



Maximum : 25°C
Minimum : 12°C
Humidity : 53%

SUNSET
Today 07:14 PM
SUNRISE
Tomorrow 05:42 AM



News Digest

06TH RAMAZAN		
FIQAH	IFTAR	SEHRI
JAFARIYA	07:24	04:09
HANAFIYA	07:16	04:12

7 Injured In Handwara Leopard Attack

Srinagar: Two women were among seven people attacked and injured by a leopard in a village in north Kashmir's Kupwara district on Wednesday. A leopard barged into a house in Pohrupeth village of Handwara this afternoon and attacked the inmates, reports said. The inmates raised an alarm inviting attention of the neighbours who rushed to the house and rescued them in injured condition. The wildlife team also reached the spot. **P-02**

Face Masks Mandatory In City From May 1

Srinagar: District administration has made mandatory for all residents of Srinagar to wear masks from May 1st and any violation in this regard will be treated as offence under Disaster Management Act. In an order issued by deputy commissioner Srinagar, Dr. Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, wearing face masks has been made mandatory for all Srinagarites from May 1st. "It shall be mandatory to wear Face Mask /Face-covering at all public places including **P-02**

55 More Released After Quarantine

Srinagar: The district authorities on Wednesday discharged another batch of 55 people who completed mandatory two-week quarantine period in this capital city upon their arrival in the Valley last month. The group was under thorough medical supervision throughout their quarantine period and was discharged after clearance from doctors and health authorities, an official spokesperson said today. **P-02**

38 Shops Sealed In City

Srinagar: The district authorities on Wednesday sealed 38 shops while 12 vehicles were also confiscated for breaking lockdown orders issued by the government to combat coronavirus spread. Acting on the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Srinagar Dr Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, Tehsildars and Station House Officers (SHOs) sealed 28 shops in Shalteng, 3 in Chanpora and five others in north and south **P-02**

Govt Allows Conditional Movement Of Stranded People

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI- Migrant workers, tourists, students and other people, who are stranded in different parts of the country, were on Wednesday allowed to move to their respective destinations with certain conditions. In an order, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said buses shall be used for transport of such groups of stranded people and these vehicles will be sanitised and will have to follow safe social distancing norms in seating. "Due to lockdown, migrant workers, pilgrims, tourists, students and other persons are stranded at different places. They would be allowed to move," he said in an order issued to all states and union territories. Listing the conditions, the ministry said all states and union territories

DIETARY COUNSELLING FROM CHILDHOOD LEADS TO BETTER CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH: STUDY

A recent study has shed a positive light on promoting cardiovascular health by regular dietary counselling from infancy to early adulthood. Altogether 1,116 children and their families from Turku participated in the study starting when the children were 7 months of age. The study was published in the journal Lancet Child and Adolescent Health. Half of the children were randomly assigned to a group that received dietary counselling promoting a heart-healthy diet.....

.....LIFE & TIMES
P6

Rainawari Rumours: A Sign of Deep-Seated Stigma in Kashmir?

Sajad Rafiq

JOGHILANKER, Srinagar — A day after witnessing a quiet and controversial burial, the archetypal Old City pocket in Rainawari wore a ghostly look. Some masked men struggled to come out of the new community confines, as weary window watchers glimpsed the gloomy streets, where a bunch of cops were enforcing the regimental routine. Some of these policemen doubled as undertakers on April 28 when they gave a hushed farewell to an elderly lady. Since then, her hometown in Rainawari Srinagar is facing fake news.

Various loose texts sent out on social media tried to malign the entire family for "abandoning her". But many pricked the propaganda balloon by terming it a blatant act to create faultlines in the lockdown-ridden community during one of the most severe health emergencies in human history. "It's all rubbish," a local, introducing himself as Mushtaq Ahmed, dismissed the rumour that the elderly lady was abandoned by her family. "Her large family of around 30 members was sent to quarantine soon after she was detected carrying the coronavirus. So this argument of abandoning her just



A photo of burial that went viral on Social Media

does not hold water."

The septuagenarian woman

from Rainawari had tested positive for Covid-19 at Srinagar's CD hospital on Monday, and a day after she became the eighth Covid-19 victim in J&K. She was suffering from various ailments, including diabetes, hypertension and other comorbidities. The knee-jerk social media reaction following her death came after a picture surfaced and showed cops lowering the lady into her grave. The loose talk was apparently triggered by the absence of her family and neighbours at the graveyard. "The cops were only following the set and strict protocol for the [Covid-19] burial," Mushtaq continued. "Even as they hadn't been in

quarantine, do we really think that the family would've participated in her funeral when authorities have barred gatherings? Let's not demonise these infectious patients, and their families, like this. Anyone of us could've been at their place." Earlier, when Covid-19 positive persons and their families faced hate campaigns driven by a mindless propaganda, Dr Samia Rashid, Principal GMC Srinagar, had to put her foot down. "My message to general masses is that," she said, "please don't ostracise them [Covid-19 patients], they shouldn't be treated as untouchables, they don't have any disease, they are part of us, **PAGE 02**

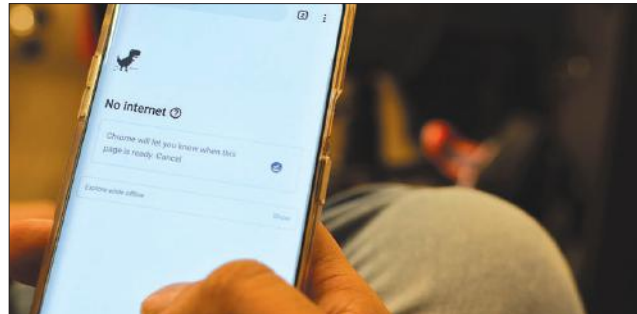
Have Right to Curb Internet Freedom: J&K Govt to SC

Internet 'Not a Right in Itself': J&K Govt Defends 4G Ban

NEW DELHI: The J&K government has justified in the Supreme Court its nine-month long and continuing ban on high-speed mobile internet in Kashmir by calling internet "as an enabler of rights and not a right in itself."

Besides, the government has also claimed that the "right to access the internet is not a fundamental right."

According to the legal news website Barandbench.com Supreme Court asked the Jammu and Kashmir government to explain why the internet speed has been restricted to 2G in the Valley, the



government replied that the "Right to access internet is not a fundamental right" and that the "Right to carry on trade and profession through internet can be curtailed."

The reply filed by the Principal Secretary to the Government, Home Department, of the Union Territory of J&K in a batch of petitions challenging the **PAGE 02**

THE GOVERNMENT HAS INFORMED THE TOP COURT THAT not only is the Right to internet not a fundamental right, but that the freedom of speech and expression and the freedom to carry on any trade and profession through the internet can be curtailed.

HC Closes Issues on Inadequate Testing, Internet

Seeks Report On Stranded Tourists, Labourers In Kashmir

Agencies

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir High Court has closed issue regarding insufficient testing and availability of safety equipment to healthcare professionals, observing that the government was conscious of its responsibilities and has undertaken all requisite steps.

Hearing a batch of petitions on novel coronavirus through video conference, a division bench of Chief Justice Gita Mital and Justice Rajnesh Oswal also sought a monthly report of the steps taken as regards ensuring provision of care to dependents, families of healthcare personnel, government employees engaged in COVID-19

management.

On April 16, advocate Ateeb Kanth had raised issue regarding insufficient sampling and shortage of technicians in J&K following which the court had directed government to file a response.

Sajad Amin Shah, Additional Secretary to Government, Health and Medical Education Department, filed a status report, informing court that there was no shortage of technicians for carrying out COVID-19 testing in Jammu and Kashmir and the guidelines issued by MOH&FW, Government of India and ICMR from time to time are being strictly followed. "The capacity of testing stands increased from 100 tests to 700 tests per day and are expected **PAGE 02**

Covid-19: 16 More Test Positive, J&K Tally At 581

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR- Sixteen more people tested positive for the novel coronavirus in Kashmir on Wednesday, taking the number of the Covid-19 patients across Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory to 581, said officials.

"Sixteen new cases have been reported from Kashmir in the last 24 hours," the officials said, adding that equal number of patients have recovered and were discharged from various hospitals.

Among fresh cases, nine are from Anantnag, four from Budgam and one each from Srinagar, Baramulla and Kulgam districts. The total number of positive cases in Jammu and Kashmir has now risen to 581.

Of the total number of cases reported so far, 523 are from Kashmir and 58 from **P-02**

Shopian Gunfight: 3 Militants Killed; Army Major, 3 Civilians Injured

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR- An army major was injured on the second day of encounter with militants at Melhoora village in Shopian district of south Kashmir on Wednesday morning.

Official sources said three militants have been killed while as two soldiers including an officer and several civilians were injured during the course of operation encounter at Melhoora village of Zainapora area of South Kashmir's Shopian district. The operation was declared over this morning, they said.

The Melhoora gunfight started yesterday and all three militant bodies have been recovered. Pertinently, four militants had been killed in an encounter with the army in the same village last week. Earlier, officials said that on specific inputs about the presence of militants, a cordon and search operation (CASO) was launched in

the area by joint team of forces including 55 RR and Shopian Police. During the searches, the trapped militants fired upon the

4 Security Men Injured In Nowhatta Grenade Attack

SRINAGAR: Three SSB personnel and a policeman were injured on Wednesday evening in a grenade attack in Nowhatta area of Srinagar's Old City. Suspected militants lobbed a grenade towards police personnel near the main gate of historic Jamia Masjid in Nowhatta **P-02**

advancing soldiers triggering an encounter, they said. Early today when forces were searching for third militant body at the gunfight site, the militant hiding under debris fired upon the troops. **PAGE 02**

38-Year-Old Man Shot At In Handwara

SRINAGAR- Suspected militants on Wednesday shot at a 38-year-old man in Beigh area of Kralgund Handwara in north Kashmir's Kupwara district.

A police officer said that the suspected militants barged inside the house of Ali Mohammad Beigh (38) son of Habibullah Beigh at around 8:20 pm and fired upon him, reported news agency GNS.

Ali Mohammad suffered **P-02**

Sniper Shot Injures Soldier Along LoC

KO Web Desk

SRINAGAR: An army man was injured in a sniper attack by Pakistani troops along the line of control (LoC) in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir, reports said Wednesday.

Violating ceasefire, Pakistan army fired sniper shot at army's Meera Post in Kalal **P-02**

Anti-Militancy Ops To Continue Despite Covid-19: DGP

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Despite the coronavirus pandemic, police will carry out anti-militancy operations across Jammu and Kashmir to 'bring a lasting peace' in the Union Territory, DGP Dilbagh Singh said Wednesday.

Singh, who visited Baramulla district today to take stock of Covid-19 pandemic and review security scenario said that the anti-militancy grid will continue its operations and no compromise will be made in the efforts for establishing a lasting



peace in the Union Territory, a police spokesperson said.

The DGP was accompanied by IGP Kashmir Zone Vijay Kumar.

He chaired a meeting of senior officers of police and central armed forces. Stressing for more vigil and alertness, Singh **PAGE 02**



Photos by:- Abid Bhat

Rainawari Rumours: A Sign...

anyone of us can get this illness, please respect their privacy."

But as the virus is spreading, many people are viewing each other with apprehension. "It's a basic human tendency to become overly cautious in times like this," says WasimMisgar, a research scholar from Pulwama. "But humanity should not lose its true meaning."

However, in Kashmir, where rumour-mongering is one of the biggest social problems, Covid-19 has created many stigmas in the society.

"The problem of rumour-mongering is adding to the ongoing troubles created by the existing health crisis," says Younus Khan, 28, a trader from Srinagar, who had to earlier gone into quarantine mode after one of his family members turned positive case.

"We Kashmiris exaggerate a lot and get hyper very quickly," Khan says. "In absence of authentic news and proper awareness, misinformation campaign is only taking us for a ride."

The long-drawn-out kill-switch on the high-speed internet, Khan believes, is clearly aggravating the current pandemic by fuelling rumours amid sluggish flow of the right news.

What's equally aiding this mindless campaign is a growing nonchalance of officials and reluctance of locals to talk and share facts.

While locals want to steer clear of any controversy in times of dreadful virus, the officials appear bent on imposing information embargo, apparently to keep bad press in check. Earlier, the same motive, many say, forced union territory movers and shakers to bar medics from reporting to media.

"Even as some babus are actively sharing their tweets on the situation, right and clear information is unforthcoming in Kashmir," says AtiDhar, 29, a banker from Sopore. "We're largely dependent on news coming from outside."

But such news has its own side-effects. Much of the misinformation and the current community confusion is being attributed to the national media's covid coverage.

"The corona pandemic has brought about the best in many, but also the worst in some," Dhar continues. "While the rightwing media made Tableegijamat members as corona villains, it conveniently ignored other big gatherings and human issues during the current crisis. Such a toxic TV coverage has changed the perspective of the people negatively."

Barring Tableegi factor, some perceptive barriers have cropped up in the society which was traditionally known for community spirit and support.

Few weeks ago, when a group of Kashmiri medical students returned from Bangladesh, they faced the wrath of their neighbours.

Fearing "potential corona carriers" at their doorsteps, they alerted the authorities and packed their "freaked out" neighbours to quarantine centres.

Although informing authorities about the travel history of the people coming from outside is a welcome gesture, it has also drawn some flak from a section of society, alleging that many people are becoming informers in guise of community whistleblowers.

"All this is being done to apply social distancing in letter and spirit," Dhar, the banker, says. "But then, social distancing does not mean cutting off a person from the society."

It's a mutual cooperation among people, which is the key element in the fight against Covid-19, says Dr. ShakeelSofi, a physician serving at the frontline today.

"Physical distancing should not stop various channels of communication with the Covid-19 infected patients, neither should it ostracise them," the medic says.

Mrinal Pathak contributed reporting.

Have Right to Curb Internet Freedom..

J&K Govt order dated March 26 where the internet speed was restricted to only 2G. The lead petitioner in the matter is the Foundation for Media Professionals.

The government has informed the top court that not only is the Right to internet not a fundamental right, but that the freedom of speech and expression and the freedom to carry on any trade and profession through the internet can be curtailed.

"Right to access the internet is not a fundamental right and thus the type and breadth of access for exercising the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) and/or to carry on any trade or business under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution of India (CoI) through the medium of internet can be curtailed. It is submitted that the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, public order or incitement to an offence, would certainly warrant curtailing the freedom of speech and expression, under Article 19(2)," reads the J&K Government reply.

Similarly, the government has added that the "right to carry on any trade or business can be restricted in the interest of the general public under Article 19(6) of our Constitution."

"These rights under Article 19(1) (a) and (g) cannot be said to be curtailed by reduction in the speed of the internet, as has been alleged by the petitioner in the petition/application under reply," says the reply.

The PIL filed by the Foundation for Media Professionals had challenged the J&K government order of 26 March, restricting the internet speed to 2G in the Union territory.

The plea was moved on the grounds that such an order violates the right to equality before law, the freedom of speech and expression, the right to life and liberty, and the right of children to free and compulsory education, granted under Articles 14, 19, 21, and 21A of the Constitution.

In another plea, an association of more than 2,200 schools across Jammu and Kashmir, have challenged the government order as being violative of the fundamental right to education, especially since the lockdown for containing COVID-19 has led to home-bound virtual classes.

The plea filed by the 'Private Schools Association J&K' stated that the "internet" is now a "medium of imparting education," especially after the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The J&K Government has stated in its reply that "current discourse of social media" suggests that "Pakistan is aiming to incite violence amongst college and University students" and that an increase in internet speed will lead to the "swift uploading and posting of provocative videos and other heavy data files."

"Many hash-tags are being used by Pakistani handles to glorify Pakistan Army and terror outfits/terrorists and portray them as "fighters" for Kashmir's "struggle". Shadow handles, believed to have been "inspired" by/or at the behest of Pakistan Army try to allure people from Kashmir and living outside the country, to organize violent protests and rallies at their respective places and also participate in social media campaigns to further their anti-India propaganda," says the J&K Government in its reply, as per the report published on BarandBench.com.

One of the other reasons stated for the restriction in the internet speed is "misuse of data services, applications like WhatsApp and Facebook for mobilizing crowds by anti-national elements", which the government believes has the potential to cause large scale violence, disturb public order and "indeed threaten the security of the country."

Further, the reply mentions that the COVID-19 pandemic has had "absolutely no impact whatsoever on chronic anti-national activities from across the border" and that "there has been a surge in terrorist incidents, post pandemic, most recent being on 05.04.2020, in Keran sector, Kupwara where 5 security personnel were martyred having successfully foiled infiltration bid along the Line of Control by 5 terrorists and killing them."

The reply mentions that Fixed-line Internet connectivity with Mac-binding is available without any speed related restriction. "For any activity dependent on heavy network usage, the broadband and fibre internet connectivity is available throughout the UT of J&K. It is noteworthy that access to social media has been allowed and the white listing of the URLs has been done away with," the J&K Government reply reads.

HC Closes Issues on Inadequate...

to increase to 1000 per day," he submitted in the report filed on April 22.

COVID19 testing facilities, he said, have been made available in five laboratories and the matter was being reviewed under the Chairmanship of the Financial Commissioner, Health and Medical Education Department.

He said purchase orders to set up rt-PCR labs in New Medical Colleges at Anantnag, Baramulla, Doda, Kathua and Rajouri has been also placed. "Existing labs, rt-PCR machines on loan have been ordered from the Universities of Jammu, Kashmir and SKAUST-Srinagar," he said.

"In view of the above, the Government is conscious of all its responsibilities and has undertaken all requisite steps which are being regularly reviewed. Everything possible to improve the testing is being undertaken," the court said, adding, "Our directions made in this issue in previous orders including order dated 3rd April 2020 shall continue to be complied with. This issue is therefore closed."

Violence against Healthcare Professionals, the court sought status report regarding The Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020.

The direction followed submissions by Assistant Solicitor General Of India Vishal Sharma that the Ordinance has been promulgated on April 22.

"The same is not on the record before us. 11. Let the status report in this regard be brought before us on the next date of hearing," the court said.

The court also directed Sharma to file before it the concerns and objections of the Ministry of Home Affairs to the Healthcare Service Personnel and Clinical Establishments (Prohibition of Violence and Damage to Property) Bill, 2019 ("Draft Bill") which had been proposed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Regarding notices issued to the Indian Medical

Association, Junior Resident Doctors Association GMC Jammu and Doctors Association of Kashmir through Dr. Nisar-ul-Hassan, the court said no representation has been received from them.

Monika Kohli, Amicus Curiae, submitted that she would contact the representatives of these associations and ascertain their stand on the examination being conducted by the Court. She also filed a comparison of the legislations enacted by the various states but sought more time to examine the matter in more detail.

"We would request Ms. Kohli to also examine the definition of healthcare personnel and the healthcare institutions as defined in the various legislations," the court said and posted the matter for further consideration on May 5.

Regarding removal of the lockdown, the court said it has not received any report "on this important issue."

"We had called upon the Secretary, Health and Medical Education; Social Welfare Department; Director, Information and Member Secretary, JKLSA to take appropriate action. Director Information was directed to place an action plan before us. This has not been done," the court said and ordered directions made by it be "positively complied with" before the next date of hearing.

The court closed its consideration regarding the internet. The direction followed perusal of status reports including one on April 15 filed by T. M. Shamsi, Assistant Solicitor General, stating that the internet facilities are fully functional in Ladakh.

Irshad Ahmad, Additional Secretary Home Department placed a copy of the 9 April order passed by the Supreme Court of India in Foundation for Media Professionals vs. Union Territory of J&K.

"We are informed that apart from this writ petition, two other writ petitions being Private Schools Association, J&K vs. Union Territory of J&K and SoayibQereshi v. Union Territory of J&K are pending consideration before the Supreme Court," the court said, adding, "In view of the matter pending before the Supreme Court of India, we close our consideration of this issue in this writ petition."

As regards the issue of stranded tourists, Divisional Commissioner Jammu SanjeevVerma in a report submitted that there are no stranded tourists in the districts.

So far as migrants and contract labourers, the Deputy Commissioners said that he was personally attending to the requirement and needs of these labourers who are being provided all the necessary assistance and food. He also confirmed that there was no reported distress or nutritional crisis.

Apart from the district administration, he said, efforts of the regional and district red-cross societies and volunteers are being utilised for handling grievance and distress promptly and efficaciously.

Additionally, he said, that over the gradual opening of industrial and other establishments including brick kilns, that migrants and contract labourers have been gainfully engaged in productive activities.

However, the Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir had not filed report on this issue and he been asked by the court to do it before the next date of hearing. "Civil Authorities of (J&) shall continue to ensure that there is no distress to any of these persons."

Stranded Kashmiris In Jammu

Regarding an application filed by an advocate Saqib Amin Parray, seeking direction to the government for grant permission to and facilitation for return of Kashmiris stranded at Jammu, the court said no orders are warranted "inasmuch as no general or overarching orders for grant of permission to all persons desirous of going from Jammu to Srinagar can be granted. Each individual case has to be examined on its own merit." (GNS)

Covid-19: 16 More Test Positive, J&K.

Jammu. Eight people (seven in Kashmir and one in Jammu) have died and 192 patients (145 from Kashmir and 47 from Jammu) have recovered. The number of active cases stands at 381 (371 in Kashmir and 10 in Jammu).

Meanwhile, the government released media bulletin said that out of 18450 test results available, 17869 samples have tested as negative till today.

The bulletin said that 68846 people have been kept under surveillance including those who are either in government established quarantine facilities or in home isolation.Besides, 53110 persons have completed their surveillance period.

Shopian Gunfight: 3 Militants Killed...

In this incident an army major was injured. He was identified as Major Capray of 55RR. He was subsequently shifted to army hospital.

Yesterday two civilians were also injured near the gunfight site and one of them, a woman, was hit with a bullet in her leg.

Also an army soldier suffered bullet wounds in the operation. Two militants were killed during

the initial exchange of fire.

Two civilians sustained injuries near the site. Among them, a woman Shahnaza Bano wife of Farooq Ahmad Koka suffered bullet injury and was shifted to a nearby hospital wherefrom she was referred to SMHS hospital Srinagar.

Another civilian Asif Ahmad Reshi son of NisarReshi of Watchi according to reports suffered pellet wounds after police and paramilitary forces chased a group of youth near the encounter site. All the injured have been moved to different hospitals.

Police said that the operation stretched throughout the night and lights were erected and exit points sealed with additional reinforcements.

Meanwhile, security forces are sanitizing the area and have appealed the people not to go closer to the encounter spot till the site is properly sanitized.

4 Security Men Injured In Nowhatta

area of the Old City this evening, news agency KNO reported. In the attack, three paramilitary personnel and a cop were injured.

Officials identified the injured cop as Constable Abdul Majid and three SSB personnel as Sub-Inspector Anurag Rao, Head Constable Sananta Kumar and Constable Dugesh.

All the security men have sustained injuries in the legs and have been removed to Police Control Room (PCR) hospital for treatment, the report added.

38-Year-Old Man Shot At In Handwara

serious bullet wounds and was shifted to a nearby primary health center from where he was referred to district hospital Handwara in critical conditions.

Soon after the incident, the officer said a joint team of police, SOG and army launched searches to nab the assailants.

Sniper Shot Injures Soldier Along LoC...

area of Naushera sector this afternoon, news agency GNS reported. The sniper shot left a soldier wounded in his right leg.

The injured soldier was taken to nearby health facility where from he was later airlifted to army's command hospital in Udhampur for specialized treatment.

Anti-Militancy Ops To Continue...

said that infiltration attempts were being constantly from across the border to push militants. He said security forces were maintaining alert at the borders to check the "nefarious designs of our neighbor"

Commenting the work of police, army and central armed forces, DGP said that the forces have to consistently safeguard and protect the people and institutions from the Pakistan sponsored onslaughts.

During the meeting, Singh also stressed for implementing the government orders in letter and spirit to contain the spread of Coronavirus, particularly in red zone areas, the police spokesperson said.

"He directed that all the necessary preventive and precautionary measures have to be strictly enforced on ground to check the disease. He emphasized upon the officers to continue all help in tracking the contacts of Corona positive persons so that the transmission chain could be breached," Singh, as per police spokesperson said.

He directed the officers that only permissible public movement has to be allowed, particularly in the areas declared as containment zones.

"He commended the role of social and religious leaders for asking people to stay and pray from their homes during the holy month of Ramazan and added that without people's cooperation desired results cannot be achieved," the police spokesperson said.

Earlier, officers gave a detailed briefing to the DGP about the preparation and contribution made amid Covid-19 and the security situation of their respective areas and jurisdictions.

On Tuesday, , the DGP visited south Kashmir's Anantnag and took stock of the security scenario and preparation to contain the spread of Covid-19 disease, the police spokesperson added.

Govt Allows Conditional...

would be assessed by the local health authorities, and kept in home quarantine, unless the assessment requires keeping the persons in in-

stitutional quarantine, the order said.

They would be kept under watch with periodic health check-ups, it said.

No Compromise On Health Of...

they have been found normal till April 21. Singh also filed a report by Amrish Gore, SP (Head-quarters), from the office of the Prisons Department, Uttar Pradesh, informing that there are prisoners from Jammu and Kashmir in six jails in UP (Varanasi, Naini (Prayagraj), Agra, Barailly, Ahmednagar, Lucknow).

"The jail authorities are taking all steps for social distancing and ensuring the health and safety of the prisoners from Jammu and Kashmir," said a division bench of Justice Gita Mittal and Justice RajneshOswal.

"In view of the above, it would appear that the jail authorities are conscious of the responsibility regarding the health and safety of the residents of the Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh who are lodged in prisons in other parts of India," the court said, adding, "The DG Prisons shall continue to monitor their well-being and ensure that the health and safety is not compromised in any manner."

The High Powered Committee constituted in terms of the order dated March 23 of the Supreme Court of India with regard to prisoners stands constituted and is also continuously taking steps and making recommendations for release of prisoners as directed, the court said.

"In view of the above, these two issues do not need to detain this court any further. So far as the consideration of these issues by this court is concerned, some are closed," the court said, adding, "In case any difficulty is faced, it shall be open to the DG Prisons to approach this court for appropriate directions." (GNS)

7 Injured In Handwara Leopard

and tranquilized the beast inside the house, reports said. In the surprise attack, seven members of a family sustained injuries. They were removed to Sub District hospital Handwara for treatment.

Face Masks Mandatory In City

public transport, offices, shopping or market places etc w.e.f 1st May/2020. Medical grade masks which are strictly for hospital use shall however be avoided for general use," reads the order. The order reads that all Government Offices /Private Establishments /Shops/ Mandis etc shall put in place arrangements for Handwash/ Sanitizers/ Soap etc as per the requirement.

"Information promoting hygiene / handwash shall be displayed at all such places. This shall be applicable for all managed public places and institutions as well." DC has also directed the nodal department to make available 15 lakh masks, which have been produced, for the public.

"Assistant Commissioner Development, Srinagar (RRD being Nodal Department) shall make available for public use 15 Lakh Masks produced, as per Government order, through Rural Development Department, Social Welfare Department, SHGS and other groups, after approval from competent authority," reads the order. DC has also directed the nodal department to distribute a pack of 05 Masks per family across district Srinagar.

The order also read that these direction shall remain in force for a period of 2 months and any violation of this order shall attract penal action u/s 51 of The Disaster Management and u/s 188 IPC, including fine—(KNO)

55 More Released After Quarantine...

He said that the concerned supervising officers oversaw their discharge and transportation to their respective homes. "A total of 1985 persons have been discharged from administrative quarantine so far after successfully completing their required quarantine in Srinagar," the official spokesperson said.

38 Shops Sealed In City...

part of the city, an official spokesperson said. 12 vehicles were also seized around Khanyar for moving without permission or need. In Eidgah, a fine of Rs10, 000 was collected from lockdown violators.

Meanwhile the district administration has constituted special teams for inspections and curbing hoarding and overpricing of essential commodities and profiteering by dealers.

Amid Lockdown, J&K records 16 cases of rape, 64 incidents of molestation

Agencies

Srinagar: The Jammu & Kashmir Government has informed the High Court that 16 cases of rape and 64 incidents of molestation were reported during the lockdown period in the Union Territory.

According to a report, submitted by the Social Welfare department, 16 cases of rape, 64 cases of molestation and one case of eve teasing have been reported in Jammu and Kashmir during the lockdown period.

As many as 1314 calls have been received from the affected persons on the emergency number 181 from 24th March, 2020 to 24th April, 2020, out of which 65 are related to violence against women, the government submitted.

The remaining 956 calls were reported by migrant labourers, who were in distress on account of the lockdown, it further said. As per the government, Rs 10 lakh for each district of UT of J&K has been sanctioned out of SDRF fund for COVID-19 containment for victims of domestic violence for providing temporary accom-



modation, food clothing, medical care etc.

“Additionally, the department of Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (DMRR) Government of J&K has issued directions to all the Deputy Commissioner for designating 10 beds in each District Quarantine Centre exclusively and accessible for victims of domestic violence in the J&K,” the High Court order reveals.

The High Court has directed the government to consider notifying appropriate spaces so that women in difficulty have easy access to them. “Women in distress would not have easy access to the Anganwadi Work-

ers. Ease of access has to be a primary concern for notifying an authority, especially in the urban areas.

It may not be correct that women as a rule would be uncomfortable in making a complaint against the violence to male members of the society. It is essential for the Social Welfare Department to consider ease of access of the women in distress, as a basis for notifying the authority,” a bench comprising Chief Justice Gita Mittal and Justice Rajesh Oswal observed.

“So far as designation of informal safe spaces for women for reporting domestic violence/abuse without alerting the

perpetrators is concerned, the Social Welfare Department has informed that it has notified Anganwadi Workers for the reason that women/complainants would not be comfortable in expressing their personal issues with the male members of the society.

We had cited the example of grocery stores and pharmacies in foreign countries being notified as such safe spaces for the reason that every family is accessing grocery stores and pharmacies even in the lock down period,” it further observed.

The Court also directed the department of Social Welfare and member State Legal Services Authority examine the requirements and steps necessary to mitigate the complaints and difficulties of victims of elderly abuse; child violence; violence against disabled and transgenders in the UTs of Jammu and Kashmir as well as Ladakh. “A report of measures in place; steps under way and those contemplated regarding them be placed before us before the next date of hearing,” the Court directed—(KNO)

223 released from J&K prisons from April 1 to 22: Prisons department

Srinagar: The government has informed the High Court that 223 persons were released from different prisons of Jammu & Kashmir from April 1 to 22. According to report submitted by DG Prisons V.K. Singh, 223 prisoners have been released from jails of Jammu and Kashmir.

“Mr. V. K. Singh has informed this court that between 1st April 2020 to 22nd April 2020, the High Powered Committee has released a total of 92 under trial prisoners; 11 persons who had been arrested under Sections 107, 109, 151 CrPC; 24 prisoners have been released on parole and 96 more prisoners have been released,” the

order states.

The Court has been informed that 15 prisoners are lodged in District Jail, Karnal and 2 in District Jail, Jhajjar. “Additionally, the report received from Director General of Prisons, Haryana regarding prisoners from Jammu and Kashmir who are lodged in Haryana has been placed before us.

We are informed that 15 prisoners are lodged in District Jail, Karnal and 2 in District Jail, Jhajjar. Mr. Singh has informed that all detainees of Jammu and Kashmir lodged in Haryana are being screened by medical team twice a day; that the health status of all these detainees is thus mon-

itored daily and they have been found normal till 21st April 2020,” it further states. The Court was informed that there are prisoners of J&K in six jails in UP.

After perusing the reports by jail authorities, the Court observed that “it would appear that the jail authorities are conscious of the responsibility regarding the health and safety of the residents of the Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh who are lodged in prisons in other parts of India”. “The DG Prisons shall continue to monitor their well-being and ensure that the health and safety is not compromised in any manner,” the court directed—(KNO)

Selling meat for Rs 600/kg

Police arrest butcher in Srinagar

Srinagar: Police arrested a butcher for selling meat at exorbitant rate in Batamaloo area of Srinagar city. Taking advantage of prevailing situation emerging out of Coronavius, vegetable sellers, vendors and butchers loot people at will while the lack of regulation has emboldened them. Almost every butcher is selling meat, on a rate of their own.

A police official told KNT that people com-

plained that a butcher identified as Waseem Ahmed Shigan son of Manzoor Ahmed Shigan, a resident of SD Colony is selling meat at Rs 600 per Kilogram.

A police team rushed to spot and found the complaints true. “The butcher was arrested and an FIR vide number 54/2020 under section 188, ¾ Essential Commodities Act was registered against him,” he said.

Don’t get ration as per ration card: Budgam BPL families

Agencies

Budgam: Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration card holders of Soibugh and Daharmuna villages of central Kashmir’s Budgam district on Wednesday expressed anguish over against the Food Corporation Budgam for allegedly failing to provide appropriate ration to them from last one year.

Locals said that they are not being provided adequate ratio by the officials, therefore leaving them to lurch at large.

“We are not getting ration as per

the ration card, which is injustice to us,” a BPL holder from Soibugh area said.

Fatima Begum, resident of Chadoora village alleged embezzlement in ration distribution, saying it is nothing new here, but such practice is going on in the area since past 14 months now. “We are six members in our family. But, we are getting ration for only five members from past 14 months,”



she said. Several other families echoed similar views in this regard.

Assistant Director of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs (FCSCA), Iftikar Ahmed said that the ration to the villages is being sent according to the online data available with the department.

He said that they will collect the details of families again soon and the ration as per fresh data will be provided to them—(KNO)

COVID-19 Pandemic

Come forward to help needy: Div Com to NGOs & VO’s

SRINAGAR, APRIL 29: In view of current situation of COVID-19 pandemic, the Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Pandurang K Pole today made fervent appeal to the NGOs and voluntary organizations active in Kashmir division to come forward to help the needy by augmenting the measures taken by the government in this regard. He also framed Divisional Level Cell (DLC), headed by a senior KAS officer, for uniformity, better coordination between the NGOs, voluntary

organizations and the administration both at the district as well as the divisional level for efficient delivery of relief work in current situation of pandemic unleashed by the COVID-19. Daily monitoring of activities are also being undertaken at the divisional level.

According to latest data provided by Kashmir Division NGO Coordination Cell, at present 97 NGOs are working in Kashmir division in active collaboration with divisional administration.

These NGOs and Voluntary Organizations in collaboration with administrative authorities have distributed more than 7300 food kits to the needy families, 14400 masks and 1670 PPE kits across the valley. Besides, some NGOs have carried out extensive fumigation in various areas and a number of logistic items needed to combat the COVID 19 have also been donated, which is helping the government machinery in managing the deadly disease, besides carrying out aware-

ness programmes.

Some of the NGOs actively working in collaboration with divisional and district administration are Syed us Sadat Foundation, Anantnag, Chinari International Foundation, Srinagar, Babul Uloom Educational Society, Srinagar, Rehmat-lil-Aalameen Society, Shopian, Spring Buds Educational Trust, Budgam, Ramzana Educational Charitable Society Pulwama, Human Aid Society, Baramulla and Hope Disability Centre, Ganderbal, have made significant.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, R&B SUB-DIVISION MAGAM CORRIGENDUM

Ref -This NIT No. 02/R&B of 2020-21 issued under endorsement No: R&B/ 114-34 Dated: 25-04-2020.

Kindly read the advertised cost (Tender value) for the work “Up-gradation of Narbal Tangmarg road surface by way of P/L wet mix , P/L 50mm thick bituminous macadam , 25 mm thick semidense with 6mm thick seal coat in patches / stretches” advertised vide this office NIT No. referred above :-

As

Tender value= “Rs. 240,00,000”

Instead of

Tender Value = Rs. 1,40,00,000

All other terms & conditions will remain same as already advertised.

No: R&B/141-49

DIPK-399/20

Dated:27-04-2020

Sd/-

**Executive Engineer,
R&B Sub-Division Magam.**

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, TLMDII PAMPORE, KASHMIR, J&K POWER TRANSMISSION CORPORATION LTD.(JKPTCL) NOTICE INVITING e-Bids

NIT No.TLMD II/08 of 2020 dt: 27.04.2020.

The Executive Engineer, TLMD II Pampore Kashmir, J&K Power Transmission Corporation Ltd. For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory (UT) invites online Percentage rate contract from registered Electrical Contractors/self-help groups for Carrying out Preventive, Routine and Break down maintenance of 132KV Transmission Lines of Sub-Division 2nd Awantipora (132 kV Pampore-Awantipora-Wanpoh and 132 kV Awantipora-Lassipora Transmission Lines) under the jurisdiction of TLMDII Pampore. Submission of e-Bid shall be deemed to have been done after careful study and examination of the procedures, terms & conditions of the NIT with full understanding of its implications. The NIT is available at website <http://jktenders.gov.in>. Interested bidders may view, download the e-Bid, submit their e-Bid online up to the date and time mentioned in the table below:

a	Date & Time of downloading of NIT.	The NIT Documents can be downloaded over http://jktenders.gov.in from 27.04.2020 (2.00PM)
b	e-Bid submission (start) date & time (Submission of e-tender fee, EMD and other supporting documents in PDF/XLS format)	27.04.2020 from 2.00 pm
D	e-Bid submission (end) date & Time	18.05.2020 up to 4.00PM.
F	Date & time of online opening of bids	19.05.2020 at 4:00 Pm
G	Estimated cost	Rs.4.11 Lacs
H	Venue of opening of e-Bids	The Office of Executive Engineer TLMD II Pampore Kashmir J&K.
I	Cost of e-Bid document	Rs. 200.00 (Two hundreds only) in the shape of non-refundable Treasury receipt/challan against MH 0801.
J	Amount of Earnest Money Deposit	2% of estimated amount
K	Status of funds	Demanded

DIPK-NB-129/20

Sd/Executive Engineer,

TLMD II Pampore.

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 Short Term e-NIT No. 08 OF 2020-21, Dated: 27-04-2020

For and on behalf of Lt. Governor of UT of J&K, Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Srinagar, invites e- tenders on item rate basis by e-tendering mode from the registered Mechanical firms/ S.S.I Unit holders for:-
“Replacement of bearing and minor works to 35 cusec- 17 mtr head (300bhp) pumping unit No. 05 at Lift Irrigation Scheme Marval Stage 3rd”.
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	27 /04/2020 at 12:00 hrs
ii	Document Down load/sale start Date	27/04/2020 from 12:30.
iii	Clarification start date	27 /04/2020 from 13:00 hrs.
iv	Bid submission start date	27/04/2020 from 14:00 hrs
v	Clarification end date	04/05/2020 upto 15:00 hrs
vi	Document Down load/sale end Date	04 /05/2020 upto 16:00 hrs
vii	Bid submission end date	04/05/2020 upto 16:00 hrs
viii	Date and time of Bid opening	05/05/2020 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
Position of funds**

**Rs 0.59 Lacs
Demanded Under M.H 2701**

No. MIDS/Ts/ 113-16

Dated:- 27-04-2020

DIPK-410/20

Sd/- Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Srinagar

Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER R&B DIVISION CHADOORA

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

NIT No: 04 /ET/EE/R&B/Chadoora of 04/2020

For and on behalf of the President of India, e-tenders (In single cover system) are invited on Percentage basis from approved and eligible Contractors registered with J&K State Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Governments for the following works:-

SN	Name of Work	Adv. Cost Inc.c/o store (Rs. In Lacs)	Cost of T/ Doc. (In Rupees)	Earnest Money	Time of Completion (days)	Time & Date of Opening of Bid	Class of Contractor	MH Account
1	Restoration of Kralpora Checkpora road by way of p/l of WBM-Gilli and 25mm thick (compacted) Semidense in patches/ stretches (Machine mix to be laid manually)	7.494	300.00	14988	5	05/05/2020 (2.30 PM)	C/D	3054 M&R
2	Restoration of Hayatpora Wahibugh road by way of p/l of WBM-Gilli and 25mm thick (compacted) Semidense in patches/ stretches (Machine mix to be laid manually)	7.51	300.00	15020	5	05/05/2020 (2.30 PM)	C/D	3054 M&R
3	Urgent restoration of Srinagar Charisharief road from km 19th to 30th by way of p/l of WBM-Gilli and 25mm thick (compacted) Semidense in patches/ stretches (Machine mix to be laid manually)	9.798	600.00	19596	5	05/05/2020 (2.30 PM)	C/D	3054 M&R
4	Restoration of Kralpora Chattergam road by way of p/l of WBM-Gilli and 25mm thick (compacted) Semidense in patches/ stretches (Machine mix to be laid manually)	7.11	300.00	7110	5	05/05/2020 (2.30 PM)	SHG	3054 M&R
5	Restoration of Nagam Babwani road by way of p/l of WBM-Gilli and 25mm thick (compacted) Semidense in patches/ stretches (Machine mix to be laid manually)	6.00	300.00	6000	5	05/05/2020 (2.30 PM)	SHG	3054 M&R

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.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given below:-

1	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	27/04/2020
2	Period of downloading of bidding documents	27/04/2020
3	Bid submission Start Date	27/04/2020
4	Bid Submission End Date	05/05/2020 upto 2.00 PM.
5	Date & time of opening of Bids (Online)	05/05/2020 at 2.30 PM in the office of Executive Engineer R&B Division Chadoora

2. All other terms conditions are as per PWD Form 25 (Double agreement Form).

No: 130-40

DT: 27/04/2020

DIPK-424/20

Sd/-Executive Engineer R&B Division Chadoora

KASHMIR OBSERVER

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Us Panel's Report

A US government panel on religious freedom has called for action against India for its treatment of minorities, ranking it among the "countries of particular concern". This is the first time India has got such ranking after 2004, marking the drastic slide in religious tolerance in recent years. Though recommendations of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a bi-partisan group, are non-binding on the US government, the lower ranking for India amounts to a stark show of disapproval of the prevailing anti-Muslim atmosphere in the country, particularly the new divisive new citizenship law.

Significantly, the panel has called on the US to impose punitive measures, including visa bans on Indian officials believed responsible and grant funding to civil society groups that monitor hate speech. It has also highlighted the revocation of the autonomy of Kashmir in August last. The US, however, is unlikely to initiate any action against India given their close ties. US president Donald Trump visited India in February and addressed a massive gathering at a stadium in Gujarat. That time he refused to criticize India's new citizenship law that bars Muslim refugees from several neighbouring countries from becoming India's citizens while seeking to fast-track Indian citizenship of non-Muslims. Trump said the law was India's internal matter. He also refused to talk about the Delhi riots that broke out during his visit.

That said, the US religious panel's report dent's India's global image, New Delhi has thus slammed it as "biased and tendentious". It said the report was "misrepresentation" at "new levels". New Delhi, however, cannot wish away the panel's report. There has certainly been drastic downturn in religious freedom in the country over the past several years and it can be traced to increasing assertiveness on the political scene of the right-wing political groups, with ruling party not doing enough to reign them in. Though an agenda for growth has been the pivot of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's broader political project, it hasn't stopped his party from purveying its ideology, sometimes in crudest terms possible. And this ideology is a majoritarian vision of India where minorities would keep their place in the society at the pleasure of majority.

Unlike India's brand of secularism which has its own serious flaws, the majoritarianism sanctions a hierarchical community relationship, with minorities formally subservient to the majority. And this is what should be most troubling for the minorities in India, most specifically the Muslims, the hate for whom undergirds the new ruling politics. But will the PM Modi transcend this? So far other than some half-hearted statements he has shown no serious concern for the state of minorities in the country. Here's hoping that the PM pays more attention to their plight and ensures their security. Only he can make a real redeeming difference.

OTHER OPINION

Ways of opening up

On Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held another video conference with state chief ministers to discuss the ongoing battle against the coronavirus, and to plan ahead. This, the fourth such interaction, was held amid growing signals of the government preparing for a gradual easing of the national lockdown as economic concerns begin to loom larger – with the prime minister himself noting that “we have to give importance to the economy as well as continue the fight against COVID-19”. This signals a cautious shift in strategy. As the lockdown has progressed, with the disruption in economic activity intensifying, its toll becoming more visible, the stark debate of lives vs livelihoods is being steadily recast and reframed. Among several state governments too, as the fiscal strain is beginning to show, the mood seems to be shifting from unqualified support for a nationwide lockdown to a push towards a gradual and calibrated exit.

To be sure, as states are on different infection trajectories, each one will have to firm up separate plans for easing and exit. States with lesser number of infections, or with a better grip over the spread of the virus, are likely to press for easing more restrictions so as to allow economic activities to resume, at least in the green zones. Yet even the modalities of the exit from the lockdown in the green zones will have to be worked out carefully. One thing is clear: Both Centre and states must work together to figure out ways to allow economic activities to resume while minimising the health fallout – even as any such joint strategy will need to take into account, and make space for, the differences across states and the varied emphases of state governments. As the number of cases mounts – during a meeting of state chief secretaries, the central government projected the number of infected in the country to reach 65,000 cases by May 15 – and the capacity of the healthcare system of the country comes under more strain, coordinated action at various levels of government will become more urgent to ensure continued expansion of the institutional capacity – setting up of containment wards, production of ventilators, ensuring adequacy of testing equipment.

During the course of the interaction on Monday, the prime minister also spoke of the need to usher in reforms that touch the lives of common citizens. While fiscal and monetary support will be needed to nurse the economy back to health, given the collapse in economic activities, the need to push through contentious but required factor market reforms that address the long-standing structural issues that plague the economy, cannot be overstated.

(The Indian Express)

Traits Deadlier Than Pandemic



Sikandar Noorani

Surprisingly, the sole super power could not tackle the pandemic with available resources. Debate on formulation of public centric security concepts and emergence of new global order are very much in air but any significant positive impact of such grand developments on humanity remains in shadow of doubts. Will saner nations alter the security priorities by allocating more resources towards the well- being of their citizens? Has pandemic made the world more sympathetic and caring?

The worst global recession after Second World War predicted by World Bank amid pandemic might be lesser damaging to humanity than deep-rooted venomous collective behaviors. Unexpected fall of the flawless health care systems of Europe and the US against the invisible virus have rightly challenged the existing concepts of national security, which primarily cater protection against the military threats.

Ability to kill thousands of humans from a distant location with one strike might frighten the millions of foes but such enormous power is too ineffective to save the life of a single infected citizen on own side. Few weeks earlier, during President Trump's Visit, India finalized a three-billion-dollar deal with the US to buy Integrated Air Defence System for national security. Interestingly, in the midst of pandemic surge, the US president had to press PM Modi through a threatening request to ease the export of anti-malarial drug for America.

Surprisingly, the sole super power could not tackle the pandemic with available resources. Debate on formulation of public centric security concepts and emergence of new global order are very much in air but any significant positive impact of such grand developments on humanity remains in shadow of doubts. Will saner nations alter the security priorities by allocating more resources towards the well- being of their citizens? Has pandemic made the world more sympathetic and caring? Answer to these questions may be affirmative about individual behaviors, as the people seem to be more accommodating and kind towards the suffering quarters of the society. However, no big change in collective approach of global

players seems evident.

Hesitant cold shoulder response by the EU to initial desperate help calls from Italy was quite disappointing. When thousands were dying in Italy, Spain, France and Germany, no finger was pointed on the WHO by the US president on any pretext. Outburst against the WHO began with a sudden rise of COVID-19 cases in the US. Cut in funding of the WHO was announced by the US for mismanaging the initial outbreak in China which allegedly damaged the global preparations. Denial of US allegations from China and the WHO came promptly with a valid suggestion to refrain from politicizing the public sufferings. No shots were fired on the WHO by the US or any G-7 country until the pandemic crept deep in their societies. Obviously, outburst on the WHO or China has nothing to do with collective well-being of humanity. Global players are pursuing their respective objectives in the larger pretext of pandemic.

Virtues have diminished and humanity is suffering in the hands of hardcore extremist elements. Tragic stories from Gaza expose the worst form of inhuman collective behavior of a state called Israel. Two million Palestinians have been forced to live a life worse than animals in the biggest open air jail of the world called Gaza strip. Reportedly, after detecting 13 infected cases, now Gaza is facing acute shortage of COVID-19 testing kits and essential drugs. While the civilized world is so keen towards social distancing, poor Palestinians are compelled to live in highly cramped and extra congested refugee camps of Jablyia and Al-Shati. Israeli forces have besieged the Gaza where already malnourished and caged Palestinians are running short of food supplies and all basic amenities of life. Fancy talks at international forums about public safety, equality and fundamental human rights

on the pretext of pandemic appear hollow once weighed against sufferings of the Gaza jail prisoners. Palestinians have already experienced toxic human behavior which is deadlier than pandemic.

The recent news about tragic death of 62 Rohingya Muslims in the Bay of Bengal has reminded the shocking tragedy spread from Myanmar to Malaysia. As per survivor witness account, 500 Rohingyas cramped in a small fishing boat struck with hunger and thrust, had been sailing for two months between Malaysia, Thailand and Bangla Dsh to seek refuge. All 62 dead were given floating funeral in the sea! No piece of land could be offered to unlucky dead as the world was busy fighting the pandemic and thinking about allocation of more resources for public welfare.

There is a long list of public sufferings which could not receive due response from international community. Syrian and Afghan refugees have been compelled to breath in unlivable camps at the mercy of global donors! Rohingyas are floating on overcrowded boats in search of shelter and food! Kashmiris imprisoned in their own houses! Indian Muslims are being labelled as 'Corona Jihadist' and discriminated in hospitals. All these tragedies prove that virtues are rapidly diminishing from the world! Question of the day is that how, in post pandemic world, a reshaped public centric concept of national security or new global order would be able to heal the wounds of oppressed human beings. No theories or verbal claims will ever work against those human traits which are much deadlier than pandemics.

Writer is a freelance and can be reached at sikandarnoorani@yahoo.com

Syed Arsalan Abid

Curricular Profiteering



There is a mushroom growth of schools in private sector in Kashmir- KO file photo

Education means a lot in one's life as it facilitates learning, knowledge and skill. It completely changes one's outlook and personality and helps attain set goals. One thing that pinches the conscience of any concerned individual is the commercialisation of education. The education has now become a profitable business with the involvement of all type of traders in the field. Every year 4-5 schools are opened within the area of two km radius across India. Many newly opened schools boast of modern facilities and hi tech infrastructure to lure parents.

It seems very easy and smooth going process in the Kashmir Valley as if there is no criteria set by the government for opening a school. This is very much detrimental for the society in the long run. The mushroom growth should be checked because it can erode the quality education system.

Back in the 90s, education never pinched the pockets. Most of the time, parents never considered it a part of monthly expenditure, except when they had to pay a bulk amount during the beginning of a session or on purchase of uniform. However, the case is no longer the same now. Over the years, the schools have grown, the facilities have increased and so have the fee structure. Charging of exorbitant fees in private schools is a major cause of concern now. Steep hike in tuition fees along with additional costs such as transport charges, fee for extra-curricular activities and sports are added costs and a burden on parents.

Regulating school fees is one of the most significant legal and administrative challenges policymakers in Kashmir face. Schools justify their fee hike as the costs of maintaining a fully functional private school with quality teaching and world-class infrastructure are quite steep. In this context, balancing the autonomy of private schools and their public welfare function becomes a contentious issue.

Can Schools Arbitrarily Hike Fees?

The constitutional basis for regulating the fees charged by private schools was considered by the Supreme Court in T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka (2002). The Supreme Court held that "regulatory measures imposed on private schools must ensure the maintenance of

proper academic standards, atmosphere and infrastructure and the prevent mal-administration".

Recently Supreme Court ruled that any private school in Delhi running on land allotted by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has to take the permission of the Delhi government before hiking the fees.

While private schools have the autonomy to generate surplus, there has to be a balance between autonomy of such institutions and the measures taken to prevent commercialization of education.

How did different states respond to private schools arbitrarily charging exorbitant fee?

Several state governments have either enacted fee regulation laws or are in the process of framing one.

Tamil Nadu follows the fee fixation model whereby a government committee is empowered to verify and approve fee structures proposed by private schools.

Karnataka is for a formula that caps fees for schools by way of framing rules under its school education legislation.

Maharashtra has a weakly enforced legislation to regulate fees and has multiple government bodies to approve school

fees. Recently, the Maharashtra government's decision to cap proposed fee hikes at 15% was widely criticised by schools.

The Self-Financed Independent Schools Act 2017 of Andhra Pradesh, which encourages private schools to open, gives them freedom of admission and fees, and removes corruption from board affiliation.

In Kolkata, about 5,500 Government-aided schools have been brought under the direct control of the State Government.

Public Concern

Different state models to curb fee hike menace are affected by the challenges of weak implementation, a lack of capacity and constant legal challenges posed by private school associations. According to the CAG report, it is found that many private schools collect money from parents under false heads, while at the same time, teachers are being underpaid, and accounts misrepresented. Existing legislative efforts have made an incomplete assessment of the deeper problems with financial management and accounting practices adopted by private schools.

An Effective Policy

There needs to be a jurisprudential

clarity on what private schools can or cannot do, how much 'surplus' they can make, or what 'commercialisation' actually means.

The state should clearly articulate the objectives behind regulating fee. It must be acknowledged that schools are free to set their fee structure and the state can only verify whether the fee charged is reasonable and does not amount to profiteering.

There is a need for transparency in private school finances. For instance, we can add a requirement for extensive disclosure on each school's website giving all fees, staff qualifications, details of infrastructure, strengths and weaknesses for parent to know before selecting a school.

The measures such as regular government supervised audits, generating capacity in State-level Departments of Education, regular inspections, and stricter sanctions for fraudulent reporting could be considered.

A fee hike should be used for improving the quality of education and not for profiteering.

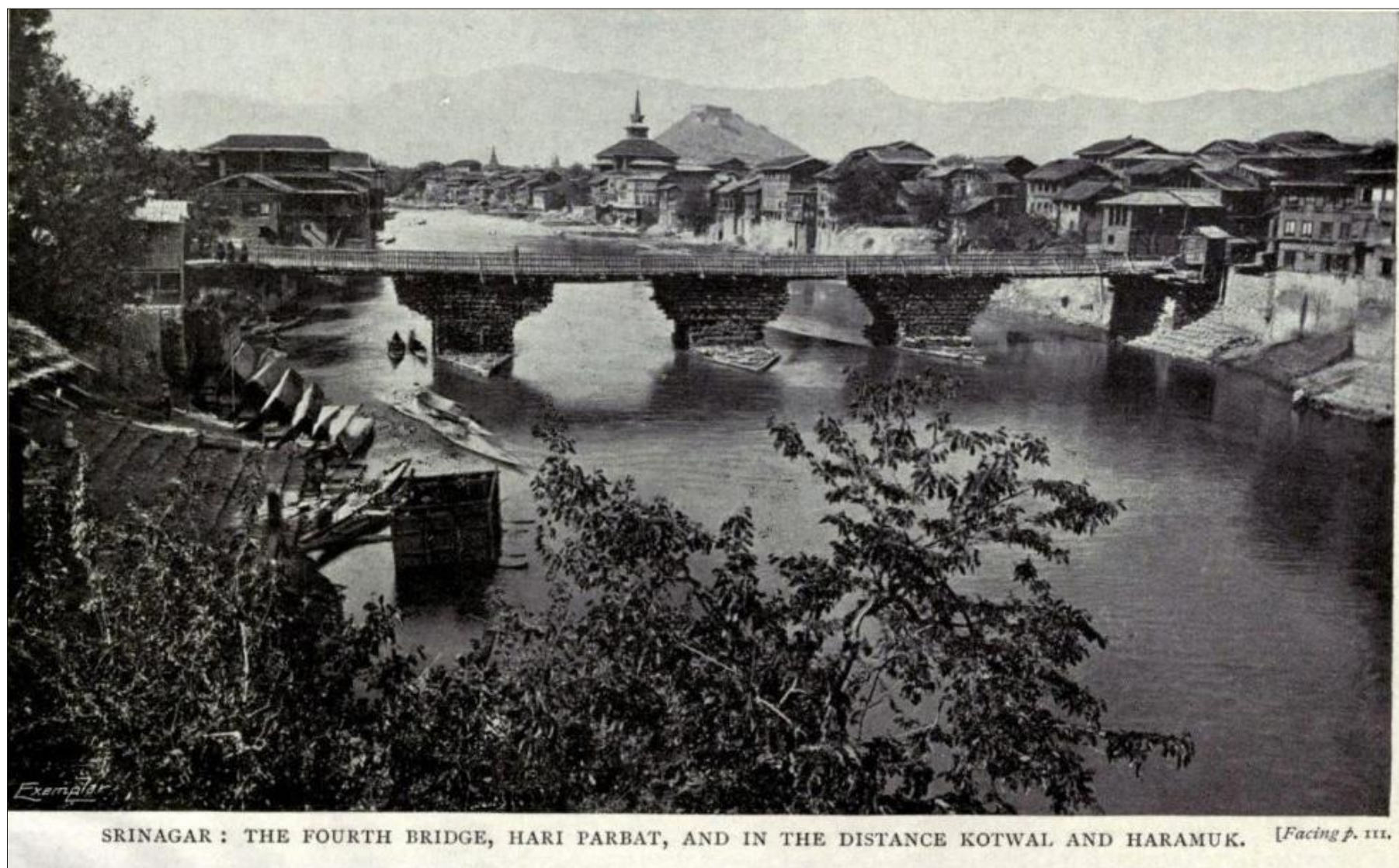
It is also crucial that a regulation strikes a balance between protecting the interests of students and parents, and preserving the autonomy of schools.

The efforts should continue and state must come up with at least a fee framework that can be implemented by both the government aided schools and the unaided private schools. That is the least they can do. Ironically there is no framework, which in turn leads the schools to decide their own fee structure over which the parents have absolutely no control.

This transparency will ensure an end to financial malpractices. And while governments should remain regulators, they need to remember that this is not a long-term solution. The problem of an acute mismatch between demand and supply of schools has happened because the government has not been able to fulfil its role of providing high quality education. And while regulation and efforts at transparency should continue – governments across the country need to pull up their socks and improve public schools. If high quality is available free of cost, why would anyone pay exorbitant fees for the same?

Author is an advocate at the Supreme Court of India.

In Pandemic, Kashmir's 'Plagued' Past Returns as Folklore

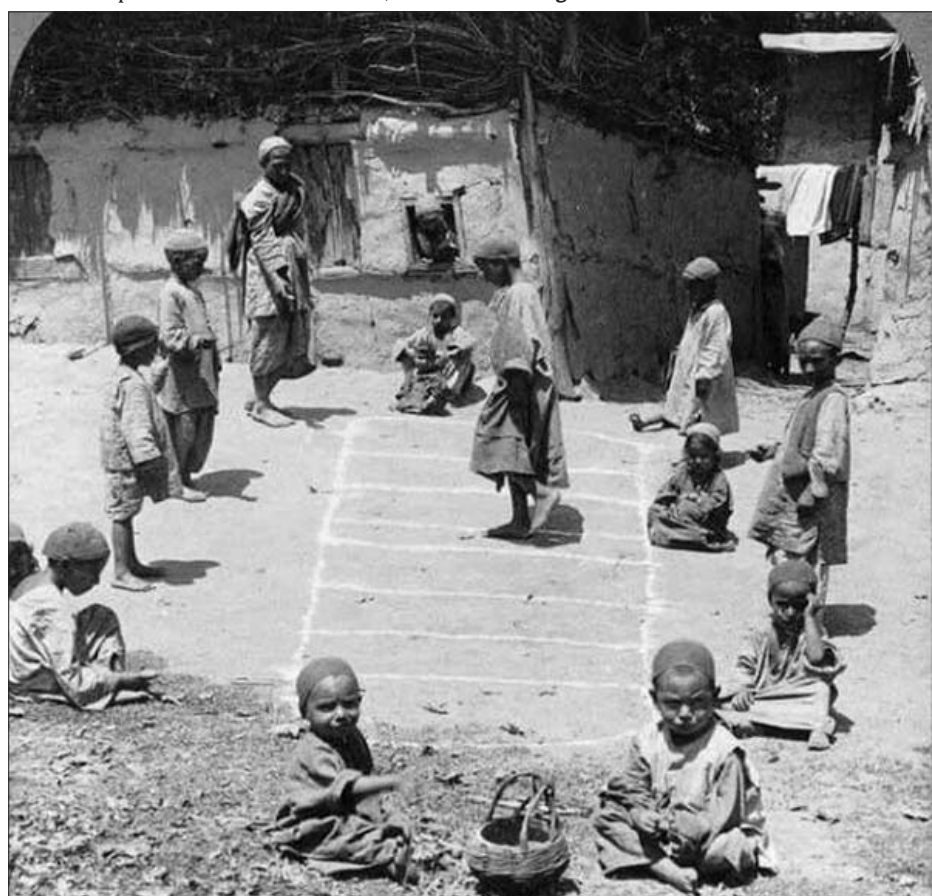


One day, Jahangir writes in his Kashmir Memoirs, a dead body was thrown on grass. "It chanced that a cow came and ate some of the grass," the emperor notes. "It died. And some dogs that had eaten its [cow's] flesh also all died." Things had come to such a pass, Jahangir notes, that due to fear of death, fathers would not approach their children, and children would not go near their fathers.

Showkat Ganai

When an 'influential' woman pilgrim bypassed high security vigil at Srinagar Airport and subsequently became the first Covid-19 positive case in Kashmir on March 16, it reminded many of a veiled Kashmiri woman returning from a plague-ridden Rawalpindi on a tonga in 1903, and becoming the epidemic trigger in the valley. Then, as now, Kashmir witnessed an emergency response to tackle an emergency situation. The contact tracing, quarantine quarters, the fear of community transfer were as much in vogue, as they are today. But then, there's something more intriguing about Kashmir's plagued past which continues to fascinate people. Most of these stories have become the lockdown folklore in Kashmir now.

That Mythical Spider
As first epidemic record of Kashmir, Kalha-



na's Rajatarangini talks about Luta, a Sanskrit word for spider during the time of Jayapida (779-810 AD).

Luta-disease, writes Dr MA Stein in his translation of Kalhana's treatise, was "contagious and fatal".

But how did that spider become the epidemic epicenter is something which Rajatarangini doesn't explain beyond a point.

However, Kalhana's claim is being challenged by medical science today, as it believes that spider-bite is unlikely to cause epidemic disease like plague.

The Killer Grass

During the reign Mughal Emperor Jahangir, the outbreak of plague in 1615 had killed many Kashmiris.

One day, Jahangir writes in his Kashmir Memoirs, a dead body was thrown on grass.

"It chanced that a cow came and ate some of the grass," the emperor notes. "It died. And some dogs that had eaten its [cow's] flesh also all died."

Things had come to such a pass, Jahangir notes, that due to fear of death, fathers would not approach their children, and children would not go near their fathers.

'A Strong Wind of Destruction'

In the summer of 1892, Kashmir witnessed the worst cholera epidemic, killing 5,781 persons in Srinagar, and 5,931 in villages.

It came to be known as "Wabah" in Kashmiri. Kashmiri name of cholera, or any other epidemic, is the same what Abul Fazl, the grand vizier of the Mughal emperor Akbar, and author of the Akbarnama, means by his words, "a strong wind of destruction" that had earlier unleashed massive death in "Hindustan".

This fatal wind in the form of the last famine, 1878-79, alone killed three-fifths of the population from the valley.

Circle and Burn

When plague struck Kashmir in 1615, Emperor Jahangir was told that 3000 houses bearing three circles burnt and ended the epidemic.

But the emperor called it a strange affair in his memoirs.

"It certainly does not agree with the canons of reason," he wrote, "and my intellect cannot accept it."

A Tonga Traveller



gaged for disposal of dead and disinfection work. They buried Ghulam Mohammed's body in a 10 feet deep grave with 2 feet of carbonate of lime surrounding it. All of his articles were burnt.

Soon, Subhan Bhat's house was also burnt along with the grains kept in the compound of the house by various dealers.

The woman, her other servant, and all members of Bhat house, the pony-man who brought the patient to the hospital, and all suspected contacts were quarantined in another camp.

Soon, news came about death of several persons in two houses in Srinagar.

The first house belonged to the deceased cop, where two persons died. And the second one was the house of another cop who had visited the first house. Five people had died there.

Nobody was sure how did this community transfer began.

"There're two possible explanations here," Mitra writes. "Either the relatives of deceased policeman had exhumed his body and reburied



An Erring Cop

Four cops posted to guard the tent where the body of patient was kept were strictly instructed not to go inside. But one of them soon died of plague. Despite his family protest, his body was buried in a deep grave.

The dead cop in connivance with his healthcare worker brother, the investigation later revealed, had gone into the tent to steal things from the body.

Some say he put his mouth on the finger of the deceased to bring out a ring, biting it with his teeth.

"If this story is correct," writes Mitra in his report, "[then] plague commenced in Kashmir from a crime."

A Plague on Both Your Houses

it at native place or they had found his hospital attendant brother who possibly died at Geru village and subsequently buried by the family in their locality."

Death on the Run

The dead cop's health worker brother who had escaped quarantine had somehow reached village Geru. He soon died there, but not before becoming a super-spreader of infection.

Among his victims were the village headman and his three sons. Mourners from many villages participated in their funeral and returned home carrying back infection.

"Till the news reached to me," Dr Mitra writes, "nobody survived in the village to tell the true story."

In 1901, as plague spread, medical examination of all visitors before entering Kashmir was made mandatory by the British Resident in Srinagar.

As nearby Rawalpindi and Jammu had become epidemic hotbeds, the examination was being done to keep plague away from Kashmir Valley.

It kept the valley safe, until a veiled and influential woman came from plague-ridden Rawalpindi on a tonga along with her two servants on November 13, 1903, and passed through the check post.

Five days later, one of her servants, Ghulam Mohammed, was found at the gate of State Hospital in Srinagar with symptoms suggesting plague. He was quickly quarantined in a tent away from city.

"He had been severely ill before coming from Uri and staying at the house of Subhan Bhat, a landlord relative of the woman, living at Kralpura," Dr. A. Mitra, a Bengali-man, the then Chief Medical Officer Kashmir writes in The Indian Medical Gazette.

At Bhat's place, the servant's health deteriorated and was brought to the hospital by another servant. A day after, Ghulam Mohammed became the first dead case of pneumonia plague in Kashmir.

Torched House

Soon, a group of coolies were vaccinated and en-

DIETARY COUNSELLING FROM CHILDHOOD Leads To Better Cardiovascular Health: Study



Agencies

WASHINGTON D.C. A recent study has shed a positive light on promoting cardiovascular health by regular dietary counselling from infancy to early adulthood. Altogether 1,116 children and their families from Turku participated in the study starting when the children were 7 months of age. The study was published in the journal *Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*. Half of the children were randomly assigned to a group that received dietary counselling promoting a heart-healthy diet according to the nutritional recommendations. Childhood Obesity: Can Malnutrition Make Children Obese?

The other half were assigned to the control group who received only the basic health education given at Finnish maternity and child health clinics and school health care. The regular counselling that started in infancy ended when the participants turned 20. According to Assistant Professor and vice-principal investigator Katja Pakkala from the University of Turku, "The research shows that regular dietary counselling starting in infancy has a positive impact on the quality of fat in the diet, as well as on the serum cholesterol level, insulin sensitivity, and blood pressure. In addition, the clustering of adverse cardiovascular health markers is less common in the

group that participated in the dietary counselling than in the control group." Obesity Can Increase Risk of 13 Different Cancers in Young Adults.

After the dietary counselling aiming at better cardiovascular health ended, the participants were invited to a follow-up study at the age of 26. In 2015-2018, 551 people participated in the follow-up. "The aim of the study was to investigate whether the persons who participated in the dietary counselling continued to have a more heart-healthy diet and a lower serum cholesterol level than the control group", says Pakkala. Children with Siblings Are Less Likely to Be Obese Than Single Kids.

The first results of the follow-up study have now been published demonstrating that the diets of the people in the intervention group continue to be more heart-healthy. In addition, sustained beneficial effects are seen in the serum total and LDL serum cholesterol levels, which are still lower in the intervention than in the control group. Furthermore, the insulin sensitivity of the persons who participated in the counselling was also better than in the control group. "As a whole, the results support the idea that counselling on a heart-healthy diet starting in childhood has a positive impact on cardiovascular health, which is sustained after discontinuation of the active counselling", sums Pakkala.

AS A WHOLE, THE RESULTS SUPPORT THE IDEA THAT COUNSELLING on a heart-healthy diet starting in childhood has a positive impact on cardiovascular health, which is sustained after discontinuation of the active counselling",

Excess Weight May Trigger Mental Fatigue



Agencies

Obesity has been shown to put physical stress on the body and researchers, including one of Indian-origin, have now revealed that excess weight may also cause mental fatigue.

"Although we were not fully surprised by this finding, this is the first study, to our knowledge, to be reporting mental exhaustion in high-fat diet-induced obese rats," said study principal investigator Chaya Gopalan from Southern Illinois University--Edwardsville in the US.

For the findings, published in the *FASEB Journal*, researchers aimed to learn more about the onset of obesity and its impact on both physical and mental abilities by studying two groups of rats.

One group was fed a high-fat diet, and the other ate a standard diet for six weeks.

The research team measured the rats' weight, blood glucose and ketone levels twice a week. Ketones are chemicals made by the liver when there is not enough insulin in the body to convert glucose into energy.

In the fifth week, the researchers administered an open-field test, which measures speed and distance as the animals move through a maze in a given time frame and determine physical exhaustion.

A novel object recognition test, which measures mental exhaustion by analyzing the time the rats spend examining new and familiar objects, was given in the final week of the trial.

Both rat groups gained weight during the trial, but the high-fat diet group, not surprisingly, gained more than the control group.

Blood glucose levels fluctuated more in the high-fat diet group as well. There was no significant difference in the average glucose levels or ketones between the two groups.

According to the researchers, the high-fat diet group performed poorly on the novel recognition test when compared with the control group.

"One message from this study is to avoid a high-fat diet, which not only makes one become obese, but also has consequences on cognitive capability," the authors wrote.

ALTHOUGH WE WERE NOT FULLY surprised by this finding, this is the first study, to our knowledge, to be reporting mental exhaustion in high-fat diet-induced obese rats,"

Cancer Patients Need Extra Precaution During COVID-19

Agencies

Cancer patients are generally immune-compromised (have low immunity) and are at higher risk of contracting an infection like COVID-19.

Accordingly cancer patients should strictly observe social distancing, avoid outings as far as possible, take balanced diet and remain positive, said Dr Sudhir Rawal, Medical Director, Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute and Research Centre (RGCIRC).

Dr Sudhir Rawal shares the precarious position cancer patients are in and also the precautions they need to take. Adding, patients with cancer may experience more serious complications if they acquire COVID-19 since cancer treatment generally contributes to a weakened immune system. Hence it is all the more important for cancer patients and survivors to keep infections at bay.

During the lockdown, one needs to consult with treating oncologist so that any visits to the hospital that can be postponed without compromising with the cancer treatment should be postponed.

For instance in case of cancer survivors, the routine surveillance visits can be easily postponed.

The doctor reiterates, "If cancer patients have symptoms associated with Covid-19, they need to consult the treating oncologist over the phone and not just turn up at the hospital without calling. Treatment of cancer can't be postponed but precautions should be taken. For instance chemotherapy and surgery needs to be postponed till the patient is cured of the infection. Even treatments such as Bone Marrow Transplant (BMT) can't take place till



infection is cured."

Speaking about fears of contracting Covid in the hospitals and hence avoiding treatment, Dr Rawal said, "super specialty hospitals such as RGCIRC are taking all precautions to prevent the spread of infection. Here each person is screened properly and social distancing is maintained.

Moreover it has strengthened the system of tele-consultancy under the charge of a nodal officer. An app is also being developed through which cancer patients could take consultation sitting at home".

Q. Who is immune compromised?

Rawal The primary function of the immune system is to fight off infection. The term 'immune compromised' refers to those individuals whose immune system is considered weaker than that of the average healthy adult. Immune compromised individuals are at a higher risk of getting infections, including viral infections such as COVID-19.

Q. What leads to having a compromised immune system?

Rawal Diseases such as cancer and diabetes, make a person im-

mune compromised. Similarly old age and lifestyle choices such as smoking, heavy drinking, sedentary life and junk food can all contribute to a weakened immune system. In cancer patients, the risk of being immune compromised is higher during the time of active cancer treatment such as chemotherapy.

Q. What can help improve immunity and fight off infections such as Covid-19 better?

Eating a well-balanced diet, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, maintaining personal hygiene, frequent and proper hand washing, maintaining social distance and shunning tobacco in all forms can help one improve immunity.

Q. What precautions need to be taken by cancer patients?

Rawal Maintaining social distance, frequent and proper hand washing, avoiding outings, keeping surfaces clean and disinfected, wearing a face mask when going out and not touching the face, eyes or nose when the hands are not thoroughly washed. These practices need to be followed by all and even more so by cancer patients and survivors who may be immune compromised.

Child's Home Environment Can Impact Risk Of Developing Depression

Agencies

Children's rearing environment has a meaningful impact on their risk for major depression later in life, a recent study has found and also noted the importance of nurturing environments

when a child is at risk.

The research was published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*. In the study, authors analysed the health records of full and half-siblings with at least one biological parent with depression who were raised by either their bi-

ological parents or in carefully screened adoptive homes. Generally, the children in adopted homes showed lower risk, but whatever the setting, episodes of major depression in the parents meant the children were more susceptible to depression themselves.

New Loss Of Smell Among 6 New COVID-19 Symptoms In US CDC List

Agencies

Muscle pain and new loss of taste or smell are among the six new COVID-19 symptoms that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has added to its official list.

The other four symptoms added to the list on Sunday are chills, repeated shaking with chills, headache and sore throat.

Previously known symptoms of the disease include fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.

These symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus which is responsible for COVID-19, the agency said.

In addition, the CDC also detailed a set of emergency warning signs for COVID-19 which included trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or inability



to arouse and bluish lips or face.

This list, however, is not all-inclusive, said the health protection agency of the US, adding that people should consult their medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to them.

Globally, more than 2.9 million people have tested positive for COVID-19 which has already killed over 200,000 people in the world, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Scientists have warned that asymptomatic transmission of SARS-CoV-2 has made controlling the spread of the disease all the more difficult.

How Creativity Blooms In People Of Different Ages

Press Trust Of India

There are two different life cycles of creativity, one that hits some people early in their career and another that more often strikes later in life, a study of the Nobel Prize winners in economics has found.

The early peak was found for laureates in their mid-20s and the later peak for those in their mid-50s, according to the study published in the journal *De Economist*.

The study supports previous work by the researchers that found similar patterns in the arts and other sciences.

"We believe what we found in this study isn't limited to economics, but could apply to creativity more generally," said Bruce Weinberg, a professor at The Ohio State University in the US.

"Many people believe that creativity is exclusively associated with youth, but it really depends on what kind of creativity you're talking about," Weinberg said in a statement. The study involving David Ga-



lenson, a professor at the University of Chicago in the US, found that the Nobel Prize winners who did their most groundbreaking work early in their career tended to be "conceptual" innovators.

These type of innovators "think outside the box," challenging conventional wisdom and tend to come up with new ideas suddenly.

Conceptual innovators tend to peak early in their careers, before they become immersed in the already accepted theories of the field, Weinberg said. However, there is another kind of creativity, he said, which is found among "experimental" innovators. These innovators accumulate knowledge through their careers and find ground-breaking ways to analyse, interpret and synthesise that information into new ways of understanding.

With Over 58,300 Deaths, US' COVID-19 Deaths Cross Country's Vietnam War Fatalities

■ PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The number of people infected by the coronavirus pandemic in the US crossed the one million-mark on Tuesday, while the fatalities spiked to over 58,300, exceeding the number of American soldiers who lost their lives in the two-decade-long Vietnam War.

According to the US National Archives, 58,220 American soldiers died in the Vietnam conflict, which began in 1955 and ended in 1975.

The US became the first country in the world to have more than one million cases of coronavirus. It accounts for nearly one-third of the 3.1 million cases globally.

With 58,355 deaths so far, the US also accounts for one-fourth of the over 213,000 global fatalities.

"We continue to pray for the victims as well as for those Americans who are grieving their lost ones and their loved ones. There's never been anything like this. We suffer with one heart but we will prevail. We are coming back, and we're coming back strong," US President Donald Trump said at the White House during his remarks on the Paycheck Protection Programme.

"Now that our experts believe the worst

days of the pandemic are behind us, Americans are looking forward to the safe and rapid reopening of our country," he said.

"Throughout this ordeal, millions of hard-working Americans have been asked to really make tremendous, tremendous sacrifices. It is sacrifices like nobody thought would even be possible; nobody thought we would ever be talking about something like this," Trump said.

Meanwhile, several states have initiated the process to reopen their economies.

In California, Governor Gavin Newsom outlined the phased reopening of his state.

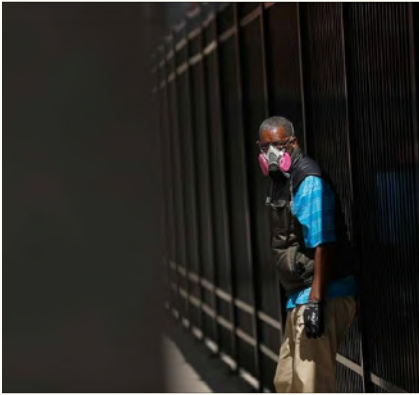
"We are not going back to the way things were until we get to immunity or a vaccine. We will base reopening plans on facts and data, not on ideology. Not what we want. Not what we hope," he told reporters.

More than 1,800 people have died due to the coronavirus in California so far.

Schools and colleges, Newsom said, could start in July-August.

California and Washington were among the first two states to impose stay-at-home order. Now more than 95 per cent of the country's 330 million population are under stay-at-home order.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott has also



announced first phase reopening of the state.

Tennessee on Monday allowed reopening of restaurants and later this week retail outlets could resume their businesses.

Pennsylvania has announced three-phase reopening of the state beginning May 3.

States like South Carolina, Oregon, Oklahoma, Ohio, have announced phased reopening of their economies. The state of Utah on Tuesday announced relax restrictions and offered a mask to its residents.

In New York -- the epicentre of the

coronavirus outbreak in the US -- non-essential businesses are ordered to stay closed till May 15. New York along with other states, including New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, have announced to coordinate reopening.

Responding to questions, Trump said the US has done more testing than any other country in the world.

"We're doing more testing than any other country in the world by far... So, we're going to show more cases because we're doing much, much more testing, double than anybody else," he said.

Trump said he relied on experts, who apparently went wrong on this.

"We were listening to experts and we always will listen to experts. But, the experts got it wrong. A lot of people got it wrong. And, a lot of people had no idea it would be this serious," he said.

"I listened to experts. I'll tell you what. I did something that the experts thought I shouldn't have done. I closed down our country and our borders. I did a ban on China from coming in, other than US citizens, and we did very strong checks on even our US citizens," Trump asserted.

The United States, he said, is opening up again.

US GDP report to show a damaged economy sliding into recession

■ AGENCIES

Washington-The US economy began 2020 riding the crest of a record-long expansion with every expectation that its 11th year of growth would not be its last.

Then the economy screeched to a sudden halt. And now it's in free-fall.

On Wednesday, the government will offer a glimpse of how dark the picture has grown and how much worse it could get as the coronavirus pandemic inflicts

ruinous damage. The Commerce Department is expected to estimate that the gross domestic product, the broadest gauge of the economy, shrank at an annual rate of 5% or more in the January-March quarter.

That would be the sharpest quarterly drop in GDP since the Great Recession, which ended in 2009. And it would be the first quarterly contraction in six years.

And yet forecasters say that will be only a precursor of a far grimmer GDP report to come for the current April-June quarter, when business shutdowns and layoffs have struck with devastating force.

The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that GDP will plunge in the current quarter by a 40% annual rate. That would be, by a breathtaking margin, the bleakest quarter since such records were first compiled in 1947.

In just a few weeks, businesses across the country have shut down and laid off tens of millions of workers. Factories and



stores are shuttered. Home sales are falling. Households are slashing spending. Consumer confidence is sinking.

As the economy slides into what looks like a severe recession, some economists are holding out hope that a recovery will arrive quickly and robustly once the health crisis has been solved -- what some call a V-shaped recovery.

Increasingly, though, analysts say

they think the economy will struggle to regain its momentum even after the viral outbreak has subsided.

Many Americans, they suggest, could remain too fearful to travel, shop at stores or visit restaurants or movie theaters anywhere near as much as they used to.

In addition, local and state officials may continue to limit, for health reasons, how many people may congregate in such places at any one time, thereby making it difficult for many businesses to survive. It's why some economists say the damage from the downturn could persist far longer than some may assume.

"The recession will be worse than the one we went through from 2007 to 2009," said Sung Won Sohn, economics and business professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, referring to the downturn that came to be called the Great Recession because it was the worst slump since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Iran Tells US Not To 'Plot' Against It Amid Gulf Tensions



TEHRAN - Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday told the United States it "should not plot against the Iranian nation every day", amid fresh tensions between the arch foes in the Gulf.

Tehran and Washington have traded barbs over a spate of incidents in the past year involving their forces in the sensitive waters of the Gulf. Their latest high-seas confrontation came on April 15, when the United States said 11 Iranian boats harassed its navy ships in what it described as the international waters of the "Arabian Gulf".

US President Donald Trump then tweeted that he had ordered the US Navy to "shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea".

Iran's president on Wednesday replied that "the Americans should know that this gulf is called the Persian Gulf, not the New York Gulf or the Washington Gulf".

"They must understand the situation by that name and by the coastal nation that has protected this waterway for thousands of years," Rouhani said in a televised address during a cabinet meeting.

"They should not plot against the Iranian nation every day.

"The soldiers of our armed forces in the guardians of the Revolution, the army, Basij (paramilitary organisation) and the police have always been and will be the guardians of the Persian Gulf."

Iran and the United States have been at loggerheads for decades. Tensions between them have escalated since 2018 when Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from a multinational accord that froze Iran's nuclear programme and reimposed crippling sanctions on its economy.

The arch enemies have appeared to come close to a direct military confrontation twice since June last year, when Iran shot down a US drone in the Gulf. On that occasion, Trump cancelled retaliatory air strikes at the last minute.

Trump also opted not to take any military action in January after Iran fired a barrage of missiles at US troops stationed in Iraq.

Iran launched the missiles after a US drone strike near Baghdad airport killed Qasem Soleimani, the general who headed the Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations arm, the Quds Force.

Covid-19 could lead to 7 million unintended pregnancies: UN study

■ PRES TRUST OF INDIA

United Nations: Ongoing lockdowns and major disruptions to health services during the Covid-19 pandemic could leave 47 million women in low and middle-income countries unable to use modern contraceptives, leading to seven million unintended pregnancies in the coming months, according to data released by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and partners.

The agencies estimate that the number of women unable to access family planning or facing unintended pregnancies, gender-based violence and other harmful practices, could "skyrocket" by millions due to the crisis.

"This new data shows the catastrophic impact that Covid-19 could soon have on women and girls globally," UNFPA Executive Director Natalia Kanem said on Tuesday.

"The pandemic is deepening inequalities, and millions more women and girls now risk losing the ability to plan their families and protect their bodies and their health," Kanem said.

As a clear view of the toll of the Covid-19 pandemic is only beginning to take shape,



experts estimate that the human cost could be extraordinary.

The economic and physical disruptions caused by the disease could have vast consequences for the rights and health of women and girls, the new analysis by the UNFPA and partners noted.

Globally, around 450 million women across 114 low and middle-income countries use

contraceptives, the study said.

The pandemic is also expected to cause significant delays in programmes to end female genital mutilation and child marriage, resulting in an estimated two million more cases of FGM over the next decade than would otherwise have occurred.

These delayed programmes, on top of growing economic hardships globally, could result in an estimated 13 million more child marriages over 10 years.

There also will be 31 million additional cases of gender-based violence during the same period, with a further 15 million more cases expected for every three months the lockdowns continue.

These figures -- produced in collaboration with partners Avenir Health, Johns Hopkins University (USA) and Victoria University (Australia) -- are rough estimates. The analysis said while a great deal is still unknown about how the pandemic, and the response to it, will unfold around the world, the projections offer an alarming view of the future that could confront women and girls if efforts are not urgently made to secure their welfare and ensure their rights.

Use Covid To Rebuild World, Says UN Chief

■ AGENCIES

Berlin- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday said the coronavirus pandemic has exposed how fragile societies are but that if governments work together on common challenges, including global warming, it can be an opportunity to "rebuild our world for the better."

Speaking at a two-day international meeting on climate change, the United Nations chief said the only effective response to the worldwide health emergency is "brave, visionary and collaborative leadership. The same leadership is needed to address the looming existential threat of climate disruption," Guterres said. He urged the European Union to show "global leadership" by presenting updated emissions reduction plans by the end of the year that would put Europe on course to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

US Says Would Recognise Israel Annexation

■ AGENCIES

Washington - The United States on Monday said that it was ready to recognise Israel's annexation of much of the West Bank but asked the new unity government also to negotiate with the Palestinians.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has reached a power-sharing deal to remain in office after three inconclusive elections, has vowed to press ahead with annexations that the Palestinians say will shut the door to a two-state solution.

A Middle East "vision" unveiled in January by US President Donald Trump gave a green light to annexations, but Netanyahu's coalition deal with centrist Benny Gantz said the cabinet would consult Washington before moving forward.

"As we have made consistently clear, we are prepared to recognise Israeli actions to extend Israeli sovereignty and the application of Israeli law to areas of the West Bank that the vision foresees as being part of the State of Israel," a State Department spokesperson said.

The step would be "in the context of the Government of Israel agreeing to negotiate with the Palestinians along the lines set forth in President Trump's Vision," she said.

Trump, whose evangelical Christian base is staunchly pro-Israel, has granted a wish-list to Netanyahu over the past three years.

His Middle East plan would let Israel annex Jewish settlements in the West Bank -- which the rest of the world considers illegal -- and exert sovereignty all the way to Jordan.

Boris Johnson, fiancée announce birth of 'healthy baby boy'

■ PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and fiancée Carrie Symonds announced the birth of a 'healthy baby boy', delivered at a government-run hospital in London on Wednesday. The birth is believed to be slightly

premature but both mother and baby are said to be doing very well.

"The Prime Minister and Symonds are thrilled to announce the birth of a healthy baby boy at a London hospital earlier this morning," a spokesperson for the couple said on Wednesday.

"Both mother and baby are doing very well. The PM and Symonds would like to thank the fantastic NHS (National Health Service) maternity team," the spokesperson said. The news comes days after Johnson, 55, returned

to 10 Downing Street on Monday after his hospitalisation for complications from COVID-19. He had been recuperating at his Chequers countryside retreat in Buckinghamshire, where he was joined by his pregnant fiancée.

Symonds had taken to Twitter earlier this month to express her relief at Johnson's discharge from hospital with a series of clapping hands emoticons alongside a picture of a rainbow, which has emerged as the symbol of support for the country's NHS through the course of the pandemic fightback.

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