Jumeirah or enroll for an intense boot camp at Mamzar Beach. These life changing (Experiences) events are arranged by the people who are experts in Yoga/Pilates, Meditation and Aerobics. I cherished the company of strangers.



The vibrant transformation helped me to rediscover my inner peace.

When I was back, for a few months, I was unable to set a routine to keep myself fit and busy. I couldn't reach the best version of myself. I rather found it difficult to adjust with people and places. It was more like slipping into oblivion but somehow I could manage to hold up against all odds. More than anything else my health was affected. I was struggling to get out of boredom and find an outlet to keep myself focused and get going with the flow. I tried very hard to get out of testing times but responsibilities kept me stuck.

On one pleasant morning, my friend took me to Badam Vaere for a brisk walk. I was surprised to see its captivating beauty. All these years a lot of things have changed. I was happy to see so many activities going around. The atmosphere was absolutely electrifying. I couldn't believe it's the same 'Bagh e Waris Khan' which once used to be a forest and one was scared to roam around. Whenever I visited this haunting place during my Childhood days I used to be very curious to lean forward on my knees to peep into the Waris Khan Chah (well). We were told that the well was built to put and punish the prisoners.



**“One cannot stop praising all those master craftsmen who toiled to build the Deodar shelter sheds (Baladars) with Khatamband ceilings. The whole structure is based and designed on Mughal pattern. Usually inside there, families sit, serve and sip tea together.**

Little did many of us know the reason for the construction of the well might be to reserve the water for the supply to Hari Parbat port atop the Kohi Maran Hills. As a child it was sort of an adventure and one of the motives behind the visit was to pluck almonds.

This mesmerizing place of around 288 canals is actually Bagh e waris Khan Which has been rechristened as 'BadamVaer'. Many decades ago it was spread over vast area starting from Sangeen Darwaz including many present day densely populated localities like Tibetan colony, Kallaye under, Hakka Bazar, other adjoining places falling within Faseel e Akbari (the stone wall)

in under its CSR agenda and took major initiative to recreate and revamp it into the most happy and happening place. It has become a must visit place for everyone. The way it has been developed, maintained and managed is highly appreciable. Honestly speaking, they have done sheer justice to this place.

It is noteworthy to put on record the way captain of the ship Mr. Jehangir Mustafa (JK Bank Executive Manager) works and manages the different and difficult day to day operations of the garden. He is proficiently supervising a dedicated workforce of 70 employees including, gardeners, office staff, sweepers and security guards. Here every person has delivered over and above the expectations of the public. There is a team of around 35 gardeners who provide proper technical care to prepare seeds, transplant them in beds and make judicious use of chemical fertilizers/pesticides for profuse flowering. The credit goes to Mr. Jehangir for his commitment and command.

Since time immemorial, Badam Vaere is famous for "Almond Bloom" (Badam Fulli). The blossom is palpable once the pleasant spring weather arrives in mid march. Meanwhile on 21st March, there is the auspicious occasion of "Nourouz". With its onset, a myriad of visitors celebrate the Festival and enjoy the advent of spring. Everything looks so mesmerizing. Only "Divine Hands" can create such flowering mir-

acles. The array of colors accompanied by a sweet aroma of flowers not only welcomes spring but also the visitors. It casts a magical spell upon them. They are refreshed by the cool breeze of "Naseeme Sabah" "which is the fusion between Mountain and Lake Breeze laying on blend of lovely fragrance of flowers. It doesn't only sway the flowers but also refreshes their souls. One wonders at the creations of God when we take a look at the flowering beds of Pansy(Panzeen), Tulips(Gule Lala), Calendula (Hamesh Bahar), Antirrhinum, Dianthus caryophyllus(carnation). In March/April this place truly becomes "Photographer's Paradise". All these little wonders give us a reason to celebrate the new season of life. Locals also make it memorable by their hospitality and offer free 'Kahwa and Bakirkhani' to the visitors. Every month, this place has something to offer. In the First week of May, peach flowering is in bloom. These days (Oct-Nov) Salvia splendens (Flowering sage) is adding new colors to its abounding beauty.

From June to Aug, Cultural academy organizes "Music concert" shows on Sundays under the banner "Jashene Amadi Bahar". The valley's renowned singers sing on the Amphitheater and amuse the audience by their spectacular performances. Food, Fruit, Beverage Kiosks and other stalls are also arranged for the public. There is also a separate playing zone for the children as well. Foreign and domestic tourists that have an eye for heritage and history fall short of words to praise its beauty.

The grandeur of Badam Vaer is evident right from the main magnificent gate which is around 25 Feet tall, built in limestone (Chunna Surok) and designed on the 'pointed Arch pattern' which is the true reflection of the elegant Mughal Architecture. Another gate of the same symmetry is built in line on its east at the distance of around 100 Mts or 330-350 footsteps. In its backdrop Zabbarwan Hills just look awesome. The pavement is built in beautifully designed tiles. The

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jogger's path is spread over 1.15 Kms or approximately 1100 footsteps. The gentle elevation of the path on its North side provides the gradual friction which is ideal for the 'High intensity walk and workout'. On these slopes, there is a feeling as if we are running on a treadmill. Rope Skipping is also done at distinct spots. At every nook and corner, we will find people engaged in different healthy pursuits. On a lighter note, it's amusing to see or hear a bunch of people doing 'Loud Laughter therapy'. They look so hale and hearty.

There is free parking for the joggers and in addition to that wheelchairs are also kept for the needy people for taking them around. The moment we enter and look around, everything catches our attention. There is a story behind every structure. They have been built based on proper designing and concept. One gets a nostalgic feel when we look at the small structures having "Chayeh Paash" (Mud & Hay Roofs) resembling those village houses which we can rarely find now.

At the center of the garden, Almond shaped 'Sculpture Fountain' of Allah' in Arabic calligraphy is Inscribed by the renowned artist of the valley Mr. Masood Hussain. Its base is also carved out in Almond shape so as to correlate it with the name and nature of the place. It's the masterpiece and main attraction for visitors. Whenever I am here, it gives me spiritual comfort and emotionally re-connects me with my Lord and with the verses of Holy Quran.

He is Allah, the one and only.

Allah is He, on whom all depend.

One cannot stop praising all those master craftsmen who toiled to build the Deodar shelter sheds (Baladars) with Khatamband ceilings. The whole structure is based and designed on Mughal pattern. Usually inside there, families sit, serve and sip tea together.

Recently, I was pleased to see Oral historian and heritage Researcher Mr. Syed Ilyas Rizvi conducting creative writing, poetry (Rumi), Sheikh Ul Alam, Gani Kashmiri, and Lal Ded) and photography workshops for the youngsters. It is highly commendable to see him creating such a Youth Discourse Platform Where they open up and don't miss any session and manage to come from different parts of the Srinager, even in these tough times. Mr. Rizvi is leaving no stone unturned to guide and nurture intellectual inclinations. Hats off to his commitment, concern and courage.

Waris Khan Chah (Well) has been properly and perfectly covered with welded mesh. Its ceiling is finely done with the paper-machie plates. Inside and around it, young boys sit and sing melodious sad songs. They take refuge there to unburden their souls and suffer (Tym Tcha Tatan Gum Daffayi Karan).

I was surprised to see 70 year old gentleman Mr. Afzal Sb doing aerobics with such pride and perfection. He does everything in more imaginable form. He leads an enthusiastic group of almost 50 people. I could easily connect with each member of the group. In a short span of time, I could catch up pace with them. I am lucky to be a part of their different activities which gave me a chance to explore places which I had never heard of before. Sometimes we plan a trip to tourist destinations where we hike and enjoy delicious Wazwan after rigorous adventure. I am happy to rediscover myself.

We may calm and console ourselves for the time being but that cannot heal our wounds. Culture and customs will never die but that cannot alone fulfill our aspirations. Palace or (This) Park is of no value unless we don't find our space, solitude and spiritual well being.

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# Will work from home outlast coronavirus? The answer may be yes

Agencies

It's a question occupying the minds of millions of employees who have worked from home the past year: Will they still be allowed to work remotely — at least some days — once the pandemic has faded?

On Wednesday, one of America's corporate titans, Ford Motor Co., supplied its own answer: It told about 30,000 of its employees worldwide who have worked from home that they can continue to do so indefinitely, with flexible hours approved by their managers. Their schedules will become a work-office "hybrid": They'll commute to work mainly for group meetings and projects best-suited for face-to-face interaction.

Ford's announcement sent one of the clearest signals to date that the pandemic has hastened a cultural shift in Americans' work lives by erasing any stigma around remote work and encouraging the adoption of technology that enables it. Broader evidence about the post-pandemic workplace suggests that what was long called telecommuting will remain far more common than it was a year ago.

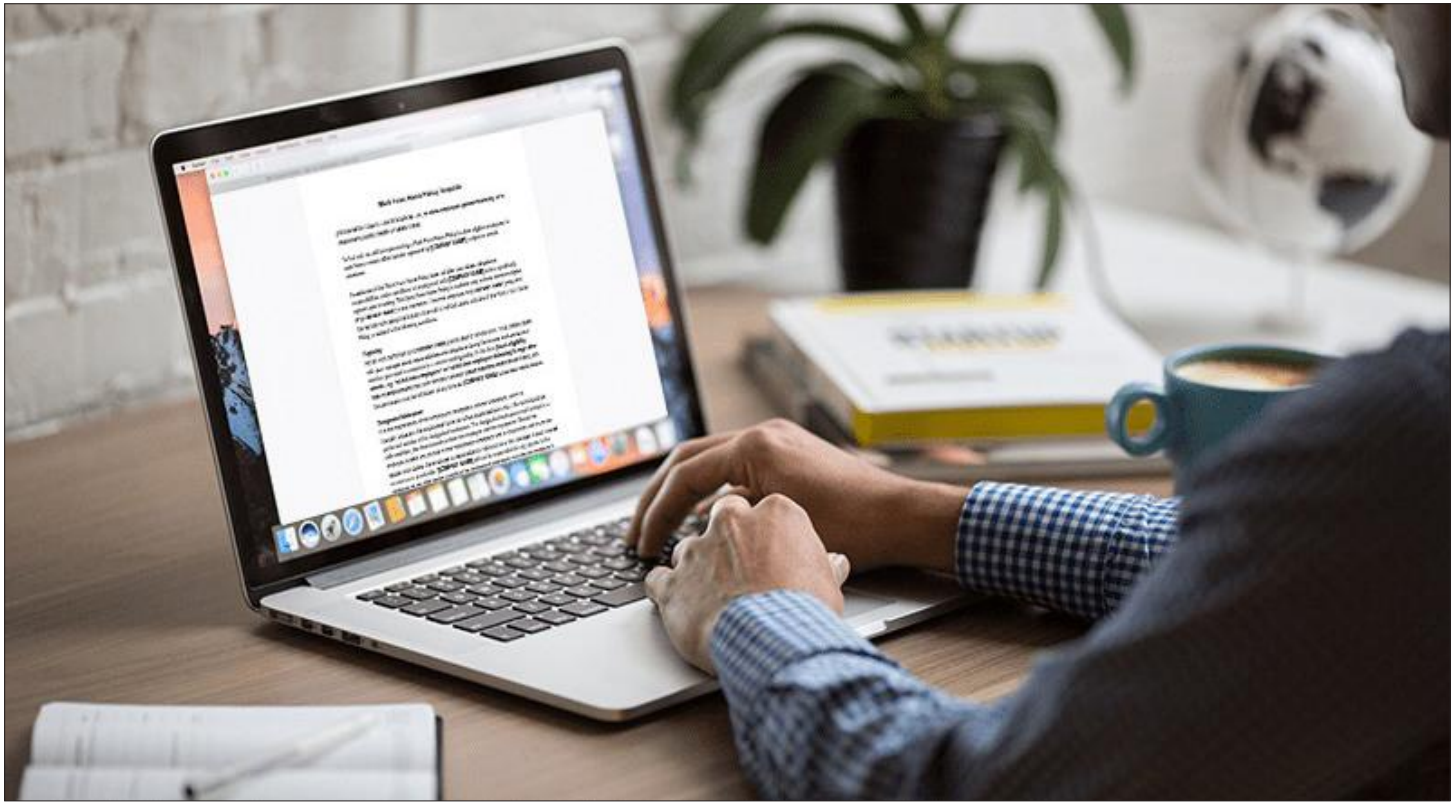
A report this week from the employment website Indeed says postings for jobs that mention "remote work" have more than doubled since the pandemic began. Such job postings are still increasing even while vaccinations are accelerating and the pace of new confirmed COVID cases is declining.

"If job postings are a guide, employers are increasingly open to remote work, even as some employees return to the workplace," said Jed Kolko, chief economist at Indeed.

The share of Indeed's job postings that mention "remote work" or "work from home" reached 7% last month, up from just below 3% a year ago. But in some industries, the gains were far more dramatic, including those that haven't traditionally welcomed remote work.

In legal services, for example, remote-work postings for jobs including paralegals and legal assistants jumped from under 5% in the second half of 2019 to 16% in the second half of 2020, according to Indeed data. In banking and finance, for such jobs as actuaries and loan underwriters, remote-work postings surged from 4% to nearly 16%. For mental health therapists, they rose from 1% to nearly 7%.

Such shifts could, in turn, trigger changes in where people live and affect the varying economic health of metro areas. Some highly skilled workers could migrate



from high-cost coastal cities, where they had clustered in the decade after the Great Recession, to more affordable cities or small towns. Downtown offices could shrink and exist mainly for collaborative work. The tax revenue of large cities could tumble as fewer workers patronize downtown bars, restaurants and coffee shops.

"The pandemic has broken the social and cultural norms for how we work," said Timothy Golden, a professor of management at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. "Remote work has become much more accepted."

Ford is just the latest company to allow more work from home after the pandemic. Salesforce, Facebook, Google and other tech firms have said they'll continue work-from-home policies indefinitely. Target Corp. will leave one of four downtown Minneapolis office locations because it's moving to a hybrid model for 3,500 workers. It will keep other downtown offices.

Flexible remote work is hardly an equal opportunity perk. It is disproportionately concentrated among more educated, well-paid workers. The jobs of lesser-paid employees generally require on-site work or

face-to-face contact with the public.

More than one-third of Asian employees and a quarter of whites worked from home because of the pandemic in January, according to an analysis of government data by the Conference Board, a business research group. Just 19% of Black workers and 14% of Hispanics were able to do so.

Ford has found over the past year that employees and supervisors believe that more work can be done remotely, that they can still connect with each other and that they have the means to do their jobs, said Kiersten Robinson, chief people and employee experiences officer. So when its hybrid schedule begins in July or soon thereafter, Ford will give teams a choice of when to come to the office.

Robinson said a flexible schedule will also help Ford compete for talent. "I do think we're seeing a real shift in expectations among candidates," she said.

Among the employees pleased by the new policy is Kelly Keller, Ford's chemistry and material compliance manager. Keller, who has been working a hybrid schedule since the pandemic erupted a year ago,

wouldn't want to go back to commuting to work each day. Now she generally works three days from home and then commutes for the next three workdays, an hour each way, to a lab in Dearborn, Michigan.

Sometimes when she's home, she gets to take her daughter to elementary school and start work a little late before finishing later in the day.

"I definitely enjoy the flexibility," Keller said. "I would be grateful for the opportunity to continue the hybrid arrangement, for sure."

Of the workers she supervises, seven commute to the lab every day; four work from home. The at-home workers, Keller said, have been more productive than they were before the coronavirus struck because they often work during the time they would have been commuting.

"For most," she said, "I think they put in longer days."

A study last month by Alexander Bick, an economist at Arizona State University, and two colleagues found that nearly 13% of workers they surveyed plan to work from home full time after the pandemic — nearly double the 7.6% who did so in February

2020. An additional 25% expect to do so at least one day a week, up from 17% before the pandemic.

Company executives overwhelmingly report that remote work has succeeded during the pandemic, according to research by consulting firm PwC. About 55% said they envision allowing continued remote work, according to the survey of 133 executives of mostly large companies. Just 17% said they wanted employees back in the office as soon as possible. An additional 26% said they preferred only limited remote work but recognized that it's become popular with employees.

Ford and other companies have been redesigning their offices, or considering doing so, to reflect fewer cubicles and personal offices and more conference rooms and other spaces for workers, who may be on-site for just part of the week, to collaborate.

A more flexible attitude about workplaces could deal a blow to the largest U.S. cities. Many Americans are already capitalizing on remote work to leave New York, Los Angeles, Boston and the San Francisco Bay Area in favor of Phoenix; Tampa, Florida; Austin, Texas; Charlotte, North Carolina; and other less expensive areas, real estate data shows.

One telling detail: Even as the number of homes for sale has tumbled nationally in the past year, the supply of for-sale houses in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles has actually increased, according to the real estate brokerage Redfin. And the drop in available homes has been much smaller than the national average in other large coastal cities, such as Seattle, Boston and Washington.

Many cities may also absorb a financial hit even if remote workers don't move. One academic study estimates that spending by workers at downtown businesses will shrink 5% to 10% after the pandemic.

Daryl Fairweather, chief economist at Redfin, said the pandemic has accelerated a trend that predated the virus: More Americans have sought cheaper homes in lesser-known cities and suburbs.

Fairweather herself left Seattle last summer after wildfires in Oregon turned the city's skies smoky and dark. Originally, she, her husband and two small children planned to stay for just a month in a small town in Wisconsin, near his family. Soon, though, they decided to make it permanent, and Fairweather has been able to work remotely.

"We liked the pace of life — we liked being near family," she said. "It's so affordable here."

## 'Eating almonds daily may help reduce facial wrinkles, pigmentation in some women'

Press Trust Of India

Daily consumption of almonds may help reduce the severity of facial wrinkles and skin pigmentation in postmenopausal women with a skin condition, a study claims.

The research, published in the journal *Nutrients*, confirms and expands on a 2019 study which found that a daily snack of almonds in place of other nut-free snacks improved measures of wrinkle width and severity in postmenopausal women.

The new study involved 49 healthy postmenopausal women with Fitzpatrick skin type 1 or 2, which is characterised by increased tendency to burn with sun exposure.

Researchers at the University of California (UC), Davis in the US randomly assigned participants to one of two groups.

In the intervention group, women ate almonds as a snack, which accounted for 20 per cent of their total daily calorie intake, or 340 calories per day on average (about 60 grams).

The control group consumed a calorie-matched snack that also accounted for 20 per cent of calories: a fig bar, granola bar or pretzels.

In addition to the snacks, study participants consumed their regular diets and did not eat any nuts or nut-containing products.

Skin assessments were made at the start of the study, and again at eight weeks, 16 weeks and 24 weeks.

At each of these visits, facial wrinkles and facial pigment intensity were assessed using high-resolution facial imaging and validated three dimensional (3D) facial model-



ling and measurement.

Skin hydration, transepidermal water loss (TEWL) and excretion of sebum — an oily, waxy substance produced by the body's sebaceous glands — were also assessed.

TEWL is the amount of water that passively evaporates through skin to the external environment due to water vapor pressure gradient on both sides of the skin barrier.

The researchers saw a statistically significant reduction in wrinkle severity in the group consuming almonds, finding that at 16 weeks, there was a reduction of 15 per cent and at 24 weeks, a reduction of 16 per cent.

There was also a statistically significant decrease in overall facial pigment intensity or unevenness of skin tone in the almond group — a 20 per cent reduction by week 16 that

remained so at week 24, they said.

The researchers noted that body weight remained constant for both the almond group and the control group from baseline to 24 weeks.

"Daily consumption of almonds may be an effective means of improving the appearance of facial wrinkles and skin tone among postmenopausal women with Fitzpatrick skin types I and II. Consumers may describe this reduced pigmentation effect as having a more even skin tone," said Raja Sivamani, dermatologist and lead researcher of the study.

"Our findings emphasise the need to look at almonds as a whole food with multiple nutrient components including alpha-tocopherol (vitamin E) and good unsaturated fats, rather than oversimplifying

potential benefits due to one nutrient alone.

According to Sivamani, almonds are high in alpha-tocopherol which has antioxidant functions, and may be partially responsible for the effects that we see in both wrinkles and skin tone in postmenopausal women.

The researchers noted that the limitations of the study include its duration of 24 weeks, and as such results do not provide insight into the potential effects of longer-term almond intake.

Additionally, the study participants were postmenopausal women with Fitzpatrick skin types I and II, characterised by increased tendency to burn with sun exposure.

The team noted that more research is warranted to investigate the impact of almond consumption in other populations.

## Smiles, winks in face recognition could increase phone security

Agencies

As hackers find ways to unlock your phone with your face while you sleep or using a photo from social media to do the same, researchers have developed a way to strengthen security by adding facial features such as smiles and winks to the mix.

D.J. Lee, Professor at Brigham Young University (BYU) in the US, who has filed a patent on the tech already, said the idea is not to compete with Apple or have the application be all about smartphone access.

In his opinion, the new technology has broader application, including accessing restricted areas at a workplace, online banking, ATM use, safe deposit box access or even hotel room entry or keyless entry/access to your vehicle, BYU said in a statement.

The new system is called Concurrent Two-Factor Identity Verification (C2FIV) and it requires both one's facial identity and a specific facial motion to gain access.

To set it up, a user faces a camera and records a short 1-2 second video of either a unique facial motion or a lip movement from reading a secret phrase.

The video is then input into the device, which extracts facial features and the features of the facial motion, storing them for later ID verification.

To get technical, C2FIV relies on an integrated neural network framework to learn facial features and actions concurrently.

This framework models dynamic, sequential data like facial motions, where all the frames in a recording have to be considered — unlike a static photo with a figure that can be outlined.

Using this integrated neural network framework, the user's facial

features and movements are embedded and stored on a server or in an embedded device and when they later attempt to gain access, the computer compares the newly-generated embedding to the stored one.

That user's ID is verified if the new and stored embeddings match at a certain threshold.

"We're pretty excited with the technology because it's pretty unique to add another level of protection that doesn't cause more trouble for the user," Lee said.



In their preliminary study, Lee and his PhD student Zheng Sun recorded 8,000 video clips from 50 participants making facial movements such as blinking, dropping their jaw, smiling or raising their eyebrows as well as many random facial motions to train the neural network.

They then created a dataset of positive and negative pairs of facial motions and inputted higher scores for the positive pairs (those that matched).

Currently, with the small dataset, the trained neural network verifies identities with over 90 per cent accuracy.

They are confident the accuracy can be much higher with a larger dataset and improvements on the network.



## Central Government's Tax Collection On Petrol, Diesel Jumps 300 Per Cent In Six Years



### Agenceis

**NEW DELHI:** Central government's tax collections on petrol and diesel have jumped over 300 per cent in the last six years as excise duty on the two fuels was hiked, the Lok Sabha was informed on Monday.

The central government collected Rs 29,279 crore from excise duty on petrol and Rs 42,881 crore on diesel in 2014-15 -- the first year of office of the Modi government.

The collections on petrol and diesel rose to Rs 2.94 lakh crore in the first 10 months of the current fiscal (2020-21), according to information furnished by Minister of State Anurag Singh Thakur in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha.

Together with excise duty on natural gas, the central government in 2014-15 collected Rs 74,158 crore which has gone up to Rs 2.95 lakh crore in April 2020 to January 2021 period.

He said taxes collected on petrol, diesel and natural gas as a percentage of total revenue have gone up from 5.4 per cent in 2014-15 to 12.2 per cent this fiscal.

Excise duty on petrol has been raised from Rs 9.48 per litre in 2014 to Rs 32.90 a litre now while the same on diesel has gone up from Rs 3.56 a litre to Rs 31.80.

Taxes make up for 60 per cent of the present retail price of petrol

of Rs 91.17 a litre in Delhi. Excise duty makes up for 36 per cent of the retail price.

Over 53 per cent of the retail selling price of Rs 81.47 a litre of diesel in Delhi is made up of taxes. As much as 39 per cent of the retail price comprises of central excise.

"The total central excise duty (including basic excise duty, cesses and surcharge) was increased by Rs 3 per litre on petrol and diesel with effect from March 14, 2020. It was further revised upwards by Rs 10 per litre on petrol and Rs 13 per litre on diesel with effect from May 6, 2020," Thakur said.

These increases took away the gain that would have accrued to consumers from a sharp drop in international oil prices.

The hike in excise duty is similar to the increase in taxes the government did between November 2014 and January 2016.

Over nine instalments, duty on petrol rate was hiked by Rs 11.77 per litre and that on diesel by 13.47 a litre in those 15 months.

The government had cut excise duty by Rs 2 in October 2017, and by Rs 1.50 a year later. But it raised excise duty by Rs 2 per litre in July 2019.

"The excise duty rates have been calibrated to generate resources for infrastructure and other developmental items of expenditure keeping in view the present fiscal position," he added.

**THE TOTAL CENTRAL EXCISE DUTY (including basic excise duty, cesses and surcharge) was increased by Rs 3 per litre on petrol and diesel with effect from March 14, 2020. It was further revised upwards by Rs 10 per litre on petrol and Rs 13 per litre on diesel with effect from May 6, 2020."**

## Maruti Suzuki To Hike Prices From April



### Agenceis

**NEW DELHI:** The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Monday said it will increase prices across its model range from next month in order to offset the impact of high input costs.

Over the past year, the cost of the company's vehicles has been impacted adversely due to an increase in various input costs, the auto major said in a regulatory filing.

"Hence, it has become imperative for the company to pass on some impact of the above addition-

al cost to customers through a price increase in April 2021," it added.

The price increase shall vary for different models, it added.

The company, however, did not share details about the quantum of the price hike it intends to take from next month. On January 18 this year, the automaker had announced to hike prices of select models by up to Rs 34,000 due to a rise in input costs.

MSI sells a range of models from entry-level hatchback to S-CROSS crossover, priced Rs 2.99 and Rs 12.39 (ex-showroom prices Delhi).

## Pandemic Pushes Back India's USD 5 Trillion GDP Goal By 3 Years To FY32: Report

### Press Trst of India

**MUMBAI:** The pandemic-induced shocks to the economy which have already shaved off 15.7 per cent of the GDP from the previous year, will delay the ambitious target of becoming the third largest economy by three years to 2031-32 now, says a report.

Currently, the country is the fifth largest economy in the world behind Germany. The government has set a target of becoming a USD5-trillion economy by 2030.

"We now expect the domestic economy to emerge as the world's third largest economy in FY32, from FY29 earlier, due to the pandemic shocks. It should touch Japan's nominal GDP in 2031 (in USD terms) if it grows at 9 per cent and in 2030 if it grows at 10 per cent," a Bank of America (BoFA) Securities report said on Monday.

The report however did not ascribe a size to either the domestic economy, which stood at USD 2.65 trillion in 2019-20, or to that of Japan, which in 2020 stood at USD 4.87 trillion.

This assumes a realistic 6 per cent real growth, 5 per cent inflation and 2 per cent rupee depreciation, the report added.

In 2017, BoFA had predicted that the country would emerge as the third largest economy in 2027-



28 based on its assumption of the demographic dividend, growing financial maturity, and the emergence of mass markets.

In their Monday's report, the house economist at the Wall Street brokerage said they find all these three phenomena strengthening now.

There are two other catalysts that support structural changes. For one, the RBI has effectively attained a silent revolution in re-achieving adequacy of forex reserves after almost eight years now.

This should help stabilize the rupee by derisking the economy from global shocks.

Further, sustained policy easing is finally bringing down real lending rates that have been a drag on growth since 2016.

## Oil Giant Saudi Aramco Sees 2020 Profits Drop To USD 49 Billion

### Agenceis

**DUBAI:** Saudi Arabia's state-backed oil giant Aramco announced Sunday that its profits nearly halved in 2020 to \$49 billion, a big drop that came as the coronavirus pandemic rolled global energy markets.

Saudi Arabian Oil Co. released its annual financial results a year after the pandemic sent the price of oil crashing to all-time lows as people stopped moving around the world to stem the spread of the virus. In recent weeks, however, the price has edged up as movement restrictions ease, commerce increases and more people get vaccinated against COVID-19. Still, analysts caution that a peak in demand may still be far off.

Despite the 44% drop in net income, Aramco said it would stick to its promise of paying quarterly dividends of \$18.75 billion -- \$75 billion a year -- due to commitments the company made to shareholders in the run-up to its initial public offering.

Nearly all of the dividend money goes to the Saudi government, which owns more than 98% of the company. Aramco's policy to pay dividends significantly higher than its 2020 free cash flow of \$49 billion stands in sharp contrast to other oil giants that have cut payouts. Seeking a cash infusion to pay the billions of dollars in the face of dwindling revenue, Aramco recently has issued international bonds.

The public figures, obligatory ever since the mostly state-owned company listed a sliver of its worth on Riyadh's Tadawul stock exchange in 2019, offer valuable insight into the health of the region's largest economy.

Despite Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to diversify the economy away from oil, the kingdom remains heavily



dependent on oil exports to fuel government spending.

Saudi Aramco profit of \$49 billion in 2020 is down from \$88.2 billion in 2019 and \$111.1 billion in 2018. Still, Aramco remains one of the world's most valuable companies.

"In one of the most challenging years in recent history, Aramco demonstrated its unique value proposition through its considerable financial and operational agility," President and CEO Amin H. Nasser said in a statement. "As a result, our financial position remained robust."

The company produced the equivalent of 9.2 million barrels per day of crude oil over the course of the year, its annual results said. Capital expenditure was down in 2020 to \$27 billion compared to \$32.8 billion the year before. Aramco expects to spend \$35 billion this year, some \$5-10 billion lower than previous estimates.

Aramco facilities have come under increasing attack as Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels across the southern border target the kingdom's oil refineries and export terminals. In an interview with Saudi-owned al-Arabiya TV on Sunday, Nasser said an Aramco facility in the capital of Riyadh struck by drones days before "has started to return to service," adding that the company "has contingency plans to deal with any assault."

In recent months, oil prices have made a major comeback

from April 2020, when the price of international benchmark Brent crude dipped below \$20 a barrel. For the first time in a year, the price of Brent surpassed \$60 a barrel last month and traded over \$64 a barrel Sunday.

The price increase has come as Saudi Arabia seems determined to curb output and support crude markets even as demand rises, with nations lifting lockdowns and accelerating vaccination campaigns.

Nasser struck an optimistic note about the year ahead, saying that Aramco is "seeing a pick-up in demand in Asia and also positive signs elsewhere."

"We remain confident that we will emerge on the other side of this pandemic in a position of strength," he added.

Earlier this month, the kingdom said it would extend its voluntary production cut of 1 million barrels a day through to April. Most OPEC oil cartel and allied countries likewise left their production cuts in place -- in stark contrast to March of last year when a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia prompted the two oil giants to unleash an onslaught of crude on the market as demand dipped. Saudi officials have urged caution, arguing that global economic recovery may still be undermined by new coronavirus restrictions and fast-spreading virus variants.

## Apple Economy In Jammu & Kashmir: Changing Paradigm

### Sanjeev Kumar Chadha

While While addressing the Nation on August 8, 2019, Hon'ble Prime Minister had said that the special dispensation provided by the Article 370 was a hurdle for development of Jammu & Kashmir and the nation has taken the historic decision to ensure equal rights for the citizens of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. After lapse of almost two years, new vistas have opened for development in most of the sectors of economy. Agriculture and Horticulture being core of rural economy, is one of them.

India ranks seven in world apple production with a share of only 3% among all fruit crops. Jammu & Kashmir boasts of around 80% share of total apple produced in the country. Apple cultivation and its value chain is one of the main stays of rural economy with revenue of around Rs. 1500 crores. The apple production is predominantly confined to districts of Srinagar, Ganderbal, Budgam, Baramulla, Kupwara, Anantnag and Shopian in Kashmir province whereas districts of Udhampur, Doda, Poonch, Ramban and Reasi also report apple cultivation on smaller scale.



Jammu & Kashmir has tremendous potential for enhanced production and export of quality apple. The productivity of apple at present is around 11 MT/hectare compared to over 40 MT/hectare in Italy, Chile, France, etc. In order to achieve the stated goal of doubling the farmer's income, there is tremendous scope for improvement in the cultivars of apple by introducing improved varieties to enhance per hectare productivity. At the same time, there is need to bridge the gap between the required and existing capacity of the Controlled Atmosphere Cold Storages. Besides this, the value chain in the form of grading, sorting and packing is an area where we can add tremendous value for better returns for growers and other stakeholders.

The U.T. Administration has embarked on the path of bringing a paradigm shift in cultivation, harvesting and marketing of apple and other fruits by introducing High Density Plantation. This is an historic intervention that would benefit over 10 to 15 lakh families and also position the country in the map of one of the largest apple growing countries in the world.

Year wise Production of Apple in Jammu & Kashmir

At present a traditional orchard can accommodate not more than 250 plants per hectare. Monoculture of old and traditional cultivars, senile orchards and non-availability of high quality cultivar spectrum has lead to low productivity and poor quality which needs rejuvenation and replacement with new emerging cultivars. Introduction of Clonal fruit stock and the Quality Planting Material (QPM) prepared from the improved genetic lines would increase number of plants per hectare to 3333. This would enhance the productivity by 3-4 times and reduce the gestation period for early harvest for the farmers.

Introduction of Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) in last two years in Jammu Kashmir has evoked positive response among the growers as they could get much better price for their produce when the market situation was not favorable. This has given them assurance that there would

always be a government agency to fall back upon to sell their produce at remunerative rates if the market conditions are not favorable.

In last three years, High Density Plantation has been attempted and around 250 hectare area has been covered with participation of the private sector. However, there is tremendous scope to fast-track creation of apple orchards with high and medium density root stock. The scheme announced by the UT Administration envisages coverage of around 5500 hectare in coming 05 years with an estimated investment of around Rs. 1750 crores. In order to sustain these efforts it is also proposed to set up atleast four Hi-Tech Nurseries with pre-quarantine facility and modern virus indexing labs so as to ensure continuous supply of QPM at much affordable rates. Nafed, which is National Level Agency of Govt. of India, has been roped in to facilitate the efforts of J&K Administration in this regard.

The HDP Programme is bound to bring a paradigm shift in the whole Horticulture ecosystem and intrinsically link the sector with markets in India and abroad. It would act as a precursor to create modern infrastructure in the value chain besides creating huge em-

ployment opportunities for all the stakeholders starting from growers to cold storage industry and traders. Some of the important focus areas of the programme are: Enhancement of area coverage under apple and other temperate fruits with improved varieties.

Increase in production and productivity.

Bringing non-traditional areas of Jammu Province under apple cultivation.

Creation of smaller hi-tech nurseries at Block/Tehsil Level with participation of private sector.

Collectivisation of farmers/growers having small and fractured land-holdings, in the form of Farmers Producer Organizations (FPOs). Jammu and Kashmir has already joined this programme and specialised crop-specific FPOs have been created in all the Districts.

Setting up of three cold chains with latest facilities for sorting, grading, pre-cooling, processing and refer transport.

Setting up Pre-Quarantine facilities and virus indexing laboratories at four nurseries of Horticulture Department.

Provide assured market linkages and better returns for growers and removing layers of middlemen.

Enhanced productivity and higher percentage of A grade apples and increase the income of farmers three to four times.

High Density Plantation programme for temperate fruits would no doubt be a game changer for the rural economy of Jammu and Kashmir. In the years to come, private sector would have to closely work with the growers and government agencies to bridge the gaps in Research and Development, training and capacity building, creating additional cold chain facilities to sustain the momentum. All stakeholders must join hands and take advantage of other related schemes like Agri Infrastructure Fund, National Horticulture Board, etc. The apple economy would get a boost to a level not seen in last seven decades and India would not only become Atamnirbar but also export apples in huge volumes.

Sanjeev Kumar Chadha is Managing Director, NAFED

**THE SCHEME ANNOUNCED BY THE UT ADMINISTRATION ENVISAGES COVERAGE of around 5500 hectare in coming 05 years with an estimated investment of around Rs. 1750 crores. In order to sustain these efforts it is also proposed to set up atleast four Hi-Tech Nurseries with pre-quarantine facility and modern virus indexing labs so as to ensure continuous supply of QPM at much affordable rates.**

### NEWSMAKERS

## Airtel Gains 6.9 Million Subscribers In January As Jio Slips

### Agenceis

**NEW DELHI:** Telecom operator Bharti Airtel added 6.9 million active users in January, extending its market lead on this count even as Jio's active subscribers tally declined by about 3.4 million, according to TRAI data.

With this, Bharti's active subscribers rose to 336 million, most of which was driven by total net adds, thereby indicating the improving quality of user addition, ICICI Securities said in a note crunching January telecom subscription numbers released by the sector regulator.

While Bharti and Jio's VLR (active) subscriber counts have remained "neck and neck" in recent months, Bharti's VLR subscriber count shot up to 336 million at the end of January (up 6.9 million month on month), compared to

325 million of Jio (down 3.4 million), UBS report said.

Active subscribers declined for Jio after rising in the previous two months—an addition of 3.2 million in December and 5.4 million in November, observed JM Financial note.

"While we cannot definitely conclude, the jump in VLR additions in Nov'20 and Dec'20 could have been driven by migrant workers coming back to cities, the effect of which could have normalised in January 21," it said.

Going ahead, active subscriber addition would be a key monitorable for Jio, it pointed out.

Active subscribers are calculated based on reported Visitor Location Register (VLR) -- the key metric reflects the number of active users on a mobile network.

It is pertinent to mention here that on an overall basis, Reliance

Jio continues to be the largest telecom operator in the country with subscriber base of 410.7 million, while Bharti Airtel is second in the pecking order with 344.6 million users as on January 2021.

Although TRAI numbers pegged Vodafone Idea's total mobile subscriber base at 285.9 million, with net additions at 1.7 million, the company has stated it had found an "inadvertent error" in the subscriber data reported to the regulator, and has now corrected and submitted revised information.

In a clarification posted on company website, VIL said: "We noted an inadvertent error in the subscriber data for January '21 submitted to TRAI in regular course."

"We have corrected the same and duly reported the revised data to TRAI," it added.

## Delhi HC Stays Order Restraining FRL To Go Ahead With Reliance Deal



### Agenceis

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi High Court on Monday stayed a single judge's order restraining Future Retail Ltd from going ahead with its Rs 24,713 crore deal with Reliance Retail to sell its business, which was objected to by US-based e-commerce giant Amazon.

A division bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh

also issued notice to Amazon to Future Group's appeal challenging the single judge's March 18 judgment on the deal.

The Bench listed the matter for further hearing on April 30.

It also stayed the single judge order asking for attachment of assets of Future Group's Kishore Biyani and others and directing them to appear in the court on April 28.



#### 4 Militants

listed as LeT militants in our records and all these names, including TRF (The Resistance Front) are the offshoots of the LeT or Jaish-e-Mohammad," he said.

The IGP said three pistols and an AK rifle was recovered from the site of the encounter.

The militants were identified as Rayees Ahmad Bhat, who was active since October last year, Amir Shafi Mir, active since last month, Raqib Ahmad Malik, active since December last year and Aftab Ahmad Wani, active since November last year.

An Army man was injured in the encounter and is undergoing treatment at a hospital here, he added.

The IGP said so far this year nine encounters have taken place in the valley with most of them - eight - in south Kashmir, while one in the north.

"In these nine encounters, 19 militants have been killed, out of which nine alone were from Shopian district and two were top commanders," Kumar said.

He said 18 youths have joined the militant ranks this year, out of which five have been killed in various encounters and three have been arrested.

"The rest are still active and we have been appealing to their parents to bring them back to the mainstream. Some may return. Also, seven youth who had joined the militancy have been brought back with the help of their families. The parents have increased their trust in the state forces," he added.

The IGP said the police will render all help to those youth who surrender their arms and leave militancy.

"I appeal to those who have taken up arms to surrender whether before an encounter or even during it. We will provide all possible help, you will be accepted and will not face any problem," he said.

Referring to the security situation in the valley, the IGP said the focus of the security forces was to maintain an atmosphere of peace.

"We would like to maintain two things. The schools and colleges should not be closed which can happen only when there is no incident and the atmosphere is good. Second, we would like to create such an atmosphere that tourists come here in huge numbers so that people here get employment and earn money," he said.

#### Stone Pelting

come. We continue to identify them and some are booked under PSA and will continue to so in future," Inspector General of Police Vijay Kumar said on Monday.

Kumar was addressing a presser along with a senior army officer here following an overnight gunfight in south Kashmir's Shopian district.

The IGP Kashmir said that such incidents were under control and urged media not to "spread false narrative that stone pelting is increasing so that environment gets vitiated."

To a question if there was contradiction in police's claim that a youth who takes extreme step to take arms is allowed to surrender while on the other side a youth is booked under PSA for protesting, the IGP said: "If there is militant attack, schools and colleges do not get closed. Economic activities are not hampered nor do yatra stops or tourists stop coming."

However, he added when there is "law and order problem", "Yatra declines, tourist fear to come while schools and colleges get shut. Stone pelting is a larger issue as society gets involved and as such we take stone pelting more seriously."

"Militant does not make much difference. We don't want schools and colleges to be shut and tourists stop coming. Law and order is a much bigger problem for me," he said.

He said that security establishment wants to ensure that schools and colleges remain open and that there is increased tourist footfall "so that people earn their livelihood and there is peace."

Responding to another question, he said it was not prudent to believe that militants will not carry attacks. "We are prepared," he said.

He also urged media to play role in highlighting drug issue.

Responding to a question regarding narcotics and no palpable change on the ground despite claims of large scale recovery every day, he said: When the disease is big, treatment takes time. It comes through Pakistan, Nepal and through drones. "We don't want you (media persons) to be informers but whenever you get any such details, share it we will act on it."

#### Assures Incident

General (IG), Kashmir, Vijay Kumar said the security grid will be enhanced with 24-hour patrolling on the yatra routes.

"We are fully ready for the summer months. We have devised a plan and checkpoints will be increased, some camps will be shifted, and as we will get additional force after elections (in some states of the country), we will plug all the gaps... Pilgrims will not face any problems," Kumar said.

The 56-day yatra to the 3,880-metre-high cave shrine of Amarnath in the South Kashmir Himalayas is scheduled to start from the twin routes of Pahalgam and Baltal on June 28 and culminate on August 22.

"Our officers go on the ground to physically check for chances of security lapses and to see whether additional forces are required or where drones can be used and equipment be placed and also for the placement of 24-hour nakas. We are fully alert, and there will be fool-proof security arrangements," Kumar added.

On the threat of sticky bombs and IEDs, the IG said yatra routes would be fully sanitised, and there would be 24-hour patrolling and nakas.

"This time the (yatra) routes will not be left unsecured even during the night. There will be deployment, mobile bunker vehicle patrolling and NVD (night vision devices), and drones will also be used 24 hours," he said.

Describing sticky bombs as a problem but "not a big worry", Kumar said security vehicles will be fitted with 360-degree cameras and distance will be maintained with civilian vehicles.

"I am sure the public will support us fully. There will be a time factor also a time frame for the yatra vehicles. They will not be allowed in a mix-way," he said, adding the yatra will be monitored through CCTV cameras and drones round-the-clock.

Asked if there are any specific inputs about

militant attacks on the yatra or the security forces during the pilgrimage, the IG said that expecting the militants not to attack was not right.

"Pakistan would always want to continue infiltration, there is no doubt about that. If not through the Line of Control, then through the International Border or Nepal. But, we are fully alert," he said.

"As far as attacks on nakas are concerned, there are still about 200 militants in Kashmir and expecting that there will not be any action by them is not right. They will try and most of them we will stop through preventive intelligence, but when there is an attempt, we will neutralise that," Kumar said.

The IG said the Army, CRPF and the police are all on alert.

#### Trouble Mounts

from across the Line of Control (LoC) for militants and channelising funds to sustaining militant activities at the behest of handlers in Pakistan, a spokesperson of the NIA said.

He said the NIA filed the supplementary charge sheet against the three accused under Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code, Sections 17, 18, 38, 39 and 40 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, and Section 25 (1AA) of the Arms Act and Section 6 of the Explosive Substances Act in a special court here in the DSP Devender Singh case, the spokesperson of the NIA said.

Singh was arrested by police along with three others -- Hizbul Mujahideen commanders Syed Naveed Mushtaq alias Naveed Babu and Rafi Ahmad Rather and advocate Irfan Shafi Mir -- while they were travelling from Srinagar to Jammu near Qazigund in south Kashmir on January 11, 2020.

The NIA had re-registered the case on January 17 and had taken over the investigation. It had already filed a charge sheet against eight accused in this case on July 6.

Parra, a close aide of former chief minister and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti, was arrested by the NIA in the case on November 25 last year.

"The investigations revealed that charge-sheeted accused Parra was part of the conspiracy for raising and transferring of militant funds to Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) militants for procurement of militant hardware and was also a crucial player in sustaining political-separatist-militant nexus in J&K," the spokesperson said.

About Lone and Parimoo, the spokesperson said the investigation revealed that the charge-sheeted accused were involved in gunrunning from across the LoC for the militants of banned militant organisations Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and were also channelizing funds to the militants for sustaining militant activities in J&K at the behest of handlers located in Pakistan.

"Further investigation in the case continues," the spokesperson said.

#### Dr Mushtaq

J&K has been transferred and posted as Director, Health Services, Kashmir.

Dr. Shahid Hussain, Medical Officer, presently posted as Officer on Special Duty in the Health and Medical Education Department, has been transferred and posted as Extended Program Immunization Officer, Directorate of Family Welfare, MCH and Immunization, J&K.

Dr. Qazi Haroon, Medical Officer, presently working in the Directorate of Family Welfare, MCH and Immunization, J&K, has been transferred and posted as Project Manager, National Health Mission, J&K.

Dr. Naheed Anjum Malik, Dental Surgeon, CHC Hajin, presently working in the Directorate of Health Services, Kashmir, has been relieved for attending to duties at her original place of posting viz. CHC Hajin.

"The above posting/ arrangement of doctors is made in the interest of administration and is purely on temporary basis and subject to the outcome of writ petition(s), if any, pending before the Court(s) of law," reads the order.

"(The arrangements) shall not confer any right upon them to claim preferential treatment at the time of regularization/promotions which shall be made strictly in accordance with the rules," the order added.

#### UAE Brokering

by the UAE that began months earlier, according to officials aware of the situation who asked not to be identified. The cease-fire, one said, is only the beginning of a larger roadmap to forge a lasting peace between the neighbors, both of which have nuclear weapons and spar regularly over a decades-old territory dispute.

The next step in the process, the official said, involves both sides reinstating envoys in New Delhi and Islamabad, who were pulled in 2019 after Pakistan protested India's move to revoke seven decades of autonomy for the disputed Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir. Then comes the hard part: Talks on resuming trade and a lasting resolution on Kashmir, the subject of three wars since India and Pakistan became independent from Britain in 1947.

Over the years, India and Pakistan have routinely made peace overtures only to have them quickly fall through, particularly as both sides frequently use the issue to stir up emotions around election time. Officials said expectations were low that the current detente would achieve much beyond the return of envoys and a resumption of trade through their Punjab land border.

But this process appears to be the most concerted effort in years, and comes as the Biden administration is seeking wider peace talks on Afghanistan -- a place both countries for years have battled for influence. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to shore up growth and focus military resources on the border with China, while Pakistan's leaders are also facing economic woes and looking to make a good impression with the U.S. and other powers.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry didn't comment on the talks or the role of the UAE, while the foreign ministries of India and the UAE had no immediate comment.

Last week Pakistan army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa asked India "to bury the past and move forward" while saying the military was ready to enter talks to resolve "all our outstanding issues." The comments came a day after Prime Minister Imran Khan after called for a resolution on Kashmir, which he described as

"the one issue that holds us back."

On Saturday, Modi sent a tweet wishing Khan well after he was diagnosed with Covid-19 -- another sign that relations between the countries are getting warmer.

The UAE, which has historic trade and diplomatic links with India and Pakistan, has taken a more assertive international role under de facto ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The biggest shift has been in the Middle East where the Gulf Arab state has intervened in conflicts and backed groups and regional leaders. But it has also looked to Asia as it strengthens political alliances beyond its role as a global trade and logistics hub.

India-Pakistan ties were effectively cut off two years ago after a suicide attack in India-controlled Kashmir killed 40 Indian soldiers, prompting Modi's government to authorize air strikes on alleged militant facilities inside Pakistan. The joint statement last month said the two sides "agreed to address each other's core issues," signaling a wider discussion on Kashmir and militancy.

Several clues over the past few months pointed at the UAE's role. In November, Jaishankar met bin Zayed and the crown prince on a two-day visit to Abu Dhabi, followed by Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi the following month. Roughly two weeks before the Feb. 25 announcement, the UAE foreign minister held a phone call with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan "wherein they discussed regional and international issues of interest." And just days before, India allowed Khan's aircraft to fly over Indian airspace as he headed to Sri Lanka for a state visit -- a practice suspended since the 2019 hostilities.

After the cease-fire, the UAE was one of a handful of countries to issue a statement welcoming the cease-fire announcement, highlighting the "close historical ties" it has with both India and Pakistan and hailing "the efforts made by both countries to come to this agreement." In Washington, State Department spokesman Ned Price dodged a question on what role the U.S. played in bringing the two sides together while urging Pakistan to play a constructive role in Afghanistan, Kashmir and other places.

"Obviously Pakistan has an important role to play when it comes to Afghanistan and what takes place across its other border," Price said on Feb. 25. "So clearly, we will be paying close attention."

#### Pak Delegation

who will be joined by his advisors from the Central Water Commission, the Central Electricity Authority and the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation.

The Indus Water Treaty (IWT) warrants the two commissioners to meet at least once a year, alternately in India and Pakistan.

However, the last year's meeting scheduled to be held New Delhi in March was cancelled, a first since the Treaty came into being, in view of the coronavirus pandemic.

This year's meeting will be the first between the two commissioners after the August 2019 nullification of the operative provisions of Article 370 that gave special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The erstwhile state was also carved into two union territories -- Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir.

India has since cleared several hydropower projects for the region.

Of these, Durbuk Shyok (19 MW), Shankoo (18.5 MW), Nimu Chilling (24 MW), Rongdo (12 MW), Ratan Nagra (10.5 MW) are in Leh; while Mangdum Sangra (19 MW), Kargil Hunderman (25 MW) and Tamasha (12 MW) have been cleared for Kargil.

India had informed Pakistan about the projects. The issue is expected to come up for discussion during the meeting.

Pakistan is also likely to raise objections on the design of Indian hydropower projects on Chenab River whose water is largely assigned to Pakistan under the IWT.

Ahead of the meeting, Saxena said, "India is committed towards full utilisation of its rights under the Treaty and believes in amicable solution of issues through discussion."

In July 2020, India had proposed to Pakistan that the meeting for discussing pending issues pertaining to Indus Water Treaty (IWT) be held virtually in the wake of coronavirus pandemic, but Pakistan insisted on holding talks at the Attari check post.

However, in response, the Indus said that it is not conducive to hold the meeting at the Attari Joint Check Post due to the pandemic. With the improvement in situation, this mandatory meeting is being held with all COVID-19 related protocols.

The meeting will take place after a gap of nearly two and half years. The last meeting took place in Lahore in August 2018.

Under the provisions of Indus Waters Treaty, signed between India and Pakistan in 1960, all the water of the eastern rivers - Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi amounting to around 33 million acre feet (MAF) annually -- is allocated to India for unrestricted use. The waters of western rivers - Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab -- amounting to around 135 MAF annually has been assigned largely to Pakistan.

According to the Treaty, India has been given the right to generate hydroelectricity through run of the river projects on the western rivers subject to specific criteria for design and operation. The Treaty also gives right to Pakistan to raise objections on design of Indian hydroelectric projects on western rivers.

#### J&K Aims

UT of Jammu & Kashmir replied that out of a total budgetary outlay of Rs. 1,08,621 crore (2021-22), tax revenue of J&K is projected as Rs. 16,276 crore and own non-tax revenue as Rs. 8,209 crore, totalling Rs. 24,485 crore for the year 2021-22," reads the report of department-related parliamentary standing committee on Home Affairs.

According to the report, the revised revenue estimates of the UT for ongoing fiscal is Rs 17030 crore.

".....out of total budgetary outlay of Rs 92,341 crore under RE 2020-21, own tax revenue is projected as Rs. 10837 crore and non-tax revenue as Rs. 6,193 crore, totalling to Rs. 17,030 crore," the report further states.

The report was tabled in both Houses of the Parliament on March 15.

It is worthwhile to mention that J&K UT's

budget was unveiled in the Parliament on March 17 by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Of Rs 1,08,621 crore budget, Rs 39,817 crore are earmarked for capital expenditure and Rs 68,804 crore for revenue expenditure.

#### HC Upholds J&K

selection process had not been completed, the petitioners have no right to dispute the decision of the respondents to go for a denovo exercise," a bench of Justice Ali Mohammad Magrey said.

"It is beaten law of the land that a job aspirant does not have any right to seek appointment even if his name figures in the select list. In the present case, however, the selection process had not even culminated; therefore, the challenge laid to the impugned action of the respondents (J&K Bank) is impermissible," the court said, adding, "The impugned cancellation, therefore, is held to have had the reasonableness attached with it and it was not arbitrary."

Subsequently, the court dismissed the petitions being "without any merit."

Interim direction, if any, shall stand vacated. The respondents shall proceed ahead with the fresh selection process initiated in terms of the impugned advertisement notice," the court added.

The petitioners in their plea had said that no reasons were disclosed by the Bank while issuing the 15th April 2020 notification, cancelling the selection process conducted for the posts of Probationary Officers and Banking Associates. They had submitted that the failure of bank to give reasons in support of its decision amounts to denial of justice.

"The agency which conducted the online examination in question has a reputed track record; therefore, the cancellation of the process does not appear to be bonafide and it being so the impugned decision of cancelling the selection process is arbitrary and illegal, therefore, deserves to be declared as ultra-vires of the Constitution," they had prayed.

The petitioners had said that a "limited right of fair consideration is available to a candidate who participates in the selection process which cannot be taken away by arbitrary means and unreasonably." (GNS)

#### MeT Predicts

"Widespread moderate rain /snow is most likely to continue till tomorrow (March 24). Heavy to very heavy rain /snow is most likely at scattered places of JK," Director Meteorological department Sonam Lotus said.

He urged people to remain alert and cautious against "possible" thunderstorms and lightning.

"Please don't sit under trees, iron poles etc," he said and also urged people to be wary of avalanches and flash floods or mudslides. Lotus also said there could be waterlogging in low lying areas.

A meteorological department official said that Srinagar recorded a low of 7.4 degree Celsius same as on the previous night while the capital received 9.4mm of rain in the last 24 hours.

Qazigund received 6.1mm of rain and recorded a low of 7.3 degree Celsius against 5.7 degree Celsius on the previous night while mercury settled at 4.3 degree Celsius against 0.1 degree Celsius on the earlier night at Pahalgam, the famous resort in south Kashmir which received 12.4mm of rain during the time.

Kokernag, also in south Kashmir, recorded a low of 5.7 degree Celsius against previous night's 6.0 degree Celsius while it received 8.8mm of rain, the official said.

The minimum temperature settled at 4.8 degree Celsius in Kupwara against 5.3 degree Celsius on the previous night, the official said. The north Kashmir district received highest rainfall of 20.6mm during the time, the official said.

Gulmarg recorded minimum temperature of minus 0.5 degree Celsius against 2.0 degree Celsius on the previous night, the official said. It received rain or snow equivalent to 16mm.

#### Highway Closed

They said that the thoroughfare was blocked for traffic movement at Panthayal and no vehicular movement allowed shall be allowed on March 23 in view of the forecast by the weatherman.

"Tomorrow (23-03-2021), no vehicular movement shall be allowed from either side on Jammu-Srinagar highway in view of inclement weather prediction issued by MeT department for next few days," a traffic department official said. He said that there was possibility of landslides and shooting stones at several places amid continuous rainfall along the highway.

The official said that Mughal road, connecting Poonch and Shopian districts continue to remain closed due to snow accumulation.

#### Why People Take

midnight baths from last three years now," Javed, who lives in Mujhpathri, talks about his village tradition. "I first took the plunge when an elderly person narrated a story of Nauroz to me."

It was village elder, Ghulam Mohammad Khatana, who explained the health benefits of this Nauroz bath to Javed and made him an ardent follower of it.

The story doesn't seem far-fetched. Nauroz being springtime is the seasonal stage when earth comes back to life after rendered forlorn and frozen by winter.

This belief--"the beginning of life after lifelessness"--fuels this midnight-bath mindset in Mujpathri, where most villagers term themselves "fit and fine".

Even the oldest among them, Khatana, who calls himself as 120-year-old, is still perfectly fine.

"Ever since I started taking bath on Nauroz," Javed continues, "I remain fit for the whole year. I don't recall any day in these years when I needed medicine for any sickness."

While Javed is still new to the ritual, some village elders like Abdul Aziz, an octogenarian man in Mujhpathri, have been taking the bath since their teenage years.

"I was just 17 years old when I first took Nauroz bath in a nearby stream which originates from the glaciers of Tattakoti," Aziz says. "And I felt very healthy for the whole year. I always wait for this day."

Another villager, Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din, 52, says his father, Ahmad Sheikh, used to leave

home at 2 in the night to take a bath in a river. "Till his demise," Mohi-ud-Din recalls, "my father was very healthy."

But some new-age "enlightened class" among the villagers, who believe in the "cause and effect" theory, simply downplay the ritual as the sign of "mindless tradition".

While they don't offer any plausible explanation behind their disavowal, the ritual-driven majority seems unruffled.

What's more interesting in this age-old ritual is that nobody should see the one who takes bath.

The villagers believe that some supernatural forces come to earth on this day. And that's way, they argue, this bath needs to be taken in complete secrecy.

This, perhaps, explains the reason why the bath needs to be taken in the dark of the night.

"Kashmir is not a place to venture in the night, but still this day, I don't think much about the situations or the consequences of seeing anyone on the streets," Javid says.

"I try to explore all the streams flowing in my area just to start a new and healthy year of my life."

#### Pandey Warns

to encourage healthy journalism and ensure that publications adhere to basic standards of printing and original content, an official spokesperson quoted him as saying.

The meeting, he said, also discussed improvement of online advertisement distribution portal, empanelment of newspapers, filling up of vacant posts, and media coverage of major events.

"The meeting reviewed the administrative issues of the department besides discussing various aspects relating to the guidelines laid down in the Media Policy and its adherence by the newspapers and other publications," he added.

While discussing the issue of implementation of Media Policy, the Director, as per the official spokesperson said that those newspapers need to be encouraged which run on professional lines and maintain the desired standards.

"He said plagiarism and irregularity needs to be checked and added that the newspapers practicing this will have to face action under the relevant provisions of media policy which may entail suspension and de-empanelment," he warned.

He further said that the Director issued appropriate instructions to the officers for making the functioning of the department more vibrant.

"Urging upon officers to work in a coordinated manner, the Director asked them to ensure that adequate coverage is given to programmes and initiatives of the Government. He said that effective promotional campaigns need to be carried out to promote major events taking place in Jammu & Kashmir during the current tourist season," the official spokesperson added.

#### J&K Reports

from the Jammu division and 104 from the Kashmir division of the Union Territory, they said.

Srinagar district recorded the highest of 77 cases, including 16 travellers, followed by 25 in Jammu district.

There were 34 travellers who had tested positive for the infection in the past 24 hours.

While six districts did not report any fresh case, 12 other districts had cases in single digits.

The number of active cases, which has been rising steadily over the past week, has now reached 1,336 in the Union Territory, while 1,25,362 patients have recovered so far, the officials said.

The death toll in Jammu and Kashmir due to the disease is 1,981 as no fresh fatality was reported in the past 24 hours, they added. (PTI)

#### Lecturer Held

years, according to a statement here. A case was registered against Khan, hailing from Assar area of Doda, last year under various sections of Indian Penal Code for his alleged involvement in issuing forged and fictitious appointment and transfer/posting orders in the school education department.

"The accused was not cooperating in the investigation of the case and was constantly on run by changing his locations from one place to another in both Jammu and Srinagar, to evade his arrest and face the investigation, the statement said.

The Crime Branch said it vigorously contested the anticipatory bail application of the accused and got it rejected.

"The case owes its origin to a communication made by Director School Education Jammu, alleging therein that while scrutiny, some fake and forged transfer and posting orders of lecturers were detected and reported," it said.

"A preliminary inquiry was initiated and involvement of Khan has prima facie been established for his role in issuing fake and fictitious orders of appointment and transfers/posting in School Education Department, which also includes his own transfer from government Higher Secondary School Jakyas, Doda to Kishtwar among others, the statement said.

After his arrest, the accused was produced before a court. (PTI)

#### Teacher Found

"The police took the body in possession for carrying out legal-medico formalities," the official said, adding "Apparently the cause of death seems to be a heart attack,"

#### Boy Charred

was engulfed in flames, they said. Locals attempted to rescue the boy but could not save him, the officials said.

The victim was alone in the structure when it caught fire, they said, adding preliminary investigations revealed that the incident was caused by an electrical short circuit. (PTI)

#### Burglars Loot SBI

confirming the burglaries said that unidentified persons broke open the machine of SBI at the four-way during the night. He said details are awaited as regards the cash contained in the ATM.

Regarding burglary in shops and the cost of the property looted, he said that "details are being collected." "A case has been registered and further investigations are underway." (GNS)



## 'ODI Series A Huge Opportunity For Everybody,' Says England Captain Eoin Morgan

Press Trust of India

**PUNE:** England captain Eoin Morgan on Monday said the upcoming three-match ODI series against India would be an opportunity for the fringe players to push their case for the T20 World Cup as 50-over format also throws situations similar to T20 cricket.

England have already lost the Test and T20s series and the Eoin Morgan-led team, who are the reigning world champions in the ODIs, would be desperate to stamp their authority in the format and sign off with some pride.

"Given the T20 World Cup round the corner, playing any international cricket is a huge opportunity for guys who have been on the fringes and not made selection so far," the World Cup-

Given the two squads are very similar, we see set skill sets as very valuable," he said.

"I think they're trying to envisage where fifty overs cricket will be in three years' time. It is going to be quite difficult. The challenge for us is always trying to explore and push the limits as much as we can, given the conditions."

England suffered a 1-3 loss in the four-Test series against India before losing the five-match T20 series 2-3 on Saturday.

"I think conditions that are a little bit alien to us naturally, like India, it's always nice to get out of your comfort zone and learn more about your team and your play and to try and make mistakes and learn," Morgan said. The England skipper said the Tests and T20s have been a learning experience



winning skipper said on the eve of their ODI series opener here.

"When you score runs, and take wickets away from home. There's always a huge incentive to try and push your case forward."

Morgan said it will be exciting to "play three games at the same ground against a very, very strong Indian side."

"It is a huge opportunity for everybody to get back into the frame of mind to deal with fifty-over cricket. But also it will be an opportunity for the guys who haven't had opportunities to really push their case forward," he said.

The England skipper feels 50-over cricket is very close to the T20 format in throwing familiar scenarios so the series would offer huge possibilities.

"There are pockets of the game that replicate T20 cricket, and given that there's very limited change between both squads.

for the team and it will hold them in good stead ahead of the T20 World Cup in October.

"Even though we didn't pick up the (T20I series) trophy we learnt a huge amount. It's been an extremely productive tour so far. I think the bigger picture will be World Cup," he said.

"You don't always have to be win every series in order to win the World Cup. Continuously you need to get better, you need to be tested. Need to fail to learn that involves losing which is part of your journey," Morgan said.

India had lost to England by 31 runs in a high-scoring game during the 2019 World Cup when the two teams last faced each other.

The Virat Kohli-led side also lost their last bilateral series in mid-2018 during their tour of England.

The hosts also lost their previous ODI series, to Australia, in December last year.

## India Legends Beat Sri Lanka Legends To Win Road Safety World Series Title



Press Trust of India

**RAIPUR:** India Legends emerged champions in the first edition of the Road Safety World Series T20 after defeating Sri Lanka Legends by 14 runs in the final here.

All-rounder Yusuf Pathan starred in the team's victory with an unbeaten 62 and two wickets for 26 runs, which restricted Sri Lanka to 167/7 in 20 overs while chasing 182 on Sunday night.

Swashbuckling opener Sanath Jayasuriya scored 43 while skipper Tillakaratne Dilshan perished cheaply for 21.

Earlier, Yuvraj Singh and Yusuf went on a rampage, slamming half centuries to see India Legends post a competitive 181/4.

Yuvraj made 60 off 41 balls with four boundaries and as many sixes, while Yusuf remained unbeaten on 62 in 36 balls, with four hits to the ropes and five sixes.

Apart from the two, legend-

ary opener and skipper Sachin Tendulkar got a classy 30, which included five boundaries.

For the Lankans, none of the bowlers were impressive as Rangana Herath, Sanath Jayasuriya, Farveez Maharoof and Kaushalya Weeraratne took one wicket each.

India lost their first wicket in the third over itself when Virender Sehwag was castled by Herath.

In the next over, Tendulkar swept Dilshan for back-to-back boundaries, before S Badrinath was trapped in front of the wicket by Jayasuriya.

Yuvraj got a classy boundary off Dhammika Prasad before the two went silent for the next few overs.

Yuvraj then smacked Dilshan for two sixes and by the end of 10th over, India were 77/2.

Brief scores: India Legends 181/4 (Yusuf Pathan 62\*, Yuvraj Singh 60) beat Sri Lanka legends 167/7 (Sanath Jayasuriya 43, Chinthaka Jayasinghe 40; Yusuf Pathan 2/26) by 14 runs.

## Punjab FC Defeat Real Kashmir 1-0 In I-League



Press Trust of India

**KALYANI:** Chencho Gleytsehn's 37th minute strike helped Punjab FC register a hard-fought 1-0 win over Real Kashmir FC in an I-League match at the Kalyani Municipal Stadium here on Sunday.

With both Real Kashmir and Punjab FC out of the title race, the two teams were playing for pride.

The match could have ended with more goals, had the goalkeepers of respective teams not been in inspired form.

In the 4th minute, Real Kashmir had the chance to take the lead when Haroon Amiri found Lalrindika Ralte inside the box. Ralte set himself perfectly with a nimble touch, but his shot was

saved miraculously by goalkeeper Kiran Limbu.

Punjab had their chance in the 11th minute when Aakash Sangwan's swirling cross was met by a thunderous Chencho Gleytsehn header but it lacked accuracy as a golden opportunity went amiss.

Punjab came close to taking the lead in the 20th minute when goalkeeper Mithun Samanta made a world-class save from close range to deny Pritam Singh's effort from inside the box.

Nine minutes later, Chencho's curling shot from the edge of the box was saved by Samanta's fingertips.

Real Kashmir tested their luck in front of the opposition goal in the 33rd minute when Dipanda Dicka's header off a Sena Ralte free-kick

was saved by Kiran Limbu.

Punjab FC then took the lead in the 37th minute when Chencho capitalised on a Pritam Singh pass inside the box and released a shot into the bottom corner, leaving Mithun Samanta wrong-footed, to make the scoreline read 1-0.

Real Kashmir were largely pinned to their own half, defending and for much of the second phase, the Snow Leopards had no answer for their rivals attacking style of football.

Real Kashmir pushed for the equaliser in the dying embers of the match and Chesterpaul Lyngdoh's shot in the 88th minute earned a good save by Kiran Limbu, but the Snow Leopards eventually ran out of steam.

### IND VS ENG, 1ST ODI PREVIEW

## A Confident India Eye Winning Start Against England In Pune

Press Trust of India

**PUNE:** Struggling opener Shikhar Dhawan will be the focus in a spoilt-for-choice Indian team when they take on world champion England in a three-match ODI series starting in Pune on Tuesday with the visitors eyeing a positive end to their tour after Test and T20 debacles.

The series is particularly important for the 35-year-old Dhawan, who failed to make an impact in the first T20 in Ahmedabad before warming the benches the remaining two games which India won.

With the management having plenty of options in (Shubman Gill) and outside (Prithvi Shaw and Devdutt Padikkal) the squad for the opening slot, it will be a litmus test for 'Gabbat' to prove himself in the lung-opener.

He is expected to open the innings along with seasoned campaigner Rohit Sharma, who was in blistering form in the T20 series and would be keen to carry on in the same vein.

The ODI format gives Dhawan the time he needs to build his innings. With loads of experience under his belt, the Delhi batsman could well return to form come Tuesday.

For the Indian team, the series would be an extension of its preparations for the T20 World Cup later this year. The 50-over-format, in general, remains a low priority in 2021 with no major tournaments around the corner.

Skipper Virat Kohli was back among the runs in the T20 series against England and he would look to carry the momentum into the ODIs.

It has been a while since Kohli scored a hundred in the format, his last and 43rd one coming against the West Indies (114 not out) at Port of Spain in August 2019.

He will be itching to make his good form count and end the cen-



tury drought. It is also expected that both KL Rahul, who is not likely to feature at the top of the order, and Rishabh Pant, after turning things around spectacularly since the brilliant showing Down Under, would be part of playing XI.

They would have a big role in the middle-order along with the redoubtable Hardik Pandya.

There could be a toss-up between Mumbaiers Shreyas Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav, for one spot in the playing XI. Yadav proved himself to be quite a power-hitter in the T20 series, notching up a blistering half century in his maiden international appearance.

The bowling attack is expected to be spearheaded by Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who picked four wickets in the T20 series, and the new ball will be shared by Shardul Thakur. Thakur claimed eight wickets in the T20 series.

Rookie pacer Prasidh Krishna, who has already caught the eye of Kohli, is also in the squad.

Krishna enjoyed a good Vijay Hazare Trophy campaign for Karnataka, claiming 14 wickets in seven matches at an average of 24.5.

Spinners Yuzvendra Chahal and Washington Sundar are expected

to be preferred over Krunal Pandya and Kuldeep Yadav.

Also, a fit-again Pandya would be the fifth bowler, but it remains to be seen how many overs he can bowl. On the other hand, England would also be keen to end the tour on a high after suffering defeats in the Tests (1-3) and the T20 series (2-3).

And for it to happen, skipper Eoin Morgan's role with the bat will be vital. The likes of Jos Butler and the swashbuckling Jason Roy will have to fire in unison and all-rounder Ben Stokes will have to step up with both the bat and ball.

England pacer Mark Wood troubled the Indian batters with his pace and in the absence of an injured Jofra Archer, he would have to shoulder greater responsibility along with Chris Jordan and the young Sam Curran.

The spin duo of Moeen Ali and Adil Rashid will have been unable to trouble the Indian batsmen and it remains to be seen whether they have any new tricks to change the dynamics. Additionally, Ali can perform the role of a pinch-hitter, if needed. All the games at MCA Stadium, Gahunje will be played in front of empty stands as India battles a fresh surge in COVID-19 infections.

## No Guarantee That Rohit Sharma And I Will Open In T20 World Cup: Virat Kohli

Press Trust of India

**PUNE:** India skipper Virat Kohli on Monday said he has decided to open in the shortest format to accommodate players like Suryakumar Yadav in the side but there is no "guarantee" of him taking up the role in the T20 World Cup at home later this year.

The move to open with Rohit Sharma worked wonders as the star duo played match-winning knocks to seal the five-match series against England. Kohli made the decision to ensure that Suryakumar plays at his preferred number three spot.

Ahead of the first ODI against England, Kohli explained his surprising call in the fifth T20 and

keep an eye on.

"As far as the opening competition in ODIs is concerned, Shikhar and Rohit will definitely start. When it comes to one-day cricket, I don't think there's any issues or doubts over Rohit and Shikhar opening together. And they've been amazing for us in the past few years."

India have picked Suryakumar, Karnataka pacer Prasidh Krishna and Krunal Pandya for the ODIs.

Though the ODIs have less importance in a T20 World Cup year, Kohli said every India game has immense value but schedules should be made after due consultation with the players, especially in times of bio-bubbles.



why he will open in the IPL, a move that attracted a lot of attention.

"Firstly, the combination that plays on the field, selectors don't have any role to play in that, just how the team management doesn't have any role in selection," said Kohli.

"Secondly, as Rohit mentioned, it was a strategic move but yes we did enjoy batting with each other, we did enjoy that partnership and we saw the effects of us batting together..."

"...it's not a guarantee that this is going to be continued in future."

Suryakumar had Kohli "stunned" with his knock in his debut game and the India skipper moved up a spot in the batting order to keep the Mumbai batsman in the eleven in the following match. India had replaced opener K L Rahul for an extra bowling option in T Natarajan.

"I have batted at four, I have batted at three. Now I want to go back into, you know, understanding my role as an opener as well which I've done successfully in the past in T20 cricket."

"So that I provide an option to open up a slot for someone like Surya who's playing the way he is at the moment and if he can continue like that I should be ready to play any kind of role that team requires."

"We will have a conversation about this closer to the World Cup when we get there," he clarified.

Senior opener Shikhar Dhawan has lost his place in the T20 eleven but Kohli made it clear that he will open with Rohit in the first ODI on Tuesday. He also said the series will serve as extended preparation for the T20 World Cup.

"Yes, there are a couple of things that internally we have discussed that we're going to

"As I've said in the past many times that scheduling and workload is something that everyone will have to be very aware of and keep an eye out for especially in today's day and age where you just don't know where restrictions might come in and you have to, even in future might have to continue to play in bubbles."

"I think it's very important to consider how much you're playing and it's not just the physical side of things but mental side of things as well."

"The players need to be spoken to and consulted with. Otherwise it's going to be a case of whoever can last through difficult times like these, plays. If not, you know, move away and someone else replaces that player."

"I don't think that that's healthy for a cricket system and a cricket culture moving forward."

In the end, Kohli stoutly defended out of form Rahul and elaborated on how the team deals with struggling players.

"I can only think about one thing when people talk about a player is out of form. kuch toh log kahenge logon ka kaam hain kehna, chodo bekaar ki baaton mein kahi beet na jaaye raina (quoting a Hindi song)."

"There is a lot of impatience outside the cricket set up. People love listening to criticism and it has only increased."

"In the team we know how to manage a player going through a tough patch. It is not as if you forget playing the game, it is just that you don't have the same mental clarity that you would usually have and then there is talk about you, which is another external factor you have to deal with."

"We will continue to back our players and keep them in good mental space."

## Harshwardhan Tomar Becomes 5th NBA India Graduate To Play In US



Press Trust of India

**NEW DELHI:** NBA Academy India graduate Harshwardhan Tomar has signed up with KEBA Preparatory School in Cincinnati, Ohio, becoming the fifth NBA Academy India male student-athlete to commit to a high school basketball program in the US.

"I am truly grateful to KEBA Prep School for this opportunity and look forward to adding new layers to my game and advance my academic goals at the same time," said Tomar in a release.

"I thank my mother who has stood by me through all, and my coaches and peers at the NBA Academy India for getting me ready for this chapter of my life."

Tomar first participated in the Reliance Foundation Jr NBA program in 2015. He joined NBA Academy India as part of the second class of student-athletes identified through the ACG-NBA Jump Program in 2018.

The centre from Bhind, Madhya Pradesh, has been part of multiple basketball development camps organised by the NBA, including the 2019 NBA Academy Games and Basketball Without Borders (BWB) Global during NBA All-Star 2019 in Charlotte.

Tomar was also part of the NBA Academy India team that competed in the 2019-20 European Youth Basketball League (EYBL) in Hungary.

Four others to commit to playing basketball in the US, include Jagshaanbir Singh, Pranav Prince, Amaan Sandhu, and Rhythanshu Negi.

Principal Singh became the first NBA Academy India graduate to sign a professional contract when he signed up with the NBA G League.

NBA Academy India is an elite basketball training centre for the top prospects from throughout India and the first of its kind in the country and is supported by official partner ACC.

## 'Umpire's Call Creates Confusion, If Ball Is Hitting Stumps It Should Be Out,' Says Virat Kohli

Press Trust of India

**PUNE:** India skipper Virat Kohli on Monday criticised the fiercely-debated umpire's call in the Decision Review System, saying it is creating a lot of confusion and LBW dismissals should be based solely on whether the ball is hitting the stumps, even if marginally.

As per the existing rule, at least 50 per cent of the ball should be hitting at least one of the three stumps for the batsman to be adjudged LBW on review in case an umpire's call has been challenged.

"I played for a long time when there was no DRS. Right. If the umpire made a decision, whether the batsman liked it or not, it stayed like that. Vice versa the umpire gave it not out and it was out, it stayed



like that, whether it was marginal or not," said Kohli ahead of the first ODI of a three-match series against England here on Tuesday.

"According to me, umpire's call

right now is creating a lot of confusion. When you get bowled as a batsman, you don't expect the ball to hit more than 50 per cent into the stumps to consider yourself bowled.

"So from basic cricket common-sense, I don't think that there should be any debate on that. If the ball is clipping the stumps, that should be out whether you like it or not, you lose the review."

Kohli, who was critical of the on-field soft signals following Suryakumar Yadav's dismissal during the T20 series against England, said the game has to be kept simple.

"That's how simple the game has to be if it hits the stumps, or it misses the stumps. It doesn't matter how much it's hitting, and those kinds of things, because it's creating a lot of confusion."

"...and you know the one more factor that needs to be considered is that, you know, how the fielding team responds to a dismissal that is claimed is also somewhere, defining

soft signals as well," he said.

"You have to question what the spirit of the game is and what those guidelines are, because if, things like that happened with the Indian cricket team overseas, then you are talking about a totally different conversation of spirit of the game..." he asserted.

Kohli said the things could come to a head in high-stakes tournaments if controversial umpiring calls end up affecting results.

"...there's a lot at stake in the future with the big tournaments, and you don't want some grey area factors in the game, which leaves you with no clarity to be the defining factors of those big tournaments."

Spin great Shane Warne for long has called for a tweak in the umpire's call, expressing a view similar to Kohli on the subject.



## Charging Mobile Phones, Laptops in AC Trains Banned

### Agenceis

**KOLLAM:** Considering chances of fire accidents, charging laptops and mobile phones inside AC coaches of trains during night hours has been strictly banned.

It has been directed to keep the charging points in trains switched off from 11 pm to 5 am. Though this was already instructed, the

charging points off. The authorities decided to conduct surprise checks and take strict action against the staff if any lapses are found. A circular was issued in this regard.

Earlier, incidents of fire accidents were reported due to over-charging and heating of laptops and mobile phones that were being charged inside trains at night. The new action was initiated to



charging points in trains switched off from 11 pm to 5 am. Though this was already instructed, the charging points in many trains were not switched off at night.

The Southern Railway has warned the employees, including AC mechanics, who fail to keep the

avoid accidents.

Also several complaints rose that the sleeping passengers are disturbed when others use mobile phones and laptops at night. This also will be resolved after the charging points are turned off during night hours.

## Govt of India Confers Gandhi Peace Prize 2020 on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

### Agenceis

**B**angabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, former president of Bangladesh is being conferred the Gandhi Peace Prize for the year 2020. The Ministry of Culture unanimously decided to select his name for recognition of his outstanding contribution towards social, economic and political transformation through non-violent and other Gandhian methods.

The jury for Gandhi Peace Prize is chaired by Hon'ble Prime Minister, Sh Narendra Modi, and comprises of two ex-officio members, namely the Chief Justice of India and Leader of the single largest Opposition Party in Lok Sabha. Two eminent members are also part of the Jury, namely Shri Om Birla, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, and Shri Bindeshwar Pathak, Founder of Sulabh International Social Service Organization.

The Jury met on 19th March, 2021 and after due deliberations and decided to select Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

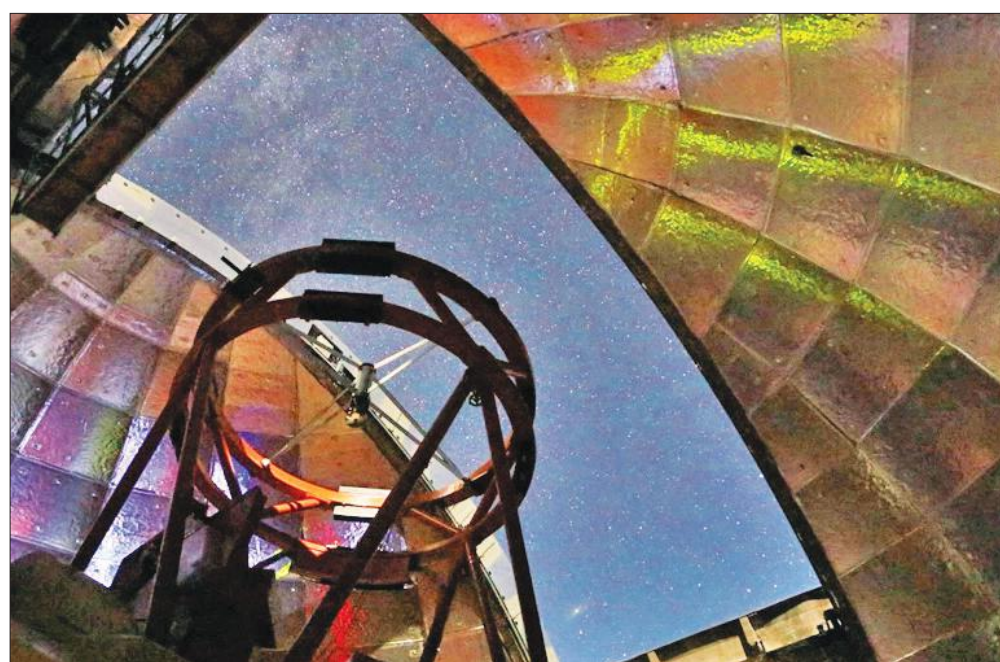
The award recognizes the immense and unparalleled contribution of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in inspiring the liberation of Bangladesh, bringing stability to a nation born out of strife, laying the foundation for the close and fraternal relations between India and Bangladesh, and promoting peace and non-violence in the Indian subcontinent.

PM Modi has said that Bang-



abandhu was a champion of human rights and freedom, and is a hero to Indians as well. He also said that the legacy and inspiration of Bangabandhu has made the heritage of both countries more comprehensive and deep-rooted, and that the path shown by Bangabandhu has laid a strong foundation for the partnership, progress and prosperity of both countries over the last decade. As Bangladesh celebrates Mujib Borsho, India is honoured to be commemorating his legacy jointly with the Government of Bangladesh and its people.

The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation, a plaque and an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item. It is an annual award instituted by Government of India since 1995, the 125th Birth Anniversary commemoration year of Mahatma Gandhi.



The view from inside the dome of NASA's Infrared Telescope Facility during a night of observing.

## No Threat To Earth As Huge Asteroid Zooms Past

### Agenceis

**T**he largest asteroid to pass by Earth this year has made its closest approach, posing no threat of a cataclysmic collision but giving astronomers a rare chance to study a rock formed during the beginning of our solar system.

The asteroid was two million kilometres (1.25 million miles) away at its nearest, according to NASA – more than five times the distance between the Earth and the Moon but still close enough to be classified as a "potentially hazardous asteroid".

NASA tracks and catalogues such objects that could potentially slam into Earth and unleash enormous destruction, like the massive asteroid that wiped out 75 percent of life on the planet 66 million years ago.

Asteroid 2001 FO32, discovered 20 years ago, was too far to be that dangerous even as it reached its nearest point to Earth at around 14:00 GMT on Sunday, according to the Paris Observatory. NASA said it was travelling at about 124,000 km/h (77,000 mph).

"Oh yes, friends! Do you see this dot of light? This dot of light is the asteroid," exclaimed astrophysicist

Gianluca Masi of the Italy-based Virtual Telescope Project, which had trained its lenses on the rock on Monday soon after its nearest approach.

"How happy I am, how proud I am, how I excited I am... to bring this to you live," said Masi as he displayed a grainy image of a pale dot during a YouTube broadcast.

Astronomers were hoping to get a better understanding of the composition of the estimated 900-metre (3,000-foot) rock as it zoomed by. "When sunlight hits an asteroid's surface, minerals in the rock absorb some wavelengths while reflecting others," NASA said.

"By studying the spectrum of light reflecting off the surface, astronomers can measure the chemical 'fingerprints' of the minerals on the surface of the asteroid."

Because of its elongated orbit, NASA said it "picks up speed like a skateboarder rolling down a half-pipe, and then slows after being flung back out into deep space and swinging back towards the Sun".

The study of asteroids and comets that come this close to our planet – dubbed Near-Earth Object, or NEO – gives scientists a better understanding of the history and dynamics of

the solar system. It is also a valuable database of potential threats – an impact by a huge rock from space could devastate the entire planet.

Around 80 to 100 tonnes of material such as dust and small meteorites fall on Earth every day, according to NASA, posing no serious threat, but larger objects can cause major destruction as they possess immense momentum because of their high speed. In 2013, an object close to 60 meters wide exploded over the Russian city of Chelyabinsk, unleashing 30 times the force of the nuclear bomb dropped over Hiroshima during World War II.

Experts estimate such events take place once or twice a century, and hits by bigger objects are even more infrequent. NASA has said more than 95 percent of near-Earth asteroids the size of 2001 FO32 or larger have been catalogued and none of them has any chance of impacting our planet over the next century.

The agency is studying potential ways to thwart an impact by an asteroid or comet, including slamming spacecraft into the object to divert it and even nuclear explosions as a last resort.

## India Has World's Fourth Strongest Military: Study

### Agenceis

**W**hile China has the strongest military in the world, the US comes a close second followed by India at the number spot, a study released by defence website Military Direct stated.

The study which was released on Sunday, calculated countries' "ultimate military strength index" after gauging various factors including budgets, number of inactive and active military personnel, total air, sea, land and nuclear resources, average salaries, and weight of equipment.

"The USA, despite their enormous military budgets, comes in 2nd place with 74 points, followed by Russia with 69, India at 61 and then France with 58. The UK just about makes the Top 10, coming in 9th place with



a score of 43," said the study.

China has the strongest military in the world, scoring 82 out of 100 points in the index, it noted.

"Based on these scores, which account for budgets, men, and things like air and navy capacity, it does suggest that China would come out as top dog in a hypothetical super

conflict," it mentioned. The world's biggest military spender with a budget of USD 732 billion per year is the USA, it noted, adding that China comes second with USD 261 billion, followed by India at USD 71 billion.

"China would win by sea, USA by air and Russia by land" in this hypothetical conflict, it said.

## 'Govt' In Delhi Means 'L-G': Lok Sabha Passes NCT Bill

### Agenceis

**A** bill that seeks to make it clear that the "government" in Delhi means the "Lieutenant Governor" was passed by Lok Sabha on Monday amidst strong opposition from the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party which said that the legislation is "unconstitutional".

Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy said the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, has become necessary as there has been ambiguity in certain issues related to the functioning of the Delhi government and several cases were also filed in courts.

According to the bill, the "government" in Delhi means the "Lieutenant Governor" and it also makes it mandatory for the Delhi government to take the opinion of the L-G before any executive action.

"Please do not say that it is a political bill. It is being brought to end ambiguity in certain issues as Delhi is a Union Territory. It will end certain confusion or technicality and enhance the efficiency of the administration," he said.

Reddy also stressed that by bringing the bill "there has been no murder of democracy".

The minister said when the GNCTD Act was enacted in 1991 by the then Congress government, Delhi was made a Union Territory (UT) with an assembly with "limited legislative powers".

"We did not do that. It was a Congress government which piloted the Act then," he said.

Reddy said the Lieutenant Governor (L-G) is an administrator so he has the right to know the day-to-day affairs. "We have not snatched any power from the Delhi government nor we have given any additional power to the L-G," he said.

He strongly objected to some opposition members' reference that the "Modi government is dictatorial" and said the NDA government has not done anything wrong or new but just ended ambiguity and brought clarity on the Delhi government.

"If we are wrong, we will listen to the abuses. But without being wrong, we won't tolerate abuses. It is aimed at bringing more transparency," Reddy said.

He said that there has been cordial relations between the central and Delhi governments since 1996, and all differences were resolved through discussions.

However, since 2015, some issues have come up and cases were filed before the Delhi High Court, which also gave certain rulings, Reddy said.

He said the court had also ruled that the L-G should be informed on executive issues of the city government.

Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party has opposed the bill. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had even urged the central government to take back the bill and said the AAP dispensation was ready to fall at the Modi government's feet for its withdrawal.

Initiating the debate, Congress MP Manish Tewari said the bill is "unconstitutional" and it takes away certain rights of the city government which were given

under a constitutional amendment, a charge rejected by the BJP.

The measure is contrary to what the then Union Home Minister L. K. Advani had perceived some 18 years ago, he said.

Tewari was of the view that the bill seeks to prevent the city government from implementing the decisions taken by the legislative assembly.

BJP member Meenakshi Lekhi, who represents the New Delhi seat in Lok Sabha, said the bill seeks to rectify the alleged mismanagement of Delhi and blamed both the Congress and the ruling AAP for it.

She maintained that the Constitution is not federal but quasi-federal in nature where the Centre's say cannot be ignored.

Lekhi said the Congress could have given full statehood to Delhi if it wanted.

AAP member Bhagwant Mann alleged that the central government is a "specialist in abusing" the rights of states and wants to rule Delhi through "soul of Viceroy".

While vehemently opposing the bill, Mann, AAP's only Lok Sabha member, wondered whether the Centre wants to turn the national capital into a Union Territory like Jammu and Kashmir where there is an assembly, but it is non-functional since election has not been held ever since it was made a UT.

He said when the chief minister of Delhi cannot take any decision, then what is the point in conducting assembly polls.

"The Centre is a specialist in abusing the rights of states whether it was in the farm laws or whether running state governments through Governors or L-Gs," he said.

Underlining that Delhi is the seat of the central government, BJP MP Brijendra Singh said "an anarchist" came to power in the national capital in 2013 and during his rule if full state-hood status had been given to Delhi, it would have resulted into a "civil war".

Stressing that the bill is against the spirit of cooperative federalism NCP member Supriya Sule said it should be referred to the select committee of Parliament for further elaborate deliberations.

According to the statement of objects and reasons of the bill, the original bill was enacted to supplement the provisions of the Constitution relating to the legislative assembly and a Council of Ministers for Delhi and for matters connected therewith.

It said that to give effect to the interpretation made by the Supreme Court which had ruled that the city government need not obtain the Lieutenant Governor's "concurrence" of every issue of day-to-day governance, the bill has been brought.

"The said bill will promote harmonious relations between the legislature and the executive, and further define the responsibilities of the elected government and the L-G, in line with the constitutional scheme of governance of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, as interpreted by the Supreme Court," the statement of objects said.

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