



P3 CITY

GOVT ROLLS OUT HOUSEBOATS POLICY

The Administrative Council (AC), which met under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, Monday approved the roll-out of policy and guidelines for sustainable operation of houseboats in Dal and Nigeen lakes....

P7 THINK COVID-19: 2021 AND BEYOND

One year ago today, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the first caused by a coronavirus. As we enter year two of the pandemic, let's remind ourselves of some sobering statistics. So far, there have been more...



P5 STATE

OUTRAGE AS TRAFFIC DEPT SEIZES NON-J&K REGISTERED VEHICLES

Traffic Department's drive to seize vehicles with outside J&K registration numbers has sparked outrage among the local residents. On Monday, the ...



Widom! Quote!

The starting point of all achievement is desire
—Napoleon Hill

NEWS DIGEST

Arms Cache Recovered Near LoC: Army

SRINAGAR: The state forces have seized a cache of arms and ammunition, including five AK assault rifles, from an area close to the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, an army official said on Monday. "In a major success to security forces deployed in Karnah, a huge recovery was made in the late hours of Sunday owing to high state of alertness of the army and police," the official said. He said the security forces • [More On P10](#)

Nine Youth 'Detained' In Baramulla

SRINAGAR: At least nine youth from south Kashmir's Shopian district on Monday were detained by police from Sheeri area of Baramulla district.

A local news agency KDC quoted Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Baramulla, Rayees Ahmad as saying that the nine boys from Zainapora area of Shopian were detained by police after noticing them in suspicious condition. He said that all the nine have been detained from Sheeri area of Baramulla, adding that after proper verification • [More On P10](#)

CRPF Man 'Strangles' Wife To Death

SRINAGAR: A Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) man allegedly strangled his wife to death at their rented house in south Kashmir's Anantnag district on Monday. 36-year-old Sumi Bai was strangled to death by her husband due to some family issue in a rented house at Nagbal, Sherbagh, news agency KNO reported Monday while quoting an unnamed official. "On visiting his house, the woman's body was found lying on a ground floor. A strangulation mark • [More On P10](#)

Shailendra Mishra Deputed To NIA

SRINAGAR: Shailendra Mishra has been appointed as Superintendent of Police in National Investigation Agency (NIA) by the government.

"Consequent upon the approval of the Competent Authority to the induction of Dr. Shailendra Mishra, IPS (RR: 09), as Superintendent of Police in National Investigation Agency (NIA), against an existing vacancy, on deputation basis, for a period of four years w.e.f. the date of assumption of the charge of the post, or till further orders, whichever is earlier, he is • [More On P10](#)

BJP Councillor, SPO Shot Dead By Militants In Sopore: Police

4 Policemen Suspended For 'Inappropriate' Retaliation



Observer Monitoring Desk

SRINAGAR: A Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) councillor and a

special police officer were killed on Monday in a militant attack in Sopore town of Baramulla • [More On P10](#)

LG, Politicians Condemn Killings

Observer Monitoring Desk

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and most mainstream political parties on Monday condemned the killing of a Municipal Councillor and a policeman by militants in Sopore town of Baramulla district. "I strongly condemn the killings of Municipal Councillor & police personnel by Terrorists at Sopore. • [More On P10](#)

CRPF Man Injured In Lawaypora Attack Dies

A CRPF constable who suffered injuries in militant firing died at a hospital here on Monday, taking the death toll in the attack in Lawaypora on the outskirts of Srinagar last week to three, officials said. Constable Jagannath Ray succumbed to injuries at the SKIMS Hospital in Soura after battling for life for four days, a police official said. He said Constable Ray was among the four CRPF personnel injured in the militant attack on Thursday. Two personnel -- a sub-inspector and a constable -- • [More On P10](#)

Mehbooba Gets 'Adverse' Police Report, Passport Application Rejected

Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR: Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti's application for a passport has been rejected by the Regional Passport Office here, based on an "adverse" police



verification report. In a letter

HC Dismisses Passport Petition

The Jammu and Kashmir High Court on Monday dismissed a petition filed by PDP president Mehbooba Mufti, in which she had sought a direction to the passport • [More On P10](#)

Art-370 Can Only Be Restored By SC, Parliament: Sajad Lone

3 Former Legislators From NC, PDP Join JKPC Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR: The Sajad Lone-led Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Conference received a shot in the arm as three former legislators from the NC and the PDP joined the party here on Monday. Former minister Syed Basharat Bukhari, who recently left the National Conference; former MLA Peer Mansoor, who was associated with the



Peoples Democratic Party since its formation; and former MLC Khurshid Aalam, who had

joined the PDP after retiring from services, joined the JKPC at a function here. • [More On P10](#)

CAG Raps 3 J&K Depts Over Improper Planning, Undisbursed Funds

Press Trust Of India

JAMMU: There was an increase in accumulated balances in 1,138 bank accounts of three departments in Jammu and Kashmir between 2014 and 2019 due to factors such as improper planning and undisbursed funds for relief or compensation to victims of militancy and natural disasters, the CAG has said.

It is recommended that there is an effective monitoring mechanism in the union territory in this regard and



government instructions are strictly implemented, it said in a report tabled in Parliament recently.

The massive increase in balances were in accounts of 131 Drawing and Disbursing Officers (DDOs) of the public works, • [More On P10](#)

'128 Solar Power Plants At Police Establishments Defunct'

As many as 128 solar power plants at police establishments in Jammu and Kashmir remained non-functional since 2014 due to non-settlement of payment of works contract tax, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has said. The CAG has asked the J&K Home Department to settle works contract tax (WCT) on priority and ensure rectification • [More On P10](#)

Rainfall Plummets Mercury In Kashmir

Observer Monitoring Desk

SRINAGAR: Rains lashed Kashmir overnight dropping mercury by a few notches even as the minimum temperatures remained considerably above normal across the Valley, weatherman said on Monday.

A meteorological department official said that Srinagar received 3.1mm of rain in 24 hours till 0830 hours while mercury settled at 11.2 degree Celsius against previous

night's 12.2 degree Celsius in the summer capital. The temperature was above by 5.1 degree Celsius in Srinagar for this time of the year, the official said.

Qazigund received 1.2mm of rain and recorded a low of 7.4 degree Celsius against 8.2 degree Celsius on the previous night, he said. Pahalgam received 13.0mm of rain while mercury settled at 7.0 degree Celsius against 6.9 degree Celsius on the earlier night at the famous resort in south Kashmir, • [More On P10](#)

J&K Logs 235 More Covid Cases

Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir on Monday recorded 235 new positive COVID-19 cases, taking the infection tally to 1,30,228, even as no fresh death due to the disease was reported in the Union territory in the past 24 hours, officials said.

These fresh cases also include 58 travellers, they said.

Out of the new cases, 51 were reported from Jammu division and 184 from Kashmir division of the Union territory (UT), they said. Srinagar district recorded the highest of 99 cases, including 40 travellers, followed by 35 in Baramulla • [More On P10](#)

Health Dept Rules Out Man's Death Due To Vaccine

Observer Monitoring Desk

The health department has refuted media reports about the death of an elderly man, hours after he was administered a coronavirus vaccine jab in north Kashmir's Handwara on Saturday last. • [More On P10](#)

The Band Show: The Quiet Return Of Theatrics In Kashmir

Saqib Jameel

A year before the "return of democracy" in Kashmir's trouble theatre, its folk play house resurrected from the belt which would be declared as the first "militancy-free" district in Kashmir during its "healing touch" years.

By 1995, the band known to "enlighten and entertain" the grassroots was back to revive the cultural pulse left paralysed by the political arising in the valley. 26 years later, on the occasion of the World Theatre Day, as the raging strife is still at the center stage, the cultural forum remains work in progress.

Their efforts, however, have revitalised some of the folk activities when Kashmir over the

years has failed to produce a prominent theatre artist like Shadi Lal Koul.

While many young and talented—some of whom are forced to give up on their passion pursuits—blame the lack of forums in the valley, Gulshan Cultural Forum Kashmir (GCFK) is keeping the artistic promise intact.

"For the first four years [since its inception 1995], GCFK played it quiet, as the valley was still in the middle of a raging phase of insurgency," says one of the band members from Budgam.

"Most of us were caught in quandary, as one group was against our pursuits, while the other would warn us: the show must go on."

The hint was purportedly heaved at the erstwhile folk-artist



who would then play a ringleader of renegades. Seasoned sleuths and scribes in Srinagar call the chieftain—backed by the martial-muscle matrix—as someone who set the stage for the 'political theatre' in 1996.

"But before that," says a senior scribe, then actively covering Kashmir, "the gloom had to be uplifted from the valley."

A certain Indian premier, the scribe states, was then talking about implementing Punjab model

in Kashmir. "It was in this backdrop that cultural activities were restarted in the desolated valley."

As some of these folk-artists regrouped under new banners, they were hailed as the 'band ambassadors' of Kashmir culture.

"While some of them show up in propaganda programmes in Doordarshan, others took the folk theatre where it was rooted — grassroots," the scribe says.

Amid this show optics in the valley, GCFK oiled its cultural

canons and consistently organised events on Art, Literature, Music and Drama.

The group would initially operate in the rural pockets of Budgam—known to house Kashmir's iconic folk-artists—with an objective of encouraging theatre as a medium of conveying social and cultural, if not political, messages.

But as the landscape was still exploding with the deafening defiance, the forum had to wait for regularizing their troupe.

The formal recognition came when 1999 Kargil War almost threatened to devour the "uneasy calm" in the valley.

"Back then, the folk-artists were badly bitten by the political paralysis in Kashmir," the senior scribe continues • [More On P10](#)

Srinagar Shows 'Exponential Rise' In Coronavirus Cases

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Srinagar is one of 46 hotspot districts in India showing an exponential rise of COVID cases.

They said that 46 districts in India contribute over 70 per cent of cases and deaths of the total since first March 2021.

They said that out of 46 deaths, 25 are from Maharashtra, four from Gujarat, three each from Haryana and Tamil Nadu, two each from Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and one each from Del-

concerts and large gathering at different places which can have a dangerous impact.

Doctors Association President and Flu expert Dr Nisar Ul Hassan said that these things can't go hand in hand and authorities must take cognizance of it.

He said new waves will continue to attack us until we have herd immunity and authorities must speed up the vaccination process as around 90 per cent of the population is yet to be vaccinated who are still susceptible to infection.

He said that people aren't following Covid-19 protocols



Experts warned authorities that on one side they are asking to follow Covid appropriate behaviour and on the other side same administration is allowing music concerts and large gathering at different places which can have a dangerous impact

hi, J&K, Karnataka, Punjab and Bihar.

Pertinent Srinagar has been witnessing the highest resurgence in Covid-19 cases and out of 2,110 active cases, 908 are from Srinagar.

Meanwhile, experts warned authorities that on one side they are asking to follow Covid appropriate behaviour and on the other side same administration is allowing music

and allowing concerts is adding fuel to the fire.

He added that as cases will go high deaths will also increase as hospitals are once again receiving several patients suffering from pneumonia.

He added that at present testing is mostly being done for the original strain and there is a need for robust genetic sequencing to check mutants—(KNO)

Drugs And Food Control Organisation Conducts Registration Mela In Srinagar

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Drugs and Food Control organisation District Srinagar conducted two licence cum registration melas at Eidgah and Shalimar Srinagar respectively.

During these melas 309 registrations and 25 licences were issued on the spot. The process for the issuance of Licence registration certificates has been made easy by the department and Food Business Operators have been advised to access the website FoSCos.fssai.gov.in for further necessary guidances statement said.

Commissioner Food and Drugs Administration Shaheel Ur Rehman said that although on one hand the issuance of licence /registrations has been made easy but at the same time there shall be no compromise on hygienic requirements and quality of food items. Assistant Commissioner Food Safety Srinagar has warned street food vendors not to keep food articles exposed to smoke and dust otherwise stern action under relevant provisions of Food Safety & Standards Act shall be initiated against them. (KNS)



Amid a surge in militant attacks, cops frisking two youth in Srinagar's Hari Singh High Street on Monday. KO Photo, Abid Bhat

Govt Rolls Out Houseboats Policy

Houseboats Moored In Dal And Nigeen Lakes To Be E-registered

JAMMU: The Administrative Council (AC), which met under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, Monday approved the roll-out of policy and guidelines for sustainable operation of houseboats in Dal and Nigeen lakes.

A government statement said that the new policy aims to regulate the functioning of houseboats moored in Dal and Nigeen lakes by adopting the models of sustainable and responsible tourism.

"The policy envisages providing a pleasant experience to tourists and sustainable source of living to stakeholders while preserving the fragile ecosystem."

Keeping in view the carrying capacities, the Tourism Department has capped the number of houseboats in both lakes at 910. Under the new policy, the houseboats are required to be registered online subject to

the fulfilment of various conservation parameters; within 30 days from the date notification of the policy.

The houseboats and associated structures are required to be fitted with bio-digesters for the scientific treatment of solid/liquid waste as per the approved design of the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority, besides ensuring availability of adequate fire safety equipment along with trained staff to be verified by Fire & Emergency Services Department.

Further, the policy lays down regulations for ancillary facilities like kitchen, lodging, furniture, first-aid, electricity, power back-up, sanitary fittings and shikara for navigation. It also ensures the availability of minimum basic facilities to the tourists to be categorised on the basis of different classes of houseboats.

The policy includes provisions for undertaking repairs on damaged, dilapidated and abandoned houseboats, and revival of cruise boats and donga cruise.

Moreover, the policy provides for the constitution of an Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of Director Tourism Kashmir to look into the conservation of the lakes in relation to the functioning of the houseboats while recommending measures to increase the tourist influx in a sustainable manner.

Additionally, a Regulatory Committee headed by Deputy Director, Tourism will also be constituted for ensuring compliance with the norms and procedures laid down in the policy.

The policy bridges the aspirations of all stakeholders while complying with the directions of the High Court in the matter.

Houseboat Owners Association Welcomes

Srinagar: Spokesperson Kashmir Houseboat Owners Association Monday, Muhammad Yakub Dunoo, welcomed the Houseboat Policy.

In a statement, Dunoo said, "I am sure this policy will be fruitful and will boost the Houseboat Industry in future for our next generation."

He said, "I hope this policy will not be similar as that was announced in July last year and was not acceptable to all the Houseboat owners."

He said he sees a ray of hope in the policy.

Adv Khan Reviews Arrangements For Tulip Festival

Observer News Service

JAMMU: Advisor to Lieutenant Governor, Baseer Ahmad Khan Monday chaired a meeting to review the arrangements for the upcoming Tulip Festival starting April 3.

The meeting held threadbare discussion on the slew of measures put in place for the successful conduct of the Tulip Festival.

The meeting was attended by Commissioner Secretary Floriculture, Sheikh Fayaz Ahmad, Secretary Tourism, Sarmad Hafeez and CEO Mission Youth, Dr. Shahid Iqbal Choudhary.

On the occasion, the Advisor directed the officers to work in synergy and cooperation with the line departments to make the festival a grand affair.

Advisor directed the officers to look into all aspects with respect to the day to day activities during the tulip festival. All the measures should be taken up meticulously so that tourists from rest of the country and abroad are attracted to the festival.

The Advisor said that the coming week is very important as the tulips would be in full bloom and will be major attraction for national and international tourists and asked the officers to be prepared in all respects, be that sani-



tation, traffic management, emergency services, cultural activities, musical fountains, road decorations and other measures.

The Advisor underscored the need to maintain guard against COVID and laid stress on following the COVID protocol adherently. He directed the officers to follow the prescribed guidelines in letter and spirit.

He said that there is a huge influx of

tourists and they are visiting the Tulip garden already in large numbers and we must tap the potential. This must look like the festive tulip season in a real sense. The Advisor also emphasised on the need for sanitation of the area with proper decoration and regulation of traffic during the festival to ensure hassle-free movement of tourists.

Commissioner Secretary, Floriculture said that tulips will be in full bloom

The coming week is very important as the tulips would be in full bloom and will be major attraction for national and international tourists and asked the officers to be prepared in all respects, be that sanitation, traffic management, emergency services, cultural activities, musical fountains, road decorations and other measures

in the coming days and will mesmerise the visitors.

Secretary Tourism gave a detailed review of the activities taken up by the department for the success of the Tulip Festival and the activities taken for attracting the tourists.

DIAL-EMMA



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

AIRPORTS

SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311



RAILWAYS

- SRINAGAR: 0194-2103259
- ANANTNAG: 01932-228243
- BARAMULLA: 0194-102029
- 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
15 SHABAN
1442

PRAYERS

FAJR	4: 57
ZUHR	12:36
ASR	5:03
Magrib	6:53
ISHA	8:13

This Day In History

- 240 BC - 1st recorded perihelion passage of Halley's Comet.
- 1603 - Battle at Mellifont: English army under Lord Mountjoy beats Irish
- 1796 - Carl Friedrich Gauss, German mathematician, discovers the construction of the heptadecagon
- 1814 - Napoleonic Wars: Sixth Coalition forces march into Paris after defeating Napoleon.
- 1842 - Ether used as an anaesthetic for 1st time by Dr Crawford Long (Ga)
- 1856 - Russia signs Peace of Paris, ending the Crimean War
- 1885 - The Battle for Kushka triggers the Pandjeh Incident which nearly gives rise to war between the British Empire and Russian Empire.
- 1919 - Gandhi announces resistance against Rowlatt Act
- 1925 - Stalin supports rights of non-Serbian Yugoslavians
- 1941 - German counter offensive in North-Africa
- 1945 - USSR invades Austria
- 1945 - World War II: a defecting German pilot delivers a Messerschmitt Me 262A-1 to Americans.
- 1950 - Phototransistor invention announced, Murray Hill, NJ
- 1953 - Albert Einstein announces revised unified field theory
- 1959 - Dalai Lama flees China and is granted political asylum in India
- 1961 - NASA civilian pilot Joseph A Walker takes X-15 169,600' (51,690 m).
- 1965 - Vietnam War: A car bomb explodes in front of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, killing 22 and wounding 183 others.
- 1968 - General Ludvik Svoboda elected president of Czechoslovakia
- 1970 - USSR wins its 8th straight world hockey championship
- 1972 - North Vietnamese troops enter South Vietnam
- 1976 - Israel kills 6 Palestinians protesting land confiscation
- 1982 - 3rd space shuttle mission-Columbia 3 lands at White Sands, NM
- 1984 - US ends participation in multinational Lebanon peace force
- 2006 - Marcos Pontes is the first Brazilian astronaut in space.
- 2006 - UK Terrorism Act 2006 becomes law.
- 2011 - Global credit information group Experian report that economic recovery in Wales slower than the rest of the UK, forecasting growth of 1.6% vs 2.2% for the rest of the UK
- 2012 - Mastercard and Visa announce a massive breach in security with over ten million compromised credit card numbers.

From KO Archives

All Set For Re-Opening Of Historic Road

Observer News Service

Srinagar - Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will flag off a historic bus service connecting the divided parts of Kashmir from a sports stadium here to accommodate a large number of people expected to turn out for the occasion.

The bus will now begin its journey from here to Muzaffarabad on April 7 from the Sher-e-Kashmir Cricket Stadium instead of the much smaller Tourist Reception Centre!

The SRTC buses will be flagged off at 11 am by the Prime Minister and the function will be also attended by UPA Chairperson and Congress President Sonia Gandhi. The decision to change the venue was taken Monday at a

High-level meeting here. The first batch of 30 passengers will leave here for Muzaffarabad in two 15-seater buses, official sources said today.

They said on the same day, an equal number of passengers from Muzaffarabad would be received here.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed reviewed arrangements for the first bus from Srinagar to Muzaffarabad with top officials of his administration.

Responding to the people's wish to celebrate the event on a major scale, the government has decided to observe the historic event in a befitting manner and Srinagar is expected to wear a merry look with enthusiastic participation of people in various festivities at the public level, the sources said.

Prominent theatre personality M K Raina who is here to choreograph the celebrations also attended the meeting. Saeed enquired about the arrangements to be made for the function and seeing off and receiving passengers from the two sides.

The Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Deputy Commissioners and senior officers of various departments, who participated in the meeting, informed the Chief Minister that everything was in place, the sources said.

Saeed said the event being of great significance, national and international media teams would be here in large numbers to cover it and called for adequate arrangement to facilitate better coverage by media persons.

The Chief Minister enquired about various arrangements to be made for the function and seeing off and receiving passengers from the two sides. He also asked about the status of the road and the reception facility erected at Salamabad for the incoming passengers. He was informed that even this is in place. (Kashmir Observer, 30 March, 2005)

US Seeks To Drive Wedge Between China, Muslim World: Spokeswoman



Agenceis

Beijing says the United States and some European countries "don't really care about Muslims," but they are using the issue of Uighur Muslims to sow discord between China and the Muslim world.

In a series of tweets on Sunday, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying questioned the intentions behind the US and other European states' declared support for Uighurs in far-western Xinjiang, drawing attention to rampant discrimination against Muslims in their own countries as well as the US-led wars in Muslim nations under the pretext of countering terrorism.

"Obviously, some in the US and Europe don't really care about Muslims. Or how could they, after 9/11, hit so many Muslim countries so hard in the name of counter-terrorism that hundreds of thousand[s] of Muslims were killed and millions displaced?" she said referring to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US.

She also underscored the serious discrimination against Muslims in the US and some European countries.

"Yet they seem to have a particular interest in the Uighur people in Xinjiang" while there are 56 ethnic groups in China, the spokeswoman said.

"For most of the Muslim people, the United States is certainly not the safest country to live in," Chunying stressed.

Her remarks came as Britain,

the United States, European Union, and Canada imposed sanctions on China over allegations of human rights violations regarding the ethnic Muslim minority group in Xinjiang.

Beijing vehemently denies reports that Uighurs are unfairly marginalized and dismisses the West's accusations as interference in China's domestic affairs.

The mostly Muslim-Turkic ethnic group of Uighurs, which makes up about 45 percent of the population in Xinjiang, has long accused Beijing of cultural, religious, and economic discrimination.

China rejects the accusation and, in turn, accuses what it describes as exiled separatist groups of planning attacks in the resource-rich Xinjiang, which is strategically located on the borders of Central Asia.

China's Foreign Ministry announced on Saturday that it had imposed sanctions on a number of US and Canadian officials in retaliation for their similar moves against Beijing.

The US relations with China grew increasingly tense under the administration of former president Donald Trump. Washington continually clashed with Beijing over trade, the South China Sea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the coronavirus pandemic.

Later, President Joe Biden also backed Trump's tough approach towards China, pledging that the US would continue to confront what he has called China's "attack on human rights, intellectual property and global governance." Beijing has rejected those charges.

French Company Convicted Of Manslaughter Over Deadly Diet Pill



Servier's former deputy boss, Jean-Philippe Seta, was sentenced to a suspended jail sentence of four years.

Agenceis

A French drugmaker has been found guilty of manslaughter and deception over a weight-loss pill which was on the market for 33 years and blamed for hundreds of deaths.

One of the country's biggest health scandals came to a conclusion in a Paris court on Monday as the Paris court's presiding judge Sylvie Daunis said Servier had "misled consumers" about the Mediator pill and "weakened people's trust in the health system".

Daunis said: "Although they knew about the risks for many years ... they never took the necessary measures."

Servier's former deputy boss, Jean-Philippe Seta, was sentenced to a suspended jail sentence of four years. Its chairman, Jacques Servier, was indicted early in the legal process but died in 2014.

The company was also fined 2.7 million euros (\$3.1m) for aggravated deceit, manslaughter and causing unintentional injury. It was ac-

quitted of fraud.

France's health ministry has said at least 500 people died of heart valve problems nationally because of exposure to the active ingredient in Mediator. Experts say it may eventually cause as many as 2,100 deaths.

The drug was used by about five million people before being pulled in France in 2009 over fears it could cause serious heart problems - more than a decade after such concerns had first been raised.

A huge trial over the scandal was spread over 10 months in 2019 and 2020 and nearly 400 lawyers worked on the case. France's medicines agency was fined 303,000 euros (\$356,000) for its delay in suspending Mediator and told it had "seriously failed" in its role as health watchdog.

Prosecutors had asked for nearly 15 million euros (nearly \$18m) in fines for Servier, and a three-year prison sentence and fine for Seta, the only surviving Servier executive accused of involvement in the scandal.

The 6,500 claimants involved in the case are seeking 1 billion euros (\$1.17bn) in damages.

Servier has acknowledged in the past that Mediator had serious consequences for some patients and agreed to compensate some victims, but it also said it would fight inaccuracies and false statements.

Lawyers for the company had argued the firm was not aware of the risks associated with Mediator before 2009. They also said Servier never pretended it was a diet pill.

Once licensed as a diabetes treatment, Mediator was widely prescribed as an appetite suppressant to help people lose weight.

Its active chemical substance is known as Benfluorex. One doctor flagged concerns over the pill as far back as 1998, and testified that he was bullied into retracting them.

Facing questions about side effects from medical authorities in Switzerland, Spain and Italy, Servier withdrew it from those markets between 1997 and 2004.

It took an independent investigation by another worried French doctor before the company suspended sales in its main market in France.

Pakistan Imposes Partial Coronavirus Lockdown



ISLAMABAD: Pakistani authorities on Monday imposed a partial lockdown in several more high-risk areas in the capital, Islamabad, and elsewhere in the country after the positivity rate from coronavirus infections jumped to over 11 per cent.

Pakistan is facing another surge in coronavirus infections which officials say is worse than last year's outbreak when Pakistan had to impose a nationwide lockdown.

On Monday, authorities in the eastern Punjab province also an-

nounced a two-week long partial lockdown in high-risk cities from April 1 in an effort aimed at containing the spread of the virus.

So far, Pakistan's government has avoided a nationwide lockdown to spare the country's ailing economy from more damage.

On Monday, Pakistan reported 41 additional deaths and 4,525 coronavirus cases in the past 24 hours.

Pakistan has reported 659,116 cases in total, and 14,256 deaths, since last year. AP

Coronavirus Lab Leak "Extremely Unlikely", Bats May Be Culprit: WHO

Agenceis

A joint WHO-China study on the origins of COVID-19 says that the virus was probably transmitted from bats to humans through another animal, and that a lab leak was "extremely unlikely" as a cause, the Associated Press reported on Monday.

The reported findings match what WHO officials have said in the past about their conclusions following a Jan-Feb visit to China. Many questions remain unanswered, and the team proposed further research in every area except the lab leak hypothesis, the Associated Press reported, citing a draft copy it had obtained.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus acknowledged receipt of the report from the independent experts but declined to give details, telling a Geneva news briefing: "All hypotheses are on the table and warrant complete and further studies."

The 400-page report, drawn up by the team which carried out a mission to the central Chinese city of Wuhan



where the virus was first encountered in late 2019, is to be issued on Tuesday after diplomats from WHO's 194 member states are briefed on its findings, Tedros said.

Germany's international development minister Gerd Mueller, speaking to the same briefing after holding talks with Tedros, welcomed China's cooperation with the probe.

The United States expects the WHO-led investigation to require

further study of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, perhaps including a return visit to China, a senior U.S. official told reporters last week. He hoped it would be "based on science".

The probe was plagued by delays, concern over access and bickering between Beijing and Washington, which under former U.S. President Donald Trump's administration accused China of hiding the extent of the initial outbreak.

Facebook, Google's New Plan To Connect Southeast Asia And America



Agenceis

Facebook said on Monday it planned two new undersea cables to connect Singapore, Indonesia and North America in a project with Google and regional telecommunication companies to boost internet connection capacity between the regions.

"Named Echo and Bifrost, those will be the first two cables to go through a new diverse route crossing the Java Sea and they will increase overall subsea capacity in the trans-pacific by about 70%," Facebook Vice President of Network Investments, Kevin Salvadori, told Reuters.

He declined to specify the size of the investment, but said it was "a very material investment for us in Southeast Asia."

The cables, according to the executive, will be the first to directly connect North America to some of the main parts of Indonesia, and will increase connectivity for the central and eastern provinces of the world's fourth most populous country.

Salvadori said "Echo" is being built in partnership with Alphabet's Google and Indonesian telecommunications' company XL Axiata and should be completed by 2023.

Bifrost, which is being done in partnership with Telin, a subsidiary of Indonesia's Telkom, and Singaporean conglomerate Keppel is due to be completed by 2024.

The two cables, which will need regulatory approval, follow previous investments by Facebook to build up connectivity in Indonesia, one of

its top five markets globally.

While 73% of Indonesia's population of 270 million are online, the majority access the web through mobile data, with less than 10 per cent using a broadband connection, according to a 2020 survey by the Indonesian Internet Providers Association.

Swathes of the country, remain without any internet access.

Facebook said last year it would deploy 3,000 km (1,864 miles) of fibre in Indonesia across twenty cities in addition to a previous deal to develop public Wi-Fi hot spots.

Aside from the Southeast Asian cables, Facebook was continuing with its broader subsea plans in Asia and globally, including with the Pacific Light Cable Network (PLCN), Salvadori said.

"We are working with partners and regulators to meet all of the concerns that people have, and we look forward to that cable being a valuable, productive transpacific cable going forward in the near future," he said.

The 12,800 km PLCN, which is being funded by Facebook and Alphabet, had met U.S. government resistance over plans for a Hong Kong conduit. It was originally intended to link the United States, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Philippines.

Facebook said earlier this month it would drop efforts to connect the cable between California and Hong Kong due to "ongoing concerns from the U.S. government about direct communication links between the United States and Hong Kong".

Barack Obama's Kenyan Grandmother Dies Aged 99



Agenceis

Sarah Obama, the grandmother of former US President Barack Obama, has died aged 99 in western Kenya, her daughter told AFP Monday.

"It is true she has gone to be with the Lord, she passed on this morning," said an emotional Marsat Onyango, her daughter.

Sarah Obama, popularly known as Mama Sarah, had been admitted to the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Teaching and Referral Hospital in Kisumu. Family spokesman Sheikh Musa Ismail said she had been unwell for a week, but had tested negative for Covid-19.

Ismail said the former president had "sent his condolences."

Once a simple country woman, Sarah Obama was for a long time best known for the hot porridge and doughnuts she served at a local school.

But she rose to world fame with the 2008 election of her step-grandson Barack as the first black US president.

Already a national celebrity after the former Illinois senator Barack Obama visited Kenya in 2006, Sarah's modest homestead became a tourist attraction with Obama's November 2008 election triumph.

Born in 1922 in a village on the shores of Lake Victoria, Sarah was the third wife of Hussein Onyango Obama, President Obama's grandfather, a herbalist and a village elder who fought for the British in Burma, now called Myanmar.

Onyango Obama, who died in 1975, is said to be the first man to swap goatskin clothing for trousers in his village. He returned from the war in Burma with a gramophone and a picture of a white woman he

claimed to have married.

"Strong, virtuous"

Although not a blood relation, President Obama often referred to Sarah as his grandmother, calling her "granny".

On his trip back to Kenya as US president, he met with her among other family members in Nairobi.

After leaving office, he travelled to her home in the village of Kogelo in 2018, joking he had been unable to do so in 2015 as his jet was too big to land in Kisumu.

Obama is linked to his Kenyan family via his father Barack senior, a pipe-smoking economist who Obama has admitted he "never truly" knew.

He met Barack Obama's mother, Ann Dunham, in Hawaii. But he walked out when Obama was just two and died in a car crash in Nairobi in 1982, aged 46.

Obama senior had worked in the government of Jomo Kenyatta, who led Kenya at independence from Britain until his death 14 years later in 1978. The two men did not get on well, with Kenyatta -- the father of Kenya's current president Uhuru Kenyatta -- sacking Obama senior, and blackballing him for further government jobs, an ostracisation that would help fuel alcoholism.

Kenyatta said Monday the country had "lost a strong, virtuous woman. A matriarch who held together the Obama family and was an icon of family values."

He said she would be remembered for her philanthropic work, saying she had initiated several community development projects in her village.

Mama Sarah will be buried Tuesday at her home, in line with Islamic traditions, said Ismail.

NEWSMAKERS

'Vaccine Passports' Are On The Way: How And Why

Agenceis

The Biden administration and private companies are working to develop a standard way of handling credentials - often referred to as "vaccine passports" - that would allow Americans to prove they have been vaccinated against the novel coronavirus as businesses try to reopen.

The effort has gained momentum amid President Joe Biden's pledge that the nation will start to regain normalcy this summer and with a growing number of companies - from cruise lines to sports teams - saying they will require proof of vaccination before opening their doors again.

The administration's initiative has been driven largely by arms of the Department of Health and Human Services, including an office devoted to health information technology, said five officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the effort. The White House this month took on a bigger role coordinating government agencies involved in the work,

led by coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients, with a goal of announcing updates in coming days, said one official.

The White House declined to answer questions about the passport initiative, instead pointing to public statements that Zients and other officials made this month.

"Our role is to help ensure that any solutions in this area should be simple, free, open source, accessible to people both digitally and on paper, and designed from the start to protect people's privacy," Zients said at a March 12 briefing.

The initiative has emerged as an early test of the Biden administration, with officials working to coordinate across dozens of agencies and a variety of experts, including military officials helping administer vaccines and health officials engaging in international vaccine efforts.

The passports are expected to be free and available through applications for smartphones, which could display a scannable code similar to an airline boarding pass. Americans without smartphone access should

be able to print out the passports, developers have said.

Other countries are racing ahead with their own passport plans, with the European Union pledging to release digital certificates that would allow for summer travel.

U.S. officials say they are grappling with an array of challenges, including data privacy and health-care equity. They want to make sure all Americans will be able to get credentials that prove they have been vaccinated, but also want to set up systems that are not easily hacked or passports that cannot be counterfeited, given that forgeries are already starting to appear.

One of the most significant hurdles facing federal officials: the sheer number of passport initiatives underway, with the Biden administration this month identifying at least 17, according to slides obtained by The Washington Post. Those initiatives - such as a World Health Organization-led global effort and a digital pass devised by IBM that is being tested in New York state - are rapidly moving forward, even as the White House deliberates

about how best to track the shots and avoid the perception of a government mandate to be vaccinated.

One of the teams working on vaccine passports is the Vaccination Credential Initiative, a coalition endeavoring to standardize how data in vaccination records is tracked.

"The busboy, the janitor, the waiter that works at a restaurant, wants to be surrounded by employees that are going back to work safely - and wants to have the patrons ideally be safe as well," said Brian Anderson, a physician at Mitre, a nonprofit company that runs federally funded research centers, who is helping lead the initiative. "Creating an environment for those vulnerable populations to get back to work safely - and to know that the people coming back to their business are 'safe,' and vaccinated - would be a great scenario."

Anderson's team is aiming to release its free software standards in April, hoping developers will use them to help build digital vaccine records that allow people to show they have been inoculated. The Vac-

cination Credential Initiative includes the Mayo Clinic, Microsoft and more than 225 other organizations, many of which have pledged to use the code when administering shots.

Biden administration officials privately acknowledge the high stakes of the effort.

Proof of vaccination "may be a critical driver for restoring baseline population health and promoting safe return to social, commercial, and leisure activities," according to the March 2 slides prepared by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology and obtained by The Post. But officials at the session - attended by more than 150 staff from the health, defense, homeland security and other departments, and even far-flung agencies such as NASA - warned of the "confusing array" of efforts underway to create credentials.

"A chaotic and ineffective vaccine credential approach could hamper our pandemic response by undercutting health safety measures, slowing economic recovery, and undermining public trust and confidence," one slide reads.

Govt To Develop 7 New Trekking Routes In J&K

Observer News Service

JAMMU: The Administrative Council (AC), which met under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, Monday approved the development of 7 new trekking routes in various wildlife protected areas by the Wildlife Department in coordination with the Tourism Department.

To sustainably promote tourism in the forest hinterland without disturbing the ecological balance in the protected areas, the Administrative Council also approved opening-up of the existing infrastructure and resources of the Forest Department including rest houses/inspection huts to tourists and wildlife enthusiasts.

The decision will allow online booking of 29 forest rest houses/inspection huts in Kashmir and Jammu divisions; under a common brand and logo from 1st May 2021.

The Department of Forest, Ecology & Environment was directed to put in place a user-friendly online portal for booking identified rest houses on a first-come, first-serve basis as per their availability and intake capacity. The Department was directed to refurbish and open another batch of 58 rest houses/huts to tourists by 1st July 2021.

These accommodations are located in different forest divisions

at the quaintest places amidst pristine nature. Hitherto, they were reserved for forest officers to be utilized only during official tours in connection with conservation, protection, and management of forests and wildlife.

Meanwhile, the Administrative Council also approved development of new trekking routes in Bahu Conservation Reserve, Sudhmahadev Conservation Reserve, Thein Wildlife Conservation Reserve, Tral Wildlife Sanctuary-Dachigam National Park-Overa-Aru Wildlife Sanctuary, Thajwas Wildlife Sanctuary, Khrew Wildlife Conservation Reserve-Dachigam National Park-Khonmoh Conservation Reserve, and Khrew Wildlife Conservation Reserve.

The trekking avenues range from short day-long treks up and down mountain slopes, to long-trans-mountain traverses involving a week of trekking and camping in the wilderness. These trekking routes pass through scenic splendours, with wild fauna and flora. Now that youth across India are inclined more towards adventure activities, these treks will be developed as well sought-after destinations for trekkers.

The development of these trekking routes will provide gainful employment to the local population and tap the adventure/eco-tourism potential of the UT.

Defunct Elevator Hits Patient Care At GMC Baramulla

Patients Suffer; Authorities Say Elevator Will Be Made Operational In A Week

BARAMULLA: Hundreds of patients from North Kashmir are suffering as the elevator in Government Medical College Baramulla is lying defunct for the last one year.

A group of patients said, "More than one year has passed since the elevator encountered some technical snag and since then it has not been rectified," they alleged. The lift is meant for lifting operated patients from Ground Floor to the concerned wards.

The patients alleged that the health department has not acted for over a year, unfortunately.

According to the sources,

"Dozens of letters have been dispatched by Medical Superintendent GMC Baramulla to higher ups regarding the issue but no higher officer of the Health department has responded," the sources rued.

The aggrieved patients requested the GMC authorities to either shift the surgical ward to Ground Floor or get the elevator rectified so that surgical patients do not suffer.

Medical Superintendent GMC Baramulla Dr. Syed Masood said that work is going on in the lift and assured that it will be operational within seven days. (CNS)

Landslide Damages Shopping Complex In Charar

Observer News Service

BUDGAM: Nearly ten shops near Jamia Masjid in Municipal Ward 8 in Charar Sharif Tehsil of Central Kashmir's Budgam district suffered heavy losses during the intervening night of Sunday-Monday after massive landslides hit the base of the shopping complex housing the shops. As soon as the news spread in the area, the owners of the shops rushed to the spot and were shocked to see the gorge formed beneath the complex.

The shopkeepers said, "We repeatedly appealed the authorities to build a protective wall, but they never paid heed."

Some shopkeepers said that they met with various officials and informed them about the continuous landslides but no one took cognisance of the matter.

Meanwhile, they appealed the Divisional Commissioner to intervene into the matter. (CNS)

DIC Shopian Organizes Cultural Programme

Observer News Service

SHOPIAN: The District Information Centre (DIC) Shopian, in collaboration with Parwana Public High School and Media Centre Shopian, organized Mehfil-e-Mushaira, Debate, Drama, seminar and a special cultural programme at Thairin Keller.

The District Information Officer (DIO) Shopian, Showkat Ahmad Khan was the Chief Guest on the occasion. Showkat while addressing the gathering said that poets and writers have an important role in preserving the literary heritage of Kashmir and in promotion of cultural activities of the area they belong to. He appreciated them and asked to take part in such events being organized for promotion of cultural activities in the district. He said the Government is encouraging these literary personalities and holding the event is one step towards this goal. He said in future more such programmes will be organized in the district especially in rural areas of the district.

Coordinated Efforts Needed To Safeguard Farmers' Interests: Govt

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Director Law Enforcement J&K, Bal Krishan Chandan Monday called for zero tolerance against spurious/substandard pesticides and fertilisers besides strict implementation of established procedures of law enforcement so that the farming community could be served in a real spirit.

The Director said this while chairing a meeting at Directorate of Agriculture Lalmandi, here.

He said that to uphold the quality of pesticides and fertilisers, all the trending modern day scientific practices should be followed so that the customers

could get best quality inputs for the cost they pay.

He impressed upon the participants that coordinated efforts are needed to maintain and ensure the availability of good quality fertilizers and pesticides to the farming community.

Earlier, Deputy Director Law Enforcement Kashmir Mohamad Younis Chowdhary briefed the Director about the various activities and achievements by the Enforcement Agency during the recent times.

He said 2055 samples of different pesticides and 675 samples of fertilizers have been taken by the enforcement agency from different pesticide and fertilizer outlets dur-

ing its visits to different districts, out of which 38 pesticide samples were found substandard and the legal proceedings have been initiated against the violators.

He added that Rs 85,000 fine has also been recovered from the erring pesticide and fertilizer dealers.

The meeting was informed that 68 lac liters of Horticulture Mineral Oil (HMO) have been distributed in Kashmir valley so far and 11 MT substandard materials has been seized by the Agency from different areas of the Kashmir valley. It was said that sufficient quantities of fertilizers are available and there is no shortage of any kind of fertilizers in the valley.

Outrage As Traffic Dept Seizes Non-J&K Registered Vehicles



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Traffic Department's drive to seize vehicles with outside J&K registration numbers has sparked outrage among the local residents.

On Monday, the department seized 137 vehicles outside Jammu and Kashmir registration numbers in the valley.

A resident of Downtown in Srinagar said that his vehicle was seized despite all the documents. However, his vehicle wore a non-J&K registration number.

The resident said that he was shocked when all of a sudden his vehicle, with a New Delhi registration number, was seized by police.

He said though he had all the documents including NOC, driving license, and registration certificate, he was asked to leave without his vehicle.

A delhi based Kashmiri business-

man said that his vehicle was also seized in Srinagar. He said he resides in New Delhi and has his vehicle registered in NCR. He said he is being asked to get the vehicle registered in Kashmir by paying nine percent tax.

Kashmir is a huge market for second-hand vehicles. Previously no such vehicles were seized.

A Regional Transport Office official said that they are seizing the vehicles in accordance with the Motor vehicle Act.

He said the rule is being implemented in all the states.

"As per the Motor vehicle Act, a person has to get NOC while purchasing a vehicle from an outsider. We have not issued any order, but we appeal people to get NOC for such vehicles as per the law," he said.

The official said the process is important for ensuring the implementation of traffic rules in the valley. "Re-

cently one of our officials was hit by a moving vehicle with an outside J&K registration number. Soon after accessing the details of the vehicle from the CCTV, we caught the driver. But how can an ordinary person catch the driver when the vehicle has outside J&K registration number," he said.

According to a circular issued by the Regional Transport Office, Kashmir, all vehicle owners who have purchased their vehicle bearing outside registration mark have to apply for a new registration mark as per the provision of section 47/50 of Motor vehicle act 1988 red with 54 of central Motor Vehicle Rules 1988 with the proscribed period.

"The owners of such vehicles have been asked to submit the relevant documents of their vehicle to the transport office within a period of 15 days of the circular failing which action warranted shall be initiated against them."

KTA Demands Exemption Of Token Tax For Re-registration

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Kashmir Trade Alliance (KTA) Monday demanded the exemption of token tax that is being asked @ 9% on the invoice amount of the vehicle.

"The actual roadblock that is stopping the common masses from re-registering their outside vehicles in J&K is a huge amount of token tax to be paid again at the time of re-registration despite the fact that one time token tax has been already

paid to the actual registered State/UT," KTA said in a statement.

The statement said the government should only charge a nominal re-registration fee from these vehicles as they used to be before. It said most of the outside registered vehicles will be re-registered to J&K if the token tax is exempted.

"The government should exempt the token tax so that all outside registered vehicles are re-registered at the earliest," he said. (KNS)

Body Of Missing Person Recovered From Chenab River

Observer News Service

DODA: Body of a person who went missing after a road accident at Gadsu on Doda-Batote highway on Sunday, was recovered from Chenab River, on Monday

The deceased was identified as Irshad Ahmed, son of Nazir Ahmed, a resident of Malhota Panchayi. Police and local volunteers shifted the body to GMC Doda where it was handed over to the heirs for final rites after completion of medico-legal formalities.

Two people including a woman were killed and one person was injured in the accident on Sunday. (CNS)

ACB Files Chargesheet Against Former BDO For Misappropriation Of Funds

Ageceis

SRINAGAR: Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) Monday produced a charge-sheet in the Anti-Corruption Court Baramulla in case FIR No. 33/2009 u/s 5(1) (c) (d) r/w 5(2) Jammu & Kashmir Prevention of Corruption Act Svt. 2006 and section 409, 420, 120-B RPC of police station ACB against Mohammad Ramzan Bhat the then BDO Gurez, Irshad Ahmad Lone the then Jr. Assistant BDO Office Gurez, Nazir Ahmad Lone (Govt. teacher) and Abdul Ahad Wani (Beneficiary).

In a statement, ACB said that the instant case was registered on the basis of an enquiry report of the then Additional District Development Commissioner, Bandipora.

The statement added that the enquiry was conducted in pursuance to Govt. Order No. No. 259-RD of 2007 dated 23-08-2007, forwarded by GAD through Dy. Secretary GAD to the erstwhile state Vigilance Organisation (Now ACB) to look into the allegations of misappropriation

of funds in the office of Block Development Officer, Gurez.

The enquiry revealed that during the period of 2003-04, prior to fire incident in BDO's Office Gurez, in march 2005, the then BDO, Gurez Muhammad Ramzan Bhat and Junior Assistant Irshad Ahmad Lone fraudulently drew an amount of Rs 17, 82,466/-. The withdrawal was made by issuing self draw cheques, cheques of varying amounts in favour of some unknown co-operative agency and a cheque of Rs. 2.00 lakh in favour of one Abdul Ahad Wani against non-existent works.

On the basis of evidence, oral as well as documentary, collected during the course of investigation, a case for commission of offences u/s 5(1) (c) (d) r/w 5(2) Jammu & Kashmir Prevention of Corruption Act Svt. 2006 and section 409, 420, 120-B RPC has been prima facie established against accused persons and the chargesheet of the case has been produced in the court of law after obtaining sanction from the Government.

Six Fraudsters Booked In Jammu For Duping Woman On Pretext Of Marriage

JAMMU: The Jammu and Kashmir Police crime branch on Monday registered a case against six people hailing from different parts of the country for allegedly duping a woman of Rs 4.37 lakh on the pretext of marriage, an official said.

The case was registered based on a complaint filed by the woman, a resident of Jammu.

The accused were identified as Atom Roy, Zahir Hussain and Sartaj Hussain of West Bengal, Hazrat Ali of Bihar, Vinay Kumar of Delhi and Huinu of Manipur, a crime branch spokesperson said.

The woman said a person befriended her on a social media platform and later proposed to marry her. The person then claimed to have sent a parcel to her despite her reluctance to accept it.

After a few days, accused Roy introduced himself as customs officer and told her to give custom duties of Rs 45,500 to claim the parcel, the spokesman said, adding that Roy again called her the next day to inform that the parcel had 1,00,000 pounds.

The woman said she contacted the sender who asked her to do as the "so-called custom people" wanted.

The spokesman said she received "an e-mail regarding anti-money

laundering certificate for which she had to pay Rs 1,18,900 and another e-mail on behalf of Foreign Remittance Department, RBI, for which she had to pay Rs 2,73,000".

Suspecting foul play, the woman then contacted international bank services in Srinagar and came to know that she was trapped in a scam.

On receipt of her complaint, a preliminary verification was conducted and oral and documentary evidence was collected which prima facie substantiated the allegations against the accused, the crime branch spokesperson said.

He said it has been found that the accused have opened various bank accounts on fake and forged documents and obtained various SIM cards besides making fake Instagram accounts by impersonation and used the internet through fraudulent e-mails/Whatsapp and allured the complainant and other gullible victims to cheat them.

"In this manner the gang of fraudsters duped the complainant of her money to the tune of Rs 4,37,400 by fraudulent means, the spokesman said.

Further investigation into the matter was on and efforts are being made to nab the accused, the spokesperson said.

Wearing Of Masks Made Compulsory In Kupwara

Observer News Service

KUPWARA: To make wearing of masks compulsory in the district, Chairman, District Disaster Management Authority/ District Magistrate Kupwara, Imam Din today issued an order where under officers of nine departments have been empowered to impose and collect penalties from the persons found without wearing masks, to ensure usage of masks at public places within their jurisdictions.

These officers have been authorised to impose a fine of Rs.500 in first instance and Rs.1000 in repeated instances for not wearing the masks in public places. Non-payment of penalty by such violators will attract proceedings under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.

The officers were asked to collect the Receipt books for imposing the penalty / fine from the Red Cross section of D.C. Office Kupwara and the final realisations so collected shall be credited to District Red Cross Society Kupwara under proper receipt.

CUK's SoE Holds Plantation Drive



GANDERBAL: School of Education (SoE), Central University of Kashmir (CUK) in collaboration with DSU and Landscape Development Department organised a plantation drive at the Tulumulla campus of the university.

More than 400 students participated in the drive for realizing the goal of planting more than 1000 saplings. Addressing students, Vice Chancellor, Prof. Mehrj ud Din Mir, highlighted the importance of plants for the survival of humans. He urged the students to be at forefront for such initiatives to

safeguard the future generations.

Dean, School of Education, Dr. Syed Zahoor Ahmad Geelani, also planted a sapling, and said the plantation is imperative to maintain the ecological balance. He said the damage done by deforestation needs to be undone and academia should be leading in such environment friendly initiatives.

Later, the students presented a skit highlighting the demerits of illegal deforestation, pollution caused, health repercussions due to pollution and the importance of plantation.

AC Approves 19 Posts For Jal Shakti Department

JAMMU: The Administrative Council (AC), which met under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, approved the proposal of Jal Shakti Department to create 19 posts in J&K Water Resources Regulatory Authority (J&KWRRRA) to enhance its efficacy.

The new posts created include a Ground Water Scientist, an Agriculture Scientist, 2 Superintendent Engineers, 3 Executive Engineers, 4 Assistant Engineers, 5 Junior Engineers, 2 Senior Assistants, and a Junior Assistant. Being a statutory body, J&KWRRRA is responsible for regulating water resources within the territorial jurisdiction of Jammu and Kashmir, ensuring judicious, equitable and sustainable management, allocation, and utilization of these resources, and fixing the rates for use of water.

Seminar Organised To Mark Birth Anniversary Of Imam Mehdi (AS)

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Maktaba Imamiya Tanzeemul Makatib Yakmanpora Monday organised an event to mark the birth anniversary of Hazrat Wali Imam Mahdi (AS).

The event was attended by students of various Makatib, youth, elders and women of Yakmanpora and other adjoining areas.

Among others, Maulana Tanveer Hussain, Maulana Muzaffar Hussain, Maulana Muzammil Hussain, Maulana Ashiq Hussain and Maulana Aijaz Hussain were present on the occasion.

They enlightened the participants about the achievements of Imam Mehdi (as).

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K O V I E W

Talks after truce

A month after agreeing to observe the 2003 ceasefire agreement, India and Pakistan have taken some more steps towards engagement by holding talks on water sharing and restoring sporting ties. But as is palpable there's also a degree of caution in the way the two countries are approaching each other. So far there has been no visible effort to institute an open dialogue. There's also some doubt over the meeting of the foreign ministers of the two countries at the 'Heart of Asia' conference at Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe today. According to Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi such a meeting has so far not been "finalized or requested".

Jaishankar last week also had not given a specific reply to questions on whether he will meet Pakistani counterpart on the sidelines of the conference. The participation of both the ministers has sparked speculation of a possible meeting between them amidst recent peace overtures from the Pakistan. Both Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and the army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa offered olive branches to India in their recent speeches at Islamabad Security Dialogue. This was reciprocated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, first by wishing Imran Khan a speedy recovery and then a letter on Pakistan Republic Day that called for 'atmosphere of trust, devoid of terror and hostility' between the neighbours.

But as is apparent there are some reservations as for as conducting an open dialogue. The reasons for it are both historical and the recent. The relations between the two neighbours have plunged to their lowest low since New Delhi withdrew Article 370 on August 5, 2019. The article granted J&K a semi-autonomous status under India's constitution. Until before dramatic re-affirmation of the ceasefire agreement a month ago, it appeared unthinkable that the two countries would come anywhere near to resumption of dialogue. But they have done it, even moving a few baby steps further towards talks.

Now, both countries are putting onus on each other to take the first step towards resuming dialogue. And what that step would be is still unknown. Islamabad had earlier made any re-engagement with India conditional to New Delhi reversing the August 5 move. But Pakistan seems to have given that up, so has New Delhi its insistence on end to cross-border terrorism before talks begin. Anyways if the last year's figures for infiltration and the killings of foreign militants in Kashmir are anything to go by, Islamabad has held back from supporting the local militancy. New Delhi, it seems, is unlikely to reverse the revocation of J&K autonomy. It remains to be seen whether it restores statehood anytime soon. A sustained, meaningful dialogue between the two countries has the potential to lead to a positive outcome. So, the neighbours should restore it sooner than later.

O T H E R O P I N O N

Neighbourly touch

The March 26-27 visit to Dhaka by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his first trip abroad since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, has conveyed that India attaches great importance to the relationship with its eastern neighbour. Bangladesh is the region's fastest growing economy, with social indicators that other countries, including India, can learn from, and a vital link without which Delhi cannot realise the full potential of either the economic or strategic underpinnings of its Look East policy. India was instrumental in the birth of Bangladesh, but ties between the two countries, though at their historic best over the last 12 years under Sheikh Hasina, remain complicated. Most recently, the ruling BJP regime's political rhetoric at home, including its use of the "illegal immigrant" trope, and unsavoury references to Bangladesh in the public conversation on the Citizenship Amendment Act, had spread frost on the ties and threatened to strengthen the hands of Islamist groups opposed to PM Hasina, who see her as too close to Delhi. PM Modi's visit, to participate in the 50th anniversary commemoration of Bangladesh's independence day and the 100th birth anniversary celebrations of Mujibur Rehman, the father of Bangladesh, coincides with the West Bengal elections, and could not escape a whiff of the sulphurous poll campaign. That 10 people were killed in protests in Bangladesh against the visit, led by an extremist Islamist group called Hefazat-e-Islam, is shocking. The responsibility for not allowing this to negate the achievements of the visit lies in both capitals.

A joint statement has listed several outcomes from the visit, from connectivity and "people-oriented" border management to anti-COVID-19 vaccines and nuclear energy. But for Bangladesh, the outcome that matters most remains elusive — the finalisation of the agreement to share the waters of the Teesta river, a draft of which was drawn up by both governments in 2011. India's inability to deliver on this promise is a fallout of the differences between the Centre and West Bengal on the issue. Irrespective of the outcome of the elections in that state, however, it is necessary that Delhi does whatever it takes towards arriving at a pact that can be a win-win for both sides. This will convey to Bangladesh, where India is vying with China for influence, that Delhi can take difficult decisions to help out a neighbour.

PM Modi drew a vision of a shared future for India and Bangladesh through the "power of democracy", and utilisation of opportunities of trade, commerce and connectivity to "progress together" and stay united against the challenge posed by terrorism. There were references to "fraternal ties" based on equality, trust and understanding that "transcend a strategic partnership". But while all countries desire to be recognised as equal, they also want bigger countries to take more responsibility for protecting this equality. This is probably what PM Hasina meant when she said that, as the biggest country in South Asia, India must "play a pioneering role". Delhi must hold up its end of the pact with Dhaka.

Indian Express

ASAD MIRZA

The idea does not spell out how territorial issues would be resolved or how sovereignty would be implemented? It gives the member states the right to take unilateral action when they deem their vital interests to be at stake, though in the same breath it says that ideally, sustained strategic dialogue would make unilateral moves less frequent and destabilising

Global Concert for a New Global Era?

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Well, the murmurs were already there in the pre-Covid era that the plans are afoot to change the present global governance and usher in a new world order. But now things have slowly started falling in place. Influential think tanks and world bodies are flush with new insights or analytical interpretation of the so-called new world order, which could usher in a new era of cooperation and economic and social prosperity for all nations, irrespective of their ideological base and past histories.

A recent article published by the influential Washington-based Centre for Foreign Relations (CFR), written by veteran diplomat and CFR's president, Dr Richard Haass and Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at CFR and professor of international affairs at Georgetown University in the Walsh School of Foreign Service, argues for a new international setup which will try to undo or overcome the fallacies of the past and instead try to setup a system which hears every voice and caters to the common well being.

In their article, Dr Haass and Kupchan assert that most of the current world's problems stems from the fact that the existing international governance architecture, which was framed soon after WWII, is outdated and not up to the task of preserving global stability. They regard the current global setup as too US-centric and term it as a club of democracies, which is poorly suited to fostering cooperation across ideological lines. Terming G-7 and G-20 as mere talk shops and the UNSC as grandstanding and responsible for a paralysis among veto-wielding permanent members, they urge for establishing a new world setup.

The Global Concert

The duo suggests forming a Global Concert (GC) of powers — which will be an informal steering group of the world's most influential countries, and will be casted in the mould of the nineteenth-century's Concert of Europe. It was a grouping of Britain, France, Russia, Prussia, and Austria formed in 1815, and successfully preserved peace for a half-century in the absence of a dominant power amid ideological diversity. Emerging after containing the bloody Napoleonic Wars, the grouping relied on a mutual commitment to conduct regular communications and the peaceful resolution of disputes to uphold the territorial settlements.

The blueprint for a new Global Concert, terms it as the best vehicle for managing a world not dominated by the US and the West. The proposed members would be

China, the EU, India, Japan, Russia, and the US, giving it a geopolitical clout while protecting it from becoming an unwieldy talking shop, and collectively representing roughly 70% of world GDP and global military spending.

The GC will have a completely different and thin hierarchical system to ensure efficiency and ensure quick response and decision-making. The member states would send senior permanent representatives to a standing headquarters in a place determined through mutual agreement. Summits would occur on a regular basis and as needed to address crises. Although they would not be formal members, four regional organisations — the African Union, the Arab League, the Association of South-east Asian Nations, and the Organisation of American States — would maintain permanent delegations at the concert's headquarters. When discussing issues affecting these regions, concert members would invite delegates from these bodies and other relevant countries to join meetings.

The concert would not replace the United Nations but will leave the operational oversight to the UN and other existing bodies. Instead it would be a consultative, not a decision-making body, addressing emerging crises, fashioning new rules of the road, and building support for collective initiatives. It would thus augment, not supplant, the current international architecture, by sitting atop it to speed up decisions that could then be taken and implemented elsewhere.

A contemporary concert, like its nineteenth-century forerunner, would enable sustained strategic dialogue. It would bring to the table the most influential states, regardless of their regime type, thereby separating ideological differences over domestic governance from matters requiring international cooperation. It would shun formal procedures and codified rules, instead relying on persuasion and compromise to build consensus.

The GC advocates further stress that the GC would also seek to generate collective responses to longer-term challenges, such as combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as well as terrorist networks, promoting global health, forging norms in cyberspace, and combating climate change. As these important matters often fall between institutional cracks which the concert could fill.

The GC votaries further say that establishing a global concert would be no panacea, however. Convening the world's heavyweights hardly ensures a consensus among them, and success

would often mean managing, not eliminating, threats to regional and global order. The proposed steering group would accept both liberal and illiberal governments as legitimate and authoritative, implying abandonment of the West's longstanding vision of a global order made in its image. And restricting membership to the most important and influential actors would sacrifice representation in favour of efficacy, reinforcing hierarchy and inequity in the international system.

Need for a new world order

The paramount question is why a new GC is being mooted now, particularly after the Covid-pandemic. Or in other words, as the conspiracy theorists say, was the pandemic created in order to test the tenacity and resilience and response of the global community to such a threatening scenario, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of human beings? Or was it staged to analyse the response time and also hope of any camaraderie between different nations on an issue afflicting all of them, as the more demanding issue as compared to it but with less apparent results i.e. the Climate Change has been unable to solicit from them due to a hunger for profit and more luxuries?

In addition, the idea does not spell out how territorial issues would be resolved or how sovereignty would be implemented? It gives the member states the right to take unilateral action when they deem their vital interests to be at stake, though in the same breath it says that ideally, sustained strategic dialogue would make unilateral moves less frequent and destabilising.

However, the silver lining for us Indians is that the idea gives us a place at the top table, perhaps for the first time in history, and also due to the P5's hesitancy to include India at the UNSC. But the move besides adding to India's prestige would also make it responsible to work for the collective good and retain, nurture and strengthen those values, for which space has been shrinking recently in India.

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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Pandemic Fatigue and Rising Cases

Despite the surge in covid cases, seeing people openly flout all sops is a common sight now. The pandemic fatigue has has made people downplay the perilousness that coronavirus poses and this non compliance of covid appropriate behaviour can be disastrous. Most of the countries in Europe have recorded a dramatic uptick of covid cases and therefore are gearing for another lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus and these are deemed necessary despite the inoculation of a significant section of their

population. This makes us wonder what south asian countries should do as we are far behind the west in the vaccination programmes and do not have a robust health infrastructure. The response in South Asian countries has been starkly different this time than it was a year ago when most of these countries went into a total lockdown. Although several efforts are being made to ramp up the vaccination programme in India as well but vaccine hesitancy has deterred the efforts to speed up the vaccination drive and even if the vaccination

programme is hastened it is a lengthy process which could take an entire year or more to acquire herd immunity. To address the fears regarding vaccines, government should engage public personalities and religious preachers to assuage the apprehensions regarding the vaccine so that more and more people come forward and get vaccinated. The alarming rise in cases and emergence of new variants has raised skepticism about the existing vaccines, it is being said that the new variants are more transmissible and more lethal, this situation

necessitates strict rules as it seems to be the only way to combat the virus. Efforts should be taken to tackle the rising cases before the situation escalates further and overwhelms the hospitals. The upcoming elections season in India makes the possibility of a complete lockdown highly unlikely and this is a matter of serious concern as disregarding covid protocols could transport us back to where we were a year ago.

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Covid-19: 2021 And Beyond

MICHAEL TOOLE

SUMAN MAJUMDAR

However, there are already signs of complacency and much misinformation to counter, especially for vaccine uptake. So we must continue to address both these barriers. The outcomes of even momentary complacency are evident as global numbers of new cases once again increase after a steady two month decline

One year ago today, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the first caused by a coronavirus.

As we enter year two of the pandemic, let's remind ourselves of some sobering statistics. So far, there have been more than 117.4 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 around the world; more than 2.6 million people have died. A total of 221 countries and territories have been affected. Some 12 of the 14 countries and territories reporting no cases are small Pacific or Atlantic islands.

Whether the race to end the pandemic will be a sprint or a marathon remains to be seen, as does the extent of the gap between rich and poor contestants. However, as vaccines roll out across the world, it seems we are collectively just out of the starting blocks.

Here are the challenges we face over the next 12 months if we are to ever begin to reduce COVID-19 to a sporadic or endemic disease.

Vaccines are like walking on the Moon

Developing safe and effective vaccines in such a short time frame was a mission as ambitious, and with as many potential pitfalls, as walking on the Moon.

Miraculously, 12 months since a pandemic was declared, eight vaccines against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, have been approved by at least one country. A ninth, Novavax, is very promising. So far, more than 312 million people have been vaccinated with at least one dose.

While most high-income countries will have vaccinated their populations by early 2022, 85 poor countries will have to wait until 2023.

This implies the world won't be back to normal travel, trade and supply chains until 2024 unless rich countries take actions — such as waiving vaccine patents, diversifying production of vaccines and supporting vaccine delivery — to help poor countries catch up.

The vaccines have been shown to be safe and effective in preventing symptomatic and severe COVID-19. However, we need to continue to study the vaccines after being rolled out (conducting so-called post-implementation studies)



in 2021 and beyond. This is to determine how long protection lasts, whether we need booster doses, how well vaccines work in children and the impact of vaccines on viral transmission.

What should make us feel optimistic is that in countries that rolled out the vaccines early, such as the UK and Israel, there are signs the rate of new infections is in decline.

What are the potential barriers to overcome?

One of the most salutary lessons we have learnt in the pandemic's first year is how dangerous it is to let COVID-19 transmission go unchecked. The result is the emergence of more transmissible variants that escape our immune responses, high rates of excess mortality and a stalled economy.

Until we achieve high levels of population immunity via vaccination, in 2021 we must maintain individual and societal measures, such as masks, physical distancing, and hand hygiene; improve indoor ventilation; and strengthen outbreak responses — testing, contact tracing and isolation.

However, there are already signs of complacency and much misinformation to counter, especially for vaccine uptake. So we must continue to address both these barriers.

The outcomes of even momentary

complacency are evident as global numbers of new cases once again increase after a steady two month decline. This recent uptick reflects surges in many European countries, such as Italy, and Latin American countries like Brazil and Cuba. New infections in Papua New Guinea have also risen alarmingly in the past few weeks.

Some fundamental questions also remain unanswered. We don't know how long either natural or vaccine-induced immunity will last. However, encouraging news from the US reveals 92-98% of COVID-19 survivors had adequate immune protection six to eight months after infection. In 2021, we will continue to learn more about how long natural and vaccine-induced immunity lasts.

New variants may be the greatest threat

The longer the coronavirus circulates widely, the higher the risk of more variants of concern emerging. We are aware of B.1.1.7 (the variant first detected in the UK), B.1.351 (South Africa), and P.1 (Brazil).

But other variants have been identified. These include B.1.427, which is now the dominant, more infectious, strain in California and one identified recently in New York, named B.1.526.

Variants may transmit more readily than the original Wuhan strain of

the virus and may lead to more cases. Some variants may also be resistant to vaccines, as has already been demonstrated with the B.1.351 strain. We will continue to learn more about the impact of variants on disease and vaccines in 2021 and beyond.

A year from now

Given so many unknowns, how the world will be in March 2022 would be an educated guess. However, what is increasingly clear is there will be no "mission accomplished" moment. We are at a crossroads with two end games.

In the most likely scenario, rich countries will return to their new normal. Businesses and schools will reopen and internal travel will resume. Travel corridors will be established between countries with low transmission and high vaccine coverage. This might be between Singapore and Taiwan, between Australia and Vietnam, and maybe between all four, and more countries.

In low- and middle-income countries, there may be a reduction in severe cases, freeing them to rehabilitate health services that have suffered in the past 12 months. These include maternal, newborn, and child health services, including reproductive health; tuberculosis, HIV and malaria programs; and nutrition. However, reviving these services will need rich countries to commit generous and sustained aid.

The second scenario, which sadly is unlikely to occur, is unprecedented global cooperation with a focus on science and solidarity to halt transmission everywhere.

This is a fragile moment in modern world history. But, in record time, we have developed effective tools to eventually control this pandemic. The path to a post-COVID-19 future can perhaps now be characterised as a hurdle race but one that presents severe handicaps to the world's poorest nations. As an international community, we have the capacity to make it a level playing field.

*By Arrangemetns with
The Conversation*

Why China's rise spurs anti-Asian hate crimes in the West

Use of coronavirus as a ruse could only make this fresh wave of hatred much worse

ASHOK SWAIN

Since the shooting to death of six women of Asian origin in Atlanta by a lone gunman, there has been a global concern over rising hate crimes in the US against Asian-Americans.

As per the data of the 'Stop 'AAPI (Asian American & Pacific Islanders) Hate' — between 19 March 2020 to 28 February 2021, there were 3,795 reported hate incidents against Asian-Americans in the US. This number is significantly higher than the previous year's count.

The US President Joe Biden, immediately after taking the oath of office, passed an executive order condemning what he calls Covid-fuelled racism against Asians. Even the UN Secretary-General has issued a statement on 22 March 2021 expressing his profound concern on the rise of violence against Asians during the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, the hate against people of Asian descent is not confined to the US only, and it was not absent before the pandemic.

The Trump factor in branding coronavirus as a Chinese virus has emboldened people with racial prejudices. Still, it will be naive to think that the hate crime against Asians is only an American problem, and it will disappear with the pandemic.

The ongoing spurt in anti-Asian hate crime in the US has taken place since 2015, much before the Covid crisis. Thus, it is not a pandemic problem. Anti-Asian mindset has some historical roots. Even in 1871, a mob had killed 19 Chinese in the China Town of Los Angeles.

In 1875, the US banned Chinese women's entry, and in 1882, it prohibited the immigration of Chinese labourers. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and the Vietnam War also had brought bouts of hate crimes against Asians in the US.

Beyond the US

Not only the US but Canada has a similar history and it had also witnessed the anti-Asian riots in 1907. Canada has also seen a significant increase in anti-Asian hate crimes recently, which has started for some years now. Though Canada didn't have someone like Trump, this has not been much of a help either.

As the 'Racism Incident Reporting Center' data show, it has a higher number of anti-Asian racism reports per capita than the US during the pandemic.

Anti-Asian bigotry is not only confined to North America. The hate against the people of Asian descent was not historically evident in Europe as it has been



on the other side of the Atlantic.

However, in recent years there has been a profound change, and the discrimination against Asians are not confined only to being structural. There are a three times more increase in hate crimes in the UK in 2020 towards Asian communities than years before. However, this trend has not become evident with Covid but with the Brexit referendum in 2016.

Nazis had forced some Chinese living in Germany into concentration camps. However, Germany had also witnessed anti-Asian sentiments after its reunification as East Germany brought 60,000 Vietnamese workers with it. Vietnamese workers taken by Communist regimes

In India, not many Chinese live, but people from the Northeastern part of the country have been targeted for years for their East Asian looks in the mainland.

In the last year, the hate crimes, racial slurs, and discrimination against Northeast Indians have gone up many folds, but this has been not coronavirus fuelled only. The border clash between China and India made a significant contribution to the rise of 'anti-Asian' hate crimes in India

had become targets in most Eastern European countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

History of anti-Asian hate crimes

So, the anti-Asian hate crimes in the early 1990s in Germany were part of that trend. Asians have become the targets of racial abuse and violence in Germany for several years now though it has taken a big jump since the Covid-19 outbreak.

Anti-Asian sentiments, or to be precise anti-Chinese sentiments, have been on the rise in all of Europe's countries with the rise of populism in the continent and much before the Covid crisis. The alleged mistreatment of Chinese tourists by

Swedish police had also led to a bitter diplomatic spat between Sweden and China in 2018.

As per the Pew Research Center's report in October 2020, the views about China have grown more negative in most of the advanced economies in Europe with the Covid-19 outbreak, but that negative trend has started at least for a decade now.

Australia, where a large Chinese community lives, has also experienced a massive surge in anti-Asian hate crimes in recent years. More than a third of Chinese-Australians surveyed by the Lowly Institute reported facing racial discrimination in 2020. However, the rise in hate against the Chinese in Australia has been attributed not only to Covid-19 but also to diplomatic tension between two countries.

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A close look at the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes worldwide shows that the current trend has started much before the Covid-19 crisis. Though this is being branded as racism against Asians, these hate crimes target people perceived to be from China mostly.

The onset of the Covid crisis and the anti-China rhetoric of some populist leaders had undoubtedly emboldened racists in recent months. However, coronavirus has now many mutants and many vaccines but that has not stopped hate crimes.

The awful drift of hate against people with East Asian looks has been almost a decade old with China's spectacular economic growth and its claim to be the global superpower. This hate and bigotry are the expressions of being envious of China's impressive success and meteoric rise.

Unless the rest of the world accepts and admits it and educates itself to fix this appalling reaction, the use of coronavirus as a ruse to hide the bitterness-led abhorrent deeds will only make this wave of anti-Asian hate much worse.

Gulf News

Vitamin D deficiency linked to metabolic changes in patients with lupus: Study

Press Trust Of India

Patients with lupus are more likely to have metabolic syndrome and insulin resistance both factors linked to heart disease if they have lower vitamin D levels, according to a study.

Researchers believe that boosting vitamin D levels may improve control of these cardiovascular risk factors, as well as improving long-term outcomes for patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), Birmingham University said in a release on Saturday.

Given that photosensitivity is a key feature of SLE, the scientists say that a combination of avoiding the sun, using high-factor sunblock and living in more northerly countries may contribute to lower levels of vitamin D in lupus patients. Patients with more severe disease also had lower vitamin D levels.

An international research team, led by experts at the University of Birmingham and University of Manchester, studied vitamin D levels in 1,163 SLE patients across 33 centres in 11 countries, publishing its findings in Rheumatology.

Report co-author Dr John A Reynolds, Clinical Senior Lecturer in Rheumatology at the University of Birmingham, commented: Our results suggest that co-existing physiological abnormalities may contribute to long-term cardiovascular risk early on in SLE.

We found a link between lower levels of vitamin D and metabolic syndrome and insulin resistance. Further studies could confirm whether restoring vitamin D levels helps to reduce these cardiovascular risk

factors and improve quality of life for patients with lupus, he said.

Lupus is an uncommon incurable immune system illness, more common in women, here the immune system is over-active, causing inflammation anywhere in the body. Untreated, the condition threatens irreversible damage to major organs including kidneys, heart, lungs and brain.

Metabolic syndrome is a combination of diabetes, high blood pressure (hypertension), abnormal cholesterol levels, and obesity.

People with metabolic syndrome are at greater risk of getting coronary heart disease, stroke and other conditions affecting the blood vessels.

The researchers note that patients with SLE have an excess cardiovascular risk, up to 50 times that seen in people without the condition - this cannot be attributed to traditional cardiovascular risk factors, such as high blood pressure or smoking, alone.

The mechanisms underlying the association between high blood pressure and low vitamin D in SLE are not clear, but researchers believe they may be linked to impact of vitamin D deficiency on the renin-angiotensin hormone system, which regulates blood pressure, fluid and electrolyte balance, as well as systemic vascular resistance.

This is the largest-ever study examining associations between vitamin D levels and metabolic syndrome in SLE; it also has the advantage of being an international cohort with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds - generating results that will be applicable across many settings, commented Dr Reynolds.



The researchers note that patients with SLE have an excess cardiovascular risk, up to 50 times that seen in people without the condition - this cannot be attributed to traditional cardiovascular risk factors, such as high blood pressure or smoking, alone.

Pros and Cons of GST Well-explained for Businesses



Sponsored Feature

GSTN or Goods and sales tax number is a 15 digit alphanumeric code assigned to each MSMEs and SMEs, which have an annual turnover of 15 crores. The number is available for those who register through the official GST portal. At present Indian government offers a GST certificate that displays the unique GSTN for any business.

After getting the GST number, a business must maintain its gst invoice format. The GST certificate with GST number should be displayed in the primary business outlet like shops, factories, retail outlets, godown, etc. The business or

business owner must display their GSTN on a spate board to ensure everyone gets to see the number.

There are different gst pros and cons. The GSTN has changed the whole scenario of the small and medium scale industries.

if you are interested to know about gst pros and cons in detail, here are some information for you-

The Pros of GST

The Simplified tax format GST has allowed the business to go through a simplified tax procedure. Earlier, businesses had to submit different taxes to the government. This created additional challenges. Often, businesses had

to opt for tax consultation services to ensure they paid every tax on time. But at present, the GST is the complete and universal tax for business folders. Hence, the procedure is pretty simple, and there are no problems with unpaid taxes. Small scale businesses also do not have to go for regular tax consultation services.

Mitigation of cascading effect

The GST network has allowed the government to create a channel to ensure the whole tax flows throughout society. Earlier, often, the business owners had to pay exclusive tax. Now consumers are included in the loop, Which means

the tax is also collected from the consumers. Now, the businesses are only charged for the goods or the services they provide, and they do not need to pay any other tax.

Regulation of the unorganized sector

The government can regulate the unorganized sector or small business establishments like small shops, small factories. With GST, the government can now offer protection to SMEs and MSMEs. It can also ensure that these business dwellings are doing legal business without indulging in any shady habits.

The Cons of GSTN

Despite the benefits offered through GST, there are still some problems and limitations. Here are the cons of GST

The compliance issue is complicated

GST has created an added challenge for compliance and business compliance. For getting the GST number, businesses and enterprises must register in the state they operate in. Hence, SMEs and MSMEs have to go through difficult and complicated compliance procedures to get their GST certificate.

In conclusion

GST number should be included in the gst invoice format for any business. This alphanumeric number is a must for SMEs and MSMEs. GST has eased the tax network, but it still has many scopes for improvement to achieve its full potential.

'Microplastics in sewage become 'hubs' for drug-resistant bacteria'

Press Trust Of India

Ultra-fine plastic particles can become 'hubs' for antibiotic-resistant bacteria and pathogens to grow once they wash down household drains and enter wastewater treatment plants, a new study says.

According to the scientists, including those from the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) in the US, these plastic particles less than five millimetres in length, called microplastics, allow the formation of a slimy layer, or biofilm, on their surface which allows bacteria and antibiotic waste to attach and mingle.

The research, published in the Journal of Hazardous Materials Letters, noted that certain strains of bacteria have elevated antibiotic resistance by up to 30 times when living on microplastic biofilms that form inside sludge units at municipal wastewater treatment plants.

"A number of recent studies have focused on the negative impacts that millions of tons of microplastic waste a year is having on our freshwater and ocean environments, but until now the role of microplastics in our towns' and cities' wastewater treatment processes has largely been unknown," said study co-author Mengyan Li from NJIT.

"These wastewater treatment plants can be hotspots where various chemicals, antibiotic-resistant bacteria and pathogens converge and what our study shows is that microplastics can serve as their carriers, posing imminent risks to aquatic biota and human health if they bypass the water treatment process," Li said.



In the study, the scientists assessed batches of sludge samples from three domestic wastewater treatment plants in New Jersey, US, inoculating the samples in the lab with two widespread commercial microplastics—polyethylene and polystyrene.

They then identified the species of bacteria that tend to grow on the microplastics, tracking genetic changes of the bacteria along the way.

The researchers found that three genes in particular—sul1, sul2 and int1—known to aid resistance to common antibiotics, sulfonamides, were found to be up to 30 times greater on the microplastic biofilms than in the lab's control tests using sand biofilms after just three days.

When the scientists added the antibiotic, sulfamethoxazole, to these samples they found it further amplified the antibiotic resistance genes by up to 4.5-fold.

"Previously, we thought the presence of antibiotics would be necessary to enhance antibiotic-resistance genes in these microplastic-associated bacteria, but it seems microplastics can naturally allow for uptake of these resistance genes on their own," said Dung Ngoc Pham, another co-author of the study from NJIT.

"The presence of antibiotics does have a significant multiplier effect however," Pham said.

Of the eight different bacterial species that the scientists found growing on the microplastics, they found two emerging human pathogens typically linked with respiratory infection.

"We might think of microplastics as tiny beads, but they provide an enormous surface area for microbes to reside," Li said.

According to the researchers, when microplastics enter the wastewater treatment plant and mix in with sludge, bacteria can accidentally attach to the surface and secrete glue-like substances.

Climate change may hurt Indian manufacturing due to heat stress on workers

Press Trust Of India

One-degree Celsius rise in annual temperatures may lead to two per cent drop in productivity levels of industrial units and climate change may hurt the Indian manufacturing sector owing to heat stress on workers, a new study has said.

The study by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago used several high-frequency micro-data sets of worker output and a nationally representative dataset of more than 58,000 factories across

India.

The researchers found that there is around two per cent drop of productivity for every one-degree rise in annual temperature.

"The greatest declines occurred in labour-intensive plants," the study said.

This multi-year study indicates that climate control in the workplace removes productivity declines but not absenteeism, presumably because workers remain exposed to high temperatures at home and outside. And the fact that climate-control is expensive, makes its use limited, it said.

"The effect of high temperatures on lower crop yields has been previously established. This paper shows that rising temperatures can also hurt economic output in other sectors by reducing the productivity of human labour.

"The damage is greatest when already warm days become hotter. If India wishes to succeed in becoming a manufacturing powerhouse using cheap labour, we need to think hard about how we can adapt to a hotter world," said Dr Anant Sudarshan, South Asia Director of the Energy Policy Institute at

the University of Chicago.

Dr Sudarshan co-authored this study with researchers E Somanathan of the Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi, Rohini Somanathan of the Delhi School of Economics, and Meenu Tewari of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Talking about how the future look like, Somanathan said it is entirely possible that the industrial sector might respond to high temperatures by increasing automation and shifting away from labour-intensive sectors in hot parts of the world.

"These adaptive re-

sponses may negatively influence wage inequality," Somanathan added. Echoing a similar concern, Sudarshan added, "The trends that we see in our data makes us think that warm countries in the developing world may face a pervasive and 'heat tax' that could damage the competitiveness of their manufacturing sectors and further hurt the wages of poor workers.

"Research into low-cost technologies to protect workers from ambient temperatures may have significant social value,"

Crude Oil Tumbles As Suez Ship Freed



Agenceis

NEW DELHI: Stock markets in Asia heaved a sigh of relief and crude oil prices fell as the vessel blocking the Suez Canal was freed.

This will clear the canal and allow movement on the busiest waterway in the world.

Crude prices fell after rising 4 per cent over the last few days as the blockage was causing \$ 9 billion of trade loss every day.

The Suez Canal accounts for 12 per cent of global trade. Oil prices have softened due to the recent lockdowns in Europe also.

Brent crude fell 90 cents to \$63.67 a barrel, while the US crude

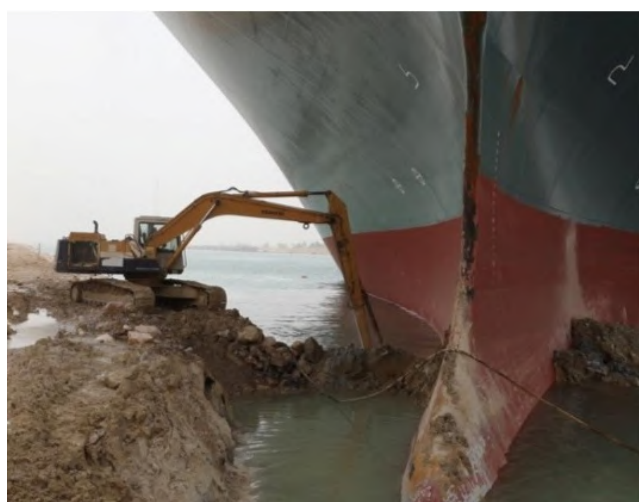
lost \$1.03 to \$59.94 per barrel.

The Suez Canal accounts for about 30 per cent of global container ship traffic each day. The blockade has hurt supplies of oil and affected shipping and container rates, leading to a rise in the cost of goods. Syria has had to resort to rationing.

The 'Ever Given' vessel was wedged in the canal since Tuesday, BBC said. More than 300 ships were stuck on either side of the blockage. Some vessels have had to reroute via Africa.

The 193 km (120-mile) Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea and provides the shortest sea link between Asia and Europe.

Suez Canal Blockade To Cause Losses In Billions Of Dollars For Insurers



Agenceis

NEW DELHI: With a loss of \$ 9 billion per day due to the Suez Canal being blocked by a container ship, global industry is awaiting the enormity of insurance claims.

For India, pressure could mount for certain industries that depend on Europe and the US and it is expected that there could be pressure for a while on the Indian ports on the west coast as many of these vessels may seek berthing together/in rapid succession.

R. Balasundaram, Executive Vice-president, Global Insurance Brokers said Suez Canal blockade, a once-in-a-lifetime type of event is estimated to cause losses in billions of dollars for insurers and the loss of trade per day due to the blockage at close to \$ 9 billion.

He added that the insurance industry is waiting with bated breath at the direction from which claims can arise out of this canal blockage and of course what could be the enormity of the exposure. There are various areas of claims

to possibly come up such as demand for GA (General Average) and Salvage guarantee from cargo interests, there could be a claim under the H&M policy or damages against the vessel, business interruption losses, etc. There could be losses due to perishable cargo or the cancellation of orders, hence the claim demand.

He said the likely impact of this incident on India is minimal for now but if the blockage continued for days/weeks, pressure could have mounted for certain industries that depend on Europe and the US for critical raw materials/parts or for those industries whose turnovers are driven by exports to these countries.

"Further, as the blockage is removed, it may still take at least a week for all the piled-up vessels to pass through the canal. Some vessels bound for India are among them and it is expected that there could be pressure for a while on the Indian ports on the west coast as many of these vessels may seek berthing together/in rapid succession," he added.

Govt. Gives Big Push To Eco-Tourism In J&K

Directs Forest Deptt. To Develop New Treks, Open Its Rest Houses/Inspection Huts For Public Use



Agenceis

JAMMU: In a mega push to promote eco-tourism in Jammu and Kashmir, the Administrative Council (AC), which met under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, approved the development of 7 new trekking routes in various wildlife protected areas by the Wildlife Department in coordination with the Tourism Department.

To sustainably promote tourism in the forest hinterland without disturbing the ecological balance in the protected areas, the Administrative Council also approved opening-up of the existing infrastructure and resources of the Forest Department including rest houses/inspection huts to tourists and wildlife enthusiasts.

The decision will allow online booking of 29 forest rest houses/inspection huts in Kashmir and Jammu divisions; under a common brand

and logo from 1st May 2021.

The Department of Forest, Ecology & Environment was directed to put in place a user-friendly online portal for booking identified rest houses on a first-come, first-serve basis as per their availability and intake capacity. The Department was directed to refurbish and open another batch of 58 rest houses/huts to tourists by 1st July 2021.

These accommodations are located in different forest divisions at the quaintest places amidst pristine nature. Hitherto, they were reserved for forest officers to be utilized only during official tours in connection with conservation, protection, and management of forests and wildlife.

Meanwhile, the Administrative Council also approved development of new trekking routes in Bahu Conservation Reserve, Sudhmahadev Conservation Reserve, Their Wildlife

Conservation Reserve, Tral Wildlife Sanctuary-Dachigam National Park-Overa-Aru Wildlife Sanctuary, Thajwas Wildlife Sanctuary, Khrew Wildlife Conservation Reserve-Dachigam National Park-Khonmoh Conservation Reserve, and Khrew Wildlife Conservation Reserve.

The trekking avenues range from short day-long treks up and down mountain slopes, to long-trans-mountain traverses involving a week of trekking and camping in the wilderness. These trekking routes pass through scenic splendors, with wild fauna and flora. Now that youth across India are inclined more towards adventure activities, these treks will be developed as well sought-after destinations for trekkers.

The development of these trekking routes will provide gainful employment to the local population and tap the adventure/eco-tourism potential of the UT.

Coordinated Efforts Needed To Safeguard The Farmers Interests: Director Law Enforcement

Says No Compromise On The Quality Of Pesticides And Fertilizers

Agenceis

SRINAGAR: The Director Law Enforcement J&K, Bal Krishan Chandan today called for zero tolerance against spurious/substandard pesticides and fertilizers besides strict implementation of established procedures of law enforcement so that the farming community could be served in a real spirit.

The Director said this while chairing a meeting at Directorate of Agriculture Lalmandi, here.

He said that to uphold the quality of pesticides and fertilizers, all the trending modern day scientific practices should be followed so that the customers could get best quality inputs for the cost they pay.

He impressed upon the participants that coordinated efforts are needed to maintain and ensure the availability of good quality fertilizers and pesticides to the farming community.

Earlier, Deputy Director Law Enforcement Kashmir Mohammad Younis Chowdhary briefed the Director about the various activities and achievements by the Enforcement



Agency during the recent times.

He said 2055 samples of different pesticides and 675 samples of fertilizers have been taken by the enforcement agency from different pesticide and fertilizer outlets during its visits to different districts, out of which 38 pesticide samples were found substandard and the legal proceedings have been initiated against the violators.

He added that Rs 85,000 fine has also been recovered from the erring pesticide and fertilizer dealers.

The meeting was informed that 68 lac liters of Horticulture Mineral

Oil (HMO) have been distributed in Kashmir valley so far and 11 MT substandard materials has been seized by the Agency from different areas of the Kashmir valley. It was said that sufficient quantities of fertilizers are available and there is no shortage of any kind of fertilizers in the valley.

The meeting was attended by Joint Director Seeds, Pesticides and Fertilizers Mohammad Iqbal Khan, Assistant Director Law Enforcement Sheikh Imran, District Law Enforcement Officers of all the concerned districts of Kashmir Division.

Domestic Fuel Rates Expected To Fall As Covid Surge Dampens Crude Cost



Agenceis

NEW DELHI: The fall in oil prices comes after a blockage at strategic Suez Canal spooked global Impex industry, while a massive wave of Covid-19 infections continued to impact large parts of Europe.

Resultantly, global fears have resurfaced on the slowdown economic recovery due to this wave.

At present, crude prices are reacting to the negative news flows.

The Brent crude futures slipped to \$63 levels a barrel on Monday.

Similarly, the US crude traded lower. The WTI crude oil traded lower by 1.05 per cent at \$59.92, while Brent is down by 0.78 per cent at \$63.65 levels.

However, the surge in domestic Covid cases will also weaken the rupee.

Consequently, lower crude oil cost will dampen domestic petrol and diesel prices.

"Crude oil prices are expected to slide due to increasing coronavirus cases and lower demand. Lower import from China is also a negative for crude oil," said Anuj Gupta, DVP Research, Angel Broking.

"In addition, the rupee is also expected to depreciate due to rising cases and fall in the equity market. Petrol and diesel prices may be revised downwards in India."

Currently, petrol costs Rs 90.78 per litre in Delhi, while diesel is pegged at Rs 81.10 per litre.

Lately, prices of petrol had crossed the psychological Rs 100 per litre mark in some cities leading to increasing public outcry against the high prices and the inflationary impact of the auto fuels.

Air India To Come Under Private Player By May-June, Says Union Minister



Agenceis

NEW DELHI: Union Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Saturday stated that the privatisation of Air India is likely to be completed by the end of May-June.

"At a meeting on Monday, it was decided that the government will close the financial bids within 64 days," Puri told ANI, adding that there were multiple bidders and some have been shortlisted.

Other Public sector undertakings (PSUs) like Pawan Hans disinvestment is also under process, the minister added.

"The airline still is in debt of Rupees 60 thousand crores and it is liable to be sold," Puri further said. The minister also said that the

second wave of COVID-19 has delayed airlines being allowed to operate 100 per cent that was planned to happen from the start of the summer schedule this month-end. But for now, there are no questions to curtail the domestic operations, he added.

He further said that flights are the safest mode to travel, adding that the authorities have taken cognisance for defaulters who are not following COVID-19 protocol on board.

Talking on the expansion of the terminal building of the Gorakhpur Airport, Puri said the civil aviation ministry is making profits from the tier 2-3 airports in the country and Gorakhpur is one of them.

NEWSMAKERS

Former Worker Sues Amazon For Not Providing Lunch Breaks

Agenceis

SAN FRANCISCO: A former Amazon worker has sued the e-commerce giant in the US for not scheduling the mandatory 30-minute meal breaks for employees.

Lovenia Scott, a former employee of Amazon's fulfilment centre in Vacaville, California, alleged that the company didn't provide enough rest breaks for workers, The Verge reported on Saturday.

"When they did get their meal breaks, workers were expected to monitor their walkie-talkies in case of any problems on the floor, which sometimes cut into their break time," the lawsuit claimed.

First filed in San Francisco County Superior Court in February, the case has now been moved to US District Court California, Northern District. The lawsuit also alleged that shifts were "chronically understaffed," which left some employees unable to take short 10-minute rest breaks in order to finish their work on time.

Amazon was yet to comment on the report.

Earlier this month, Amazon and an independent contractor it worked with in California were fined \$6.4 million for wage theft by the Labor Commission's Office.



The probe found that "Green Messengers, the subcontractor for Amazon, underpaid drivers, scheduling them 10-hour days but with a workload that forced drivers to skip meal and rest breaks".

Last week, amid a mounting evidence of allegedly ill-treating its low-paid workers, Amazon denied exploitative working conditions at its facilities, including forcing exhausted workers to 'pee in bottles'.

Replying to a tweet from US Representative Mark Pocan (D-WI), the e-commerce behemoth said that

the company's union-busting tactics allegations are baseless.

"Paying workers \$15/hr doesn't make you a 'progressive workplace' when you union-bust & make workers urinate in water bottles," Pocan said in a tweet.

Amazon replied: "You don't really believe the peeing in bottles thing, do you? If that were true, nobody would work for us. The truth is that we have over a million incredible employees around the world who are proud of what they do, and have great wages and

health care from day one".

"We hope you can enact policies that get other employers to offer what we already do," the company further stated.

Once the Twitter war started, several journalists and people who have documented such incidents at Amazon facilities began flooding the Web.

Journalist James Bloodworth, whose 2018 book titled 'Hired: Six Months Undercover in Low-Wage Britain,' documented his experience of low-paid work for companies including Amazon.

Samsung Reclaims Top Spot In Smartphone Sales In Feb

Agenceis

SEOUL: Samsung shipped 24 million units of smartphones for a 23.1 per cent market share last month, according to market researcher Strategy Analytics, outpacing Apple which sold 23 million units for a 22.2 per cent share.

China's Xiaomi came in third with an 11.5 per cent share, followed by Vivo with 10.6 per cent and Oppo with 8.5 per cent.

In January, the South Korean tech giant logged a market share of 15.6 per cent, while Apple had 25.4 per cent, reports Yonhap news agency.

In February, Samsung's smartphone shipments were 26 per cent more than a year earlier, and even 12 per cent more than the pre-pandemic levels in February 2019.

Samsung has been introducing new Galaxy S devices in mid-February each year, but this time, the company released its new flagship Galaxy S21 series in January in an apparent move to take over market share of Huawei, which is struggling from US sanctions, and better challenge Apple's iPhone 12 series that was released in October.

The market share gap be-



tween Samsung and Apple generally has been around 5 percentage points in February, but with robust sales of the US tech titan's iPhone 12 series, it narrowed to only 1 percentage point

this time, Strategy Analytics data showed.

In February, Apple's iPhone sales soared 74 per cent from a year earlier and 35 per cent from two years ago.

BJP Councillor

district, police said.

BJP councillor Reyaz Ahmad Peer of Ningli, another councillor Shamas Din and SPO Shafqat Nazir of Mundji were seriously injured when militants opened fire upon them near the sub-district hospital Sopore on Monday afternoon, a police spokesperson said. He said that Peer and the SPO succumbed to their injuries while another councillor Shamas Din was removed to the hospital for treatment.

Soon after the attack, teams of police, army and CRPF reached the spot and launched a search operation to nab the attackers. Inspector General of police (IGP) Kashmir, Vijay Kumar also visited the shootout spot.

He further said that the preliminary investigation has revealed that a local militant Mudasir Pandit of Lashkar-e-Taiba along with a foreign militant are involved in the said attack.

"However, further investigations are rigorously going on. IGP Kashmir also took serious note of the poor and inappropriate retaliation by the PSOs of protected persons present on spot and directed SSP Sopore to put four PSOs under suspension," he said.

According to the police spokesperson, IGP Kashmir also chaired a security review meeting with Commander 5-Sector RR, DIG CRPF and SSP Sopore.

"The main focus of meeting was today's attack by the militants in Sopore Town and the necessary security measures to be taken to counter such attacks. While interacting with the officers, the IGP Kashmir urged upon the participating officers that it is of crucial importance to enhance security of vulnerable persons and to take all necessary measures to thwart away the nefarious designs of militants," he said.

"Meanwhile, police has registered a case in this regard under relevant sections of law and officers continue to work to establish the full circumstances of this crime, the police spokesperson said, adding Cordon and search operation at various locations is going on to nab the assailants."

LG, Politicians

Perpetrators of this heinous act of violence will be brought to justice very soon. Heartfelt condolences to bereaved families of martyrs & prayers for eternal peace to departed souls," Office of J&K LG tweeted.

Besides LG, several mainstream leaders also condemned the killings and urged police to nab the assailants.

National Conference Party President Dr. Farooq Abdullah, and Vice President Omar Abdullah on Monday condemned attack.

They while condemning the attack in unequivocal terms said "brutality has no place in any emancipated society."

"The duo termed the incident unfortunate and urged the police to investigate the case and nab the culprits behind the attack. The duo also expressed union with the bereaved families and prayed for fortitude to them and peace for the deceased," reads a party statement issued here.

In a statement, J&K Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) expressed grief over the loss of precious lives and said such "mindless and shameful acts are not acceptable, deserve strong condemnation from every section of the society."

"JKPCC conveyed deepest condolences to family of martyred councilor and special police officer and prayed for eternal peace to departed souls and recovery of injured," a party statement said, adding, "JKPCC has also urged the Govt to take immediate effective measures to contain such inhuman and cowardice incidents."

CPI(M) leader Mohammad Yousef Tarigami termed the killings as inhuman and barbaric.

In a statement, he said that violence in any form is condemnable and there is a need to put an immediate end to these civilian killings. "The CPI (M) leader expressed sympathy with the bereaved families."

The BJP's Jammu and Kashmir unit also condemned the attack, saying the party activists can't be cowed down by such "cowardly acts".

CRPF Man Injured

had died within hours of the attack.

Police have arrested two overground workers involved in providing logistical support to the militants who carried out the attack. (PTI)

India, Pak Bonhomie

regional peace and stability as well as development," he said.

Zhao was responding to a question on Pakistan President Arif Alvi's remark that China is his country's "closest and friendliest friend" during his speech at the Pakistan Day parade on March 25.

While welcoming Alvi's remark, Zhao also referred to the recent rapprochement between India and Pakistan to dial down the tensions between the two countries.

"China expresses warm congratulations on the 82nd Pakistan Day. We believe that Pakistani Government and people will make further progress on national building and revitalisation," he said, adding that Beijing "highly appreciates" President Alvi's remarks.

"China also values the all-weather strategic co-operative partnership between the two countries," he said.

"I would like to take the opportunity of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties to work with Pakistan to fight coronavirus and carry forward our traditional friendship to expand our all dimensional cooperation and build a closer China-Pakistan community of shared future in a new era," the spokesman said.

J&K Govt Orders

order issued on March 25, 2021

"As such it is enjoined upon all Deputy Commissioners/ Head of the departments/ Directors of Kashmir division to ensure hoisting of National Flag on all government buildings/ offices on all days and occasions, ceremonial or otherwise with the dignity & honour of National Flag," it adds.

Pertinently, Piyush Singla, Deputy Commissioner Anantnag on Saturday last issued a circular directing the district administration to hoist tricolour at all the government buildings within 15 days.

"It has been impressed upon all district, sectoral, tehsil and block level officers to comply with the directions therein and ensure that the National Flag is flown on all Government buildings within a period of 15 days. The district heads have further been instructed to submit the progress report on a daily basis in this regard", stated a press statement issued by the office of Deputy Commissioner Anantnag.

Earlier, Divisional Commissioner Jammu on Friday directed all the Deputy Commissioners

and Heads of the Departments to hoist tricolour atop government buildings on the directions of Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha.

Mehbooba Gets

to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) president, the passport officer has informed Mehbooba that her application for an Indian passport has been rejected as the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Union Territory had recommended against granting the document to her.

The letter adds that Mehbooba can appeal against the decision at a higher forum provided by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

Commenting on the rejection of her application, the PDP president said it shows the level of normalcy achieved in Kashmir.

"Passport Office refused to issue my passport based on CID's report citing it as 'detrimental' to the security of India. This is the level of normalcy achieved in Kashmir since Aug 2019 that an ex Chief Minister holding a passport is a threat to the sovereignty of a mighty nation," she wrote on Twitter.

"The accumulated balance in 1,138 bank accounts of 131 DDOs of three selected government departments (public works, revenue and rural development) increased from Rs 116.41 crore to Rs 399.94 crore during the period from 2014 to 2019," it said.

HC Dismisses

authority for the issuance of the document to her. Dismissing the petition, Justice Ali Mohammad Magray observed that Mehbooba's application for a passport was rejected by the passport officer, Srinagar as the police verification report recommended against the issuance of the document to her.

"In such circumstances, I am of the considered view that no direction can be issued by this court for issuance of passport in favour of the petitioner. Even otherwise, the scope of this court in the matter of grant or otherwise of passport in favour of an individual is very limited in as much as the court, in this behalf, can only direct the concerned authorities to expeditiously consider the case of an individual in the light of the mandate of the scheme of law governing the subject," the judge said in his order.

The court observed that it did not find any reason to interfere with the course of action adopted by the respondents in the case and "as a sequel thereto, the petition of the petitioner is hereby dismissed, along with the connected CM(s). Interim directions(s), if any subsisting as on date, shall stand vacated".

It, however, said the dismissal of the writ petition shall not come in the way of the petitioner for availing the remedy as may be available to her in accordance with the law.

Art-370 Can Only

The trio was welcomed into the JKPC by party chairman Lone and other senior leaders.

Bukhari said he was happy and given respect in the NC but "I could not get much done".

"Many people came to me asking me to float a new party, but my conscience did not allow me to float another party as it would have led to the further division of votes," he said.

"I think I am the first one from south Kashmir to join the JKPC. I am proud to be a part of this new team," he added.

Bukhari described Lone as a very practical and sincere man.

Speaking to reporters, Lone said, "It is with great pleasure that we welcome the three senior leaders of Jammu and Kashmir into our party. We are very happy that they have joined us and our party will benefit immensely from their experience."

He said the three former legislators were joining a political movement and expressed hope that in the coming years, the JKPC would "play a great and a pivotal role in contributing to the state of J&K, to the politics of J&K".

"I am hopeful that this caravan of change will get stronger and we will try to play a constructive role in the extraordinary situation in J&K and navigate it through the troubled waters," he added.

Asked about his party's stand on the revocation of Article 370, Lone said the special status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir can be restored either in the Supreme Court or the parliament.

"We were among the first ones to challenge it (the revocation of Article 370) in the Supreme Court. That is one institution. The other is the people of India, which is the parliament. There is no magic wand other than these," he said.

Lone said the people of Kashmir have to engage with the people of India and cannot possibly "dream" of getting Article 370 back by not engaging with them.

"You have to engage with them. The ball is in their court and they will decide whether you get it back or not and we have to tell this to our people. The more you speak negatively or irritate them, the more you confirm that it won't return.

"The more you engage with them, clear misunderstandings with them, clear the image that has been created about us, the more you are going to win the sympathy of those people - the people, the Union government and the opposition," he said.

Lone said the reality is that "we have failed our people".

"None among us has gone to talk to them, be it the ruling party or the opposition. I think there is scope and space and we can do things differently. It is a very difficult task, but not impossible," he said.

J&K Logs 235

district and 19 in Jammu district.

Four districts did not report any fresh cases, while nine other districts had cases in single digits. Budgam, Pulwama, Anantnag and Kishtwar were the other districts to register coronavirus cases in double digits.

The number of active cases, which has been rising steadily over the past week, has now reached 2,110 in Jammu and Kashmir, with 1,26,129 patients have recovered so far, officials said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the Union territory stands at 1,989.

Health Dept Rules

According to the block medical officer (BMO) Langate, the septuagenarian— Ghulam Mohammad Ganie died after suffering a cardiopulmonary arrest. Ganie, he said, was suffering from bronchial asthma, hypertension and cardiomegaly.

He said Ganie was administered coronavirus vaccine jab at the Sub-centre Haril at 12:30pm on Saturday.

"The man was kept under observation for 30 minutes and no adverse effects following immunization were reported by the supervisory team headed by Dr Latief Ahmad, Medical Officer," he said.

He said that the elderly man died three hours after he was given vaccine.

CAG Raps 3 J&K

revenue and rural development departments,

the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India said.

The CAG made the remarks in its Jammu and Kashmir report on the social, general, economic and revenue for the year ended March 31, 2019.

The increase in the accumulated balances was due to undisbursed funds of relief or compensation to the victims of militancy and natural disasters, improper planning and non-completion of schemes, overstatement of expenditure in utilisation certificates, retention of funds, retention of statutory deductions and land compensation outside the government account, the CAG said.

It said that instructions issued by the government from time to time on consolidation and streamlining of utilisation of funds retained in bank accounts of DDOs were not strictly adhered to.

"Only a meagre amount of Rs 64.10 crore was transferred from the redundant bank accounts of DDOs during the period December 2016 to February 2017," the report said.

"The accumulated balance in 1,138 bank accounts of 131 DDOs of three selected government departments (public works, revenue and rural development) increased from Rs 116.41 crore to Rs 399.94 crore during the period from 2014 to 2019," it said.

The report said the compliance audit on management of bank accounts in government departments was conducted from February 2019 to February 2020 to assess whether rules and procedures relating to financial matters as well as the circulars or instructions issued by the finance department have been complied with by the DDOs.

"Emphasis was given to assess the compliance by the DDOs to the government instructions of December 9, 2016, regarding consolidation of and reduction in number of bank accounts in government departments. Test-check of records was conducted in 131 DDOs selected on a random basis, of three departments in six out of 22 districts of the (erstwhile) state," it said.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 became a union territory after its special status was revoked the Centre. The erstwhile state was bifurcated into union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

The test check of records, the report said, was conducted in Jammu, Reasi and Rajouri districts of the Jammu Division and Anantnag, Baramulla and Kargil districts in the Kashmir division.

Kargil is now part of union territory Ladakh after bifurcation of the erstwhile state.

"The audit scrutiny of the records (February 2019 to February 2020) of 131 DDOs of three selected departments in six districts revealed accumulation of undisbursed/unutilised balance in 1,138 bank accounts operated at the end of each financial year during the period from 2014-15 to 2018-19," the CAG said.

"The cumulative balance of 131 DDOs as on 31 March 2015 was Rs 116.41 crore in 1,138 bank accounts, which increased to Rs 399.94 crore at the end of March 2019," it said.

The report said the audit also noticed that in the three departments, 44 DDOs had opened 182 bank accounts in banks other than the J&K Bank Limited without obtaining prior approval of the finance department.

The CAG also highlighted the non-compliance of instructions including transfer of cash balance of all government accounts which had remained inoperative for more than a year to official account of the finance secretary without closure of the bank accounts.

It recommended the finance department to ensure strict implementation of the government instructions issued for streamlining of retention of funds in bank accounts. There should also be an effective monitoring mechanism so that funds are not withdrawn by DDOs from the treasury in anticipation of immediate disbursement to avoid accumulation of undisbursed balance in the bank accounts, the CAG said.

‘128 Solar Power

of defects in the non-functional plants, so that the investment made is utilised.

In its report on the social, general, economic and revenue for the year ended March 31, 2019 which was tabled in Parliament recently, the CAG said that "non-settlement of payment of WCT with the state taxes department rendered 128 solar power plants (SPPs) installed at police establishments non-functional since September 2014 despite incurring an expenditure of Rs 9.70 crore between May 2014 to January 2015 and availability of maintenance free warranty".

To ensure uninterrupted power supply to police establishments, a proposal of Rs 37.94 crore to provide solar photovoltaic system for 523 locations was submitted by the Jammu and Kashmir Police on August 25, 2011, to the government for approval and onward submission to the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, it said.

After only two days, a reworked proposal with a total financial implication of Rs 43.31 crore was submitted (27 August, 2011) including additional 25 locations (district police offices)," the report said.

"The government of India, under the Central Financial Assistance (CFA) sanctioned (February 2012) Rs 33.54 crore towards installation of 523 SPPs with an aggregate capacity of 1,408.6 KWP at the establishments of the J&K Police at a tentative cost of Rs 37.94 crore, it said.

Meanwhile, in line with a recommendation of state level purchase committee in March 2012, it was decided to float a notice inviting tender (NIT) in April of that year for the project.

The requirement of 523 locations was reworked to include 25 district police offices, four police stations and 10 police posts. The number rose to 562 and was duly projected in the NIT floated on April 25, 2012, the report said.

It said the lowest bidder quoted a price of Rs 36.14 crore, inclusive of taxes, for the project.

The contract for supply, installation, testing, commissioning and maintenance of SPPs of different capacities, aggregating up to 1553.76 KWP, for 562 locations was placed in March 2013 with the firm for Rs 36.14 crore on the grounds that the price quoted by it was well within the approved budget of Rs 37.94 crore, the report said.

As stated in the NIT, the J&K Service Tax and Value Added Tax (VAT) was not to be applicable to this contract and would be paid extra by the police department, if charged by the state taxes department.

The report said the delivery, installation and commissioning of SPPs was to be completed within six months from the date of placement of the supply order.

As per the terms and conditions of the supply order, the supplier was responsible for free warranty of five years for SPPs, 10 years for power

output warranty for solar photovoltaic modules and replacement guarantee of 20 years for the modules," it said.

Under the scheme, the renewable energy ministry was to provide CFA of Rs 243 per watt or 90 per cent of the sanctioned project cost whichever is less," the report said.

The ministry, therefore, in June 2013 reduced the CFA to Rs 29.43 crore based on the tendered cost of the project, it said.

The first installment of 50 per cent of CFA or Rs 14.71 crore was released in June 2013 by the Centre to Jammu and Kashmir out of which an amount of Rs 14.39 crore towards payment of 187 out of 252 SPPs installed was made between May 2014 and January 2015, according to the report.

The CAG said post the installment of the 252 SPPs, 163 SPPs were found to be non-functional which included 128 SPPs for which payment of Rs 9.70 crore had been made.

The home department directed (August 2015) the supplier to rectify the defects in the installed 163 SPPs. The supplier informed the department in August 2015 that instead of repairing old power conditioning units of these SPPs, new power conditioning units were dispatched to J&K," it said.

The material was, however, detained by the sales tax department on the grounds of non-deposit of WCT. The home department took up (February 2015 to May 2018) the matter with the government to either release Rs 3.80 crore on account of WCT at a rate of 10.50 per cent or for waiver of such tax, the report said.

The audit scrutiny in July 2017 of records of the director general of police, police headquarters, Jammu, revealed that the matter relating to WCT, however, has not been resolved even after a lapse of more than five years, and 128 SPPs have remained non-functional for which payment of Rs 9.70 crore was made up to January 2015.

The DGP, police headquarters, Jammu, in its reply in June 2020 said the non-functional SPPs could not be repaired as spare parts were impounded by the commercial taxes department for non-payment of WCT.

The home department stated that all the issues shall be resolved as soon as the government releases WCT amount or waives it, the report said.

Thus, failure of the department to effectively coordinate and settle the issue regarding payment of WCT with the sales tax department led to impounding of spare parts dispatched by the firm which resulted in non-functional SPPs," it stated.

As a result, the benefits of installation and commissioning of 128 SPPs could not be availed, despite an expenditure of Rs 9.70 crore having been incurred for installation of these 128 SPPs. The matter was reported to the government on May 2020, their reply is awaited (September 2020), the CAG said. (PTI)

Rainfall Plummets

Kokernag, also in south Kashmir, received 2.6mm recorded a low of 10.7 degree Celsius against previous night's 7.2 degree Celsius, the official said.

The minimum temperature settled at 8.7 degree Celsius in Kupwara against 7.7 degree Celsius on the previous night, the official said. The north Kashmir district received 15.6mm of rain during the time, he said.

Gulmarg, the world famous skiing resort in north Kashmir's Baramulla district, recorded a minimum temperature of 1.5 degree Celsius against 2.0 degree Celsius on the previous night and had 21.4mm of rain. The temperature was 2.3 degree Celsius above normal for the place during this time of the year, the official added

The meteorological department has forecast "fairly widespread light to moderate rain, snow or thunderstorm in Kashmir and Pirpanjal range of Jammu division" in next 24 hours. "There will be mainly dry weather on the plains of Jammu division," the official said.

For next two days, the weather office has predicted "isolated very light rain/thunderstorm."

Meanwhile traffic authorities said that subject to fair weather and better road condition Light Motor Vehicles (LMVs) shall be allowed from both sides on the Jammu-Srinagar highway

In a communiqué, Traffic authorities said Heavy Motor Vehicles (HMTVs) shall be allowed towards Jammu after the last LMV crosses Banihal. (GNS)

The Band Show

in his Srinagar office. "For most of them, the Gulshan Forum only became a much-needed platform."

Among its pioneers was a native of a non-descript Budgam village, Mohammad Akbar Dar.

Dar is seen as a doyen in his cultural cabal consisted of some prominent citizenry and civil society members. Years of campaign for strengthening the folk shows in Kashmir have earned him a name—Gulshan Badrani—a blend identity carrying his roots and role.

I met Badrani in a frozen February morning at his home in Bedran, a sleepy village nestled on the Baramulla-Budgam boundary. The bespectacled man sporting trimmed salt-and-pepper stubble was getting ready for his Jammu cultural tour.

"What we do is beyond the rustic show derided for its outlived utility," Badrani said akin to a college lecturer. "We're promoting the cultural capital of Kashmir."

As the 'bandmaster' of the band, Badrani can be often seen attending cultural programmes in different campuses and forums of the valley. His tribe is driven by the belief of taking the theatre to the next-generation.

"Our educational campuses are our thinking spaces," the forum founder continued while guiding his members for the upcoming tour.

"One of the reasons behind the fall of the theatre is our inability to take it to classrooms. But this is where we're focussing on and trying to create a difference."

Nearly a month after our meet in his hometown, Badrani is back in the valley. His band is now preparing for another tour—this time in "Naya Kashmir".

However, cynics of these cultural shows see them as a "normalcy projects". Behind the dismissive rant is a barking history—wherein different regimes have conveniently used these cultural shows to conceal Kashmir's conflict countenance.

"These 'baand' [folk-artist] shows only make many people paranoid in Kashmir today," says Showkat Malik, a history lecturer.

"Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad used these cultural activities to create the so-called 'Jashne-Kashmir' pomp and show, and so did his successors. But the problem with these cultural programmes is that they eventually fail to erase the larger reality of the land."

Such programmes—theatre, symposiums, book launches and folk-singing—have been weaponized

to an extent that, Malik says, the poor performers often become clowns in the conflict theatre.

"We've already seen instances in this regard when our young and politically naïve artists end up drawing online flak for their participation in the state-sponsored events," the lecturer says.

"While the lack of artistic opportunities drives most of these young towards such events, they only become a political casualty in a highly-sensitive place like Kashmir."

But the movers and shakers of these troupe shows are unfazed by the denigration. They call themselves as 'cultural crusaders' who have a job to do—revive the roots.

And for that, the Gulshan Forum is already involving big names.

Some seasoned faces after their retirement from government services can be seen in the forum events. A few of them call their participation as the much-needed initiative to safeguard the signs and symbols of what collectively make the culture of Kashmir.

But while many of these 'big faces' declined to come on record, some of them anonymously said that their cultural campaigner role is resisting the recent events threatening the identity of the place.

"When you open floodgates in a region, its first casualty becomes its culture," says a former bureaucrat known for his post-retirement art-patron image.

"One can see that happening in the Indian metropolitan cities which have become melting pots, when they were once celebrated as the cultural capitals of India. Culture defines the identity of the communities, and one has to make every effort to safeguard it for future generations."

At his home, while making preparation for another cultural tour, Badrani says his forum is already working on this front. "We're doing our best to revive the cultural moorings of the region."

Some of these efforts, he adds, have taken the theatre tribe out of their self-imposed suspension mode.

"Over the years, as platforms became useless due to paucity of opportunities, many of our cultural icons faded in obscurity," Badrani says.

"But from the last 26 years, we're trying to create more opportunities, avenues and engagements for these unsung heroes who define us and represent us on many fronts and forums."

In this regard, Badrani's band is also conducting regular theatrical activities to recreate pride in the Kashmiri culture and bring it back to its 'old glory'.

"While we're exploring the hidden talent these days, our motive remains to transmit our cultural heritage to the next generation," he says.

"And that's why we organize various campus competitions, musical concerts and symposiums from time to time."

Among the art-forms, the forum mainly banks on Baandi Pather — the traditional band performance delivered with drums and oral storytelling. It's known for its amusing flash mob engagement. "Till 1970s, the Baandi Pather was ruling the minds and hearts of Kashmiris, particularly in rural areas," says Syed Bashir Kausar, President GCFK. "It was the main source of entertainment and enlightenment for the simpletons. The country dwellers would eagerly wait for the 'Baands' to perform in their village. But now the art is dying a slow death and needs some attention and intervention."

But while the efforts are being made to contemporise the band show, many in Kashmir believe that the "stale content" and the clichéd performance is only turning off the tech-savvy new generation.

"Selling old wine in new bottles is fine as long as it retains taste and charm," says Munazir Lone, a young playwright from Srinagar.

"Problem with these cultural campaigners remains their lack of imagination and innovative narrative technique. They're only killing the art by adhering to the same old methods."

In fact, when Kashmir is witnessing resurgence of some forgotten folk artists, like a "lady shah", many dismiss the renewal as a "distasteful come-back" bereft of a compelling plot.

"And this is where it truly becomes a challenge for these cultural campaigners," Lone says. "They need to become a bit creative just like those new restaurateurs in town who're coming out with these

Virat Kohli Surprised By Shardul Thakur And Bhuvneshwar Kumar Not Winning Awards

Press Trust of India

PUNE: India captain Virat Kohli on Sunday said he was surprised that Shardul Thakur was not adjudged man-of-the-match for the third and final ODI against England and Bhuvneshwar Kumar missed the man-of-the-series honours despite strong performances.

Sam Curran was handed the man-of-the match award for his heroic 83-ball 95 not out in a lost cause as India won the third ODI by seven runs to clinch the three-match series 2-1. Shardul took four wickets for 67 runs but conceded 18 runs in the 47th over to give England a shot at victory.

England top-order batsman Jonny Bairstow got the man-of-the-series award for his 219 runs in the three games, including a hundred to top the run-scorers' chart. Bhuvneshwar took six wickets in the series at an economy rate

keep them in the hunt.

"However, our bowlers picked up wickets, and it moved from us finishing it off to them getting over the line before Hardik (Pandya) and Nattu (T Natarajan) pulled it back. Prasidh (Krishna) and Krunal (Pandya) were impressive.

"But death overs batting was extremely good, despite the early wickets, and if the top three can get a hundred, then we can get 370s and 380s later.

"This win has been sweet because it's against the top team in the world, and we're looking forward to the IPL. It's been an amazing season, series, and this was a great way to finish it off."

Asked about two months inside a bio-secure bubble during the England tour, he said, "Scheduling needs to be looked at in future, since playing in bubbles will be difficult, and everyone can't have the same mental capacity all the time."



of 4.65 and an average of 22.50.

"I'm surprised Shardul wasn't the man of the match, and Bhuvneshwar wasn't the man of the series. A lot of credit to them for bowling so well in adverse conditions," Kohli said at the post-match presentation, wrapping up series victories across formats against the tourists.

India dropped at least four catches, including that of Curran, at crucial junctures to pile on the pressure but Kohli sought to play it down.

"It's most disappointing for the guy who drops the catch, but as much as you get disappointed, catches get put down and sometimes they cost you. That is a part of the game.

"There's no lack of intent, and our body language was outstanding. Eventually we got over the line," he said.

Asked about the intensity shown by both the teams in the white-ball leg, Kohli said, "When the top-two teams battle each other, we'll get exciting games. We knew England are not going to throw in the towel, and Sam played a really good innings to

"But I'm looking forward to the IPL for now."

England captain Jos Buttler said his team was disappointed to lose the series but learnt a lot during the tour.

"A fantastic game, both sides made some mistakes but played some brilliant cricket. We witnessed an incredible knock from Curran to nearly get us over the line, but congratulations to India on winning," he said.

"We've learnt a lot as a side and seen many guys stand up and take the lead. The white-ball leg was incredibly competitive. These are the conditions we will face in the near future in the (T20) World Cup.

"It's a great experience for the young guys to play a top-class side like India and they will be better cricketers for it."

He admitted that his bowlers didn't bowl that well at the top and gave away easy boundaries.

"But our bowlers dragged it back only to be pegged back by Pant and Hardik Pandya, but we restricted them well enough. We didn't have those big partnerships to take us over the line."

Coach Ravi Shastri Congratulates Team India For 'Season Of A Lifetime'

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: Head coach Ravi Shastri was effusive in his praise for the Indian team for having what he termed "a season of a lifetime", during which it notched up five consecutive series victories against the world's top two teams in the difficult COVID era.

After clinching the T20I and Test series against Australia, India completed a clean sweep in all three formats against England, with a seven-run win in the third ODI here on Sunday.

"Congratulations Guys for holding up and having a season of a lifetime in toughest of times across all formats and hemispheres against 2 of the best teams in the world. Take a bow #TeamIndia #INDvsENG," Shastri tweeted.

Most of the Indian players have been inside the bio-bubble, which is a highly restricted area, since the IPL started last September. They were given a week's break after the tour of Australia before

heading back for the home series' against England.

Shastri, along with several other players, have been very vocal about the challenges of being in bio-bubbles for long periods of time.

India were off to a rocky start in Australia, losing the ODI series 1-2. However, the Men in Blue came back with a bang to clinch the T20I series 2-1.

In the first fixture of the Border Gavaskar Trophy, they succumbed to a humiliating defeat after being bundled out for their lowest-ever Test score of 36. Struggling with injuries and without the services of regular skipper Virat Kohli, who was on paternity leave, the team then showed tremendous grit and character to win the series 2-1 against all odds.

Back home, India were upstaged by Joe Root and his men in the first Test. But the team once again came back stronger, bagging a 3-1 series victory, which was followed by wins in the T20 and ODI series respectively.

JKSC Delegation Visits National Kayaking & Canoeing Camp At WSC, Dal Lake



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Secretary J&K Sports Council, Nuzhat Gull today visited the Water Sports Centre (WSC) of J&K Sports Council (JKSC) at Nehru Park, Dal Lake here to monitor the progress of the month-long National Coaching Camp and take stock of the facilities being provided to participants.

The month-long National Coaching Camp as a prelude to Asian Olympic Qualifiers to be held in Pattaya, Thailand is underway at the Water Sports Centre (WSC) of J&K Sports Council at Nehru Park, Dal Lake here.

The Government of India has specially allotted the camp to J&K Water Sports Centre keeping in view the state of art facilities placed at the newly laid infrastructure at Nehru Park, Dal Lake.

During the visit, the Secretary, J&K Sports Council interacted with the participants and also distributed Team Kits and Track Suits among them. While speaking on the occasion she asked all the participants to be ambassadors for J&K and spread

the positive word with fellow sports fraternity across the country.

The Secretary also informed the gathering that the Water Sports Centre is being augmented with more standard facilities in some time to bring it at par with other international facilities across the globe.

As many as 24 players from different States and UTs of the country are attending the camp under the watchful eyes of Coach duo of Piyush and Nazish.

Head Water Sports Centre J&K, Bilquis Mir, who is also National Chief Coach for Women was assigned the role of coordinating all logistics including boarding and lodging security, medical and other related matters as well as to oversee aspects of coaching including planning, conduct and assessment etc.

Participants of the camp are elated at the training facilities being provided in the camp. One of the participants Susheela Chanu who is from Manipur was all praises for the camp facilities and desired more and more National camps should be allotted to Water Sports Centre J&K in future which

houses best facilities.

Another participant, Nocha Singh who has been training in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh previously said that he is visiting Kashmir for the first time and is spellbound by both scenic beauty and facilities of the Water Sports Centre, J&K.

Similar views expressed by Ajat Shatru Sharma who desired for frequent National Camps in Srinagar Water Sports. Both Nocha Singh and Ajat Shatru who are internationally acclaimed Kayaking athletes said, Water Sports Centre, Srinagar can be easily clubbed with other international sports facilities of the world.

Ms Anjali Bashishth and Ph. Soniya Devi International Canoeing players opines that upgraded facilities in centre make it a unique facility in the country which will go a long way in producing more and more water sports athletes not only in the country but Jammu and Kashmir as well.

Secretary, J&K Sports Council was also accompanied by Dr. Zafar Iqbal Chief Accounts Officer J&K Sports Council, Nuzhat Ara, Divisional Sports Officer (K) and other officials during the visit.

Series Victories Over England Prove Indian Cricket Is Basking In Riches

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: Indian cricket never had it so good. If the Australian summer was the stuff of dreams, the Indian 'spring' brought about hopes of a bright future after one of the most dominant performances against a quality England side over two eventful months of international cricket.

It's not that Indian teams of the past haven't had great scorelines against English sides but this batch of talented men, under Virat Kohli, has looked more intimidating with its relentless attacking mindset.

The shining stars once again shone brightly but a few who have made real statements include Mumbai's Shardul Thakur, who, in the coming days, could be the all-rounder Indian team requires on foreign shores with his incisive swing bowling and powerful batting built around decent technique.

Think about options and Shardul as a seam bowling all-rounder alongside Ishant Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami could be as valuable as a Hardik Pandya.

If Shardul becomes an all-format seam bowling all-rounder, then Washington Sundar, a specialist batsman, can give multiple options across formats including opening the batting or bowling and then chipping in with a wicket or two with his fast off-breaks.

People waited for Suryakumar Yadav's debut and the player, perhaps, waited even more. When it happened, the Almighty conjured to help the Mumbai maverick write the most brilliant prologue of what would be a "lovely book to read" in the coming days.

The all-format assignment against England saw India accomplish a few specific goals.

Firstly, ensuring a spot in the World Test Championship final was non-negotiable and despite the blip in the Chepaak opener, India were ruthless in their approach, cooking the English goose with Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel.

The second goal was to check out the core group of players who will be travelling to England to play six Test matches, including the WTC final against New Zealand, followed by five Tests against the home team.

During the five matches in the shortest format, the third aspect was exploring various combinations before the T20 World Cup in October.

The fourth and final point in the check-list was to try out extra options during the ODI series. It goes without saying that the Indian team management were able to tick all the boxes and as Ian Chappell pointed out, this team has the ability to match the great West Indies side of the 1970s or the Australians in the 90s to mid 2000.

If Australia provided a trailer of what India's bench strength is, the England assignment was like a 70mm feature film that left the audience in awe of the reserve players.

A player like Ravindra Jadeja wasn't missed as Axar Patel, in his first series, looked like a veteran of 50 Tests, who was ready to play havoc with the minds of English batsmen.

He bowled straight undercutters and they played for turn. He got the ball to turn but they played for the straight ball. The result was 27 wickets in three Test matches as he matched the magician Ravichandran Ashwin, strike for strike.

And come to think of it, when India step out in Southampton for the World Test Championship

final on June 18, Axar is unlikely to feature if Ravindra Jadeja doesn't sustain another injury.

In the batting department, Shubman Gill, after a promising Australia series, didn't have the best of times against England but that will be the least of concerns for Kohli.

The team believes in Gill's match-winning abilities but in case he doesn't fire, there is KL Rahul and Prithvi Shaw in the mix to partner the peerless Rohit Sharma, whose 160-odd in the second Test was one of the finest knocks on a track that offered significant turn.

If Australian tour witnessed the re-emergence of Rishabh Pant as a formidable match-winner, the England home series saw him stamp his authority as he blended solid defence into his wide range of strokes.

This was one such series where he never looked like getting out until he committed an unforced error.

Pant's big-hitting is already on its way to become the stuff of legends but what stood out was his defensive game in the fourth Test in Ahmedabad, where he completely changed his game to suit the team's needs.

It's a pity that Wriddhiman Saha's decent international career on either side will be flanked by two special players, MS Dhoni and Rishabh Pant, who were simply better than him in terms of winning games for India.

But imagine that India's reserve Test wicketkeeper is Wriddhiman, who many believe is the world's best stump.

If that's difficult to fathom, then any opposition team's eyes would pop out if they see that Pant's replacement in the T20 Internationals could be an Ishan Kishan, who can hit even bigger sixes and keep decently.

He scored a century against England in the fourth Test, compelling the selectors to include him in the white-ball squads. In the series-deciding third ODI on Sunday, which India won by seven runs, he was the top scorer with his 62-ball 78.

"He's had a fantastic series, hasn't he? Across all three formats. I saw a real calmness about him today. It's not only high-risk, sloggish or anything like that," Bell said.

"Also, he gets off strike and rotates it. So I imagine that those bowlers at the end of their mark are thinking that if they get it slightly wrong, Pant does hurt them.

"We've seen a maturity as this series has gone on. That Test match hundred again would have given him a lot of confidence," he added.

Bihar CA Defies BCCI Diktat To 'Stop T20 League', Players May Face Sanction

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: The controversy-ridden Bihar Cricket Association, along with its registered first-class and List A players, are likely to face tough sanctions from the BCCI for defying the parent body's orders to stop the unsanctioned Bihar Cricket League (BCL).

The BCL was held in Patna from March 20-26.

The tournament had five franchises Angika Avengers, Bhagalpur Bulls, Dharbhanga Diamonds, Gaya Gladiators and Patna Pilots and was aired on Eurosport channel.

Darbhanga Diamonds emerged as champions in the final played at the Urja Stadium.

The BCCI, on March 23, had sent a letter (in possession of PITI) to the BCA telling them, in no uncertain terms, that their 'T20 league' hasn't got approval and must be stopped.

However, the defiant BCA officials didn't pay heed to the BCCI and went ahead with the remaining games.

"We have reviewed your responses to our queries, and upon careful consideration, BCCI has decided to not accord its approval to the Bihar Cricket Association (BCA) for conducting its T20 domestic league cricket tournament (i.e. BCL), as it does not fulfil/comply the directives of the advisory and guidelines issued by the BCCI," the board's acting CEO Hemnag Amin had written to the state body, clarifying its stand.

The BCCI, in its communication, categorically asked the BCA to cancel the BCL or get ready to face sanctions in line with the board's constitution.

".....we appreciate BCA's endeavour and constant pursuit towards building cricket culture in the state of Bihar, and assure you that the BCCI will support BCA, within the contours of law. Accordingly, BCCI instructs you to cancel the T20 domestic league cricket tournament (i.e., BCL)," it stated.

"In the event, BCA does not cancel the ongoing T20 tournament (i.e., BCL), the tournament will

be deemed to be an 'Unapproved Tournament' as per BCCI's Rules and Regulations and BCA will be liable for sanctions, as per BCCI's Rules and Regulations," it said.

In recent years, on the recommendation of its Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU), the BCCI has decided to put a cap on state body-run T20 leagues after multiple cases of dubious ownership, unusual betting patterns emerged.

"What the Bihar CA officials have done is they have put the careers of young players in line with their defiance. What if BCCI now ban players as per Article 31 of constitution? What if BCCI stops the annual grant? Will Rakesh Tiwary take responsibility," IPL spot-fixing petitioner and member of rival body, Aditya Verma, told PITI.

The BCCI is also peeved that BCA officials perceived the board's silence as a mark of approval and went ahead with the tournament.

"... BCCI is required to ensure that all its members (including BCA) comply with the relevant rules/regulations/advisories, issued by competent authorities for regulating cricket in India.

"Keeping this background in mind, please note that the BCCI has not provided its approval to BCA for conducting BCL. At this juncture, we also clarify in clear and unequivocal terms that mere silence cannot and should not be construed to be as approval (deemed or otherwise)," it stated.

The rules as per Article 31 of BCCI constitution that has been violated are 31. BAN ON PARTICIPATION IN UNAPPROVED TOURNAMENTS (1) No Member shall participate or extend help of any kind to an unapproved Tournament.

(2) No Player, Umpire, Scorer, Official or other person associated with the BCCI shall participate in any unapproved tournament.

(3) The Apex Council shall take appropriate action including suspension and stoppage of financial benefits and any other action against individuals / Members contravening the above.

BCA supremo Tiwary couldn't be reached for a comment.

US Men Lose 2-1 To Honduras, Miss 3rd Straight Olympic Spot

Agencies

GUADALAJARA (MEXICO): American players fell to the field at the final whistle. Another missed Olympics soccer tournament for the US men.

Juan Carlos Obregon scored in the fourth minute of first-half stoppage time, goalkeeper David Ochoa committed a blunder that gifted Luis Palma a goal two minutes into the second half and Honduras beat the United States 2-1 on Sunday in an Olympic qualification game at Guadalajara, Mexico.

US captain Jackson Yueill pulled a goal back with a curling 23-yard shot in the 52nd minute, but the Americans miss-fired on several good chances to equalize.

"Obviously, we're devastated, absolutely devastated," US coach Jason Kreis said.

"In our locker room, the guys are like it's a tragedy — a tragedy."

US men had trouble creating chances in the first half, and the Americans missed their third straight Olympics.

"They were very well man-oriented to stop players, which didn't give us a lot of time to kind of break them down," Yueill said.

The American Olympic skid is part of a trend that includes the senior national team missing the 2018 World Cup.

"We lose an opportunity to play in an international tournament with more pressure, where these players have to be in these environments and continue to improve with that pressure," Kreis said.

Olympic men's soccer is limited to players both Jan. 1, 1997, and later, and clubs don't have to release players.

In contrast, the women's tournament is open to senior national teams. The US has won three of the last four soccer gold medals and is favoured to win again this summer.

Still, there were chances. Jonathan Lewis' 63rd-minute header was headed off the goal line by Wesley Degas, and Yueill's free kick in the 69th was batted away by goalkeeper Alex Barrios. Lewis had an open 4-yard shot off Tanner Tessman's pass in the 83rd minute but allowed the ball to bounce off a boot, Johnny Cardoso mis-hit an open header in second-half stoppage time.

"I don't know that if I've ever seen a game where we've had players mis-control the ball so much by going under people's feet, passing out of bounds," Kreis said.

"These are things that are just really — you just really kind of scratch your head, you think

of what's going on here? But I also have been around the game enough in our country at a pro level to tell you this is what you see in preseasons and at the beginning of MLS seasons it's typical."

Kreis had seen similar from his team during the group stage.

"I think the first half looked a lot like the Dominican Republic first half," Kreis said.

"We have players that aren't moving. We have people on the ball that aren't committing defenders to make decisions, to open up spaces. We have guys that look like they're just don't really want the ball, and so it just kind of goes back to a mostly mentality for me."

Honduras advanced to its fourth straight Olympics this summer in Japan after finishing fourth in 2016. Mexico, the 2012 gold medal winner, earned the other berth from North and Central America and the Caribbean by defeating Canada 2-0 in the second game of the doubleheader.

CONCACAF qualifiers join Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Egypt, France, Germany, Ivory Coast, Japan, New Zealand, Romania, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea and Spain in the draw, which will be held in Zurich on April 21. The tournament will be played from July 21 to Aug. 7 in Tokyo, Kashima, Miyagi, Saitama, Sapporo and Yokohama.

On a 90-degree afternoon with kickoff at 4 p.m. at 5,100 feet, Honduras went ahead after a clearance by Justen Glad that followed a free kick. The US defense began to move upfield as Edwin Maldonado recovered the ball and quickly made a long diagonal pass. Denil Maldonado sprinted past defenders and sent the ball back across the goalmouth with a diving header and the New York City-born Obregon used his left leg to redirect the ball past Ochoa.

On the second goal, Ochoa received Aaron Herrera's back-pass just outside the 6-yard box, hesitated and tried to chip the ball upfield. The ball ricocheted off Palma's left leg and into the American goal — an error by Ochoa that brought back memories of Sean Johnson's misplay that knocked out the US in qualifying for 2012.

Among the top US players not in qualifying were Christian Pulisic, Weston McKennie, Tyler Adams, Gio Reyna, Josh Sargent, Sergio Dest, Chris Richards and Antonee Robinson.

Atlanta refused to release defenders George Bello and Miles Robinson, and forward Brooks Lennon.

'Rishabh Pant Is A Rare Talent, Can't Imagine India Without Him,' Says Ian Bell

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: "I can't imagine an Indian side without Rishabh Pant in it," says former England batsman Ian Bell and calls the swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batsman a "rare talent", who played with a lot of maturity against the Englishmen recently.

Making a comeback into the Indian white-ball side, Pant was promoted to No. 4 and the 23-year-old did not disappoint. He scored half centuries in the two ODIs.

"I can't imagine now an Indian side without him in it. It just feels like he's the future and (he's) around some world class players as well," Bell told ESPNcricinfo.

"We've seen a mature series and that's quite rare at the moment for



seeing someone playing like that.

"I think it's a rare talent and this is just the start of him now having a successful career. Incredible to watch,

a real match-winner," Bell added.

The highly-rated Pant has been in incredible form across formats this year. He played match-winning

knocks of 97 and unbeaten 89 in the third and the fourth Test against Australia to help India clinch the Border Gavaskar Trophy Down Under.

'Dr Reddy's Expects Sputnik V Vaccine To Get Approval From Indian Regulator Soon'



Agenceis

HYDERABAD: Pharma major Dr Reddy's Laboratories expects the Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V to get approval from the Indian regulator in the next few weeks, a company official has said.

"We expect to get the approval in the next few weeks. It is a two dose vaccine. You take the first dose on day zero and the second one on day 21. The peak immunity develops somewhere between day 28 to day 42. So, it is a two-dose vaccine and we expect it to be available in the next few weeks," Deepak Sapra, the company's CEO, APIs and Services, said.

Sapra, who was speaking in a webinar on Sunday evening, was asked as to how soon Sputnik would be available and whether it is a one dose or two doses vaccine.

Dr Reddy's has partnered with the Russia Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) to bring the Sputnik V vaccine to India and other countries, he said.

Observing that trials of the vac-

cine have been conducted in Russia, India, the UAE and others, he said the vaccine demonstrated an efficacy of 91.6 per cent as published in reputed journal Lancet.

The data on trials is currently with the Indian regulator and the company expects it to get approved in the next few weeks, he said.

"Now, what we have done in India, in addition to all this, we also conducted trials in India and evaluated the vaccine on the Indian population for both safety as well as for immunogenicity. This data is currently with the Indian regulator and we expect it to get approved in the next few weeks," he said.

The webinar on "India's vaccination journey and the second wave of COVID-19" was conducted by the All India Professional Congress (AIPC), Telangana. Former minister J Geeta Reddy, a medical doctor, moderated the event.

Mahima Datla, Managing Director of Biological E, and Nageshwar Reddy, Chairman of AIG Hospitals, spoke on various important issues concerning COVID-19 surge and the vaccines.

Why Did BJP Spend Crores On Ads In Assam If It's "Confident", Asks Congress



Agenceis

GUWAHATI: Assam Congress chief Ripun Bora today questioned the need for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to spend crores of rupees on a newspaper advertisement if it's confident of winning all the assembly seats in Upper Assam that went to polls in the first phase on March 27.

The Congress has filed a case against Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, BJP chief JP Nadda, state president Ranjit Kumar Dass and eight leading newspapers for "camouflaging an advertisement as news" predicting the BJP's victory in all the seats in Upper Assam.

It has accused the BJP of violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), provisions of Section 126A of the Representation of People Act, 1951 and the ECI directives issued on March 26.

Mr Bora alleged that there is no unanimity among BJP leaders over their prediction and they are hiding their failure by putting up such advertisements.

"At first, the BJP had said it will win 46 seats, then the advertisement claimed the saffron party will emerge victorious in all the 47 seats. The state BJP president later said his party will win 42 seats and finally, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the BJP will secure 37 constituencies. There is no unanimity among the BJP leaders on the number of seats they are expected to win as they want to mislead people and hide their failure," he said.

"If they are so confident of winning all the seats in the first phase, why did they have to spend crores of rupees on the newspaper advertisement," he added.

The state Congress had filed a complaint with Assam Chief Electoral Officer Nitin Khade and the AICC with the Election Commission of India against the publication of the advertisements on Sunday urging immediate action against the BJP and the newspapers.

"The question also arises under what circumstance was the BJP forced to spend crores of rupees on advertisements predicting its victory. If it is confident of winning, why will it spend money to stress it? Journalists and other agencies would have anyway done their assessment

and filed reports highlighting the trends," he said.

Mr Bora said that the people of Assam have realised that the BJP is out to fool them and they will not give it the responsibility of running the next government in the state.

"The foundation for the formation of the Grand Alliance government after May 2, when results will be declared, was laid in the first phase of the polling in which around 80 per cent of the 81.09 lakh voters exercised their franchise," the PCC chief said.

The AICC and the party's state unit have closely monitored the situation and calculated that the Congress will win more than 30 seats in the first phase, he claimed.

Mr Bora said that people of Assam are convinced that only Congress can protect their identity and culture by not allowing the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

"Even if Nadda says that CAA is a central legislation, he seems to have forgotten that the state government will have to ratify it for implementation. We will not ratify it if we come to power in Assam," he said.

Mr Bora said his party will repeal the law if it comes to power at the Centre in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. He said the Congress had not given any advertisement but over 1.75 lakh youths have registered themselves for the job guarantee campaign and over 75,000 of them have interacted with party leaders in the constituencies that went to polls in the first phase.

"We do not mislead people or make promises without proper planning. Former prime minister and renowned economist Dr Manmohan Singh has examined our job guarantee campaign and given a viability report, after which it was presented before the people," he said.

The BJP, on the other hand, makes provocative statements and announces unfeasible schemes without proper planning, just to mislead people and win elections, he alleged.

"We thank the people for showing immense maturity by not getting swayed by such claims and coming out in large numbers to exercise their franchise for bringing a change," Mr Bora said.

BENGAL POLLS

Mamata Intensifies Efforts To Win Over Nandigram Voters Before Campaigning Ends



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee along with TMC candidate from Rajerhat Aditi Munshi during election campaign, in Nandigram.

Agenceis

KOLKATA: Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee intensified efforts to woo voters before campaigning for the second phase of the assembly poll ends in Nandigram on Tuesday evening.

Her campaign in the high-stakes constituency will begin at 11 am on Monday with an 8-kilometre roadshow from Khudiram More to Thakurchowk in Nandigram Block 2, followed by a public meeting in Jansabha Boyal II. Another one will take at 2 pm then at 3:30 pm in the Amdabad High School Ground.

Nandigram will witness the most high-profile contest of the state assembly elections with the Chief Minister taking on her former ministerial colleague Suwendu Adhikari, who had joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in December last year.

Adhikari had earlier said that BJP will defeat Banerjee by over 50,000 votes from Nandigram.

The BJP will also be bringing in big names to counter the TMC's top lead-

er. Senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah will take on Mamata in a massive roadshow in Nandigram on Tuesday to bat for Adhikari.

Bollywood star Mithun Chakraborty is also expected to conduct a roadshow in Nandigram ahead of polling.

PM Narendra Modi had addressed a public rally for Suwendu Adhikari earlier. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath too had come to campaign in the constituency.

With rallies of Mamata planned for each day till the campaign ends, the Adhikari clan too has focussed its energy on ensuring that polling agents remain alert and that panna pramukhs bring out the voters on April 1.

The Adhikaris have been working on a strategy to not let the last leg of campaigning sway the voters towards her.

Sources in the BJP stated that the focus would remain on bringing voters to the polling stations while the candidates would be intensifying campaigning.

"It's all about that one day when

polling happens. It is all that matters. So, if the Chief Minister campaigns and we do too, voters have largely made up their minds," said a senior BJP leader.

Adhikari, a former TMC leader, joined the BJP ahead of Assembly polls. Adhikari is a sitting MLA from Nandigram, a seat where Mamata Banerjee has decided to contest this time instead of Bhawanipur.

Meanwhile, the first phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections concluded with an estimated 79.79 per cent voter turnout on Saturday.

In the first phase, 30 seats covering all assembly constituencies from the districts of Purulia and Jhargram and a segment of Bankura, Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur went to polls to decide on the electoral fate of 191 candidates, including 21 women.

Now the remaining seven phases for the 294-member West Bengal Assembly polls will be held on different dates with the final round of voting scheduled on April 29. Counting of votes will take place on May 2.

Political Parties Field Actors, TV Stars In Kerala, Adding Glamour To Poll Arena

Agenceis

Thiruvananthapuram: To spice up the electoral arena in Kerala, political parties have fielded a host of film and television personalities for the April 6 Assembly polls, hoping to woo the electorate with their favourite stars.

As many as nine actors are in the fray in the state, trying their luck in the electoral battle for their respective fronts.

National award-winning film actor and Rajya Sabha MP Suresh Gopi has been fielded by the BJP-NDA from the Thrissur constituency, while his tinsel town colleagues—K B Ganesh Kumar and Mukesh, both sitting MLAs of the Left Front, are trying their luck from Pathanapuram and Kollam assembly constituencies respectively.

Suresh Gopi, who has acted in over 200 films, including "Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha", "Thalasthanam", "Eklavya" and "Patram", had unsuccessfully contested in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from Thrissur and is hoping to make it this time to the state assembly.

Former minister Ganesh Kumar, son of Kerala Congress (B)



leader R Balakrishna Pillai, entered films in 1985 through KG George's "Irakal" and forayed into the political arena in 2001. He has successfully represented Pathanapuram in the Assembly since then and is confident of sailing through effortlessly this time too.

Another actor, Mukesh, known for his comic roles and television programmes, is hoping that the electorate would give him a second stint as an MLA.

Actors G Krishnakumar (Thiruvananthapuram) and Dharmajan Bolgatty (Balussery) are making their electoral debut on BJP and Congress tickets respectively.

Pala MLA, Mani C Kap-

pan, who switched over to the Congress-led UDF camp, after the LDF denied him the seat, is once again trying his luck from the same constituency, hoping to give a tough fight to his rival Jose K Mani, leader of the Kerala Congress (M) faction.

Kaplan has essayed various roles in 25 films, produced at least 12 films, besides directing the super hit "Mannar Mathai Speaking" in which Mukesh had essayed a role.

Playback singer Daleema Jojo is the LDF candidate from Aror Assembly constituency and is locking horns with UDF candidate and sitting MLA Shanmool Usman.

Woman Beaten To Death In Uttar Pradesh By Holi Revellers For Opposing Celebrations



Agenceis

A 60-year-old woman was beaten to death and five members of her family were injured on Monday when they opposed Holi revellers from celebrating the festival outside their house in Mevati Tola locality in Etawah, police said.

The Holi revellers, in an inebriated state, entered the woman's house around 10 am and beat her to death with sticks and stone, Additional Superintendent of Police (city) Prashant Kumar Prasad said.

When other family members tried to save her, five of them, including two women and three children, were also beaten up, the police officer said.

In another incident reported from Ekdil police station area, a youth under the influence of alcohol, drove a tractor at high speed and injured six people.

The tractor got damaged after hitting an electricity pole. The youth was handed over to the police and the injured have been hospitalised, police said.

UP Boy Dies After Phone Battery Explodes On His Face

Agenceis

Mirzapur: A 12-year-old boy died after his mobile battery exploded on his face. The incident took place over the weekend in Matwar village under Halia police circle.

The tragic event took place when he was testing the battery power after charging it with a 'ju-gaad' charger.

The Class 6 student, identified as Monu, died on the spot when the battery exploded on his face leading to severe facial injuries.

Monu had put his mobile battery into a 'jugaad' charger. An hour later, he decided to check the power by touching it and the battery exploded immediately, ripping his face.

Hearing the blast, the family members rushed to his room and



found him lying in a pool of blood. He was immediately taken to the primary health centre in Matwar where he was declared dead.

Later, Monu was cremated without his family informing the police.

Indian-Origin Singaporean Sent To Jail For Deliberately Coughing At Cop

Agenceis

SINGAPORE: An Indian-origin Singaporean was sentenced to 14 weeks in jail on Monday for deliberately coughing at a police officer and using abusive language at a hospital in Singapore last year.

Devraj Tamil Selvan was also given a three-year driving ban after pleading guilty to four charges, that included using abusive behaviour towards a public servant and riding a motorcycle while already under a driving ban.

District Judge Ng Cheng Thiam considered another 10 charges, such as being drunk in public, before announcing the 14-week prison sentence. The court heard that on September 13 last year the police received a call from a woman who said her sister-in-law's boyfriend was at their home "using violence".

Three police officers went to the scene. While they were there, Devraj slapped his girlfriend once on the face, leading to his arrest.

When he was taken inside the police vehicle, Devraj claimed he could not breathe and was taken to Ng Teng Fong General Hospital. At the hospital's accident and



emergency department, Devraj removed his mask -- which must be worn mandatorily in public places here to stem the spread of COVID-19 -- and coughed at a police officer, despite several warnings from the officers and hospital staffers.

The court also heard that about a month earlier, Devraj's sister-in-law called the police to say that he and her mother were fighting.

When police officers got to the scene, they interviewed Devraj who admitted that he had ridden his motorcycle from Chua Chu Kang to Jurong with his girlfriend as a pillion rider. Deputy Public Prosecutor Eugene Teh revealed that Devraj was previously fined SGD2,000 in 2009 for theft and also served six months in the Singapore Armed Forces' detention barracks for voluntarily causing hurt.

Most recently, in October 2019, he was jailed eight weeks for harassment offences.

MLA "May Kill Me": Woman In Alleged Sex Tape To Karnataka Chief Justice

Agenceis

BENGALURU: The case of the alleged sex-for-jobs CD is continuing to make waves in Karnataka - particularly in political circles. BJP MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi resigned as Water Resources Minister after local channels began playing a tape that allegedly showed him with a woman.

The complaint that was subsequently filed - by a third person - was later withdrawn, and the woman filed one herself.

Now she has written to the Karnataka Chief Justice, requested him to personally supervise the investigation and direct the state to provide her with protection.

"I am the rape victim, having filed a complaint against the former minister of the Government of Karnataka... Ramesh Jarkiholi is a highly influential person and has already threatened me in public... of going to any extent against me to clear my charges against him," she wrote.

"I have already expressed my serious apprehension about the frequent threats... to me and my parents by Ramesh Jarkiholi and his



followers... have requested the Special Investigation Team (SIT) seeking protection for myself and my parents," she added.

In her three-page letter the

woman also wrote: "Despite my apprehension, the SIT has not given any protection to my parents and to myself, so far, in collusion with Ramesh Jarkiholi."

RAMESH JARKIHOLI IS HAVING criminal antecedents and has already started destroying evidence..." Ramesh Jarkiholi may kill me at any place or at any point..."

"Ramesh Jarkiholi is having criminal antecedents and has already started destroying evidence..." Ramesh Jarkiholi may kill me at any place or at any point..." she alleged. The opposition Congress has attacked the ruling BJP on this issue - both inside and outside the Assembly, with former Chief Minister tweeting this morning.

"The news of CD victim writing a letter to High Court Chief Justice about threat to her life is distressing and terrifying. Mr BS Yediyurappa... Is your government working in Karnataka? CD victim claimed to have attempted suicide and now she claims there is a threat to her life. Chief Minister Yediyurappa, Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai and the whole government will be responsible if something happens to the victim," he said.

The former Chief Minister also referred to allegations that the SIT probing the case and the accused were in collusion, tweeting: "In a letter to High Court Chief Justice, the victim has expressed distrust about SIT probe and she feels SIT is destroying evidence by colluding with her opponents. This allegation is very serious & needs immediate attention."

The state had set up the special team to probe the issue.

"Ramesh Jarkiholi has taken moral responsibility and resigned. It is being investigated. What more do you want? There is an investigation on, he has resigned, we are looking for the woman," the Chief Minister had said.

Jarkiholi was earlier with the Congress and was one of the leaders of the rebellion that brought down the Congress- Janata Dal Secular government in 2019.