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Holi Celebrations Subdued In India Amid Coronavirus Concerns

NEW DELHI: Holi was celebrated in several states across the country on Tuesday amid the coronavirus scare as people exercised caution and avoided mass gatherings.

However, the celebrations turned tragic as at least 27 people, including 13 in Odisha, were killed in Holi-related incidents.

President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and a number of other leaders had earlier announced that they would not attend any Holi Milan function in view of the coronavirus outbreak.

An 'effigy' of coronavirus was burnt during the festivities in Mumbai on Monday night.

Delhi witnessed subdued celebrations due to the coronavirus threat, while in parts of riot-affected northeast Delhi, most people played Holi inside their

houses amid heavy presence of security forces on the streets.

While many chose to skip the celebrations altogether, some preferred small gatherings but without colours. Some played Holi only with 'gulal'.

President Kovind, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu and PM Modi greeted people on the occasion.

Sombre mood prevailed in parts of Punjab and Haryana as people stayed away from big gatherings.

However, a large number of people paid obeisance at Gurdwara Kesgarh Sahib in Anandpur Sahib on the occasion of Holi Mohalla, a Sikh festival, amid heightened vigil.

Chandigarh-based Aditya (16) said his parents had advised him not to join a large group while celebrating the festival.

"I used to celebrate Holi with

my friends until late afternoon, but this time the celebrations were over by noon," he added.

With an Italian couple testing positive for coronavirus in Rajasthan last week, people were alert and preferred to stay safe.

The coronavirus scare played spoilsport in Jaipur, with people mostly restricting themselves to small groups.

Even as the political crisis has gripped the Kamal Nath-led government in Madhya Pradesh, workers of the opposition BJP broke into the celebrations at the party office in Bhopal.

Scores of BJP workers, including women, danced and played Holi.

A woman activist, however, said they are elated because of Holi and in view of the early onset of "Diwali", hinting at uncertainty prevailing over survival of the Kamal Nath government.

Mumbai and most parts of Maharashtra had a subdued Holi due to the coronavirus threat amid appeals to revellers from authorities to participate in the festival after taking necessary precautions.

Residents of Worli in south Mumbai on Monday night burnt an 'effigy' of coronavirus, dubbing it "Corona-sur" (corona-demon).

In Bihar's capital Patna, residents were reminded of the boisterous Holi celebrations organised by Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad, as his elder son Tej Pratap Yadav peddled down the streets with hordes of supporters who broke into 'Phagwa' songs and smeared each other with 'gulal'.

Yadav seemed intent on stepping into the shoes of his father when he sat with a 'dholak' (drum) in his lap at his Strand Road residence and bellowed

traditional Holi songs amid cheers from loyalists.

Revellers in Gujarat ensured adequate precautions by keeping off 'rain dances' amid the coronavirus threat.

One of the organisers even deployed hand-held thermal detectors to scan the guests for potential fevers.

In Goa, the main celebrations organised by the Panaji Shigmotsav Samiti took place at the historic Azaad Maidan, which was attended by hundreds of people.

Due to the coronavirus threat, the celebrations were held in an open ground and not inside a pandal (tent) as was the case in previous years, one of the organisers said.

Two people were killed and seven injured in a clash between two families while performing 'Holika Dahan' at Bawani Khera

in Haryana's Bhiwani district on Monday night.

One person was killed and 11 were injured in a clash over a trivial issue during the Holi celebrations in Kadipur village in UP's Azamgarh district.

At least 10 people drowned while bathing and three were killed in a road accident after Holi celebrations in Odisha.

Four children drowned in a pond in Nadia district while taking a bath after celebrating 'Dol Jatra', the festival of colours in West Bengal. Four people reportedly drowned in Gujarat while bathing in water bodies after celebrating Holi.

A 32-year-old construction worker from Kalyan in Maharashtra's Thane district drowned in a creek while celebrating Holi.

Two boys drowned while bathing in a river, on the outskirts of

Odisha's Cuttack city, following Holi celebrations.

Kovind, Naidu, Modi and several other leaders greeted people on the occasion of Holi.

"Wishing everyone a #Happy-Holi! The festival of colours, Holi is a celebration of spring and fraternity in our society. May it bring peace, joy and prosperity to everyone's life," the President tweeted.

"This Holi, let us strive to strengthen the bonds of friendship and amity that hold our society together," Naidu tweeted.

Modi hoped that Holi brings happiness in the lives of all people of the country.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal stayed away from the celebrations this year. He had earlier said he would not play Holi due to the coronavirus threat and last month's riots in northeast Delhi that claimed 53 lives.

Man Suspected Of Coronavirus Admitted

ward of the institute for quarantine.

"We took his samples today and are awaiting the reports," Yattoo said.

Yattoo further informed that at least 6 suspected cases are undergoing quarantine at the Valley's tertiary hospital. He said all of the six suspects have tested negative to the infection.

"We have also started testing facility at the institute. Now, we don't send samples outside the Valley anymore," he added.

It may be noted that in view of the increasing number of people requiring tests for coronavirus, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has designated SKIMS Srinagar and Government Medical College (GMC) Jammu as testing centres, part of its network of laboratories across India.

"The coronavirus testing lab has been made operational yesterday. Today, we tested the first sample at the laboratory," an official said.

Director National Health Mission (NHM), Bhupinder Kumar in a newsconference at Jammu urged people not to panic and pay heed to any rumor regarding COVID-19.

Giving a detailed break up about the Corona virus suspected cases in UT of J&K till date, Director informed that 705 travellers and persons in contact with suspected cases have been put under active surveillance; 150 of these have completed surveillance period of 28 days and 09 are under hospital quarantine.

"56 samples of suspected cases have been sent for testing so far; 26 have reported negative, of earlier two cases who were reported with high viral load 01 has tested positive and another one is being retested, 29 reports awaited," he said.

"Meanwhile one more person has reported with high viral load and samples have been sent to NCDC New Delhi for confirmation, he added.

Kumar said that the administration has strengthened the Surveillance and Control measures against the disease. Helpline nos: +91-0191-2549676 (UT level Cell for J&K), +91-0191-2520982 (For Jammu Division), +91-0194-2440283 (For Kashmir Division) are functional.

He said coronavirus lab testing facilities have been started in Kashmir and Jammu as well.

"Screening of travellers has been started at Lakhampur and Lower Munda toll posts as well as Jammu, Katra and Udhampur Railway stations, where Health Help Desks have also been setup" Kumar added.

The government also urged citizens especially those with travel history to affected countries such as China, Italy, Iran, South Korea etc to self declare immediately and to report to the nearest government health facility if any symptoms are found.

So far no positive cases have been reported from any part of valley; however a 63-year-old woman tested positive for coronavirus in Jammu on Monday, making her the first confirmed case in Jammu and Kashmir.

115 countries have been affected by coronavirus and there are 114,635 confirmed cases, 4,031 deaths with majority of them in China, Italy, South Korea and Iran.

Children Least Affected By Coronavirus: DAK

Dr Nisar ul Hassan in a statement issued today.

"Very few children have been diagnosed with the new virus," he said.

Quoting a WHO report, Dr Nisar said children under 19 years comprise of just 2.4% of all reported cases of new coronavirus. Of those only 2.5% experienced severe symptoms and a minuscule 0.2% had critical disease.

He said young kids under 9 years of age make up only 0.9% of confirmed cases. There has been no death reported in this age group.

"A paper published in New England Journal of Medicine analyzed characteristics of 425 of the first people infected by the virus and found none were younger than 15 years of age," Dr Nisar said.

"Similar pattern was seen during outbreaks of SARS and MERS, which are other coronaviruses," he added.

Dr Nisar said it is possible that, due to some quirk of biology children are less susceptible than adults to new coronavirus.

"Kids tend to have more active innate immune system that could explain their resilience" he said adding "young children are especially exposed to other coronaviruses that might have given them at least partial immunity to the new one," he said.

"It appears that children aren't getting the disease, or if they get it, they develop milder symptoms," he added.

"But, that doesn't mean we lower our guard," he cautioned.

Dr Nisar said that parents should encourage little ones to wash their hands frequently and cover their cough and sneeze. They should also discourage kids from touching their eyes, nose and mouth, he said.

"From everything that we have seen, it does seem that the virus is primarily impacting adults," he said.

Based on data from 72,314 persons diagnosed with coronavirus, 87% cases were between 30 and 79 years of age.

"About 80% of people who died from the virus were over 60 years of age and 75% had underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic lung disease, hypertension or cancer," said Dr Nisar.

HC Suspends Bio Metric Attendance

in the courts.

According to an official spokesperson, the High Court today launched an awareness campaign in view of outbreak of novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) in the UTs of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

"During the campaign, information pamphlets, posters and other material were displayed at all the conspicuous places in the High Court as well as in all the District Courts of the UTs of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh," the spokesperson said.

HE said that various guidelines/advisories issued by WHO, Ministry of Health and family welfare Government of India and by Health and Medical Education Department J&K were widely conveyed.

"Through Digital Display Boards installed in High Court as well as in District Courts, precautions regarding Corona virus are being regularly displayed for public at large," the spokesperson said.

A cleanliness drive at war footing was also launched in the premises of High Court as well in the District Courts of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

An advisory in this regard was also issued by the High Court impressing upon lawyers and litigants to avoid unnecessary overcrowding in the courts. The bio metric attendance system of the staff has also been suspended till 31st of March 2020.

To further intensify the awareness against novel Corona Virus (COVID-19), High Court has organized a training programme for the Court staff, lawyers and litigants and the same scheduled to be conducted in the premises of the High Court as well as in the District Courts on 11th of March 2020. The training shall be imparted by experts from the Health Department.

400 Calls Made, Recieved At Srinagar

after it was activated.

While most of these calls were dialled out from the control room a significant number of these calls were those which were made to and received at the control room. Both included both international and domestic connections.

The calls dialled out from the control room included those made to Srinagar citizens based outside India – to those in the most affected countries in particular – noting important details and giving relevant advice.

The control room also handled technical calls thanks to two doctors - working in shifts - made available thereat. The doctor on night shift last night attended tens of calls made to seek relevant medical and technical advice.

Equipped with five helpline numbers including two landlines and three mobiles and two internet-enabled computers the control room is well-equipped to handle multi-tasking as has been witnessed during the last 24 hours.

The administration has encouraged one and all seeking relevant information or assistance based in or outside Jammu & Kashmir to contact the control room and expect the quickest response and action to concerns raised.

In order to ensure smooth and purposeful operation of the control room the administration has designated Registrar Srinagar Masrat Hashim as the nodal officer and CMO Srinagar Dr Talatjabeen as the supervisor for the control room.

Deputy Commissioner Srinagar Dr Shahid Iqbal Choudhary said the control room can be contacted anytime of the day or night at any of its five helpline numbers which include (+91194)2457552,2457543, (+91)9419028251, 9419028242 and 9419014723.

NC Demands Release Of 3 Ex-CMs, Others

The statement regretted continued detention of the party leadership, adding this is for the third consecutive time when the representative and loud voice of the people of Kashmir is not heard in Parliament.

"Denial to Dr Farooq Abdullah in participating in the parliamentary proceedings is not only undemocratic but a matter of concern for all those believing in highest traditions of civil liberties in this country," it added.

National Conference leaders said that absence of political activities have created a vacuum across Jammu and Kashmir with people suffering from a sense of denial, especially due to complete disconnect with the government.

"This sense of denial and alienation has potential of people losing faith in democratic polity, they said, adding "Earnest steps would be taken for restoration of democracy and allowing political activities in a free atmosphere. More delay can prove to be counterproductive."

The senior leaders expressed gratitude to the opposition leaders for their solidarity with the Kashmir mainstream and equally appreciated the raising of issue regarding release of senior parliamentarian of the country in both the houses of Parliament repeatedly.

"The people of Jammu and Kashmir are overwhelmed by the concern and gesture of the country's leadership and feel a sense of belonging," the NC leaders said.

"Detention of political leaders and workers for over seven months is unprecedented, unfortunate and highly undemocratic, hoping that the Centre will listen to reason and announce unconditional release of all the leaders," they added.

Incarcerated Omar Abdullah Turns 50

Both Abdullahs have been in detention since August 5 following abrogation of special status and bifurcation of erstwhile state into two union territories.

On his 50th birthday, the Twitter handle of Omar saw a message from his sister Sara Abdullah Pilot who said she would be temporarily managing the account.

"Temporarily looked after by Sara Abdullah Pilot to keep track of my brother's mentions & DMs. Will restore the a/c to its original owner as soon as he's out," the bio on Omar's account reads.

Shiv Sena leader Priyanka Chaturvedi, actor-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha and NCP Lok Sabha member Supriya Sule were among those who greeted Omar on his birthday on social networking site.

Omar has grown a long salt and pepper beard and is almost unrecognisable judging by a couple of photographs that have surfaced on social media in recent weeks triggering mostly anger and anguish from netizens. The pictures showed him smiling in a snow-covered jacket and sporting an unkempt greyish beard.

The Supreme court is hearing a petition of Sara Pilot challenging Omar's detention under the PSA. The hearing is slated for next week.

The political career of Omar began at the age of 28 when he became a Lok Sabha and was youngest minister inducted in Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led Cabinet in 2000 when he was appointed Minister of State for external affairs and later as commerce.

Omar, who was the chief minister of the state from 2009 to 2014, rose to fame in 2008 with his famous five-minute speech at Parliament when he, despite being in opposition, supported the Indo-US nuclear deal.

"I am a Muslim and I am an Indian," he said. "And I see no distinction between the two. I don't know why should I fear the nuclear deal. It is a deal between the two countries which, I hope, will become two equals in the future,"

Omar had said and warned that the enemy of Indian Muslims was not America or deals like these.

Surprisingly, the PSA dossier and grounds for his detention served on him late on February 6 last month accused him of having "considerable influence" over people including ability to get voters during poll boycott calls and potential for diverting energies of public for any cause.

Ironically, the fact that he was able to convince electorates to vote in huge numbers even during the peak of militancy and poll boycotts has been mentioned in the dossier prepared by the police to detain him under the PSA.

The grounds also mention his comments on social networking sites to instigate common people against the decision on 370 and 35-A which had the potential of disturbing public

order.

However, the police have neither mentioned any of Omar's social media posts in the dossier nor in the order for grounds of his detention.

"To the people of Kashmir, we don't know what is in store for us.....stay safe and above all please stay calm," was the last few tweets of Omar before he was taken to Hari Nivas for preventive detention.==

Masrat Alam Produced Before TADA Court

listed the case for next hearing on April 9. The police in a case filed against Alam in 2012, has alleged that he was involved in disturbing peace and order in the Valley.

Alam pertinently is facing detention under 37th Public Safety Act (PSA) that was slapped against him last year in May.

The separatist leader, who is part of Syed Ali Geelani-led Hurriyat Conference, has spent most part of his life in jail since 2008. In the last 25 years, he has been booked 37 times under the PSA.

4 Children Among 5 Killed

wereburied, according to officials.Locals and police rushed to the spot and recovered five bodies, and an injured person, Raj Singh, has been hospitalised, theofficials said.The deceased have been identified as Sharda Devi(35), Aarti Devi (16), Anu Devi (14), Swani Devi (12), and Pawan Singh (10),they added.

British Legal Body Calls For Mian Qayoom's

Human Rights Commission Chairperson H.L. Dattu.

The letter says that Qayoom's detention seems to be politically motivated and a consequence of his work as a lawyer and representative for persons detained under the PSA in Kashmir.

Calling his continued detention as "judicial harassment", the law society emphasises that his ongoing imprisonment "impedes his ability to carry out his legitimate work as a lawyer." The Law Society's letter stated that Qayoom has not been formally charged with any crime and no allegation against him has been tested in a court of law.

The letter further points out that Qayoom, who was shifted outside the Valley after August 5 and lodged in Agra's Central Jail, did not have access to a lawyer during the first six months of his detention.

"He is in his seventies and suffers from chronic health problems, including diabetes, reduced kidney functions and heart problems. We have been informed that these medical conditions have worsened in detention and that Mr. Qayoom now has to use a wheelchair. We are concerned that Mr. Qayoom's ongoing detention in Tihar prison is likely to result in Mr. Qayoom's health deteriorating further," the letter says, adding that his family has raised serious concerns about the quality of medical care he is currently receiving.

The Law Society's president urged the relevant authorities to immediately release Qayoom "in the absence of any charges having been brought against him on the basis of sufficient and credible evidence in proceedings that comply with the international fair trial guarantees."

Authorities have also been asked to ensure his "physical and psychological wellbeing Qayoom in correspondence with international standards regarding detention conditions, including by providing him with the medical care he requires, as well as access to legal counsel and visitation rights".

It also demands that Qayoom and other members of the legal profession be permitted "without intimidation, harassment or improper interference" to carry out their profession.

Rechristening Landmarks Expose

mal-governance.

"Thousands of youth who appeared in JK Bank examination and lost two precious years because of an arbitrary decision of J&K government are craving for simple attention. Similarly, thousands of daily wagers, contractual lecturers, ITI trained labourers, daily rated workers and other causal labourers have been left with no option but to go for strike and protests," Bukhari said, adding that instead of listening to them the UT government has left these important sections of the society to the mercy of ruthless policing.

He said changing names of roads, tunnels and buildings can to an extent plough a polarised terrain to fulfill the political motives and

satisfy the ego of few persons but this renaming frenzy provides no solution to the unending sufferings of the people.

"Rather than expending on renaming the sign boards of buildings, historical roads and tunnels, the government could have explored the means to release pending salaries of daily wagers in Jammu and Kashmir," the president of JKAP observed.

Dropping 'Sher-E-Kashmir' Title An Attack

undermine the contribution of the leadership headed by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah who preferred secular India over Pakistan by rejecting the two nation theory.

"Sher-e-Kashmir is not just a title but a glorious chapter of history in Jammu and Kashmir. We might have difference with Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah but that doesn't mean we should undermine his and his colleagues historic role which they played right from their advent on the political scene," Tarigami said.

"The contribution of the Quit Kashmir Movement led by him for the upliftment of the people and revolutionary changes in agrarian sector and education laid the foundation of 'Naya Kashmir' which unfortunately is under attack since BJP came to power at the centre, especially after August 5 last year," Tarigami said in a statement," he added.

He alleged that the BJP is known to have a grudge against that movement and want to rewrite the history. He said but it was not easy to erase the historic contribution of our people and the leadership".

"Dropping the public holiday on 13th July, Martyrs Day and on the birth anniversary of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah followed by removing the title of Sher-e-Kashmir from state award and police medal and now renaming Sher-e-Kashmir International Convention Centre as Kashmir International Convention Centre exposes the dubious stand of the BJP time and again. BJP can welcome with open arms anybody when it feels its need but will not hesitate in punishing him/her, when it opposes their disastrous policies," the CPI (M) leader said.

"The slapping of PSA against three former Chief Ministers who all worked with BJP for some time is an eye opener for anyone who is lured by the saffron party," he added.

He said that what happened on August 5 last year was a historic blunder and an unprecedented assault on the basic structure of our republican constitution.

He said right thinking people, groups and parties including CPI (M) have challenged the revocation of special status under Article 370 and Article 35A and downgrading of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories in the Apex Court.

"It remains a duty for all secular democratic forces to raise their voice at every level against this unconstitutional Act. We must unite demand restoration of whatever has been snatched from our people including the constitution of Jammu & Kashmir," he said.

"We cannot look at the emerging situation in isolation. That will only amount to playing in the hands of those working behind the scene and aiming at disrupting our unity. The time demands all of us to stand together at this crucial juncture of our history and safeguard the interests of our people," he added.

Why It May Not Be Easy For Apni Party

develop his own political credibility, chances of which look moot. It will be a challenge for him to make his politics relate to the people. The general population in Kashmir seems still unwilling let go of the Article 370. Apparently, there's still no space for a pro-India politics which doesn't acknowledge or seeks to address the political conflict in Kashmir.

So, one would wonder what is it that motivates Bukhari and the other leaders of his party, if eventually, they don't get to enjoy power? More so, when they have staked everything to be on the good side of New Delhi at a time, when people are angry about its decision to abrogate Article 370. It is not an easy question to answer.

It, however, doesn't still mean that Bukhari's efforts are doomed to fail. They may well come to naught. But as long as centre protects his politics from any opposition by keeping the established political leaders under detention, Bukhari is certain to draw a lot of attention if not make himself immediately relevant. This makes the coming weeks and months very interesting in Kashmir. It remains to be seen if Bukhari and his team are able to create a space for an alternative political narrative in Kashmir, a job they have apparently taken upon themselves to accomplish.