



Maximum : 22°C
Minimum : 08°C
Humidity : 49%

SUNSET
Today 07:09 PM
SUNRISE
Tomorrow 05:50 AM

OBSERVER

23rd year OF PUBLICATION

KASHMIR

29 Shaban-UL-Muazzam | 1441 Hijri | Vol: 23 | Issue: 86 | Pages: 08 | Price: ₹3

www.kashmirobsrver.net • twitter.com / kashmirobsrver • facebook.com/kashmirobsrver • Postal Regn: L/159/KO/SK/2014-2016

Contact: -0194-2502327
FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS &
YOUR COPY OF



.....LIFE & TIMES
P6

AS PEOPLE STAY HOME, EARTH TURNS WILDER AND CLEANER

An unplanned grand experiment is changing Earth. As people across the globe stay home to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, the air has cleaned up, albeit temporarily. Smog stopped choking New Delhi, one of the most polluted cities in the world, and India's getting views of sights not visible in decades. Nitrogen dioxide pollution in the northeastern United States is down 30 per cent. Rome air pollution levels from mid-March to mid-April were down 49pc from a year ago. Stars seems more visible at night.



News Digest

Snow Leopard Kills 37 Livestock In Ladakh

Leh: A snow leopard killed 37 sheep and Pashmina goats in a remote village near here, taking the number of livestock perished in wild animal attacks over the past four weeks in the district to 170, officials said on Wednesday. The snow leopard strayed into the Yourgo village from a nearby forest and entered the livestock shed of Tsering Dorjay during the intervening night of April 19-20, the officials said. Executive Councilor for Wildlife Konchok Stanzin immediately sent a wildlife team to the village to catch the snow leopard. Caught snow leopard will be released back into the wild after a P-02

No Friday, Taraweeh Prayers In Jamia

Srinagar: There would be no congregational Friday and Taraweeh prayers in Jamia Masjid Srinagar for the holy month of Ramadhan in view of the ongoing coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, the grand mosque's management said on Wednesday. "In view of the ongoing coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic Anjuman Auqaf Jama Masjid Srinagar keeping in view the strict medical advisories of maintaining social distance by health experts will continue with the suspension of Friday congregations and Taraweeh prayers in Jamia Masjid, till P-02

Burglars Strike Soldier's House In Anantnag

Srinagar: Unidentified burglars struck a soldier's house and decamped with valuables in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, reports said Wednesday. The burglars broke into the abandoned house of Ghulam Nabi in Seer Hamdan village of Anantnag on Tuesday night and decamped with valuable goods, news agency KNT reported. The soldier is posted at army's Badami Bagh cantonment area and lives with his family in Srinagar. Meanwhile, a police official said that a case has been registered and further investigations started in this matter.

Arms Recovered During Searches In Poonch

Jammu: A cache of arms and ammunition was recovered on Wednesday during a search operation in a forest area in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir, a senior police officer said. The combing operation was launched in Sheendhara top in Surankote area after information was received about suspected movement of militants, SSP Poonch Ramesh Angral said. He said the operation led by Deputy Superintendent of Police (Operations) Manish Sharma led to the recovery of an AK-47 rifle, its three magazines with 43 rounds, a Chinese pistol with a magazine and a pouch from a hideout. However, no one was arrested during the operation which was still going on when last reports were received, the officer said.

'Weary, Worried, Wondering'—Kashmiri Students In Lockdown



Hirra Sultan came a pandemic prisoner in her home, Mehnaz Shafi, 18, has been equating her life with a protracted

ed plague threatening her normal upbringing and student life.

"The lockdown is another reminder of our cursed lives," Mehnaz laments, "as it [closure] is what has always happened to our studies."

Even though, she says, the year 2020 started with some internet promise and 'normalcy', it looks miserable now, as Kashmir, like rest of the world, is under the contagion curbs.

"This is not the first time," she continues. "At least there's a disease out there this time, and not someone's blood."

Campus Cravings

Mehvish Akhtar, 20, was supposed to join college this year, which amid pandemic, looks difficult now.

The wannabe architect says she has already lost precious time facing the situational torment in Kashmir, which last summer, was stripped of its special status.

"After last August, schools had reopened this early spring to everyone's joy in Kashmir," Mehvish says. "But now, they [campuses] are once again under a lock and key. It's crazy to make peace with

such a stressful situation, every now and then!"

Future Tense

"What would become of us in the face of these repeated campus-closures?" wonders Haziq Ali, a class 10 student from Srinagar.

"How long are we going to suffer silently under the tormenting situation? I cannot even sleep at nights any longer."

For weary indoors amid pandemic lockdown, the online tutorial is a global solution.

But as the union territory government seems in mood to restore

4G internet, despite the pleas from civil society members and veteran unionist like Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Kashmiri students are only becoming anxious for their careers.

"They tell us to compete with students from all over India and yet do not give us the same facilities," Shoaib Bhat, a Sopore-based student preparing for IIT-JEE, says. "Which other city has been under a curfew for this long?"

Kashmiri students, Shoaib says, don't have sufficient internet speed to even download a PDF file. "How are we supposed P-02

BEING A KASHMIRI DOESN'T FEEL LIKE OLD TIMES OUTSIDE THE VALLEY NOW," Arsalan Mir, a college-goer, says. "It feels as if you've become some symbol of suspicion now."

COVID-19

27 More Test Positive, Cases Cross 400-Mark

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The number of coronavirus cases crossed 400 mark in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday as 27 more people tested positive for the pandemic, said an official.

"27 new cases reported today. All from Kashmir Division. Total now 407. Jammu-56 and Kashmir-351," Govt spokesperson Rohit Kanagal tweeted. The total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in J&K has gone upto 407 - 351 in Kashmir and 56 in Jammu divisions.

Out of total cases, there are 310 active positive cases (272 in Kashmir and 38 in Jammu division) as 92 patients (75 in Kashmir and 17 in Jammu) have recovered and have been discharged from different hospitals. Five people (four in Kashmir and one in Jammu) have died.

Meanwhile, the media bulletin issued by the government said today that 11 more Covid-19 patients

have recovered and discharged from the hospitals.

The bulletin said that till date 64089 travellers and persons in contact with suspected cases have been enlisted for surveillance,

including 5806 persons in home quarantine, 252 in hospital quarantine, 310 in hospital isolation and 15376 under home surveillance.

"Besides, 42340 persons have completed their P-02

DAK Calls For Mass Screening Of Healthcare Workers

SRINAGAR: Raising concern about transmission of coronavirus in Kashmir hospitals following a doctor testing positive for the virus, Doctors Association Kashmir (DAK) on Wednesday called for mass screening of healthcare workers for the novel virus.

"That would ensure the safety of patients," said DAK President Dr Nisar ul Hassan who is also Associate Professor of Medicine at GMC Srinagar. P-02

16 More Set Free After Quarantine Ends

SRINAGAR: As many as 16 people on Wednesday were discharged after they completed their mandatory quarantine period at a government operated facility in this capital city.

16 people, who were shifted to a government run quarantine centre in Srinagar two weeks ago, were discharged today after successfully completing their 14-day quarantine period, an official spokesperson said. All these people remained under medical P-02

BESIDES, 42340 PERSONS HAVE COMPLETED THEIR surveillance period. Out of 10039 test results available, 9632 samples have tested as negative till April 22, 2020," the spokesperson said.

Govt Grants Rs 1 Cr Relief For Lawyers Hit By Lockdown

Press Trust Of India

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir government on Wednesday granted financial relief of Rs one crore to lawyers whose livelihoods have been severely hit due to the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

Lieutenant Governor G C Murmu on Wednesday handed over a cheque of Rs one crore to Registrar General, Jammu and Kash-

mir High Court, Jawad Ahmad in the presence of High Court Bar Association Jammu president Abhinav Sharma here.

A Raj Bhawan spokesperson said Murmu handed over a cheque of Rs one crore as relief to financially distressed lawyers whose livelihoods have been severely hit due to the ongoing coronavirus lockdown.

He claimed the Jammu and Kashmir government became the first in the country to P-02

225 Iran Evacuees Airlifted From Jodhpur To Leh

Press Trust Of India

LEH: The second batch of 225 pilgrims who had returned from Iran reached here on Wednesday in a special Indian Air Force plane after undergoing quarantine in Rajasthan, officials said.

The returnees, 208 hailing from Kargil and 17 from Leh, were airlifted from Jodhpur to Leh and were subjected to screening by a medical P-02



A fisherman rows his boat during sunset in Dal Lake, Srinagar on Wednesday. Pic Abid Bhat

India Ranks 142nd On Global Press Freedom Index

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI: India has dropped to rank 142, two points below its 2019 rank, in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index unveiled Tuesday.

Reporters Without Borders analysis released on Tuesday.

While Scandinavian countries like Norway, Finland and Denmark made up the top 3, India was ranked 142. Its neighbour Pakistan was 145, while Bangladesh was 151.

The RSF report stated: "With no murders of journalists in India in 2019, as against six in 2018, the security situation for the country's media might seem, on the face of it, to have improved. However, there have been constant press freedom violations, including police violence against journalists, ambushes by political activists, and reprisals instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials."

It attributed the decline in index to "pressure on the P-02

South Kashmir: 4 Militants Killed In Overnight Gunbattle

SHOPIAN: A gunbattle that erupted Tuesday night between government forces and militants in a South Kashmir village has left four militants dead, police said this morning.

Reports said that a joint team of army's 55 RR, police and CRPF laid a siege at Melhora village late Tuesday evening.

Police said the operation was launched following inputs about the presence of some militants.

The exchange of fire took place in the area soon after the joint team fired some warning shots towards the suspected hideout.

According to sources militants tried to break the cordon amid

the exchange of fire; however, the joint team engaged them in the gunfight. "The intermittent exchange of fire continued through the night. A fierce exchange of fire took place early Wednesday morning and during the course of gunfight, all four militants were killed, police said.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Vijay Kumar confirmed the killing of four militants.

"We have taken DNA samples of all four unidentified killed militants. We are conducting burial in presence of the magistrate," he said.

"So far, the family of one of the slain militants came. If they identify, then 2-3 family members P-02

WE HAVE TAKEN DNA SAMPLES of all four unidentified killed militants. We are conducting burial in presence of the magistrate," he said.

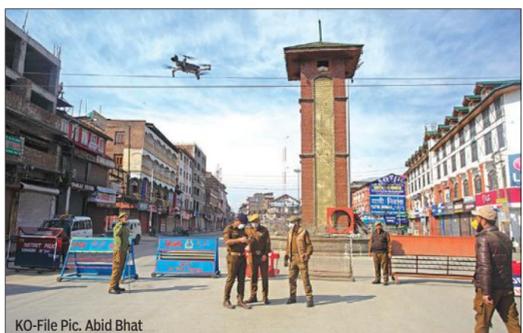
COVID-19: J&K Police Uses 'Eye-In-The-Sky' To Enforce Lockdown

Press Trust Of India

JAMMU: As a drone hovers over an area in Jammu and Kashmir, people walking in the narrow lanes run inside their houses, while those standing outside a ration shop quickly queue up keeping adequate distance between each other.

After August 5 last year, when the special status of J-K was scrapped and the state was divided into two union territories, police had extensively used drones for surveillance to prevent any law and order problem.

Now, as J-K faces the challenge of coronavirus outbreak, these unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have become a vital tool for authorities in enforcing the lockdown to check the spread of the disease, especially in hotspots where multiple cases have been detected. "We are using scores of high-tech



KO-File Pic. Abid Bhat

Kupwara, Pulwama, Shopian, Badgam, Rajouri, Udhampur and Kathua districts besides over the highways during the past fortnight.

In videos shared by J-K Police, cops can be seen spreading the message via drones asking people to stay indoors and not come out unless it is necessary.

There have been 380 coronavirus cases and five deaths in Jammu and Kashmir till now, according to Union Home Ministry data.

At least 90 red zones have been declared.

Police said drones allow them to keep an eye on a wider area.

"Especially, in rural areas where people tend to gather in crowds or indulge in group activities, more than in urban areas. Using drones has definitely been a deterrent," an officer said.

Drones can travel up to a distance of one to five kilometres and to a height of 500 metres. P-02

drone to keep vigil and electronic surveillance in most of the red zones across the union territory," a senior police officer told PTI here.

Any place that has three or more cases is a red zone.

The intention was to use technology to complement manual surveillance, and strictly enforce the lockdown, he said.

Drones have been increasingly used in Srinagar, Jammu, Baramulla,

KPC Demands Withdrawal Of FIRs Against Journalists

Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR: The Kashmir Press Club on Wednesday expressed grave concern over a series of FIR registered against journalists working in Kashmir Valley and demanded their withdrawal.

"The Kashmir Press Club (KPC) yet again notes with grave concern the series of FIRs that have been filed against journalists in the valley," the journalist body said in a statement.

It said in the latest instance, a case has been registered against journalist and author Gowhar Geelani. This is the third such FIR against media persons from the valley in the last few days. P-02

Yatra Flip-flop: SASB Reserves Decision on Amarnath Yatra

Observer News Service

JAMMU: Shortly after releasing a press note announcing the cancellation of this year's Amarnath Yatra, the state government issued a new statement stating the decision about the Yatra will be taken in near future.

Lieutenant Governor, Girish Chandra Murmu, Chairman of Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB), presided over the 38th Board Meeting held here today at the Raj Bhawan, the statement released late at night said.

"The Board expressed its apprehension and held that as on date, it may not be possible to organize the Yatra 2020. Due to the current COVID-2019 pan-



demic situation being dynamic, appropriate decision can be taken on organizing the Yatra on reviewing of the situation in coming future."

According to the earlier press release, "The Board decided unambiguously that in view of the pandemic situation prevailing in the world it would not be prudent to organize the Yatra 2020. It was also decided P-02

From Front page...

Return Of Stranded People To Their Native States Post Lockdown Will Pose Challenge: Jitendra Singh

NEW DELHI: Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said the return of people stranded in different parts of the country due to the lockdown to their native states will pose a major challenge after the curbs are lifted.

During a video conference with councillors and corporators from across Jammu and Kashmir to discuss COVID-19 related issues, the Udhampur MP said the return movement of people to the Union Territory from other parts of the country will also pose a challenge. Singh complimented the elect-

ed representatives of all the municipal bodies for ensuring co-ordination between civil society and the administration for effective implementation of government's guidelines regarding COVID-19 crisis management and offering their full cooperation in ensuring lockdown, according to a Personnel Ministry statement.

The minister said he was particularly delighted to note that district collectors and deputy commissioners were voluntarily expressing their appreciation for the cooperation received from

the local body representatives. "With some relaxation having been gradually made despite lockdown, Singh said, the major challenge now is going to be the return movement of people from Jammu and Kashmir, living in other parts of the country, who wish to come back to their homes or those from other parts of the country including the labourers, who are keen to move back to their respective states," the statement said.

The minister said he has been receiving numerous requests from students of Jammu and

Kashmir who are residing in different parts of the country as well as their parents back home. Singh, the minister of State for Personnel, elicited the cooperation of the public representatives, particularly the local body representatives who have grassroots contacts, to explain to the people that the movement and return can happen only in small groups and in a very strategised and discreet manner.

"We cannot take any risk in haste," he said. There is an inference to be

drawn from district Kathua which was so far coronavirus-free in spite of huge influx of people after the declaration of lockdown, but suddenly reported a corona positive case last evening when a person working in Maharashtra chose to return to his village in Hiranagar without following the prescribed guidelines, said Singh.

He said all of us are keen that people held, up in different places, should unite with their families. He also appealed for cooperation in this regard.

Adequate arrangements are being made to provide all requirements to these people in whichever part of the country they are residing and soon after an information is received about their problems, the local district authorities there establish contact with them, said Singh.

He appreciated the spirit with which the civil society has contributed ration and food to labourers in the last four weeks and said wherever any issue is brought to the notice, the respective administration and the

corporation/municipal body members are immediately intervening to provide supplementary help.

Singh exchanged inputs with representatives of different municipal bodies.

Prominent among those who presented their views included Chandra Mohan Gupta, Mayor Jammu, Hilal Shah from Anantnag, Ishey from Leh, Naresh Kumar from Kathua, Vijay Kumar Sharma from Hiranagar, Riyaz Ahmad Mir from Kupwara and Yogeshwar Gupta from Udhampur.

Strict Action Against Troops, Officers WHO Violate COVID-19 Protocols: BSF DG

New Delhi, Apr 22 (PTI) Border Security Force (BSF) chief S Deswal on Wednesday issued a stern warning to its personnel, saying strict action will be taken if any of them violates the COVID-19 medical protocols.

The Director General (DG) issued a circular under his name for troops and officers after it was found that a Deputy Commandant rank officer of the 2-5 lakh-strong border guarding force, posted with its intelligence wing in the border area of Jaisalmer in Rajasthan returned from leave but "refused to undergo quarantine in isolation ward."

"It has been brought to my knowledge that officers are not obeying the guidelines and instructions issued from time to time regarding COVID-19 protocol," the BSF Director General (DG) said in the circular accessed by PTI.

Refusal by the officer to go into a designated quarantine "is a clear violation of government orders and the force, the DG said.

The circular said the officer also called "several unit personnel to his house" despite being in quarantine.

Officials said the officer concerned had gone on a day's leave to bring back his child from an-

other location and he was subsequently directed to be in home quarantine by the unit doctor.

The circular issued by the DG said "every personnel irrespective of rank, on return from leave or training, should be put in quarantine facility so created, under supervision of doctors."

"No home quarantine is permitted," the DG said in his directive.

"Strict disciplinary action will be taken against such defaulters as well as the supervisory officers and it is again directed to comply with COVID-19 protocol in letter and spirit," Deswal said.

Officials, however, maintained that the instance was a case of

"miscommunication" between the field formation and the headquarters of the force in the national capital and the officer had taken all precautions.

There has been a positive case of coronavirus infection in the BSF. A second-in-command rank officer (equivalent to a Superintendent of Police) posted at the forces' academy at Tekanpur in Madhya Pradesh contracted the infection last month.

The BSF is primarily tasked to guard two important Indian fronts with Pakistan and Bangladesh apart from rendering a variety of duties in the internal security domain of the country.

UK Coronavirus Death Toll Hits 18,100 As Peak Nears

London: UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on Wednesday said Britain is making some progress through the peak of the coronavirus pandemic crisis as the country's death toll from COVID-19 hit 18,100 a daily rise of 759.

Raab, the First Secretary of State who is standing in for Prime Minister Boris Johnson as he recuperates after testing positive for coronavirus, said during the daily Downing Street briefing that the UK's strict social distancing rules were making a difference and saving lives.

It has been a mental strain

on people. We are making progress through the peak of this virus but we are not out of the woods yet, said Raab, as he stressed that the biggest risk remains of a so-called second peak if the lockdown is eased ahead of time.

"There is a light at the end of the tunnel, there is certainly a glimmer but we are not there yet, he said.

He reiterated the five preconditions previously set by the government before any lifting of social distancing measures can be considered protecting the National Health Service's

ability to cope; a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates; reliable data showing that the rate of infection is decreasing; confidence that the range of operational challenges such as testing are in hand; and confidence that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections.

The minister was joined at the daily briefing by General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the UK Defence Staff, who spoke about the logistical support provided by the armed forces to the Department of Health and NHS.

'Weary, Worried, Wondering' ...

to stand up against someone who has had a whole year of classes and all other facilities?"

Out of Valley Trials

As part of 'normalcy' routine, many Kashmiri families would send their wards outside the valley to study in different Indian educational institutions. But many Kashmiri students in the face of hate campaign and assaults, especially after 2019 Pulwama attack, have grown apprehensive for their safety and security.

Even though thousands of Kashmiris study and work in mainland India, more now prefer overseas.

"Being a Kashmiri doesn't feel like old times outside the valley now," Arsalan Mir, a college-goer, says. "It feels as if you've become some symbol of suspicion now."

Worried and Wondering

But as there's no place to go right now, many of these students—who otherwise would cool their heels in outside campuses—are conveying a hard time back home.

"Be it 2016 or 2019, I was always away, watching home from distance," says Sibtain Shah, a college student in Delhi.

"But now, as the world has become Kashmir, with police guarding every entry and exit, it feels as if chickens have come home to roost. But for us, it's worrying time. As we grow weary indoors, we keep wondering about our dystopian world."

27 More Test Positive...

surveillance period. Out of 10039 test results available, 9632 samples have tested as negative till April 22, 2020," the spokesperson said.

The bulletin also carried an advisory about a Tele-Survey covering about 2 crore phones across the country which is being carried out by NIC.

"People are informed that it is a genuine survey and are requested to participate in good measure when a call comes in from 1921 to enable proper feedback of the prevalence," reads the advisory.

It urges people to be aware of any other calls by pranksters or phishing/fishing attempts from any other number.

DAK Calls For Mass Screening...

"Mass screening of doctors, nurses and paramedical staff by antibody testing should be given the highest priority to prevent hospitals from becoming hotspots of disease transmission," he said.

"With 78 percent of coronavirus cases in Kashmir valley showing no symptoms, it becomes vitally important to screen medical personnel to protect patients from asymptomatic transmission," Dr Nisar said, adding that "asymptomatic medical staff have the potential to transmit the virus to patients who are vulnerable to complications and even death."

Dr Nisar said patients are very aware of the risk and are staying at home due to justified fears that they could contract the virus by attending hospitals. They are too scared to go to hospitals.

"The situation appears to be causing fewer emergency calls from patients who have suffered heart attacks or strokes, potentially fuelling rise in non-coronavirus fatalities. Those with other medical conditions are also deterred from seeking medical help," he said

"As a result, salvageable conditions are not

being treated," he added.

Dr Nisar said unlike PCR test which is used to diagnose an active COVID-19 infection, antibody testing will identify which healthcare workers were exposed to the virus in the past and have now developed antibodies against the virus. The presence of antibodies in blood means they are immune to the virus.

"If the healthcare worker has developed immunity, he or she can safely go to work and patients will also have the confidence to go to hospitals," he said.

"We will be in this situation for another month, probably more. We need to test staff quickly for immunity to allow them work without the fear of infection and ensure safe environment in hospitals for patient care," said Dr Nisar.

16 More Set Free...

After supervision throughout their quarantine period and were discharged after clearance from doctors and health authorities," the official spokesperson said.

He said that the concerned supervising officers oversaw their discharge and transportation to their respective

"A total of 1922 persons have been discharged from administrative quarantine so far after successfully completing their required two-week quarantine in Srinagar," the spokesperson added.

South Kashmir: 4 Militants...

will be permitted to participate in burial," IGP said, adding that "those who claim later on, their DNA samples will be taken for further course of action".

A case under FIR number 28/2020 under section 307, 7/27 IA Act and 16, 19, 23, 38 U/LF Activities Act has been registered in connection with the encounter in police station Zainpora.

Meanwhile, the bodies of the slain militants were shifted from Shopian to PCR Kashmir where from the bodies will be taken to Sheeri Baramulla for burial, sources said. Reports from Shopian said authorities have snapped internet services in the district.

Yatra Flip-flop: SASB Reserves...

that Board would explore the possibility of telecasting the Pooja and darshan of Shivalinga online and through other media for millions of devotees worldwide. The Board members expressed that not organizing of Amarnathji Yatra should also set an example for all during the prevailing circumstances of pandemic to avoid such congregations".

When contacted, a senior official of the Department of Information, told Kashmir Observer, that the new information will come from Raj Bhawan as the press release was withdrawn by it".

Former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah tweeted after the press note was withdrawn. "Once again proving the point that these days nothing to do with J&K actually gets decided in J&K," he said.

Annual Hindu pilgrimage to a cave shrine in South Kashmir Himalayas was scheduled to begin on June 23 and culminate on August 3. The yatra was suspended midway last year after New Delhi imposed a lockdown on Kashmir ahead of abrogation of its special status.

India Ranks 142nd On Global...

media to toe the Hindu nationalist government's line."

Ever since the general elections in the spring of 2019, won overwhelmingly by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, pressure on the media to toe the Hindu nationalist government's line has increased.

It added: "Those who espouse Hindutva, the ideology that gave rise to Hindu nationalism, are trying to purge all manifestations of "anti-national" thought from the national debate. The coordinated hate campaigns waged on social networks against journalists who dare to speak or write about subjects that annoy Hindutva followers are alarming and include calls for the journalists concerned to be murdered. The campaigns are particularly virulent when the targets are women. Criminal prosecutions are meanwhile often used to gag journalists critical of the authorities, with some prosecutors invoking Section 124a of the penal code, under which "sedition" is punishable by life imprisonment.

The report further said: "India's score in this year's World Press Freedom Index is heavily affected by the situation in Kashmir where, after rescinding the state's autonomy, the federal government shut down fixed line and mobile Internet connections completely for several months, making it virtually impossible for journalists to cover what was happening in what has become a vast open prison."

The "coordinated hate campaigns" waged on social networks against journalists who dare to speak or write about subjects that annoy Hindutva followers are "alarming," it said. "The campaigns are particularly virulent when the targets are women," it said.

Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), or Reporters Without Borders, is a non-profit organisation that works to document and combat attacks on journalists around the world.

South Asia in general features poorly on the index, with Pakistan dropping three places to 145, and Bangladesh dropping one place to 151.

Norway is ranked first in the Index for the fourth year running. China at 177th position is just three places above North Korea, which is at 180th.

KPC Demands Withdrawal...

"Many scribes in the valley have expressed anguish over these developments. The KPC stands in solidarity with all members of the fraternity," the statement said.

An FIR was registered against senior journalist Peerzada Ashiq, working for The Hindu, over a story he had filed recently. Ashiq was summoned by the police on Sunday in two different districts of Kashmir within a span of six hours to explain his position regarding one of his news reports.

In the second case, freelance photographer Masrat Zahra was booked for uploading anti-national content on social media.

In the third instance, the Cyber Police Station in Kashmir Zone on Tuesday registered a case and started investigation into allegations that journalist Gowhar Geelani was indulging in unlawful activities through social media posts.

"While condemning and seeking withdrawal of the cases against Peerzada Ashiq and Masrat Zahra, we also urge the authorities to withdraw the case against Gowhar Geelani, the press body said.

The Kashmir Press Club said it will send a representation to the Press Club of India (PCI) detailing these issues and other grievances related to difficulties faced by media in their functioning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We hope the media fraternity which is working amid huge challenges get a conducive atmosphere to deliver their day-to-day duties," the statement added.

Govt Grants Rs 1 Cr Relief ...

extend relief to financially distressed young advocates.

"This step of the government is in continuation of the relief measures announced for various sections of the society including registered building construction workers, MGNREGA job card holders and beneficiaries of various pensionary schemes," he said.

"We met Lieutenant governor and held a meeting with him over the issue. He approved our request", Sharma told reporters at Raj Bhawan.

225 Iran Evacuees Airlifted...

team on their arrival at Leh airport, the officials said.

They were evacuated from coronavirus-hit Iran by a special plane on March 25 and were put under quarantine at various facilities in Rajasthan.

This was the second batch of the pilgrims who reached the Union Territory of Ladakh within two days. On Tuesday, the first batch of 57 pilgrims was airlifted from Hindon in Uttar Pradesh to Kargil.

However, the returnees would not immediately join their families as the authorities have decided to put them under a 14-day institutional quarantine at Leh and Kargil towns as a precautionary measure.

The UT administration has thanked the Centre, the army and the IAF for prompt consideration of the request for evacuation of the pilgrims from Iran and subsequently to Ladakh, the officials said.

While nearly 600 pilgrims from Ladakh were evacuated from Iran in March, there are still about 300 more pilgrims who are stranded in the foreign country and 250 of them were reported to have tested positive for coronavirus.

Meanwhile, senior BJP leader and MP Ladakh Jamyang Tsering Namgyal welcomed the return of the stranded pilgrims. "It shows the presence of good governance from Kargil to Kanyakumari under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said.

The MP praised the Modi-led government and Home Minister Amit Shah for their active consideration of the plea made by the stranded pilgrims and their family members through him for their evacuation from Iran to their home country in a very short span of time.

Namgyal also extended his gratitude to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Minister for Health and Family Welfare Harsh Vardhan, Lt Governor of Union Territory of Ladakh R K Mathur and all the concerned officials as well as the Administration of Ladakh for all possible care and support in the evacuation of the stranded pilgrims.

The MP said he was in constant touch with all the concerned officials pursuing the case of evacuation of the remaining pilgrims from Iran to India at the earliest besides the evacuation of others including patients and students from Ladakh who are stuck in different parts of the country.

COVID-19: J&K Police Uses 'Eye...

depending on the model, from where the operator is controlling the UAV.

"It is proving efficient for surveillance and preventing lockdown violations," he said.

This is not the first time that drones have been

used in J-K to help police in surveillance, the officer said, adding, "We have used drones post abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir".

During the 2014 floods, the Army too used drones in some selective locations in Srinagar to trace and help stranded people during rescue operations.

While enforcing the lockdown in the union territory, police lodged 1,012 FIRs, action was taken against 1,295 shop and vehicle owners and 2,303 people were arrested for violations.

In Kashmir zone, 568 FIRs have been lodged against people for violating government orders and 447 vehicles were seized.

The J-K Police arrested 1,691 people for illegal movement and 1,683 were granted bail after detailed counselling on COVID-19.

Similarly in Jammu zone, 444 FIRs were lodged for violating government orders.

As many as 612 persons were arrested for not adhering to government orders, out of which 608 were released after counselling.

In other states too, drones are being used to monitor public gatherings, ensure social distancing, for spraying disinfectants over villages, overseeing cargo, among other tasks.

The drones were also used by China, where the disease was first reported, to detect people with fever in large gatherings using thermal images.

Snow Leopard Kills 37...

few days, he said, expressing grief over the huge loss of livestock which is the only means of sustenance for the nomad family.

He also directed wildlife warden to assess the livestock loss for giving timely compensation and also instructed him to provide a corral pen to the family for protecting the remaining livestock.

Konchok also directed the concerned to sanction a unit of sheep and goat to the affected family to recover the loss while the Revenue Department Durbuk was directed to assess the livestock loss.

This was the fourth wild animal attack on livestock within four weeks in the district, resulting in the killing of 170 cattle including 52 Pashmina goat kids in a wolf attack reported in the same village (Yourgo) on March 30.

Earlier on March 28, a snow Leopard killed 39 sheep at RonjukKhardong and two days later a Lynx killed 42 sheep and goats at KherapullaKargyam village.

Eurasian Lynx or Ee in Ladakhi is one of the medium-sized Wildlife cats which roam the high and cold snow covered mountains of Ladakh Himalaya. The cat is agile and strong and is highly adapted to the thin air atmosphere of Ladakh.

No Friday, Taraweeh...

the situation returns to normal, In Sha Allah," the Anjuman AuqafJama Masjid Srinagar said in a statement issued here today.

So, it is suggested to Muslims to offer Taraweeh along with the mandatory daily five time prayers at homes and seek Almighty Allah's refuge from the pandemic, it added.

Meanwhile, the Anjuman has felicitated and expressed good wishes to the Muslim Ummah especially the Muslims of Jammu & Kashmir on the arrival of the holy month of Ramadhan.

The Anjuman prayed to Almighty Allah to "bestow us with Eemaan, Ikhlās and good health to spend this holy month with full sincerity and dedication".

'Together We shall Overcome'

JKAACL releases song on communal harmony amid COVID-19 pandemic

SRINAGAR, APRIL 22: Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (JKAACL) Muneer-Ul-Islam today released a Urdu video song dedicated to communal harmony and as a tribute to people who are helping vulnerable sections of society amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Secretary said that the song on communal harmony celebrates untiring efforts of those social warriors who are helping poor, disadvantaged, vulnerable and weaker sections of society irrespective of their religion, caste, colour or creed.

The mood-lifting song 'Ye Dourey Corona Guzar Jayega' by music artist Imran Latief is part of the public awareness campaign of the Cultural Academy on coronavirus disease, its precautions and preventive measures.

Muneer-Ul-Islam said art can play a pivotal role in making people understand the concepts about this deadly virus. He said, besides this people—who are under complete lockdown also needs some infotainment. "Cultural Academy is doing its part in exploring various genres," he said.

He said the Academy's campaign, "Together We shall Overcome"—in which several artists have been roped in to contribute their art pieces from their homes—has received an enthusiastic response from the general public.

The Academy has also started a song-a-day which generated a huge response. The songs were sung by prominent singers of Jammu and Kashmir in several languages including Urdu, Kashmir, Dogri, Punjabi and later on are shared widely on social networking sites.

The Secretary said that JKAACL campaign is aimed to educate and inform people about the dangers of Coronavirus—and the steps being taken to protect the society from this contagious disease.

SKIMS Doctor Terminated for asking PPE Kits

Agencies

SRINAGAR: A day after a junior resident doctor claimed that he was terminated from services for asking standard personal protection equipment (PPE), Principal SKIMS Medical College Bemina Dr Riyaz Ahmad Untoo Tuesday said his "tenure engagement was relieved for indulging in indiscipline and abusing a senior doctor". He also claimed that junior doctor was causing "hindrance" in the delivery of healthcare to patients.

On April 20, Principal SKIMS Medical College Hospital Bemina issued an order which reads, "A doctor (Code No JR-1166) Junior Resident Department of Accident and Emergency is hereby relieved from this institution."

He has written a letter to President Doctors Association Kashmir Dr Suhail Naik that despite the non-availability of standard PPE, he continued to discharge his duty in the COVID ward without taking into consideration the risk of acquiring this fatal infection.

"Despite repeated verbal and documented requests to administration, the doctors were not provided with standard PPEs. That on 17-04-20 after finishing my uninterrupted duty in COVID ward with substandard PPE, I asked the in-charge stores Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad, Consultant Ophthalmology, to issue standard PPE. The said doctor responded in a harsh way which resulted in an argument," he said in the letter.

He claimed he was repeatedly "harassed and threatened".

"That I will be terminated and sent behind the bars along with my family and subsequently relieving order was issued against me on 20-04-20," he said.

Principal SKIMS Medical College Bemina Dr Riyaz Ahmad Untoo however rubbished the reports that

DAK demands reinstatement of doctor

SRINAGAR: Doctors Association Kashmir (DAK) Wednesday strongly condemned the "unprecedented termination" of a doctor of SKIMS Bemina who it said was sacked for demanding standard accredited protective gear.

President DAK Dr Suhail Naik in a statement said that it is unfortunate that Dr Asif Ali Bhat, a junior resident at SKIMS Bemina terminated without holding a proper inquiry or without any prior warning.

"This is sheer power arrogance and it seems our health institutions stand hijacked by some white collar officers," he said.

Dr Naik said it is very "unfortunate and unethical to terminate a young front-line doctor who just demanded a standard PPE".

"On one hand government is

recruiting retired doctors to add to deficient human resources and on the other hand young doctor is terminated without asking for any inquiry," he said.

General Secretary DAK, Dr Owais H Dar said that demanding accredited PPE is their fundamental right and it is responsibility of administration to arrange and sustain their supply.

"The arrogance of some administrators is pushing resident doctors to the wall and forcing them to go for strike and shut-down of essential services," he said.

Dar said "such officials remain stationed in administrative blocks which are usually 110 meters away from Covid-19 wards and to cover up their administrative failures they are trying hard to muzzle the voice of frontline resident doctors".

AGENCIES

doctor was "terminated from his services". "Permanent employees or those on contract are being terminated. Junior resident is a house job of three to six-month tenure engagement," he said.

He claimed that if junior resident does not comply with the norms and guidelines, the administration can relieve his tenure engagement which is three to six months or one year. He said the said doctor's tenure engagement started at SKIMS Bemina in Oc-

tober 2019.

"He was relieved. Any one causing hindrance in the delivery of health care to patients, action will be taken as indiscipline can be disastrous particularly in prevailing situation due to coronavirus pandemic as SKIMS Medical College Bemina is the largest COVID designated hospital in the UT. He (junior doctor) was even asking some doctors not to enter wards to treat patients," he said. (KINS)

Advisor Khan asks ASHA workers to prepare list of pregnant women

SRINAGAR: Advisor to Lieutenant Governor, Basier Ahmad Khan today directed that pregnant ladies should be checked for COVID-19 infection before referring them to maternity hospital Led Ded here.

He issued these directions during a meeting held with Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Pandurang K Pole, Deputy Commissioners of J&K, Director SKIMS Prof. AG Ahangar and Principal GMC Srinagar Dr Samia Rashid here through video conferencing.

The Advisor said that ASHA workers should prepare a list of pregnant ladies in their areas and check if they have any

symptom of COVID-19 infection before referring them to the Valley's premier maternity hospital.

He added that if the lady is found with any kind of symptoms for the infection, the ASHA worker should immediately report it to concerned so that the pregnant lady, instead of Led Ded hospital, could be referred to JLNH hospital or Government Medical College.

The Advisor said that sending pregnant ladies to Led Ded hospital without following due precaution may lead to a bigger problem.

During the meeting, Divisional Commissioner (Div Com) Kashmir informed that door-to-door health check clinics have

been established to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the red zone areas of Gund Jahangir and Hajin in Baniptora district.

He informed the meeting that contact tracing of all 324 COVID-19 positive cases has been done for which 60 teams were constituted.

The Div Com said that an institutional arrangement of three-tier-system has been put in place to deal with COVID-19 patients. He said the first tier is called as wellness centre and this will be for healthy patients who do not show symptoms for the infections. For such centres, the Div Com informed 6400 bed capacity centres are established in every district.

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, MECHANICAL IRRIGATION DIVISION SRINAGAR
NEAR J&K BANK, (Zaldagar)
Telefax No. 0194-2503195 e-mail Id: xenmidsrinagar@gmail.com

Gist of Fresh Short term e-NIT No. 01 of 2020-21 to Short term e-NIT No. 33 of 2019-20
Dated:- 07-03-2020

For and on behalf of Govt. of Lt. Governor of J&K, Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Srinagar, invites e-tenders affixed with Rs. 06/- revenue stamps on item rate basis by e-tendering mode from the registered and experienced Mechanical contractors / Firms/S.S.I Unit holders for:-

"Overhauling of 10 cusec VT pumping unit at Lift Irrigation Scheme Gundirosan"

The bidding process shall be completed online in **single cover** containing -Tender Document fee, Earnest Money Deposit, Pre-qualification & Financial Bid in the prescribed BOQ.

The critical dates are as tabulated below:-

i	Publish Date	21/04/2020 at 13:00hrs
ii	Document Down load/sale start Date	21/04/2020 from 16:00hrs.
iii	Clarification start date	21/04/2020 from 17:00 hrs.
iv	Bid submission start date	21/04/2020 from 10:00 hrs
v	Clarification end date	27/04/2020 upto 14:00 hrs
vi	Document Download/sale end Date	27/04/2020 upto 16:00 hrs
vii	Bid submission end date	28/04/2020 upto 14:00 hrs
viii	Date and time of Bid opening	29/04/2020 at 14:00 hrs

The bid uploaded on the website up to due date and time will be opened on scheduled date /time or any other date convenient to the tender opening authority in the office of the Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Zaldagar Srinagar.

All other terms and conditions shall remain same as laid down in PWD Form No. 25 & 33.

Estimated Cost Rs 0.52 lacs
Position of funds Demanded Under M.H 2702

No. MIDS/Ts/ 54-58
Dated:-21-04-2020

DIPK-268/20

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
Mechanical Irrigation Division,
Srinagar

Government of Jammu & Kashmir
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PW(R&B) DIVISION SHOPIAN
e-mail:- mbddivisionshopian@gmail.com(Phone/Fax No: 01933-260226)

NOTICE INVITING TENDERS
NIT No:-02/185-95/SPN/RnB/e-Tendering/2020-21 Dated:- 22/04/2020

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor Union Territory of J&K, e-tenders are invited on **item rate basis** from approved and eligible Contractors registered with J&K Government, CPWD, Railways and other state/Central Governments for each of the following works:-

S. No	Name of Work	Est. Cost (Rs. in Lacs)	Major Head of Account	Class of Contractor	Time of Completion in days	Cost of T.Doc. (Rs.)	Earnest Money (Rs.)
1	Balance work of Health Sub Centre at Sharatpora Shopian	8.80	4010-Medical D/S	DEE/CEE	15 working days	600/-	17,600/-

Position of AAATs: Accorded **Position of funds: Available**

Note:- The work shall be completed during the current financial year 2020-21, no such claim shall be entertained on account of said work unless until the work is completed in all respects. Otherwise the contract shall get cancelled automatically

1. The Bidding documents Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Drawings, bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the departmental website www.iktenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given below:

1	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	22-04-2020
2	Document downloading Start Date.	23-04-2020 From 10.00 A.M
3	Document Downloading End Date.	30-04-2020 upto 4.00 P.M
4	Bid submission Start Date.	23-04-2020 From 10.00 A.M
5	Bid Submission End Date.	30-04-2020 upto 4.00 P.M
6	Date & time of opening of Bids (Online)	01-05-2020 at 11.00 A.M

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
PW(R&B) Division Shopian

No.:- NIT/e-Tendering/NIT/ 196-98
Dated:- 22/04/2020

DIPK-303/20

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, MECHANICAL IRRIGATION DIVISION SRINAGAR
NEAR J&K BANK, (Zaldagar)
Telefax No. 0194-2503195 e-mail Id: xenmidsrinagar@gmail.com

Fresh Short Term e-NIT No. 02 of 2020-21 to Short Term e-NIT No.34 OF 2019-20 Dated:- 16-03-2020

For and on behalf of Lt. Governor of J&K, Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Srinagar, invites e-tenders affixed with Rs. 06/- revenue stamps on item rate basis by e-tendering mode from the registered Mechanical Contractors / Firms/S.S.I Unit holders for:-

"Repairs to 02 cusec horizontal multistage pump at Beigh Mohalla Watlar"

The bidding process shall be completed online in **single cover** containing -Tender Document fee, Earnest Money Deposit, Pre-qualification & Financial Bid in the prescribed BOQ.

The critical dates are as tabulated below:-

i	Publish Date	22/04/2020 at 12:00hrs
ii	Document Down load/sale start Date	22/04/2020 from 15:00hrs.
iii	Clarification start date	22/04/2020 from 13:00 hrs.
iv	Bid submission start date	22/04/2020 from 16:00 hrs
v	Clarification end date	29/04/2020 upto 16:00 hrs
vi	Document Down load/sale end Date	29/04/2020 upto 14:00 hrs
vii	Bid submission end date	29/04/2020 upto 16:00 hrs
viii	Date and time of Bid opening	30/04/2020 at 14:00 hrs

The bid uploaded on the website up to due date and time will be opened on scheduled date /time or any other date convenient to the tender opening authority in the office of the Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Zaldagar Srinagar.

All other terms and conditions shall remain same as laid down in PWD Form No. 25 & 33.

Estimated Cost Rs 1.88 Lacs
Position of funds Demanded Under M.H 2702

No. MIDS/Ts/ 69-73
Dated:- 22-04-2020

DIPK-265/20

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
Mechanical Irrigation Division,
Srinagar

DIAL-EMMA

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

AIRPORTS

SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311 ✈️

RAILWAYS

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

HIGHWAY STATUS

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

This Day in History

- 1925 - Having badly defeated Spain and driven her out of Spanish Morocco, the native Riffi, led by Abd-el-Krim, turn on the French in French Morocco
- 1941 - Greece Army surrenders to German Nazis
- RAF brings Greek king George II to Egypt
- 1942 - 4-day allied bombing on Rostock begins
- 1943 - British & US offensive directed at Tunis and Bizerta
- 1949 - Netherlands annexes Elten & Tudderden
- 1965 - Launch of 1st Soviet communications satellite
- becomes 1st in-flight casualty
- 1971 - Soyuz 10 launched; cosmonauts become 1st in Salyut 1 space station
- 1972 - Apollo 16 astronauts explores Moon surface
- 1978 - USSR performs nuclear test at Eastern Kazakh/Semipalinsk USSR
- 1984 - AIDS-virus identified as HTLV-III (acquired immune deficiency syndrome)
- 1992 - McDonald's opens its 1st fast-food restaurant in China
- 1993 - Eritrea votes to secede from Ethiopia
- 1997 - Omaria massacre in Algeria: 42 villagers are killed.
- 2003 - Beijing closes all schools for two weeks because of the SARS virus.
- 2012 - 38,000 London Marathon entrants have their home and email contacts published in a data protection breach
- 2013 - 28 people are killed and 70 are injured during clashes between police and Sunni Muslims in Hawija, Iraq
- 2013 - 21 people are killed during violent unrest in Xinjiang, China

HIJRI CALENDAR
29
SHABAN
1441

PRAYERS

- FAJR 4: 23
- ZUHR 12: 31
- ASR 5:16
- Magrib 7:12
- ISHA 8:3

From KO Archives

Manmohan Speaks Of 'Final Settlement' Of Kashmir Issue

JAKARTA - In the most optimistic assessment yet of the India-Pakistan peace process, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said Friday that "if allowed to go forward" it could help in the "final settlement" of the Kashmir dispute.

"I really believe that if this process is allowed to go forward, it will create a climate conducive to die final settlement. " the prime minister told reporters accompanying him on his visit here for the Asian-African summit during a press conference on 'board Air-India One.

But Manmohan Singh said it was not possible to put a time frame for resolving die problem. "I really don't know today. It is a process. I can't lay down a timetable, where will it lead us or when will it."

"But I am convinced this is die way of looking at die problem which creates a situation where there are no losers, no winners.

"They only gainers are the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the prospects of reconciliation between the people of India and the people of Pakistan," he added.

Asked about the reference to "soft borders" by both him and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf during the latter's visit to India, the prime minister said India and Pakistan have to tackle die Kashmir problem from a "different perspective".

"Territorial disputes are not 'easy to resolve overnight. They take time," he said.

But he said there was "a lot" India and Pakistan could do together by focusing on die interests of the people of Jammu and Kashmir living on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) so that they, can "lead a life of dignity and self-respect".

The LoC divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

"We can create an environment of freer trade, freer movement, thereby the development process on both sides can improve," the prime minister said.

He said though the last few weeks had been hectic with the visits of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and Musharraf, the visits had produced "solid results".

Wen's visit led to both countries agreeing to a political settlement of their boundary question-and putting an end to the controversy over Sikkim's status, with die Chinese leader declaring the former Himalayan kingdom as an integral part of India.

"We agreed that the delineation of die LAC (Line of Actual Control) should be accelerated," Manmohan Singh said, adding: "I am confident that our- relations will take a new mm for the better."

He also referred to the joint statement issued at the end of Musharraf's visit in which both sides declared the peace process-as "irreversible" and said: "It is my sincere desire to work with President Musharraf to carry forward, this process of reconciliation."

KASHMIR
OBSERVER

Printed & Published by Sajjad Haider on behalf of the Kashmir Observer LLP
Published from: # 5- Boulevard, Srinagar-190001
Printed at: KT Press Pvt. Ltd, Rangreth Ind Area, Srinagar.
RNI Registration No: 69503/98
Postal Registration No-L/159/KO/SK/2014-16
Editor-in-Chief: Sajjad Haider
Legal Counsel: Tasaduq Khwaja
Switchboard: (0194) 2106304
Editorial: (0194) 2502327
Email editorial: editor@kashmirobservers.net

Ease Lockdown

The number of Covid cases in Kashmir is showing an upward trend with every passing day. The number of cases has now climbed to more than 350, a predominant number of these cases is from Kashmir Valley and only a small proportion from Jammu. One reason for this is probably that in winter Kashmiris travel more than their counterparts in Jammu. A significant number of people go to Saudi Arabia and Iran for religious pilgrimages. Iran was one of the countries worst hit by the pandemic with more than 80,000 cases, 5000 of whom have so far died.

Kashmiris also visit countries like Dubai and the other Gulf and Arab countries to escape the winter. And in March a large number of them return home. According to the data, 31 percent of the positive cases travellers and 64 percent are the contacts.

A proper screening at the airport may have been of some help to arrest the spread of the virus. However, considering the number of Covid cases in the Valley is still within manageable levels and discounting the fact that the testing is inadequate, we should be able to get over the crisis sooner than later. In a positive development, percentage of samples that test positive at the two laboratories in Kashmir has dropped drastically over the past five days. According to reports in local media, among 2698 samples that were tested at SKIMS and CD Hospital from 14 April to 18 April, only 65 samples were found positive for coronavirus.

This does auger well for the near future. That is if this leads to the gradual flattening of the curve and later its plateauing and eventual elimination of the infection. But there are many ifs and buts before we reach that stage. It is difficult to say with certainty whether this decline in the positive cases is the result of inadequate testing. In the past week, the sample collection had come to a halt for some time after reportedly 5000 test kits bound for Srinagar were diverted to Jammu. Things, however, would become clear in the days and weeks ahead. If the declining trend sustains, it would mean the lockdown is making a redeeming difference.

That said, what after the lockdown comes to an end. Considering the devastating economic impact of the shutdown of the businesses, the lockdown is unlikely to be extended. There is a need for the government to chalk out a plan whereby parts of the economy which don't entail mass gathering of people are allowed to function. At the same time, people will need to be more responsible about their conduct outside home. The use of face mask and sanitizers should be made mandatory till the time the world gets a grip on the disease.

OTHER OPINION

50 Million Kids Can't Attend School. What Happens to Them?

Other research has shown that virtual education as widely practiced in the United States is no substitute for traditional classroom schooling. A scalding 2016 study of full-time virtual public charter schools laid out this indictment in great detail. Researchers found that full-time virtual public charter schools performed worse than traditional public schools in most states and showed weaker academic gains for all demographic subgroups of students. Moreover, the data suggest that students tend to become disengaged from virtual schools, leaving them quickly.

The historical record shows that lengthy interruptions to schooling — during teacher strikes, for example — can undermine student achievement and even success in higher education. Parents affected by the coronavirus shutdown may not be familiar with this history, but they are clearly concerned about the risk that an extended break from school poses for their children.

Recent polls conducted in New York and California show that nearly 90 percent of parents are worried that their children will fall behind because of the closings. Parents in both polls voiced a clear desire for more consistent access to their children's teachers — an obvious plea for more guidance about how to proceed during the shutdown.

Schools need to do a better job of communicating with these parents, and effective partnership with them will be essential when schools undertake the policy changes that will be required to get students back on track academically.

The country may be stuck with virtual schooling because of the pandemic, but the data clearly show that the method is far from desirable. That makes it even more important that educators sort out how to best catch students up when in-school instruction begins again.

State education officials and policymakers ought to acknowledge that no amount of hard work from dedicated teachers will avert the learning loss crisis. The states should be working right now, in concert with parents groups, on a menu of solutions.

The step of requiring a student to repeat the current grade ought to be taken judiciously — and only after diagnostic tests have shown that the student is too far behind to be promoted. Another option to help all students catch up would be to shorten or skip school breaks, including lengthy summers off, over the next few years to make up for the lost classroom time.

The worst possible outcome would be for state and local officials to shrug and do nothing about a problem that could sidetrack a generation of Americans.

The New York Times

Restoration Of 4G In Kashmir; Dissecting The Legality

SIKANDER HYAAT KHAN

The crux of these decisions is that before taking the measure, authorities must assess whether an alternative mechanism existed to help it achieve the goal. The principle requires to be tailored in accordance with the territorial extent of the restriction, stage of emergency, nature of emergency, duration of restrictive measure and nature of such restriction.

THE Supreme Court of India, finds itself in midst of a barrage of litigations in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. A writ petition of pertinent importance has been filed before the Court, by the Foundation for Media Professionals and the Private Schools Association of J&K seeking restoration of 4G internet services.

At the outset of this discussion, a distinction must be drawn between the instant petition and Anuradha Bhasin, so as to address a confusion in peoples' minds regarding why a writ petition seeking restoration of fast internet connectivity has been filed twice, one after the verdict in another has been rendered. The difference lies in the fact that the two are borne out of a separate cause of action.

The Union issued the Constitution Order 272, in August 2019, effectively stripping the state of the special status conferred to it under Article 370. The writ petition by Anuradha Bhasin was filed against restrictions on internet connectivity, communications and movement of the people imposed as measures to mitigate backlash. The judgment was rendered in January 2020, contents of which are known to public at large. The Union, later, vide an Order dated 26.3.2020, restricted internet speed in Kashmir to 2G. The instant writ petitions have been filed against this order.

One must now address questions at the heart of the matter, i.e. whether there is a violation of fundamental rights of Kashmiris due to the 26 March Order or the restriction is reasonable and permissible under the Constitution.

It is alleged that the said Order is in violation of the rights under Articles 14,19,21. The rights under these Articles are intricately linked and cannot be compartmentalised. A finding of the violation of one right leads to an adverse finding for the rest, as per the Golden Triangle rule laid down by the Supreme Court in Maneka Gandhi v. UOI case. It is also alleged that the Right to Education under Article 21A is being violated as lack of quality internet is hindering access to education that is now being imparted online due to lockdowns imposed to prevent Covid-19.

The Supreme Court has held in Anuradha Bhasin itself, that a fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1) (a) can be extended to the internet. In the context of the pandemic, the restriction on internet is not only violative of the right to freedom of



speech and expression, inter alia, but also freedom of trade and profession (from those eligible to work from home).

However, such freedom can be restricted "reasonably" by the government. The question is one of extent and rather than the existence of the power to restrict. To ascertain such extent, one may turn to the proportionality test. The Supreme Court held in CPIO v. Subhash Chandra Aggarwal, that proportionality requires that a right is not restricted "to a greater extent than necessary to fulfil the legitimate interest of the countervailing question". In Mohd. Faruk v. State of MP, it was stated that in considering validity of an impugned act a Court must attempt an evaluation of the act's direct impact upon the fundamental rights of the citizens affected and larger public interest sought to be ensured in light of the object sought to be achieved, its necessity to restrict the citizen's freedom and the possibility of achieving the object by imposing a less drastic restraint.

The crux of these decisions is that before taking the measure, authorities must assess whether an alternative mechanism existed to help it achieve the goal. The principle requires to be tailored in accordance with the territorial extent of the restriction, stage of emergency, nature of emergency, duration of restrictive measure and nature of such restriction.

The crux of these decisions is that before taking the measure, authorities must assess whether an alternative mechanism existed to help it achieve the goal. The principle requires to be tailored in accordance with the territorial extent of the restriction, stage of emergency, nature of emergency, duration of restrictive

measure and nature of such restriction. The law, also, clearly states that the proportionality test needs to be applied in context of facts and circumstances of a case.

The Attorney General responded to these petitions by pointing out that the issue of militancy could not be overlooked while allowing the restoration of fast internet connectivity. The implication of this submission being that restoration of fast internet connectivity would facilitate militant activities in Kashmir.

The goal of the Order is to prevent militant activities to ensure public safety, it must be noted that restricting internet speed is not the only possible way of doing so, considering that rights of millions, have been brought to a standstill, more so in context of Covid-19 wherein, the internet has become the most crucial element of all aspects of life; be it education, work or communication. In the alternative, if such a restriction is considered legitimate, it ought to be imposed only in certain areas where militant activity is prominent.

Additionally, militancy in Kashmir is not a new phenomenon. The Union has used instrumentalities to quell insurgency in the past that did not involve an internet ban or slowdown. Considering that militancy is an issue that is not bound to subside in Kashmir anytime soon, the Union cannot shy away from using its resources to tackle the issue at the expense of suspending fundamental rights of citizens for prolonged periods in a constitutional democracy.

Author is a lawyer.
He can be reached at: sikanderhyaat@hotmail.com

Longer It Goes, Harder It Is: The Psychology Of Lockdown

DOUGLAS SUTHERLAND

THE Covid-19 pandemic has forced millions of people to live under strict lockdown conditions, but the psychology of human behaviour predicts they will find it harder to stick to the rules the longer the situation continues.

New Zealand has now reached a midway point of a comprehensive four-week lockdown and there have already been some rule breakers. Most prominent among them was the country's health minister, David Clark, who almost lost his job this week for flouting lockdown rules by going mountain biking and driving his family 20 km to a beach.

He won't be the last to break the rules. During a pandemic, fear is one of the central emotional responses and up to this point, most people have complied with lockdown conditions out of fear of becoming infected. But as time passes, people's resolution may begin to fray.

Psychology of a pandemic

A group of more than 40 psychologists are currently reviewing research relevant to people's behaviour during a pandemic to advance the fight against Covid-19.

The psychological factors that motivate us to stay in our bubble are a mix of individual, group and societal considerations.

At a very basic level, human behaviour is governed by reward principles. If what we do is followed by a perceived reward, we're more likely to keep doing it. Not getting sick is a reward, but it may not be perceived as such for much longer as most of us weren't sick in the first place. This lack of reward reinforcement could be intensified by



an optimism bias — "It won't happen to me" — which may become stronger than our anxiety as time passes and the perceived threat reduces.

Outside of our individual psychology, broader social factors come into play. In times of uncertainty we look to others to guide our own behaviour as they set our social norms.

Often, there is a degree of confusion about guidelines on what people are allowed to do, for example when exercising during lockdown. Seeing others out surfing, mountain biking and picnicking in a park can lead to a mindset of "if they're doing it, why can't I?"

To counter this, governments must appeal to people's sense of shared identity and highlight examples of punishment for rule breakers. But an over-emphasis on punishment risks people sticking to rules merely for social approval, which means they may conform in public but not in private. Being punished can also build

resentment and may lead people to seeking out loopholes in the rules.

Group behaviour

In order to last the distance at the highest level of lockdown, people need to cooperate as a group. If everyone complies, we'll all be okay.

The reverse was evident in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic with the panic-induced buying of toilet paper, face masks and other "essentials". Here, we saw decision making based on emotion and the government attempting to counter it with fact-based information.

There is evidence that in times of major crises, groups may prioritise their local interests, such as keeping your family, neighbourhood or wider community safe. But this has the potential to spill over into vigilantism if local protection interests combine with fear. It can prioritise the interests of a few over the greater good.

Cultural factors

Cultural and political psychology also has an impact on our behaviour during lockdown. Broadly speaking, different cultures can be categorised as "tight" or "loose".

Tight cultures, such as China or Singapore, tend to be more rule bound and less open but are also associated with more order and self-regulation. In contrast, looser cultures, like the United Kingdom and the United States, place more emphasis on individual freedoms and rights, and are correspondingly slow to self-regulate in the face of government requirements. Australia appears to fall towards the looser end of the spectrum while New Zealanders sits somewhere in the middle.

The challenge is how we respond as societies continue to "tighten" with strict rules while boredom and annoyance sets in.

Political polarisation, which has increased markedly in recent years, may be exacerbated by being physically distant from others. There is a danger that as we stay in our bubbles, both physical and virtual, we fall into "echo chambers" wherein we only hear similar voices and opinions to our own.

If this chamber becomes filled with resentment at ongoing restraints on our freedom, it can break down our motivation to stay home. But polarisation can be overcome by helping people identify with a bigger cause — and this was often invoked during times of war.

Even after populations emerge from the lockdowns, it will be hard to know what to expect. People will need clear guidelines at each stage and help to adjust to a new normal.

This article first appeared on The Conversation.

5 Kashmiri Writers You Should Read in Lockdown

As many people have resorted to reading during the present pandemic-induced indoor routine, here's the list of five authors one should read to understand the Kashmir's celebrated penmanship.

RAKSHANDA AFRIN

This literary heavyweight recently hogged headlines when Indian Financial Minister, Nirmal Sitharaman, during the budget session, recited a verse from Nadim's famous poem, Myon Watan (My Country) in Kashmiri. It caused quite a stir on the floor of the house. Credited with beginning an era of modern Kashmiri poetry, Dinanath "Kaul" Nadim is considered a pioneering literary icon and poet who led the progressive writers' movement in Kashmir.

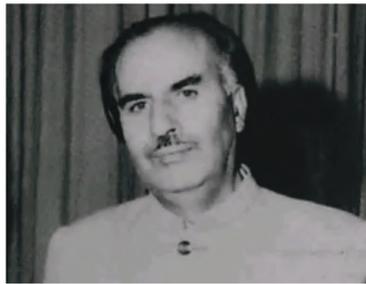
KASHMIR Valley has seen the emergence of some of the greatest literary luminaries who would go on to influence and inspire a whole lot of generations to contribute to Kashmir's literature.

As part of progressive writers' movement, some of these literacy heavyweights would introduce new writing forms, techniques and narrative styles. This creative force wouldn't only fuel the literary passions in the valley, but also evolve graph of Kashmiri literature in times to come.

However, with Kashmir witnessing a creative boom in English prose and poetry writing, especially in last 30 years, some of these Kashmiri writers took backseat.

Even as some attempts were made to translate their works in English language for young generation to read, and understand their vintage vernacular authors, it seems much more needs to be done to revive the buried pen.

Let's take a look at a few of these intellectual literary icons.



Dinanath Nadim (1916-1988)

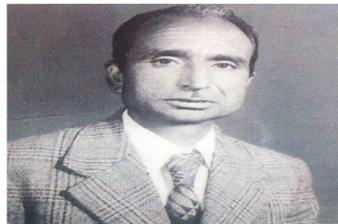
This literary heavyweight recently hogged headlines when Indian Financial Minister, Nirmal Sitharaman, during the budget session, recited a verse from Nadim's famous poem, Myon Watan (My Country) in Kashmiri. It caused quite a stir on the floor of the house.

Credited with beginning an era of modern Kashmiri poetry, Dinanath "Kaul" Nadim is considered a pioneering literary icon and poet who led the progressive writers' movement in Kashmir.

Nadim's poetry saw popular emergence during the political events happening in the valley in 1947.

Throughout his career, he was greatly influenced by communism and many feel the valley's literary history is incomplete without his mention.

He has penned down several operas and poems. His collection of poems titled- Shihul Kul won him the Sahitya Academy Award in 1980s. This literary icon and his legacy will forever be cherished for years to come.



Akhtar Mohiuddin (1928-2001)

Considered as one of the finest short story Urdu writers, during his literary career, Mohiuddin penned over

fifty short stories in Kashmiri.

He's acknowledged for writing his characters and plots with universal image and appeal and therefore giving new dimensions and perspectives to Kashmiri literature.

Daud Dag (Disease and Pain), considered to be the first novel written and published in Kashmiri, was authored by Akhtar Mohiuddin where he wrote about the dark lives of the lower middle class.

His writings were mainly about reflections of human nature and provided his readers with thought provoking plots on themes of disparity between poor and the rich and corruption during the post-partition period.



Amin Kamil (1924-2014)

Considered as Kashmir's 'Master of Ghazal', Mohammad Amin Kamil's poems found a major voice in Kashmir's literary history.

The influence of the progressive writers' movement had made him shift his writings from Urdu to Kashmiri primarily.

Kamil is considered as a fearless literary icon from the valley who had written in almost every form of diverse literary works such as Nazm, Ghazal, opera, short story, poems.

As a critic and fiction writer, he also wrote about the painful picture of the Kashmiri problems post-1947 in his literary works.

Kamil is considered as one of the most multifaceted literary luminaries from the region.



Rehman Rahi (1925 - Present)

The sole Kashmiri to be bestowed with Jnanpith, the highest literary award of India, Rahi began his career as

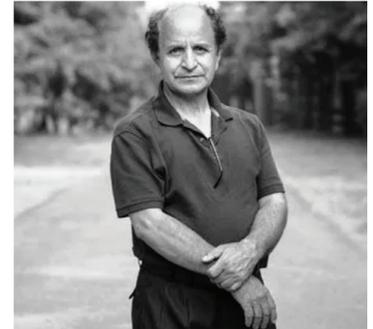
The sole Kashmiri to be bestowed with Jnanpith, the highest literary award of India, Rahi began his career as a government clerk and, getting closely associated with the progressive writers' movement, he's now considered arguably the greatest living Kashmiri poet.

a government clerk and, getting closely associated with the progressive writers' movement, he's now considered arguably the greatest living Kashmiri poet.

Like Dinanath Nadim, he also has been heavily influenced by Marxist thoughts. Rahi's literary works also drew influence from the former.

In his poems, Rahi mostly talks about the day to day problems in a commoner's life and predicament a common Kashmiri undergoes.

Some of his major published works are Sana-Wani Saaz, Sukhok Soda, Kalam-e-Rahi, Nawroz-i-Saba.



Shafi Shauq (1950 - Present)

Renowned poet and critic, Mohammed Shafi Shauq is from modern day Kashmir, who definitely has been credited with redefining the origin of Kashmiri language.

As a literary heavyweight, Shauq believes that Kashmiri is a different language (than any South Asian language) deriving its origin from Greek-Latin languages rather than Sanskrit or any Asian language as commonly believed.

A former University of Kashmir professor, Shauq has compiled and written Kaesher Lugaat, a complete dictionary of Kashmiri language which is considered as the most accomplished work in Kashmir language.

He has authored, edited and translated over forty-seven books in Kashmiri, English, Urdu and Hindi. Prof. Shauq has received several National and State awards like the Best Book Award (1982), Sahitya Akademi Award in Creative Writing (2006), Bharti Bhasha Saman Award (CIIL, 2007), Sahitya Akademi Translation Award (2007), Best Teacher Award (2009) and Ahad Zargar Award (2011).

Today Is World Book Day: Why Don't We Celebrate It In Kashmir?

India is among one of the ten countries that account for almost three quarters of the world's illiterate adults: UNESCO



AZRA MUFTI

Azra Mufti is the author of 'Tearful Pages and Shattered Dreams' and a research scholar in Management Studies.

World Book Day, also known as World Book and Copyright Day, is an annual event celebrated on 23 April. UNESCO observes the day to promote a culture of reading and publishing. It coincides with the death anniversary of William Shakespeare and several other prominent authors.

I have found very few schools in Kashmir celebrate this day and it does not get the treatment that it deserves. Book day should be celebrated in schools, colleges and universities to make students realise the importance of reading and inculcate the habit of book reading. It is unfortunate that the habit of reading is seeing a sharp decline since the advent of social media and with the electronic gadgets robbing us of the fun of holding a book in our hands.

According to National Literacy Trust, the number of children reading books has fallen down to 26 percent in 2020 as compared to 43 percent in 2015. Their annual survey shows that the more that can be done to develop and sustain children and young people's intrinsic motivation to read, the more success they will enjoy in future. Book day should thus be seen as a platform where authors, writers, poets and readers come together to share their love of reading and writing. In schools especially, activities should

be organised where students share their favourite characters, induce role-plays, conduct book reviews and organise book quiz. The importance of book day in schools will help students realise the importance of this day and they will pick the habit of book reading at an appropriate age.

Sub-continental society is still feudal in nature with the societies divided into haves and have nots. Opportunities of reading are also not evenly distributed. Poor people don't have access to quality education or literature and thus do not have choices that concern reading. There is a small section that has inculcated the habit of vernacular reading. Iceland, for example, on the other hand is one among the top literate nations and is continuously expanding its literary horizons. According to a survey conducted by Icelandic Literature Centre, women read about three to four books in a month and men read about two. No doubt that Iceland is one of the happiest and peaceful nations on earth. UNESCO has given warning of "legacy of literacy" in developing nations which costs them billions of dollars a year. According to its report, India is among one of the ten countries that account for almost three quarters of the world's illiterate adults. Education funding should be shifted towards early primary education

and reading initiatives.

There is a need to take books to the people rather than waiting for the people to come to the books. Unfortunately, with the advent of internet, children prefer to listen audio books or e-books but reading a hard copy has its own perks, it is like having a conversation with the brightest minds that ever lived on earth. A recent scholastic survey found that only 32 percent of children read 24 non-academic books annually which is really heartening. Students must be encouraged to look book reading as a fun activity rather than a chore. The demographic dividends cannot be reaped if we do not improve our literacy rates and readership.

In Kashmir, the government and non governmental institutions should start the trend of book fairs. Private organisations should come forward and open some book clubs to promote readers and reading. Book promotion centres should come up to promote budding writers and readers and for those who cannot afford to buy quality and expensive books. A dedicated team should come forward to reach to the marginalised sections of society and help them read.

"I have always imagined paradise as a kind of library" Jorge Luis Borges

AS PEOPLE STAY HOME, Earth Turns Wilder And Cleaner

Agencies

CHICAGO- An unplanned grand experiment is changing Earth.

As people across the globe stay home to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, the air has cleaned up, albeit temporarily.

Smog stopped choking New Delhi, one of the most polluted cities in the world, and India's getting views of sights not visible in decades.

Nitrogen dioxide pollution in the northeastern United States is down 30 per cent.

Rome air pollution levels from mid-March to mid-April were down 49pc from a year ago. Stars seem more visible at night.

People are also noticing animals in places and at times they don't usually. Coyotes have meandered along downtown Chicago's Michigan Avenue and near San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge in US. A puma roamed the streets of Santiago, Chile. Goats took over a town in Wales, United Kingdom. In India, already daring wildlife has become bolder with hungry monkeys entering homes and opening refrigerators to look for food.

When people stay home, Earth becomes cleaner and wilder.

"It is giving us this quite extraordinary insight into just how much of a mess we humans are making of our beautiful planet," says conservation scientist Stuart Pimm of Duke University. "This is giving us an opportunity to magically see how much bet-

ter it can be."

Chris Field, director of the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment, assembled scientists to assess the ecological changes happening with so much of humanity housebound. Scientists, stuck at home like the rest of us, say they are eager to explore unexpected changes in weeds, insects, weather patterns, noise and light pollution. Italy's government is working on an ocean expedition to explore sea changes from the lack of people.

"In many ways we kind of whacked the Earth system with a sledgehammer and now we see what Earth's response is," Field says.

Researchers are tracking dramatic drops in traditional air pollutants, such as nitrogen dioxide, smog and tiny particles. These types of pollution kill up to 7 million people a year worldwide, according to Health Effects Institute president Dan Greenbaum.

The air from Boston to Washington DC is its cleanest since a NASA satellite started measuring nitrogen dioxide in 2005, says NASA atmospheric scientist Barry Lefer. Largely caused by burning of fossil fuels, this pollution is short-lived, so the air gets cleaner quickly.

Compared to the previous five years, March air pollution is down 46pc in Paris, France, 35pc in Bengaluru, India, 38pc in Sydney, Australia, 29pc in Los Angeles, US, 26pc in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and 9pc in Durban, South Africa, NASA measurements show.

"We're getting a glimpse of

what might happen if we start switching to non-polluting cars," Lefer says.

Cleaner air has been most noticeable in India and China. On April 3, residents of Jalandhar, a city in north India's Punjab, woke up to a view not seen for decades: snow-capped Himalayan peaks more than 100 miles away.

Cleaner air means stronger lungs for asthmatics, especially children, says Dr Mary Prunicki, director of air pollution and health research at the Stanford University School of Medicine. And she notes early studies also link coronavirus severity to people with bad lungs and those in more polluted areas, though it's too early to tell which factor is stronger.

The greenhouse gases that trap heat and cause climate change stay in the atmosphere for 100 years or more, so the pandemic shutdown is unlikely to affect global warming, says Breakthrough Institute climate scientist Zeke Hausfather. Carbon dioxide levels are still rising, but not as fast as last year.

Aerosol pollution, which doesn't stay airborne long, is also dropping. But aerosols cool the planet so NASA climate scientist Gavin Schmidt is investigating whether their falling levels may be warming local temperatures for now.

Stanford's Field says he's most intrigued by increased urban sightings of coyotes, pumas and other wildlife that are becoming video social media staples. Boar-like



“IN MANY WAYS WE KIND OF WHACKED THE EARTH SYSTEM with a sledgehammer and now we see what Earth's response is,”

javelinas congregated outside of a Arizona shopping centre. Even New York City birds seem hungrier and bolder.

In Adelaide, Australia, police shared a video of a kangaroo hoping around a mostly empty downtown, and a pack of jack-

als occupied an urban park in Tel Aviv, Israel.

We're not being invaded. The wildlife has always been there, but many animals are shy, Duke's Pimm says. They come out when humans stay home.

For sea turtles across the globe,

humans have made it difficult to nest on sandy beaches. The turtles need to be undisturbed and emerging hatchlings get confused by beachfront lights, says David Godfrey, executive director of the Sea Turtle Conservancy.

But with lights and people

away, this year's sea turtle nesting so far seems much better from India to Costa Rica to Florida, Godfrey says.

"There's some silver lining for wildlife in what otherwise is a fairly catastrophic time for humans," he says.

Hygiene Rules For Babies Every Parent Should Follow

Agencies

NEW DELHI: As people adopt social distancing measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, every parent should know that newborns are most prone to infections as their immune system is still developing, and hence, they should be protected from infection-causing germs and bacteria.

Simple tips like washing your hands before feeding your baby, after changing a nappy, after touching pets or any surface and not mixing baby's clothes with that of any adult's can go a long way in protecting your baby from infections, health experts said.

These measures need to be followed every day, not just during the period of pandemic.

"Hygiene plays a key role in keeping your baby healthy. It reduces the chance of your baby falling ill due to the germs and virus she is exposed to every day. So, to ensure baby's safety, parents should maintain good hygiene, especially mothers, since the baby spends a lot of time with her," said Dr. Prathibha Babshet, Ayurveda expert, The Himalaya Drug Company.

Your hands carry germs and bacteria that most often cause common cold, flu, and other infections.

Washing your hands properly and regularly for a minimum of 20



seconds with water and soap is essential to remove harmful bacteria and germs, Dr. Prathibha said.

It is equally important to encourage your toddler to wash hands. Keep a sanitizer with you at all times, just in case you do not have the option to wash your hands, she said.

While your baby is playing, crawling, or running, she comes in contact with floor surfaces and almost everything in the house. This exposes her to all kinds of bacteria. Therefore, make sure to clean surfaces with disinfectants, the Ayurveda expert advised.

New mothers should also re-

member that it is natural for your baby to create a mess while crawling, playing, or eating.

A good bath is necessary to keep your baby clean and tidy. Make sure you replace your baby's bath towel every 3-4 months, she said, adding that it is equally important for the mother to maintain basic hygiene, which will prevent germs from passing on to the baby.

As baby's clothes and diapers get soiled every other hour, make sure you change the diaper every 2-3 hours and clean or wipe the baby's bottom also. Wash your baby's clothes regu-

larly and keep them sanitised. Be sure not to mix baby clothes with yours or any adult's, since germs can be transmitted from those to your baby's clothes.

You can opt for a baby laundry detergent which is effective and gentle on baby's clothes and formulated with naturally derived cleansing agents, herbs with antibacterial properties, and is free from phosphorus, parabens, SLS/SLES/ ALS, synthetic color, added bleach, and silicates, Dr. Prathibha said.

Keeping your nails long can cause a bacterial infection because dirt can accumulate in your nails.

Air Pollution Linked Again To High COVID-19 Deaths

Agencies

LONDON- In yet another study linking air pollution with high rate of coronavirus mortality, German researchers have found that elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide in the air may be associated with a high number of deaths from novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Nitrogen dioxide is an air pollutant that damages the human respiratory tract. For many years it has been known to cause many types of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases in humans.

The study, published in the journal Hypertension, combines satellite data on air pollution and air currents with confirmed deaths related to COVID-19 and reveals that regions with permanently high levels of pollution have significantly more deaths than other regions.

"Since the novel coronavirus also affects the respiratory tract, it is reasonable to assume that there might be a correlation between air pollution and the number of deaths from COVID-19," said study researcher



Dr Yaron Ogen from the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (MLU) in Germany.

In his latest study, the geoscientist combined three sets of data.

This included the levels of regional nitrogen dioxide pollution measured by the European Space Agency's (ESA) Sentinel 5P satellite, which continuously monitors air pollution on earth.

Based on this data, the researchers produced a global overview for regions with high and prolonged amounts of nitrogen dioxide pollution.

"I looked at the values for January and February of this year, before the corona outbreaks in

Europe began," explained Ogen. He combined this data with data from the US weather agency NOAA on vertical airflows. His premise is that in motion, the pollutants near the ground are also more disseminated.

However, if the air tends to stay near the ground, this will also apply to the pollutants in the air, which are then more likely to be inhaled by humans in greater amounts and thus lead to health problems.

Using this data, the researcher was able to identify hotspots around the world with high levels of air pollution and simultaneously low levels of air movement.

Antibodies May Provide A New Treatment For OCD

Agencies

LONDON- Mental health conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) could be treated in a new way using drugs that target the immune system, research suggests.

Published in the journal Brain, Behavior and Immunity, the study found that patients suffering from (OCD) have increased levels of a protein called Immuno-moodulin (Imood) in their lymphocytes, a type of immune cell.

"Our findings overturn a lot of

conventional thinking about mental health disorders being solely caused by the central nervous system," said study lead author Fulvio D'Acquisto from the University of Roehampton in the UK.

According to the researchers, mice with high levels of this protein was also found to exhibit behaviours that are characteristic of anxiety and stress, such as digging and excessive grooming.

When they treated the mice with an antibody that neutralised Imood, the animals' anxiety levels reduced.

Early Referrals By General Physicians May Help Cancer Patients Survive Longer

Agencies

LONDON - Early referrals by General Physicians (GP) are likely to increase the lifespan of cancer patients, suggests a new study conducted by the researchers of King's College London and National Institute for Health Research. The analysis of 1.4 million cancer patients in England published in the British Journal of General Practice,

led by King's College London and Public Health England (PHE), found that cancer patients from the highest referring GP practices had a lower mortality rate.

Cancer patients from these same practices were also more likely to be diagnosed at an earlier stage for breast, lung and prostate cancer.

"As a GP, considering a cancer diagnosis is not easy. A typical full-time

GP would have 8-9 new cancer cases per year but sees many patients who have symptoms which could be due to cancer," said Dr Thomas Round, from King's College London and PHE.

"The urgent referral, or two-week wait pathway, is very helpful for both patients, with potentially worrying symptoms, and their GPs who can fast track them to have a specialist review or tests.



Trump Demands Harvard Pay Back \$8.6M

Agencies

Washington: Harvard says it has no intention of paying back nearly \$9 million in coronavirus relief aid, despite President Trump's demand it do so. During Tuesday's coronavirus briefing, Trump said the world's wealthiest university, with an endowment fund of \$40 billion, should pay back \$8.6 million it received through the \$2.2 trillion aid package signed on March 27, reports the New York Times. "This is meant for workers, this isn't meant for one of the richest institutions ... They got to pay it back," Trump said, per the BBC. But Harvard didn't receive any money from

Arizona State University received \$63.5 million, Cornell and Columbia each received about \$12.8 million, Arkansas State University received \$9.2 million, Central Connecticut State University received \$9 million, Stanford received \$7.3 million, and Yale received \$6.8 million, per the Times. Half of the relief money was intended to go to students, with the remainder assisting in revenue losses as a result of shuttered campuses, canceled athletic events, and more. Though Harvard president Lawrence Bacow tells the Times that resources are "already stretched," the university says it has "committed that



The John Harvard statue at Harvard University, a popular tourist attraction at the campus in Cambridge, Mass, sits adorned with a medical mask as students prepared to leave campus on March 14.

a fund granting loans to small businesses. It benefited from \$14 billion in relief for higher education, distributed to institutions based on the number and income of students.

100% of these emergency higher education funds will be used to provide direct assistance to students facing urgent financial needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic."

'Coronavirus has mutated into at least 30 variants'

The Wuhan-originated novel coronavirus that globally killed around 180,000 people so far, has mutated into at least 30 different genetic variations, according to a new study in China.

The study conducted by professor Li Lanjuan and others from Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, was published in a non-peer reviewed paper released on Sunday. The researchers have detected 30 different mutations out of which 19 were new and previously undetected.

The study revealed that healthcare practitioners have vastly underestimated the ability of the virus to mutate. Incidentally, Dr Anthony Fauci, the famous immunologist and the leading member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, very early on in his presentation about the virus to US President Donald Trump had stressed the rapid mutation of the virus.

This characteristic of the virus, makes it extremely challenging for scientists to find a cure for the disease Covid-19 attacking the respiratory system, which the virus causes. The Zhejiang university study shows that different strains have affected different parts of the world, which will make it even more difficult to develop a vaccine for it.

The research study is based on the analysis of the strains from 11 randomly chosen coronavirus patients from Hangzhou, which were tested for their potency to infect and kill cells. "Here we report functional characterizations of 11 patient-derived viral isolates, all of which have at least one mutation. Importantly, these viral isolates show significant variation in cytopathic effects and viral load, up to 270-fold differences, when infecting Vero-E6 cells," the paper said.

Li Lanjuan and his colleagues in the paper wrote, "Sars-CoV-2 has acquired mutations capable of substantially changing its pathogenicity." The aggressive strains killed the human cells fastest, the study said.



Agencies



Muslims Try To Keep Ramzan Spirit Amid COVID-19 Restrictions

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: Every year during Ramzan, the Light of Muhammad Mosque sets up long tables on the street and dishes up free meals at sunset for the poor to break their daily fast. It's a charity that many rely on in this impoverished district on the edge of the Egyptian capital.

But it's too dangerous in this era of the coronavirus in Egypt and in many Muslim countries, such Tables of the Compassionate have been barred.

So the mosque, which like others in Egypt had to shut its doors as a precaution against the virus, will use the funds that would have gone into the free communal tables to distribute packed meals and cash to those in need.

"We hope this could ease their suffering, said Sheikh Abdel-Rahman, the muezzin of the mosque in the district of Bahtim.

As Ramzan begins with the new moon later this week, Muslims around the world are trying to maintain the

cherished rituals of Islam's holiest month without further spreading the outbreak.

At the heart of Ramzan is the sunrise-to-sunset fast, meant to instill contemplation of God. But alongside the hardship of abstaining from food and drink for hours every day, the month sweeps everyone up into a communal spirit. Families and friends gather for large meals at sunset, known as iftars.

In some countries, cafes and cultural events are packed late into the night. Worshippers go to mosques for hours of evening prayers, or taraweeh. Many devote themselves to charity.

Muslims now find themselves cut off from much of what makes the month special as authorities fight the pandemic. Many countries have closed mosques and banned taraweeh to prevent crowds. Prominent clerics, including in Saudi Arabia, have urged people to pray at home.

Governments are trying

to balance restrictions with traditions.

Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Egypt loosened their curfews, moving them back to start anywhere from a half hour to 90 minutes after sunset. That gives time to get to Iftar, but not much: people can't go too far to visit others for the meal unless they're prepared to stay the night.

Other countries have banned long internal travel. Syria gave people a window of two days this week to move between provinces, then restored its ban.

In Malaysia, Mohamad Fadhil said he was resigned to missing out on the surge in business at the Ramzan bazaar, where he and other sellers hawk food and drinks in crowded open-air markets. The bazaars have been shut down. But he hoped the country's lockdown will be eased so he can bring his 7-year-old daughter home. She was at his parents about an hour away when the lockdown began six weeks ago, trapping her there.

Pak doctors urge govt to review its decision to allow congregational prayers in mosques

Sajjad Hussain | PTI

Islamabad: Pakistan's senior doctors based in the county and abroad have urged the Imran Khan government to review its decision to allow congregational prayers in mosques during the month of Ramzan amid the coronavirus outbreak which has infected more than 10,000 people.

The Pakistan government has succumbed to pressure from the hardline clerics and allowed conditional congregational prayers in mosques during Ramzan, endangering the drive to curb the spread of coronavirus that has killed more than 175,000 people worldwide.

In a letter to the government as well as religious leader, the doctors asked to limit the prayers to 3-5 persons - a practice already going on to check the coronavirus outbreak.

Indus Hospital CEO Dr Abdul Bari Khan confirmed that the letter had been sent to express fears and reservations of the medical community.

The doctors wrote that mostly aged people of 50 years and above go to mosques and referred to videos that surfaced in the past 48 hours had shown that more than 80 per cent of the people attending prayers in mosques were mostly in their 60s and 70s, Dawn online reported.

"Clearly this has resulted in the violation of the first and foremost principle of preventing the spread of the virus in the most vulnerable group" of elderly people, stated the letter, which has been endorsed by the Pakistan Islamic Medical Association (PIMA).

"With Ramzan approaching, we would understandably expect higher number of namazis (worshippers) attending the prayers. Moreover, long Taraweeh prayers and waiting times will lead to prolonged gatherings. It is all but certain that this will cause significant mayhem..." it added.

Hospitals in Karachi have started experiencing a "significant influx of corona positive patients", the letter said. "We anticipate these num-

bers and resultant mortality to expand exponentially in the next few days."

"This will undeniably result in significant pressure on our already compromised health system." The doctors explained that increased exposure to the virus increases the likelihood of getting infected and, as a consequence, of complications and death. "We fear that allowing congregational prayers in larger number in our mosques may contribute to such fatal outcomes," the letter stated.

It expressed the fear that all of the above issues will have the combined effect of jeopardising the "reputation of Islam and that of our ulema" and will lead to "unwanted loss of lives".

"In these circumstances, if COVID-19 disease becomes an epidemic in Pakistan and the government loses control of its management in the country, it will not just be a failure of Pakistan as a country but it may have substantial unwanted and unforeseen effects on the whole Muslim ummah,"

IRGC shoots Iran's first military satellite into orbit

Agencies

nication capabilities.

Tehran: Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has successfully launched and placed the country's first military satellite into the orbit.

The elite force fired the satellite — dubbed Nour (Light)-1 — aboard Qased (Carrier) satellite carrier during an operation that was staged in Dasht-e Kavir, Iran's sprawling central desert, on Wednesday, the Corps' Sepah News reported.

The satellite was placed into the orbit 425 kilometers above Earth's surface.

The Tasnim News Agency, meanwhile, carried a report outlining some details of the launch and the country's space activities.

The report described Nour-1 as Iran's first multi-purpose satellite with application in the defense industry among other areas.

The launch operation, it noted, was carried out by the IRGC's Aerospace Division from a launch station situated in the desert plain's Shahroud region.

The report specified Qased as the country's first three-stage satellite launcher to successfully pass all its tests.

The agency said the country's aerospace program was expected to gather pace following the launch. Over the next several years, it said, the country was expected to deploy its military space activities towards taking care of its relevant telecommunication purposes, including promotion of reconnaissance and safe commu-

"IRGC now a space force"

Speaking on the launch, IRGC Chief Commander Major General Hossein Salami said, "Today, we can observe the world from space," congratulating Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and the Iranian people on the Islamic establishment's achievement.

The launch, he said, served as an acknowledgment of the "empowerment approach" that has been advised by the Leader.

General Salami noted that the development showed that the Islamic Republic was capable of securing "remarkable" achievements that warranted international acclaim in whatever area that the country would choose to explore.

"The satellite's successful launch enhanced new aspects of the Islamic Republic's defensive might. By God's grace, the Corps turned into a space force today," the commander said.

General Salami further characterized the achievement as a strategic gain that expanded "the realm of our capabilities." Setting foot in the space was a "necessity" for a powerful defense force like the IRGC, he added.

The success translates into a "mutation" in expansion of the country's intelligence reach and command, General Salami said, noting that the orbiter could now come to the country's assistance in "intelligence warfare."

Scientists observe smash-up around nearby star



Agencies

WASHINGTON: Scientists have observed what appears to be the aftermath of a violent collision between two planetary building blocks orbiting a large and luminous star, a glimpse of the type of carnage that may have been commonplace early in our solar system's history.

The apparent crash between two icy bodies, each about 200 kilometres wide, occurred around a star called Fomalhaut, located a relatively close 25 light-years from Earth, that is about twice the mass and 17 times the luminosity of the sun, the researchers said. A light year is the distance light travels in a year, 9.5 trillion kilometres.

The two parties in this celestial smash-up may have been objects called planetesimals that are thought to join together to eventually form

planets during a planetary system's formative stages, though in this case the two were destroyed.

"We have never witnessed a collision of this scale anywhere, and we know that collision activity in the early solar system was vital in shaping it," said astronomer Andrs Gsgr of the University of Arizona's Steward Observatory, lead author of the research published this week in a journal, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"The Earth-Moon system formed in a violent collision, though not in one that destroyed both bodies. We would not be here to talk about this system if it weren't for a large-scale collision in the history of the early solar system," Gsgr added.

The two objects were substantially smaller than Earth's moon, but larger than the two small moons of Mars — Phobos and Deimos.

Pakistan PM Imran Khan tests negative for coronavirus

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan may go into self-quarantine after it emerged that he came in contact with an individual who tested positive for the novel coronavirus last week.

On Wednesday, the PM underwent a Covid-19 test.

A team of doctors from the Shaikat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital collected samples from Khan and the result was negative, Ary news reported today.

Sources said that Khan met Faisal Edhi, the chairman of Edhi Foundation, the world's largest volunteer ambulance network, on April 15.

After meeting the Prime Minister, Faisal developed flu like symptoms and tested



positive for the virus the following day, sources said.

Faisal is the son of Abdul Sattar Edhi, the noted Pakistani philanthropist.

Pakistani newspaper Dawn reported on Tuesday quoting Shaikat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital CEO Faisal Sultan, who is

also Khan's personal physician, as saying that the premier was "currently occupied with a cabinet meeting" but "as soon as he is finished", he will recommend that he "gets tested and follow all the protocols in place".

Faisal however, according to his son who spoke to the Dawn newspaper, is in self-isolation and his health remains fine.

He has donated Rs 1 crore to the Prime Minister Imran Khan fund for Pakistan's fight against the pandemic.

The Edhi foundation is also helping the coronavirus victims in their burial services.

So far 197 people have died and over 9,500 tested positive for the disease in Pakistan.

Saudi Princess: I'm in Jail for No Reason

A senior Saudi royal says she and a daughter are being held in a Riyadh prison without charge despite repeated pleas to her cousin, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Princess Basmah bint Saud bin Abdulaziz al-Saud—a granddaughter of Saudi Arabia's founding monarch and the youngest daughter of King Saud, who ruled from 1953 to 1964—demanded their release in a series of tweets late Wednesday, per the BBC, though they have since been deleted. Her plea, said to have come from inside al-Ha'ir prison, surprised some extended family members. While the 52-year-old human rights advocate hadn't been seen in more than a year, per



the Guardian, some senior royals believed she was recovering from an illness, while others thought she was

under house arrest.

It's now believed Basmah and her daughter were detained while trying to leave

the country for Switzerland in March 2019. Basmah, who claimed the trip was for urgent medical treatment, now describes her health as "deteriorating to an extent that is severe, and that could lead to my death," per the BBC. She claims to have not received medical care. Human Rights Watch says the case is further evidence that the crown prince is working to silence "all forms of critics," but especially women. Basmah, who previously lived in London, called on Saudi Arabia to swap its absolute monarchy for a constitutional monarchy, as in the UK. She also worked to advance women's rights in the country and advocated for restraint in the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

Sprinkl Row: Kerala Forms Committee To Examine Data Privacy Of COVID-19 Patients

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Amid opposition charges, the Kerala government on Tuesday constituted a two-member committee to examine whether the privacy of personal and sensitive data of COVID-19 patients has been protected under the agreement entered by it with US-based IT firm Sprinkl.

The committee, headed by former Special IT Secretary M Madhavan Nambiar and former health secretary Rajeev Sadanandan, will also ascertain whether adequate procedures were followed while finalising the arrangements with the private company.

The Opposition Congress

and reasonable considering the extraordinary and critical situation faced by the state, it said.

Meanwhile, the Kerala High Court on Tuesday asked the state government to file its reply by April 24 on a plea seeking to quash its contract with the US-based firm.

Expressing concern over the confidentiality of the citizen's data processed by a third party, the court sought to know why the sanction of the law department was not taken before finalising the agreement.

The court hailed the state government's fight against COVID-19, but said it is concerned



has been levelling charges that the collection of data by the US firm violated the fundamental rights of the patients.

In its order, state government said it had initiated steps to set up a Data Analytics platform to integrate data from various sources available in the government to meet the "exigency of a massive and unprecedented surge of epidemic".

The committee will also examine whether deviations, if any, are fair, justified

about data confidentiality.

The government informed the court that the agreement with Sprinkl has safeguards for data protection "as per standard practices of software as a service model."

The ward-level committees, set up by the government for the anti-coronavirus fight, collect information of those under home isolation, the elderly and those at the risk of the disease, using a questionnaire and later uploads it on the server of the private agency.

'Virtual Wedding' A Hit In The Times Of Coronavirus

NEW DELHI: Avinash and Kirti had an online wedding on April 14 which was virtually attended by 80 of their close friends and relatives. They also held an online mehendi, and a sangeet ceremony apart from the marriage which was performed according to the Hindu custom wherein a 'pandit' (priest) was chanting Hindu mantras while being connected on a video call.



The lockdown has forced many couples to postpone their weddings planned for March and April. But those who hold their fixed wedding date close to their heart and want to get married on the same date amid this nation shutdown are not hesitant to try the idea of 'virtual wedding'.

"We had a grand wedding planned in Satna, Madhya Pradesh, with over 8,000 expected guests. But things got changed a bit. We did not want our wedding to go beyond April. So we thought of an online wedding. We had a proper Hindu marriage but online. And we are happy about it," said Avinash.

Mumbai-based Sushen and Kirti from Bareilly also had an arranged marriage online on April 19. Sushen said: "Even if the lockdown gets lifted in the next few days, I doubt we will be allowed to organise a social gathering like a marriage anytime soon. We did not want to wait for our wedding. And being responsible citizens, we felt this was one way to maintain social distance and at the same time making sure that we had all the fun like a typical wedding. So it was like an entire party we had online. It was a really cool idea and being a part of it is much more exciting to us."

Their weddings were facilitated by Shaadi.com who has introduced 'Wedding from Home' service to help couple tie the knot by making arrangements for all the online ceremonies even during the time of coronavirus when social distancing is the need of the hour.

lowed to organise a social gathering like a marriage anytime soon. We did not want to wait for our wedding. And being responsible citizens, we felt this was one way to maintain social distance and at the same time making sure that we had all the fun like a typical wedding. So it was like an entire party we had online. It was a really cool idea and being a part of it is much more exciting to us."

Their weddings were facilitated by Shaadi.com who has introduced 'Wedding from Home' service to help couple tie the knot by making arrangements for all the online ceremonies even during the time of coronavirus when social distancing is the need of the hour.



India's Death Toll Due To COVID-19 Rises To 652; Cases Cross 20,000-Mark

NEW DELHI: The death toll due to COVID-19 rose to 652 and the number of cases to 20,471 in the country on Wednesday, according to the Union health ministry.

The number of active COVID-19 cases is 15,859, while 3,959 people have been cured and discharged, and one patient has migrated, the ministry said.

The total number of cases includes 77 foreign nationals.

Of the total deaths, Maharashtra tops the tally with 251 fatalities, followed by Gujarat at 90, Madhya Pradesh at 76, Delhi at 47, Rajasthan at 25, Telangana at 23 and Andhra Pradesh at 22.

The death toll has reached 20 in Uttar Pradesh while Tamil Nadu has reported 18 deaths and Karnataka has registered 17 fatalities due to COVID-19.

Punjab has registered 16 deaths while West Bengal has reported 15 fatalities so far.

The disease has claimed five lives in Jammu and Kashmir, while Kerala, Jharkhand and Haryana have recorded

three COVID-19 deaths each.

Bihar has reported two deaths, while Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and Assam have reported one fatality each, according to the ministry data.

However, a PTI tally of the figures reported by various states as on Tuesday evening showed at least 646 deaths in the country.

There has been a lag in the Union Health Ministry figures, compared to the number of deaths announced by different states, which officials attribute to procedural delays in assigning the cases to individual states.

According to the health ministry's data updated in the morning, the highest number of confirmed cases in the country are from Maharashtra at 5,218, followed by Gujarat at 2,178, Delhi at 2,156, Rajasthan at 1,659, Tamil Nadu at 1,596 and Madhya Pradesh at 1,552.

The number of COVID-19 cases has gone up to 1,294 in Uttar Pradesh, 928 in Telangana and 757 in Andhra Pradesh. The number of cases has risen to 427 in Kerala, 423 in West

Bengal, 418 in Karnataka, 380 in Jammu and Kashmir, 254 in Haryana and 245 in Punjab.

Bihar has reported 126 coronavirus cases, while Odisha has 79 such cases.

Forty-six people have been infected with the virus in Uttarakhand followed by Jharkhand with 45 cases.

Himachal Pradesh has 39 cases and Chhattisgarh has 36 while Assam has registered 35 infections so far.

Chandigarh has 27 COVID-19 cases, Ladakh 18, while 16 cases have been reported from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Meghalaya has reported 12 cases, while Goa and Puducherry have seven COVID-19 patients each.

Manipur and Tripura have two cases each, while Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh have reported a case each.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the ICMR," the ministry said on its website.

It also mentioned that one case of Jharkhand has been reassigned to Bihar after reconciliation. PTI

ICMR Examining Quality Of Rapid Antibody Test Kits

NEW DELHI: India's apex medical research body ICMR on Tuesday advised states to stop using the rapid antibody test kits for next two days till it examines their quality in the wake of complaints that they are not fully effective.

Last week, India procured five lakh rapid antibody test kits from two Chinese firms and they were distributed to several states reporting rising cases of coronavirus infection.

Rajasthan government on Tuesday said that the kits were giving out inaccurate results.

At a press briefing, Head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases at Indian ICMR, Dr Raman R Gangakhedkar, said the companies which supplied the kits will be asked to replace them if the kits are found to be faulty.

The Indian Council of

reports about quality of Chinese medical equipment, spokesperson in the Chinese embassy Ji Rong last week said China attaches great importance to quality of medical products.

"We hope that foreign buyers can choose products certified by Chinese regulatory authorities and with production qualifications when importing relevant products," Ji had said.

She said the Chinese authorities introduced stricter regulatory measures, requiring exporters to declare that their supplies have obtained the registration certificate for medical device from the State Food and Drug Administration and meet the quality standards of the importing country.

About questions over quality of the tests, Gangakhedkar said that these were first general tests and may show variations.

It has been just three-and-a-half months since the disease appeared and so any test will have to be refined further, he added.

At present, the government uses the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests to detect coronavirus from throat or nasal swab samples of people. These take around five to six hours to show the results.

In the rapid antibody tests, the blood samples of suspected patients are taken, and it normally takes around 15-30 minutes to give the result.

The government has recommended the use of rapid antibody tests in hotspot areas.

"It is to be used for surveillance and for epidemiological purposes in such areas. The RT-PCR test is the gold standard for frontline test and antibody test cannot replace this test. Utility of rapid antibody test is primarily for assessing prevalence of infection in a particular area," officials earlier had said.



Medical Research (ICMR) has been the nodal medical body in the country's fight against the pandemic.

"We have received complaint from one state and so far discussed the issue with three states. High variations ranging from 6 to 71 per cent have been reported between the results of the rapid tests and RT-PCR tests. We will advise states not to use these testing kits for the next two days," he said.

These kits will be tested and validated in the field by teams from our eight institutes after which we will issue a clear-cut advisory for the states. If there is some fault in the batch, we will ask the company to replace the kits," Gangakhedkar said.

Officials clearly indicated that the kits over which questions have been raised are from China.

Rajasthan health minister Raghu Sharma on Tuesday said the kits gave only 5.4 per cent accurate results against the expectation of 90 per cent accuracy and therefore were of no benefit.

In the wake of adverse

reports about quality of Chinese medical equipment, spokesperson in the Chinese embassy Ji Rong last week said China attaches great importance to quality of medical products.

"We hope that foreign buyers can choose products certified by Chinese regulatory authorities and with production qualifications when importing relevant products," Ji had said.

She said the Chinese authorities introduced stricter regulatory measures, requiring exporters to declare that their supplies have obtained the registration certificate for medical device from the State Food and Drug Administration and meet the quality standards of the importing country.

About questions over quality of the tests, Gangakhedkar said that these were first general tests and may show variations.

It has been just three-and-a-half months since the disease appeared and so any test will have to be refined further, he added.

At present, the government uses the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests to detect coronavirus from throat or nasal swab samples of people. These take around five to six hours to show the results.

In the rapid antibody tests, the blood samples of suspected patients are taken, and it normally takes around 15-30 minutes to give the result.

The government has recommended the use of rapid antibody tests in hotspot areas.

"It is to be used for surveillance and for epidemiological purposes in such areas. The RT-PCR test is the gold standard for frontline test and antibody test cannot replace this test. Utility of rapid antibody test is primarily for assessing prevalence of infection in a particular area," officials earlier had said.

Separate Jails For Jamaatis, Coronavirus Suspects In UP

LUCKNOW: The Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh has decided to set up 23 temporary jails in various districts to lodge Tablighi Jamaat members and suspected COVID-19 positive persons who have been arrested during police raids.

The decision was taken after six inmates of Moradabad jail tested positive on Tuesday, leading to the possibility of other prisoners also getting infected.

Five out of the six who tested positive for Corona are those have been arrested for attack on a medical team in Moradabad on April 15.

Additional Chief Secretary (home) Avanish Awasthi said that in a fortnight-long drive, the state police have identified 3,000 Tablighi Jamaat members in 20 districts who arrived in Uttar Pradesh after attending the congregation organized in Nizamuddin Markaz in Delhi.

The samples of all the Tablighi Jamaat members and their family members and contacts were sent for a laboratory test.

The report released by the state health department on Tuesday said out of the 1184 positive cases in the state, 814 were members of Tablighi Jamaat.



The state police registered cases against the Tablighi Jamaat members, he said.

The police have also arrested 325 Tablighi Jamaat members who arrived from foreign countries. The cops registered 45 FIRs against them and seized their passports for violation of visa norms.

All the Tablighi Jamaat members of foreign origin would also be lodged in temporary jails, the additional chief secretary home said.

The state police are continuing to carry out raids in various districts to search for suspected Tablighi Jamaat members and suspected Corona positive people who are in hiding. IANS

Mithun Chakraborty's Father Basantakumar Dies At 95 In Mumbai, Actor Stuck In Bengaluru

MUMBAI: Bollywood star Mithun Chakraborty's father breathed his last in Mumbai on Tuesday, but the veteran actor is currently stranded in Bengaluru owing to the on-going COVID-19 lockdown.

Basanta Kumar Chakraborty, 95, reportedly died of renal failure after battling health problems for a while now.

Right now, the actor is trying to reach Mumbai to perform the last rites. He was in Bengaluru for a shoot, a timesofindia.com report stated. His eldest son Mahakshay, also known as



Mimoh, is in Mumbai along with the rest of the family.

Mithun, whose real name is Gouranga Chakraborty, is the eldest among the four children of Basanta Kumar Chakraborty, who is survived by his wife Santimoyee Chakraborty. IANS

Spotlight

COVID-19: Turkish Mosque Turned Into Temporary 'Supermarket'

ISTANBUL: At the entrance of an Istanbul mosque, the racks usually reserved for the shoes of the faithful are loaded with pasta packages, oil bottles, biscuits - like a supermarket.

But they aren't for sale. Instead they are destined for the needy, hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

The sign on the mosque's window asks anyone who can to leave something, and says those in need can take something.

Abdul Samet Cakir, 33, imam of the Dedeman mosque in the Sariyer district, came up with this idea of reaching out to the poor via the place of worship after Turkey suspended mass prayers in mosques until the

risk of outbreak passes.

Turkey's official death toll from the virus now stands at 2,259 after 119 more deaths were reported on Tuesday, and major cities including Istanbul will be under lockdown for four days from Thursday.

"After the suspension of mass prayers, I had an idea to revive our mosque by bringing together well-off people with the people in need," Cakir told AFP inside the mosque, where bags of food and cleaning products were piled up on the floor.

The young imam, who takes the products from the floor and places them on the shelves at the entrance, said he was inspired by a donation culture

in the Ottoman period called "charity stone" - a small pillar stone erected at certain locations of the city to connect rich people with the poor.

'Tough situation'

In this Ottoman system aimed at giving charity in a dignified manner without offending the needy, people with means would leave whatever amount they wanted in a cavity on the top of the charity stone.

Those who were in need would then take the amount they needed and leave the rest for others.

"After the coronavirus pandemic, we have thought about what we can do to help our brothers in need," said Cakir,

who would already help the poor in his neighbourhood before the outbreak.

"With the inspiration from our ancestors' 'charity stone' culture, we decided to fill the racks in our mosque with the help from our brothers with means," he added.

Cakir hangs a list on the wall of the mosque where citizens who need help write their names and telephone numbers.

The imam later sends the list to local authorities who check whether the names are really in need and his team then sends a message that they can visit the mosque and receive whatever they need: eight items at maximum.

"I am really in dire need. My

husband doesn't work. I used to clean houses but since the virus, they no longer call," Guleser Ocak, 50, told AFP.

"I wrote my name on the list before. I received a message today to pick up aid," she said. "We are in a tough situation."

'No cash'

The mosque has been providing services for two weeks and reaches out to 120 people in need per day. And the list includes over 900 people.

A maximum of two people wearing masks and gloves enter the mosque and take what they need, while others wait outside, standing a few paces from each other.

"We spread the services through



the day. We call 15 people for each social distancing and do not cause big queues," the imam said.