#### Back to Back Avalanches Wreak

Ganderbal district on Monday, killing at least five persons, including a father and his two sons. Scores were left injured, while six persons trapped under the snow were rescued by the police. Also more than two and a half dozen houses in the area suffered heavy damage due to the avalanches.

Giving details, Ganderbal SSP said that persistent snowfall in the Kashmir Valley for the past two days had enveloped much of the Ganderball district with around 4ft of snow. A warning was also issued to people not to leave their homes without urgency.

"We got information at 4:30 that two people were trapped in the Raisin area. 12 members of a family were rescued by police and one of the injured was sent to get medical treatment" SSP Khalil Mohammad said.

"At 5:30, another avalanche struck in which nine people were trapped. Police and locals engaged in rescue efforts and four were saved, two died in hospital and after much search overnight, three dead bodies were recovered from under the snow," police officer said.

4 Soldiers Killed

Four Army soldiers (One report put the toll at 5) were killed and one was missing after an avalanche hit their post in Machil sector along the LoC in north Kashmir on Tuesday, defence sources said. The sources said five soldiers were trapped un-

der the avalanche. The Army launched rescue operations and traced four of the soldiers.

While three of them were declared dead, another was injured and is being treated at a local military facility, the sources said. Efforts are on to trace one missing soldier.

However, ShriramAmbarker, SP, Kupwara put the toll of dead at five. "We took out all the five jawans buried under the snow while four of them succumbed to their injuries," he said.

Due to heavy snowfall in the last 48 hours, there have been multiple avalanches in several areas in north Kashmir after which a number of soldiers were rescued.

In a separate incident, a Border Security Force (BSF) personnel was killed and six others were rescued after avalanches hit the Naugam sector near the near the Line of Control.

"Out of the seven troopers deployed in the area, six were safely rescued but one constable trapped could not be revived even after much effort," a senior officer of BSF said.

In Kupwara district, an avalanche hit three residential houses in the Limber Boniyar area Monday evening. Five people were rescued from the debris soon after.

On Monday, two teenage girls trapped under a heap of snow after an avalanche in Baramulla district were rescued by locals, officials said.

An Army porter lost his life while three others were rescued after they were struck by an avalanche along the LoC in Poonch district last week, police said.

#### Avalanches Claims 67 Lives

said many villagers were still stranded in the avalanches in the Neelum Valley area following heavy rains that also triggered landslides.

Many people were reported missing and feared dead as rescue efforts got underway, one of the officials said.

The area is one of the world's most militarily tense frontiers, where the neighboring armies have confronted each other over disputed territory for decades.

Kashmir has been divided between Indian and Pakistan since their independence in 1947 and for decades tension on the border has left tens of thousands dead.

In 2012, an avalanche engulfed a Pakistani army

which authorities were in continuous effort of removing. On the other side in several areas of Ramban district landslides struck the area making the movement of vehicular traffic impossible.

Meanwhile Metrology department has predicted another two day long snowfall, beginning from 17th January, while light to moderate rainfall at isolated places in Jammu division on Friday and Saturday. —With inputs from CNS

#### MOS Defence Backs Army Chief's

de-facto border that separates India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir, is very active and the Indian armed forces assess all intelligence alerts related to that part of the country very seriously," Naravane said.

The Pakistan government is yet to react officially to General Naravane's statement, though the Information Minister of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir MushtaqMinhas responded with a "We are waiting" tweet.

Historically tense relations between India and Pakistan, which both control Kashmir partially but claim it in full, hit a new low last summer when New Delhi revoked the seven-decades-old temporary special autonomous status accorded to the former state of Jammu and Kashmir on 5 August 2019. The state is now divided into two federally administered territories, which Islamabad describes as a blatant violation of the 1972 Simla Agreement and the UN Conventions of 1948 and 1949.

# No Lawyer to Defend

during the protest.

Hailing from a well to do Tamil family Nalini did her mass communications from the University of Mysore in 2016 and later studied at National Institute of Design in Gujarat.

After her photo holding the Free Kashmir Placard went viral on social media, Nalini was detained by police and she also faced trolls forcing her to tender an apology. Nalini also said that she had no intention of creating any confusion. Though she was granted bail, lawyers in Mysore have refused to forgive her and are now denying her right of defence.

# DySP Had Taken Militants to Jammu

kept in different rooms at an interrogation centre in South Kashmir.

During questioning it emerged that Singh had taken them to Jammu in 2019 also, the officials said. In a tone laced with sarcasm, they said the DSP

was taking the militants for "rest and recuperation". Naveed told the interrogators that they used to stay in the hilly regions to avoid the J&K police and

left the areas to escape harsh winters, they said. The official said the DSP's bank accounts and other assets were being verified by the police and papers were being collected, amid speculations that the case may be handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Going into the service history of Singh, majority of retired and serving officials of the JKP spoken to referred to a proverb -- coming events cast their shadows long before -- to say that if action had been taken against the officer during his probation period, such things would not have happened.

Recruited in 1990 as a sub-inspector, Singh along with another probationary officer were subject of an internal enquiry where some narcotics had been seized from a truck. However, the contraband was sold by Singh and another subinspector, the officials recalled.

There was a move to dismiss them from the service which was stalled by an Inspector General rank officer purely on humanitarian ground and the duo was shifted to the Special Operations Group, a team of policemen engaged in countermilitance offencing

militancy offensive.

stables B N Murti and Mohammad Tasleem, were declared brought dead, the official said.

He said another jawan, constable Sanjay Thali, was referred to the Government Medical College (GMC) hospital Jammu for specialised treatment after first aid.

It was not immediately clear whether the jawan, who opened fire, is among the dead or injured, he said, adding that senior police and security officers have rushed to the spot and further details are awaited.

#### Calls For Internet Freedom

the House Foreign Affairs Committee for necessary action.

Congressman Brad Sherman said he looks forward to getting US Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster's report on his recent visit to Jammu and Kashmir.

"I expect the report to indicate what restrictions the Ambassador faced, in particularly, whether or not the Ambassador was able to visit detainees. The visit and report are valuable only to the extent of the access given," Sherman wrote on Twitter.

A group of 15 envoys, including Juster, visited Jammu and Kashmir last week where they interacted with select political representatives, civil society members as well as the military top brass. Internet services, landline and mobile phones

were snapped across Jammu and Kashmir on August 4, a day before the Centre's announcement to scrap the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and divide it into two union territories.

Though most services, except mobile internet, were restored in Jammu within a week, Kashmir saw landlines and post-paid services being restored in phases.

However, internet continues to remain barred in the entire Valley except for some government offices, hospitals and business establishments. Pre-paid mobile services too are yet to be restored in Kashmir.

Mobile internet services were restored in Kargil district of Ladakh after remaining suspended for 145 days.

The visit by the envoys of 15 nations was the second one of a foreign delegation to Jammu and Kashmir since the abrogation of Article 370 provisions on August 5 last year.

Earlier, Delhi-based think tank International Institute for Non-Aligned Studies took 23 EU MPs on a two-day visit to assess the situation in the Union Territory.

HINDU FOUNDATION BEGINS CAMPAIGN

Meanwhile, the Hindu American Foundation has launched a nationwide campaign urging Indian Americans to reach out to their representatives Congressmen and Senators to appraise them about the improving situation in Jammu and Kashmir and the atrocities against Kashmiri Hindus in the past.

In the past several weeks, more than half a dozen US lawmakers have come out in support of India's position on Kashmir. Almost all of them have spoken on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Congressman Scott Perry from Pennsylvania last week said that he stands with India in its aspiration to provide equal economic, social, and political opportunities to all citizens.

"As part of this pursuit, two-thirds of the Indian Parliament voted last year to change the status of Jammu and Kashmir. This vote allowed the government of India to address the stagnant economy and high youth unemployment plaguing the region by providing economic opportunity and sound governance," he said.

"The residents of Jammu and Kashmir have battled economic depression and forces of extremism and radicalisation for too long. The regional stability now provided by government will give residents of Jammu and Kashmir a better way forward and hope for the future "Perry added. were protecting against a ground assault which base commanders expected would follow the missile attack.

Ground forces never came, and troops would only re-emerge from their shelters at the break of dawn. The strike had ended just before 4 a.m.

The first missiles fell at 1:34 a.m. They were followed by three more volleys, spaced out by more than 15 minutes each. The attack lasted over two hours. Troops on the base described it as a time fraught with suspense, fear and feelings of defenselessness.

"You can defend against (paramilitary forces), but you can't defend against this," said Capt. Patrick Livingstone, US Air Force security forces commander on the base, referring to previous rocket attacks by armed groups.

As the expected attacks drew nearer, most troops filed into dusty, pyramid-like structures peppered throughout the base. These bunkers were built during the rule of deposed President Saddam Hussein.

On the night of the attack, one of the rooms doubled as a makeshift bathroom, with cut up plastic water bottles serving as urinals.

Lt. Col. Staci Coleman was one of the US team leaders who corralled troops into such a bunker. After about an hour and a half of being in the shelter, she had doubts."I was sitting in a bunker and I was like man, maybe I made the wrong decision [to come down here]," said Coleman.

"About 10 minutes, after I said that to myself, it went boom boomboomboom and I said well there's my answer."

"The whole ground shook. It was very loud," she said. "You could feel the blast wave in here. We knew they were close."

She said the doors appeared to bend like waves with every hit that reverberated through the shelter. None of the bunkers on the base were impacted.

Meanwhile, Staff Sgt. Ferguson was in a USmade bunker -- a crammed space held together by slabs of five-inch concrete fortified by sandbags. He watched the attack unfold through cracks between the adjacent walls.

"There's a little hole on the side of the shelter and we saw a flash of orange light," said Ferguson. "After that we figured that every time we see a flash it's just a couple of seconds before it's going to hit.

"It was Flash. Boom. Flash. Boom. We didn't know when it was going to stop. We sat there and waited for it to end."

Several troops CNN spoke to said the event had shifted their view of warcraft: the US military is rarely on the receiving end of sophisticated weaponry, despite launching the most advanced attacks in the world.

"You looked around at each other and you think: Where are we going to run? How are you going to get away from that?" said Ferguson.

"I don't wish anyone to have that level of fear," he said. "No one in the world should ever have to feel something like that."

## Chenab Rail Bridge to Withstand

being built under the direct supervision of the PMO and Railway Board, is likely to be completed by December 2021, said Chief Engineer (Coordination) R K Hegde of Konkan Railways, which is executing the project

A national project with 100 percent of central funding, the bridge is being built on Chenab river between Bakkal and Kauri in the Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir.

The bridge is being built under a round-theclock monitoring directly by the Prime Minister's Office and the Railway Board in New Delhi through "electronic eyes", he said.

After the completion of the bridge, the Chenab Bridge will boast of having the world's highest rail bridge -- 359 metre above the river and around 35

to withstand wind speeds of up to 260 km per hour. "The railways will also install sensors on the bridge to check the wind velocity and as soon as the wind speed exceeds 90 kmph, the signal on the track will turn red, preventing train movement," the engineer said. According to the plan, a ring of aerial security will also be provided to safeguard the bridge. "An online monitoring and warning system will be installed on the bridge to protect passengers and trains in critical conditions. Footpaths and cycle trails will also be built adjacent to it," he added. The Chenab Bridge, an arched steel and concrete structure, will connect Baramulla to Jammu via Udhampur-Katra-Qazigund with a travel time of six-and-a-half hours. Currently, it takes exactly double the time. 13 hours, to reach Jammu from Baramulla in northern Kashmir, which is 60 km from Srinagar. Talking of measures to make the bridge earthquake-proof, Konkan Railway Chairman Sanjay Gupta said a detailed, site-specific seismic analysis has been carried out by experts from the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, and the Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore. "The most difficult phase of the project now is the construction of the section between Banihal and Katra. This is most challenging for Konkans," he added.

KASHMIR OBSERVER

Wednesday| 15-01-2020 \_

#### PDD Line Man Electrocuted In Devsar

Pertinently casual employees, who were on pen down strike since last several days, demanding the regularization of their services and payment of their long pending wages had called off their strike, owing to the difficult situation faced by the people due disruption of power supply after recent snowfall hit the valley, damaging power transmission lines across the valley.

The death of Nazir Ahmed Ganai is first death, of any casual PDD employee, after the resumption duty by the protesting casual employees working with the department. (CNS)

#### JK Bank On Path Of Development: Chibber

been regained and customers would soon recognize it, while adding that the fruits of progress would be shared by all including the valuable customers of the bank. The CMD assured the stakeholders that bank would guard their trust and would come up to their expectations. "The bank is showing positive results in every affair, be it lending, CD ratio, CASA or NPA recovery. The future balance sheets of the bank will write off the past stress and reflect the growth it has registered by inculcating the reforms in the bank," the Chairman said. He also informed that bank is now covered under RTI Act, besides acquiesces with the CVC guidelines. He said that the affairs of the bank would be more transparent in future.

## Kerala moves SC Challenging CAA

to India from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh till December 31, 2014, following persecution over their faith.

The Kerala government has said in its suit that there is no rationale in grouping together the three countries -- Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh -- for the purpose of the CAA and rules and orders. "Such grouping is not founded on any rationale principle justifying a separate special treatment for the irrationally chosen class of religious minorities facing persecution on the basis of religion therein," it said. The Kerala government has sought from the apex court that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 be declared as violative of Articles 14 (Equality before law), 21 (Right to life and personal liberty) and 25 (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice, and propagation of religion). It also said that CAA is violative of the basic principle of secularism enshrined in the Constitution. Besides, the plea has stated that the Passport (Entry to India) Amendment Rules, 2015 and Foreigners (Amendment) Order are ultra vires the Constitution and be declared void. It said the CAA, the amended Passport Rules and Foreign Order are class legislations harping on the religious identity of an individual, thereby contravening the principles of secularism, which has been recognised by the court as a basic structure of the Constitution. The suit claimed that these amendments make religion and a person's country of origin a criteria for grant of citizenship and result in classifications based on religion and country, which are discriminatory, arbitrary, unreasonable and have no rational nexus with the object sought to be achieved. "The religious classification brought forth violates the twin test of classification under Article 14, the protection of which is not limited or restricted to citizens alone and extends to all persons," it said. The plea added that the CAA and rules and orders are bereft of any standard principle or norm in discriminating migrants from other countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bhutan, which are sharing international borders with India and to which and from which there has been trans-border migration. It said if the object of the CAA is to protect the minorities who faced religious persecution in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, then the Ahmaddiyas and Shias from these countries are also entitled to treatment equal to that being now extended to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities. "In accordance with the mandate of Article 256 of the Constitution, the plaintiff state (Kerala) will be compelled to ensure compliance of Impugned Amendment Act (CAA) and the Rules and Orders, which are manifestly arbitrary, unreasonable, irrational and violative of fundamental rights. "Thus, there exists a dispute, involving questions of law and fact, between the plaintiff state of Kerala and the defendant Union of India, regarding the enforcement of legal rights as a State and as well for the enforcement of the fundamental, statutory constitutional and other legal rights of the inhabitants of the State of Kerala. Hence, this Original Suit under Article 131 of the Constitution is being preferred," the plea said. On December 18, 2019, the top court had issued a notice to the Centre and sought its response by the second week of January on a batch of pleas challenging the CAA's legality. The apex court fixed January 22 for hearing 59 anti-CAA petitions, including those filed by the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and Congress leader Jairam Ramesh. RJD leader Manoj Jha, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra and AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi have also filed pleas against the act. Other anti-CAA petitioners include the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, All Assam Students Union (AASU), Peace Party, CPI, NGOs 'Rihai Manch' and Citizens Against Hate. Several law students have also approached the apex court challenging the Act.

battalion headquarters near the Indian border killing at least 124 soldiers and 11 civilians.

#### No Respite for Residents As Met Office

waterlogged hampering the normal public movement. Till Tuesday afternoon authorities were unable to achieve any success to drain out the water and many low lying areas remained submerged. People preferred to stay back home, while those who came out had to wade through ankle deep water.

City's two major thoroughfares the Residency and Maulana Azad roads remained partially submerged.

Upper reaches of Kupwara received the maximum Snowfall, resulting in the closure of Kupwara-Karnah road. Sadhna Top in Karnah Tehsil of Tangdhar in Kupwara district recorded about three feet of snow, while as low lying areas in the region received up-to one and a half feet. Due to the unprecedented snowfall in the region, Karnah and Tangdhar area remained cut off from the district head quarter Kupwara, since the road remained closed for a third consecutive day on Tuesday.

Upper reaches of valley including Gulmarg and whole Peerpanchal region witnessed medium to heavy snowfall during the period, while authorities did not withdraw avalanche warning issued on Monday, given to the heavy snowfall in these areas.

In Budgam district all the link roads remained blocked with snow till Tuesday evening, as there was no effort visible from the administration towards removing of snow from these link roads. In Tangmarg area several houses are reported to have suffered damage to the heavy snowfall.

In Kangan area of Ganderbal district people said that no snow clearance operation was conducted by the administration, resulting in difficulty to vehicular movement on KanganSonmarg highway. Officials from beacon said that their men and machinery is occupied with snow clearance in the upper reaches, where situation is more critical, while the officials from Roads and Buildings (R&B) department said that they have only one JCB and they are doing whatever they can with that one JCB.

Meanwhile QaziGund in South received 24inches of snow, resulting in the closure of Srinagar Jammu highway, which was thrown open on Monday morning at 11 for one way traffic from Srinagar to Jammu, but with no let up in the snowfall in the day highway was gain closed for the traffic.

Officials said that from Banihal to Udhampur thousands of trucks and passenger vehicles are presently stranded, waiting for the highway to open. There was huge amount of snow on the highway in Banihal region, blocking the road, was shifted this time to the police lines only to be rehabilitated in 1997 again in the SOG.

During this period, he was posted in Budgam and is alleged to have indulged in extortion for which he was sent back to the police lines.

His proper rehabilitation began in 2015 by the then Director General of Police K Rajendra, who posted him in district headquarters of Shopian and Pulwama, the officials said.

However, after some alleged wrongdoing during his stint in Pulwama, the then Director General of Police S P Vaid transferred him in August 2018 to the sensitive Anti-Hijacking Unit in Srinagar, though the move was opposed by some other officers.

An advocate, Irfan Ahmad Mir, was driving the vehicle when they were caught by the police on National Highway in Kulgam district.

The advocate, who has also been arrested, had travelled to Pakistan five times on an Indian passport.

#### Only A Pawn? Cong Hints At

conspirators are elsewhere? A bigger conspiracy?," he added.

Singh, who was in line for promotion as a Superintendent of Police later this month, was posted at the anti-hijacking unit at the Srinagar airport. He was under the radar of the police when the plan was being hatched to smuggle out the terrorists, an official said on the condition of anonymity. Singh's name had also surfaced during investigations into the 2001 Parliament attack, when convict Afzal Guru had alleged his role. The probe, however, was in Singh's favour. Surjewala also tagged a media report titled "Who is Davinder Singh, the Kashmir police officer arrested in a car with Hizbul militants?" with his tweet.

# Indian Havaldar Slips In Snow

safely from Pakistan.

Negi, a resident of AmbiwalaSainik Colony in Dehradun, had joined the 11 Garhwal Rifles regiment in 2002. He had arrived in Dehradun in October for a month's vacation and was posted to the snowy area of Gulmarg in November.

# Sentry Kills 2 CISF Jawans In Udhampur

allegedly opened fire at his colleagues inside the camp after he lost his temper during a heated argument over some issue.

Three injured jawans were rushed to the district hospital Udhampur, where two of them, con-

#### US Troops Describe Terror of Iran

"I held on to my gun and put my head down and I tried to find a happy place, so I started singing to my daughters in my head," said the six-foot tall US staff sergeant. "And I just waited. I hoped that whatever happened, that it was quick.""I was 100% ready to die," he added.

Ferguson survived unscathed along with other US troops and civilian contractors after a barrage of Iranian ballistic missiles on the morning of January 8.

The strike was the widest scale attack on a base housing US troops in decades. Troops said the absence of casualties was nothing short of a "miracle."

A closer look at the site reveals a base vulnerable to this type of assault. Personnel received advance warning of the strike several hours before it took place, enabling them to take cover.

Near the airfield, shards of metal crack underfoot as two military personnel take measurements of the gaping crater left behind by one of the missiles. It is around 2 meters deep and roughly 3 meters in diameter -- a burned copy of "Beauty and the Beast" teeters on the edge of the hole. A flip-flop, an Uno card, and a military jacket stick out from the charred wreckage left in the wake of the missile. This was a housing unit for drone pilots and operators on the base. They evacuated the unit before the strike. Incidentally, the they had nicknamed the living quarters "chaos."

Like most of the US section of the base, they had already been on lockdown at bunkers for over two hours when the first missiles landed. The strike was an Iranian response to the US drone attack, ordered by US President Donald Trump, that killed Iran's most powerful general, QasemSoleimani, less than a week before. Ten of the 11 missiles struck US positions at the sprawling desert Iraqi airbase. One struck a remote location on the Iragi military's side. Roughly one-third of the base is controlled by the US. The Iranian missiles, which used on-board guidance systems, managed to shred sensitive US military sites, damaging a special forces compound, and two hangars, in addition to the US drone operators' housing unit. CNN journalists were the first to be granted access to the base after the Iranian attack.

#### Advance warning

The first warning came from secret intelligence signals in the evening before the attack. By 11 p.m. on January 7, most of the US troops at al-Asad were sent to bunkers, and a few had been flown out, according to commanders at the base.

Only essential personnel, such as tower guards and drone pilots, would remain unsheltered. They

metres taller than the Eiffel Tower.

The bridge forms a crucial and the most difficult link in the 111 km-stretch between Katra and Banihal, which is part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link project, he said.

"So far, 83 percent of the work has been completed. For the overall completion of the Chenab bridge project, the deadline is December 2021," Hedge said.

Once completed, it will surpass the record of Shuibai Railway Bridge (275m-high) on Beipanriver in China, Hegde told PTI at the project site.

The bridge construction, which was halted in 2008 in wake of concerns over its safety and alignment, was restarted in 2010. It has already missed many deadlines in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019. The construction of the bridge was started in 2002 when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the prime minister. Talking of the bridge sturdiness, Hegde said, "It can withstand high intensity blasts of up to 40 kgs of TNT and an earthquake of magnitude 8 on Richter Scale. Even after the blast, a train can run at a speed on 30 kmhp," he said. Blasts of such intensity cannot damage any of the bridge pillars either, he added. To ensure its sturdiness, the bridge is being built with 63 mm-thick special blast-proof steel owing to Jammu and Kashmir's propensity to frequent terror attacks, he said. Even the concrete pillars of the bridge is designed to withstand explosions and painted with a special corrosionresistant paint, which lasts for 15 years, he said. Detailing various measures to make the bridge blast proof, Hegde said, "It is for the first time that self-compacting concrete is being used for filling steel boxes and ends of plate girders." The Konkan Railway has also set up a blast lab at the site to test steel plates' the strength to withstand blasts of up to 40 kg of TNT. "Before being used in the project, each high grade steel plate is being tested at the project site itself for its capacity to withstand the blast load," said an engineer at the lab. "There is no compromise with quality. We have rejected a large quantity of steel plates being procured from SAIL and two other companies," he added. Steel plates for the bridge have been procured from the Bhilai plant of Steel Authority of India, while the girders are assembled at a fabrication workshop adjacent to the bridge. "Each girder plate is eight-metre-long and we have estimated that 161 girders will be required for the purpose," he said. Talking of the highest-level interest in the project, an engineer said, the PMO and Railway Board directly monitor its work progress everyday through "electronic eyes". "If the CCTVs goes off for one minute, we get a call from the PMO as to what is happening. They are monitoring it round the clock through electronic eyes," an engineer said. The bridge, an 1.315 km-long engineering marvel is also designed