



Maximum : 22°C
Minimum : 10°C
Humidity : 54%

SUNSET
Today 07:20 PM
SUNRISE
Tomorrow 05:36 AM

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COVID VIRUS AFFLICTED 2020 LOOKS LIKE 1918 SPANISH FLU DESPITE SCIENCE'S MARCH

Washington- Despite a century's progress in science, 2020 is looking a lot like 1918. In the years between two lethal pandemics, one the misnamed Spanish flu, the other COVID-19, the world learned about viruses, cured various diseases, made effective vaccines, developed instant communications and created elaborate public-health networks. Yet here we are again, face-masked to the max. And still unable to crush an insidious yet avoidable infectious disease before hundreds of thousands die from it.....

.....LIFE & TIMES
P6

News Digest

13 TH RAMAZAN		
IFTAR	SEHRI	
TODAY	TOMMOROW	
FIQAH HANAFIYA	07:21	04:02
FIQAH JAFARIYA	07:32	04:01

Mobile Telephony, Internet Suspended

Srinagar: Mobile internet services in Kashmir were suspended on Wednesday after top commander of Hizbul Mujahideen Riyaz Ahmad Naikoo was on Wednesday killed in an encounter with armed forces in his home village in Pulwama district, officials said. The pre-paid mobile and mobile internet services were suspended as a precautionary measure, they said.

600 Kashmir Residents Have Reached Srinagar

Srinagar: Shahid Choudhary, Srinagar District Magistrate and Development Commissioner on Wednesday said that over 600 people who were stranded in other states have reached Srinagar. "More than 600 residents arrived back this Sehri. Certainly lot of hardships to be back home. Thankful to all the colleagues for the night out to keep them comfortable. More on way," Choudhary tweeted. On May 5, Rohit Kansal, spokesperson of Jammu and Kashmir. ● P-02

Real Kashmir Coach To Return To Scotland

Srinagar: Stranded in Srinagar for over a month due to the coronavirus-forced national lockdown, Real Kashmir's head coach David Robertson and his family will return to Scotland on Thursday, ending an anxious wait to attend to his sick mother. Robertson, his wife Kim, son Mason, who plays for the club, and three support staff reached Jammu on Wednesday by an official club bus which left ● P-02

Kerala Records No Fresh COVID Case

Thiruvananthapuram: No new positive cases were reported in Kerala on Wednesday, while samples of seven people returned negative and only 30 COVID-19 patients are under treatment. There are no new hotspots either in the state. Six people from Kottayam, including one from Idukki and another from Pathnamthitta have been declared cured on Wednesday, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said. The total positive cases touched 502, while 30 people are under ● P-02

Hizb Commander Riyaz Naikoo Killed In Pulwama Encounter

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: - A top Hizbul Mujahideen commander Riyaz Ahmad Naikoo was on Wednesday killed in an encounter with armed forces in his home village in Pulwama district.

Authorities soon snapped cell phone and mobile internet services across Kashmir valley and clamped a curfew as a precautionary measure, in anticipation of possible protests, police said, adding that there are strict restrictions on the movement of people.

Naikoo, 35, was one of the most wanted militants in Kashmir and his death is a serious blow to Hizbul Mujahideen. Confirming the killing In-



spector General of Police Kashmir Vijay Kumar said Naikoo and his associate Adil were killed in the gunfight.

Naikoo, operational commander of the banned Hizbul Mujahideen, was trapped in Beighpora village ● PAGE 02

Police Version

Police in statement issued on Wednesday evening said that on specific inputs two cordon and search operations were launched by J&K Police and SF at Sarshali and Beighpora in Awantipora. These cordon and search operations led to encounters as the hiding terrorists fired upon the operation parties.

During these encounters four terrorists were neutralized. In Sharshali encounter 02 terrorists of LeT were killed. The identification of killed terrorists is being ascertained. Incriminating material including arms and ammunition were recovered from the site of encounter. ● P-02

2 Militants Killed In Khrew Encounter

PULWAMA: In yet another fierce encounter in the district Pulwama, apart from the one, in which Hizb commander Riyaz Naikoo and his associate were killed, two more militants were killed in the district, on Wednesday. The encounter took ● P-02

A Humble Village Boy To A Dreaded Militant

Naikoo was the last major name among militants active in South Kashmir. IGP Kashmir Vijay Kumar once said, that, "If we are able to kill Riyaz Naikoo, Hizb would almost be wiped out from South Kashmir". Naikoo had replaced Sabzar Ahmad Bhat ● P-02



Road leading to Beighpora where Naikoo was killed- KO Photo Abid Bhat

Mehbooba Mufti's PSA Extension Ideas Can Not Be Chained or Killed: PDP

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on Wednesday flayed the BJP government over furthering PSA detention of party president Mehbooba Mufti and other senior political leaders for three months, terming such an action vindictive and reiterated that muscular approach will not take Jammu and Kashmir anywhere as this has been tried for many decades and hasn't yielded any positive outcome.

Reacting over the government order in question, PDP spokesman



said that even after being imprisoned for nine months since Jammu and Kashmir was plundered of its unique position; the extension of PSA for three more months against PDP President has hinted that government has some more dreadful developments in its kitty to shock the already perturbed ● PAGE 02

Indo-Pak Troops Trade Fire

SRINAGAR: Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged fire along the Line of Control in Kashmir on Wednesday with India blaming Pakistan for violating ceasefire.

At about 3.40 pm, Pakistan initiated unprovoked firing with small arms in Shahpur sector of the Poonch district, an army spokesman said.

"The Indian Army is retaliating befittingly", he said.

On May 1, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in a demarche had lodged a strong protest with the Pakistani high commission over the killing of an Indian citizen in a ceasefire violation by Pakistan. The unprovoked ceasefire violation by Pakistan forces on April 30 took place in Krishna Ghati Sector of Jammu and Kashmir where ● PAGE 02

Pak PM Says, India Could Launch 'False Flag Operation'

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday claimed that India could use the current tension to launch a "false flag operation" against his country on the pretext of infiltration.

Khan took to Twitter after India said Pakistan was behind the unrest in Kashmir, leading to a spike in the verbal duel between the two sides.

"I have been warning the world about India's continuing efforts to find a pretext for a false flag operation targeting Pakistan. Latest baseless allegations by India of 'infiltration' across LoC are a continuation of this dangerous agenda," Khan tweeted. Khan also claimed that the violence in Kashmir was local. He once again accused India's ruling party of following policies that could imperil the peace in South Asia.

"The international community must act before India's reckless moves jeopardise peace and security in South Asia," said Khan.

Pakistan Muslims League-Nawaz president and Leader of the Opposition in parliament Shehbaz Sharif also fired a salvo against India. "Allegation of 'terror launching pads' by India is meant to whip up propaganda against Pakistan!" he said. PTI

Covid-19: 34 More Test Positive In Kashmir, J&K Tally At 775

SRINAGAR- Thirty four more people tested positive for the novel coronavirus in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, taking the number of the Covid-19 patients in J&K to 775, said an official.

"Thirty five new cases have been reported from Jammu and Kashmir in the last 24 hours," the official said adding that two patients have recovered and were discharged from various hospitals.

Of fresh cases, 32 were reported from Kashmir and two from Jammu division.

In Jammu Valley, 11 cases were reported each from Srinagar and Anantnag districts, five from Shopian, three Kupwara and one each from Ganderbal and Kulgam districts.

Two cases were reported from Jammu district.

The total number of positive cases in Jammu and Kashmir has now risen to 775..

Of the total number of cases reported so far, 710 are from Kashmir and 65 from Jammu. Eight people (seven in Kashmir and one in Jammu) have died and 322 patients (269 from Kashmir and 53 from Jammu) have recovered. The number of active cases stands at 445 (434 in Kashmir and 11 in Jammu).

More than 82,000 people have been kept under surveillance including those who are either in government established quarantine facilities or in home isolation.

THIRTY FIVE NEW CASES HAVE BEEN reported from Jammu and Kashmir in the last 24 hours,"

Fresh Curbs On Civil Movement From 7 Pm To 7 Am

In view of the movement of Stranded persons from outside the valley, the busses carrying them are entering the valley mostly after 6.00 PM. These stranded passengers have to follow various SOPs with regard to COVID-19 management. These persons are being dispatched to their respective districts mostly after 7.00 PM which has necessitated that there shall be no civil movement from 7.00 PM to 7.00 AM. Accordingly the District Magistrates have imposed restrictions during these night hours. The people have accordingly been advised not to venture out of their homes during night hours so that the stranded passenger can reach their destination in a hassle free manner.

Govt Issues Guidelines For Stranded Kashmiris

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: In view of COVID-19 Management, to regulate the movement of students, workers, pilgrims and other persons stranded outside India, in other states, UT's of the country, under various government orders issued in this regard, from time to time, the residents of Kashmir Division have been asked to adhere to the following set of guidelines laid down in this regard.

Accordingly, the persons/ residents of Kashmir Valley stranded outside the country, who intend to return to the Valley, have been asked to register in the respective Embassies of the countries.

While the persons stranded in other states and UT's (except Punjab and Himachal Pradesh) of the country, have been asked to register themselves with the Nodal Officer, designation for this purpose under government order issued on 30 April. While persons stranded

in Himachal and Punjab have also been asked to approach the designated Nodal Officer.

Similarly, the persons stranded in Jammu have been advised apply online on the official website of Divisional Commissioner, Jammu at www.divcomjammu.gov.in.

Besides, Labours, workers stranded in Kashmir division who intend to return to their home towns can register themselves on www.jktpo.in.

The cases involving medical exigency, death of a close relative and the government officials stranded in Kashmir who have to attend their duties in Jammu can apply online on the official website of Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir at Kashmirdivision.nic.in.

For additional assistance such persons can contact government officers Mr. Tahir on Mobile Number 9419004030 and Mr. Zahid Rashid at 9149654809 or can visit these officers, in person, ● PAGE 02

How Can Schools Reopen Safely? UN Agencies, World Bank Lay Down Guidelines

Warning that widespread closures of educational facilities present an unprecedented risk to children's education and wellbeing, the UN agencies have laid down guidelines for reopening of schools that have been closed in most parts of the world due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

According to the guidelines framed by UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and the World Food Programme, the best interests of children and overall public health considerations, based on

an assessment of the associated benefits and risks to education, public health and socio-economic factor, must be central to national and local authorities' decisions to reopen schools.

The guidelines note that while there is not enough evidence yet to measure the impact of school closures on the disease transmission rates, the adverse effects of school closures on children's safety and learning are well documented. Gains made in increasing access to children's education in recent decades risk being lost

and, in the worse cases, reversed completely.

As per UNESCO estimates, over 154 crore students are severely impacted by closure of educational institutions across the world amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Widespread closures of educational facilities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic present an unprecedented risk to children's education and wellbeing, particularly for the most marginalised children who rely on school for their education, health, safety and nutrition.

"Schools do much more than teach children how to read, write and count. They also provide nutrition, health and hygiene services, mental health and psychosocial support; and dramatically reduce the risk of violence, early pregnancy and more.

"And it's the most vulnerable children who are the hardest hit by school closures, and we know from previous crises that the longer they are out of school, the less likely they are to return," the guidelines read.

According to a UNESCO representative, the guidelines ● PAGE 02

Case Of Kashmir Bar President J&K HC Adjoins Hearing Due To Poor Video Connectivity

KO Monitoring Desk

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir High Court while hearing a habeas corpus petition through video conferencing challenging the detention of the President of Jammu and Kashmir Bar Association adjourned the hearing on account of poor connectivity. The petitioner Mian Abdul Qayoom had filed an appeal against the order of the single judge refusing his plea.

The bench comprising Justice Vinod Chatterji Koul & Justice Ali Mohammad Magrey observed that "We, while sitting at two different places through Video Conferencing, faced great difficulty in the process of hearing the matter via Video Conferencing. Despite that being the position, we were continuing hear the parties, but Mr B. A. Dar, learned Senior Additional Advocate General, got disconnected on account of poor connectivity," India Legal Bureau reported.

B A Dar, Senior AAG, representing the Union Territory owing to the difficulty faced during video conferencing sought ten day's time to file his reply.

The bench having concern of the difficulty faced by the parties on account of the non-availability of proper video conferencing facility but at the same time being aware of the fact that the case ought to have been heard, listed the matter for next hearing on May 18.

The bench further ● PAGE 02

Time Limit For Annual GST Returns Extended

SRINAGAR: Government has announced further relaxations for filing of Annual returns for Goods and Services Tax (GST) and movement of goods in the country.

Official sources said that the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has extended the time limit for furnishing of the annual return and GST audit for the financial year 2018-2019, till 30 September, 2020.

"Government has also given an extension till 31st May for all the e-way bills generated on or before the March 24th, whose validity were to expire between March 20th and April 15th. This relaxation will allow seamless movement of goods and ● PAGE 02



SECURITY FORCES laid siege of a vast area of Pulwama on Wednesday where in two separate encounters four militants were killed. KO Photo Abid Bhat



Hizb Commander Riyaz Naikoo Killed...

in Pulwama, the officials said. They added that Naikoo's family has already been informed about it. A police spokesperson said earlier in the morning that a top militant commander along with an accomplice was trapped in an encounter but did not reveal his identity. Later in the day, officials disclosed that the man in their sights was Naikoo, who carried a reward of Rs 12 lakh. He had been looking for him for eight years. Naikoo became the de facto chief of the militant group after the death of Burhan Wani, the poster boy of militancy in the Valley, in July 2016. The encounter, which started late on Tuesday, 5 May, night went on till Wednesday afternoon. One report said Riyaz Naikoo had come to his village home when the government forces including the Rashtriya Rifles (RR), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Special Operations Group (SOG) of the local police, moved in quickly to seal all entry and exit points of the village.

Police Version...

In the second operation in Beigpora village of Awantipur district, a top terrorist commander was trapped along with his associate. The operation was launched last evening and contact was established with hiding terrorists in the morning today. In this encounter two terrorists were killed. One of the terrorists has been identified as Riyaz Naikoo. He was the Chief operational Commander of (HM) outfit in Kashmir. He joined Militant ranks of HM outfit in May 2012 and was a close associate of Burhan Wani. After Zakir Musa's defection from HM to form his own Outfit called Ansar Gazwat ul Hind, he took command of HM outfit in Jammu Kashmir. Pertinent to mention that Zakir Musa was eliminated in operation last year. Naikoo had been continuously making audio and video clips and putting up on social media to motivate youth to join militancy and went on recruiting new boys. He was responsible for a large number of innocent youths getting into militant ranks and indulging in serious violence against local population and SF. He was a masterminded behind the revival of HM outfit in Jammu and Kashmir. He also released videos / audios on number of occasions carrying Pro-Pakistan and separatist propaganda. He executed a series of attacks on policemen, SF and civilians. He resorted to brutal killings of civilians branding them as police/SF informers. He looted orchard owners and farmers to collect funds for his outfit. He also has been collecting booty from illicit cultivation of opium and bhang in South Kashmir. His outfit also figured in narco trade case in Jammu where a huge sum of sale proceeds was transferred to one of his contacts. Some of the killings/ violence where he was directly involved were – 1) Killing of Haji Ghulam Mohd Dar Father Of a Sarpanch At Dogripora On 8-3-2014 2) Firing On Police Bus Near Bhatpora Tokena 3) Killing of Gh Mohi-Ud-din Dar 4) Killing of Javaid Akbar Khanday R/o Khandaypora 5) Killing of a Police HC Ashiq Hussain Mir at Padgampoara crossing. 6) Kidnapping of constable Naseer Ahmad 7) Looting of 09 weapons from the residence of ex MLA Wachi. 8) Killing of six migrant labour in Kulgam 9) Killing of truck drivers and fruit traders post Aug 5. 10) Release of an audio tape threatening attacks on the jail staff after preferential treatment being provided to militants and the separatists lodged in various jails was discontinued. Apart from the above he was involved in many other cases of heinous crime for which a big number of FIRs were registered against him. (CNS)

2 Militants Killed In Khrew Encounter...

place in Shaar village of Khrew block. Sources said that encounter started between government forces and militants in Shaar village in Khrew Pampore Tehsil of South Kashmir's Pulwama district. An official while confirming the killing of two militants in the encounter, that on specific inputs about the presence of militants' cordon and search operation was launched in the area by joint team of forces including 50 RR, CRPF and Awantipora Police. As forces zeroed towards suspected spot, hiding militants fired upon forces which were retaliated, triggering an encounter, he said two militant killed in this encounter. Army spokesman said about Beighpora Encounter (Pulwama).

A Humble Village Boy To A Dreaded Militant...

who was killed by army in Tral in 2017 as groups commander. Sabzar had, in turn, replaced Burhan Wani as the operational chief in Kashmir. Naikoo was considered a soft face of the Hizb in Kashmir. In 2018, after militant attacks in South Kashmir, Naikoo had reassured Amarnath Yatris that the pilgrims were guests of Kashmir and they need not worry about their safety. He had also asked for the repatriation of Pandits to Kashmir, assuring them safety and saying that the militants were not against them. Naikoo was born to Asadullah and Zeba in Beighpora village of Awantipora tehsil in district Pulwama in April 1985. The second among a sister and three brothers, Naikoo studied at the government school in the neighbouring village of Gulzarpora, and then at the Higher Secondary School in Noorpora, according to a report by Azaan Javed in Huffpost India. "Riyaz wanted to become an engineer but he decided to pursue his graduation in science with Mathematics as his major subject," according to the Huffpost report. "In 12th standard he scored 464 marks out of 600," according to his father Asadullah. "He was always the silent type and was even called upon by village elders to mitigate local disputes. After his graduation he began teaching Maths at a private school. According to the Huffpost report "Naikoo's parents spoke of Riyaz in the past tense, as if already reconciled to the likelihood that their son would one day die in gun battle. In 2010, Tufail Ahmad Mattoo was killed when a tear gas shell-fired by policemen to quell a protest against the fake encounter of three civilians in Machil-struck him as he played cricket in Srinagar's Gani memorial stadium. Mattoo's death triggered a fresh cycle of unrest; scores of youth were arrested by the police and Naikoo was one of them. When he was released from prison in 2012, something had changed inside the young maths teacher, Huffpost report said. On 21 May 2012 Naikoo disappeared from home. On 6 June, the police informed Asadullah that his son had joined the Hizbul Mujahideen.

Indo-Pak Troops Trade Fire...

16-year-old Gul Faraz was killed. Another civilian, 36-year-old Zafar Iqbal was injured. The Pakistan Army has carried out more than 1,518 unprovoked ceasefire violations so far in 2020. While asking the country to adhere to 2003 ceasefire understanding, India instructed Pakistan to desist from such acts. The issue of unprovoked ceasefire violation has been also raised during the weekly Director Generals Military Operations talks. India, on March 13, also had issued a demarche to Pakistan over the killing of three of its civilians in ceasefire violations. Pakistan in ceasefire violation on April 12 in Chowkibal and Kupwara, Jammu and Kashmir killed three Indian civilians, including women and a minor child. Pakistan in ceasefire viola-

tion killed 34-year-old Shamima Begum, 17-year old Javid Ahmad Khan of Reddi Chowkibal and 8-year old Zeeshan Bashir, resident of Tumna.

Govt Issues Guidelines For Stranded Kashmiris...

during Office hours at Excise & Taxation Office complex, Solina, Srinagar.

Ideas Can Not Be Chained or Killed: PDP...

populace with. "Otherwise there is no justification of extending PSA of Mehbooba Mufti and other senior leaders for three more months amid the prevalent pandemic. By taking such undemocratic, unconstitutional, and unnatural measures, the government in actual is trying to show its electorate how tough it is against the Muslims and against Jammu and Kashmir," said the spokesman. According to the party spokesman, such measures will have far-reaching consequences, and such decisions only increase the level of alienation and frustration among the people. He added that PDP has a clear stand that ideas cannot be chained, banned, or killed and that in democracy, ideas are allowed to flourish and not choked. "It is ironic that by taking such undemocratic, unconstitutional and unnatural measures, the BJP still believes in the efficacy of these methods and are trying to repeat the old mistakes which will be meaningless and will prove counterproductive," said the party spokesman. Meanwhile, senior PDP leader Nizamuddin Bhat has condemned government decision of extending detention of Mehbooba Mufti, Sartaj Madni, and Ali Mohd Sagar, terming it disregard of all exceptions- Holy month, pandemic age, law, justice, and the public interest.

How Can Schools Reopen Safely? UN Agencies...

aim to inform the decision-making process regarding school reopening, support national preparations and guide the implementation process, as part of overall public health and education planning processes. "It is designed to be a flexible tool that can be adapted to each context and updated as the situation changes. The guidelines outline six key priorities to assess the readiness of those schools and inform planning," she said. As the countries grapple with when to reopen schools, UNESCO, UNICEF and WFP, as part of the Global Education Coalition, have urged governments to assess the benefits of classroom-based instruction compared to remote learning, and the risk factors related to reopening of schools, noting the inconclusive evidence around the infection risks related to school attendance. Stefania Giannini, UNESCO's assistant director-general for education, had told PTI in an interview that shutting down of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic comes with a warning of "potential for increased drop-out rates that will disproportionately affect adolescent girls, further entrench gender gaps in education and lead to increased risk of sexual exploitation, early pregnancy and early and forced marriage". In India, the ministry of human resource development is formulating safety guidelines to be followed whenever classroom learning is resumed. New seating matrix, staggered classes, different mess and library rules, revamped hostels and canteens, could be part of students' socially distant lives in schools and colleges when they return. Universities and schools across the country have been closed since March 16 when the central government announced a countrywide classroom shutdown as one of the measures to contain COVID-19. More than 3.6 million cases of coronavirus, including at least 257,000 deaths, have been recorded worldwide, according to

Johns Hopkins University.

J&K HC Adjourns Hearing Due To Poor Video ...

directed the Registrar of the High Court to ensure that all arrangements are put in place in advance with reference to ensuring effective hearing of the case by providing the necessary link to all the parties appearing in the case so that the submissions made by a particular counsel are clearly recorded not just by the Bench but also by the rest of the appearing counsel.

Time Limit For Annual GST Returns Extended...

supplies through road transport carriers ensuring availability of supplies across the county".

600 Kashmir Residents Have Reached Srinagar...

had tweeted: "28,000 J&K residents return. 48 from Jodhpur returning tomorrow to Srinagar. Plans final for return of students from Dhaka. Understand anxiety of everyone to return quickly but numbers are large. Please be patient. ALL shall be facilitated."

Real Kashmir Coach To Return To Scotland...

Srinagar early in the morning. They will fly back home in a British Airways flight from Amritsar on Thursday afternoon. With his mother undergoing chemotherapy in Aberdeen, Robertson and his family became anxious after international flights were suspended due to the lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. "The British High Commission gave them the permit yesterday and so they left Srinagar at 5am in our club bus which has reached Jammu at 1pm today," Real Kashmir co-owner Sandeep Chattoo told PTI from Srinagar. The six of them will go to Chattoo's residence in Jammu before proceeding to Amritsar in the evening in the same bus. "It was my duty to look after them and they were in high spirits throughout as they have been staying in Srinagar for so long. But who does not want to go back home? I am in a way relieved that they will go back home and meet their near and dear ones," he added. Under Robertson, Real Kashmir won six games and collected 22 points from 15 matches this season. With five matches left to play, the All India Football Federation decided to wind up the I-League early due to the pandemic. "We have chalked out our plans (for the future) and they will come back to Srinagar whenever the situation allows them," Chattoo said. Robertson, Kim, Mason and other foreign recruits have been staying in Chattoo's hotel in Srinagar since the lockdown was enforced. Four other foreign players, all from Africa, including skipper Loveday Enyinnaya are still stuck in Chattoo's hotel.

Kerala Records No Fresh COVID Case...

treatment for the infection and 14,670 are under observation, including 268 in hospitals, he said. Eight of the 14 districts have zero positive cases, including Kozhikode, Malappuram, Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram and there are no new hotspots in the state, the chief minister said. Over 34,500 samples have been sent for testing and 34,063 have returned negative. PTI

Offices Of Universities, Colleges Open With 30% Staff Class Work In Schools. Colleges To Remain Off Till May 30

JAMMU: Pursuant to directions of Lieutenant Governor, G C Murmu, the Higher Education department has ordered that class work of all educational institutions will remain closed till May 30th 2020.

The government order issued here today in this regard reads that 'However, in the interest of administration, it is hereby ordered that offices of Vice Chancellors including Head of Departments and Principals of Government Degree Colleges of Higher Education Department and Principals of Polytechnic Colleges and ITI's of Technical Education Department across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir shall

start functioning from 06-05-2020 (Wednesday) with minimum 30% staff strength on rotation basis.

Besides, Principals of respective Institutions shall draw duty roster of teaching staff to start pending work of evaluation/assessment, virtual class-work, lab work, curriculum development, scholarships and other activities assigned by the Principal of their institutions.

Similarly, duty roster of non-teaching staff on rotation basis shall also be drawn to start routine official work as assigned by the controlling officer of the institution. Research Scholars are also permitted to start their activities



in the lab while strictly observing the COVID-19 protocol.

Meanwhile, all staff detailed for duties shall observe/follow COVID-19 protocol and

safety precautions issued by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, GoI from time to time particularly regular hand wash/sanitization and main-

taining proper hygiene, mandatory wearing of mask, maintaining social distance etc.

Pertinently, Advisor to LG, K K Sharma, had also held a detailed review meeting with the Principal Secretary Education and Secretary Higher Education regarding the status of preparation of online content and various centrally sponsored schemes. It was suggested in the meeting that the administrative staff of all education institutions and polytechnics should be asked to resume their duties for successful implementation of CSSs and preparation of online content keeping in view the protocols set in place for COVID-19.

Govt Offers Work Opportunity To Labourers At Various Sites

Observer News Service

JAMMU- What could be termed as a major relief for the workers amid COVID-19 Pandemic, Labourers in J&K, facing hardships, due to lockdown in wake of COVID 19, can now avail the opportunity of working.

The Government has invited them for work at various work sites. The workers will be provided all basic amenities like kerosene, PWS clothing, tents/shelter, vehicle for arrival, ration etc.

In this regard, the Government has identified several schemes and work sites where they can work and earn their livelihood. For Scheme VIJAYAK GREF at Kargil & Dras, Padam & Zanskar, there is requirement of 3000 labourers and those willing to work can contact to Col. Kaushik Mitra on 9815944311, while at Leh & Hunder, there is requirement of 3000 workers and willing persons can contact Manoj

Jain AE (Civil) on 7086046035.

Similarly, at HIMANK BRO in Shyok 2500 labourers can get work and for that they need to contact Col. Deepak Baskandi 9419069342- 7060324163; and to get work at Upshi, Mahi, Nyoma, Harnala with the requirement of 1500 labourers, the interested workers can contact Col. Abhishek Khanna 8858400020 and 01982-267148

Likewise, BEACON GREF Rangeth, Srinagar requires 100 workers and contact person is Col. Mukesh Kumar 9622104123, while ahead of Kupwara, there is requirement of 300 men and workers can contact Col. Nitin Chander Joshi 7051721437. At Sonawari, Bandipora there is need of 300 persons and workers can contact Maj. Brijesh B. N. 8966947762, while 300 workers are required Ahead of Haripora and interested persons can contact Padam Vamsi Krishna AE(Civil) 9797184491

The SHIVALIK BRO requires

2300 labourers in Mana, Malari, Chamoli district in Himachal Pradesh and contact person is Col. Manish Kapil 9419981684, while for Bharoghati, Uttarakashi district in HP, the workers can contact Vinod Shrivastava 9717247156; for DEEPAK GREF Udaipur Lahaul Spiti district in HP with requirement of 200 men, workers can contact Hqr 38 BRO 1902-255301; for Jispa in Lahaul Spiti dist, HP, requirement is of 300 labourers, the interested persons can contact Lt. Col. Piyush Shukla 9070897888; for Kiling Sarai, Lahaul Spiti district, HP, having requirement of 400 men, the workers can contact Col. Deepak Singh Bisht 7651003870; at Koksar, Lahaul Spiti district, HP, there is requirement of 300 men and workers can contact Maj. K. Harish Babu 8600138948; at Chika Lahaul Spiti dist, HP, workers requirement is 300 and interested person can contact Capt. Ashwin Tripathi 8860113187.

We Have To Meet The Expectations Of Customers: J&K Bank CMD

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR- With a view to meet the men in operations amid Covid-19 pandemic and listen to the issues faced by them, J&K Bank Chairman & MD R K Chhibber today paid a visit to South Kashmir where he interacted with the Zonal Heads Kashmir South (I & II) Mohammad Shafi Salroo and M A Wanchoo respectively along with Cluster Heads and Lead Bank Officers.

Lauding the role played by the staff in dispensing uninterrupted banking services to the people amid ongoing covid-19 pandemic, the CMD complimented the efforts put in by the entire staff in managing the branches, offices & ATMs very efficiently while managing continuity of business by facilitating the general people.

He also appreciated the efforts put in by both the zones for maintaining cordial relations with the district administration to ensure smooth functioning.

"I have come all the way to meet you and listen to your problems and issues rather than taking any business review at this critical juncture, for, I am sure about your commitment and seriousness towards your institutional duty", the CMD said adding, "However, we need to remain aware that our sustainability and health as a profitable institution necessitates that sufficient income is generated from the business so as to take care of expenses without putting any strain on the reserves of the bank".

Under such circumstances, he urged the staff to rise up to the occasion and put in action the bank's considered mantra of 'survival and revival should go hand in hand' for all our customers.

"In order to make that happen we have to meet the expectations of customers and keep facilitating them to the best of our abilities", he said.

The fact that the banking was included in essential services list for the first time by the government, he asserted, highlights the importance of banking in the lives of people, adding, "Since J&K Bank is known



for working in tough conditions like these while undertaking the responsibility efficiently; the efforts are being appreciated from every corner."

In the given conditions, one of the measures to deal with the situation is to cut on costs, which he said, the bank has already initiated besides putting on hold the CSR spending. While appreciating the fact that even though the business units/offices were working with less-than-required staff strength, the CMD said SOP is already in place.

Encouraging the staff to explore all available business opportunities including micro business despite the challenges and difficulties, the CMD recalled the age-old and time tested maxim i.e. "penny and penny make many." In this regard, he said, "Sufficient powers have been delegated down the line, so officers should not shy away from utilizing those powers responsibly." "Ensure that both the staff and our customers are protected from the ongoing epidemic", the CMD reiterated, "you can undertake any genuine expenditure in this regard". Earlier, the Zonal Heads, Cluster Heads and LBOs of both the zones thanked the CMD for his visit. They briefed the CMD in detail about the business activities in their respective zones since the outbreak of the pandemic. They also apprised the Chairman about the opportunities available and also suggested few measures to improve the business under the present circumstances. On the occasion, the CMD also granted approval to the request put up by the Zonal Heads, to commission the ATMs - that were ready for operations - for public service. Before leaving, the CMD also heard the issues of few staff members, casual labourers and addressed those on the spot.

Supplies To Govt Deptts

Dwivedi Reviews Release Of Payments To MSMEs, PSUs

JAMMU: Commissioner/Secretary, Industries & Commerce, Manoj Kumar Dwivedi, today chaired a meeting regarding clearing of the outstanding payments on account of supply of cement, iron, steel, furniture, bitumen, tiles, crates and other supplies by all the Government Departments to J&K Cements, SICOP/MSMEs and other suppliers.

The meeting was attended by senior officers of PHE, I&C, PWD (R&B), Department of Rural Development & PR, Finance Department and Planning Dev & Monitoring Department.

The Commissioner/ Secretary impressed upon the officers that the out-standings of supplies made by JK Cements, SICOP/MSMEs and others are pending with the departments from last several years, which was re-



viewed by Lieutenant Governor and instructed for payment by all the departments by May 15, 2020. The progress on this account shall be reviewed on daily basis starting with the Departments which are having considerable /major outstanding.

In some cases, the delay is more than 2-3 years which was viewed very seriously and it was impressed upon all the departments to hold HODs and DDOs person-

ally responsible for these delays.

The Commissioner/Secretary further insisted upon daily reporting of the payments cleared by the Departments and also to evolve work culture within the Departments where officials are held accountable and mechanism is put in place for clearance of outstanding payments without delay.

The meeting, among others, was also attended by Director Finance, I&C, MD SICOP

JKSSB Okays Selection For 60 Posts For 5 New GMC's

Observer News Service

JAMMU- The J&K Services Selection Board today convened 169th Board meeting under the chairmanship of Chairman JKSSB Khalid Jahangir at Central office, JKSSB Bahuplaza, Jammu and approved the selections for the 60 posts of Driver under item no. 040 of advertisement notification no.'s 01, 02, 03, 04 and 05 of 2019.

The Board meeting was attended by its Members M.Shafiq Chak, Angrez Singh Rana, Pritam Lal Attri and Harvinder Kour. Controller of Examination JKSSB Musheer Ahmad Mirza, Special Secretary Law Jung Bahadur, Secretary, JKSSB Ranjeet Singh and other officers of the Board assisted the Board in the conduct of its proceedings.

The above mentioned vacancies of Drivers were referred to the J&K Services Selection Board by the Department of Health and Medical Education Department for newly created five GMC's in the year 2019. Subsequently,

Advertisement Notice was issued by the SSB in the year 2019, which was followed by written examination and driving test, in accordance with the selection criteria fixed by the Board for these posts. Accordingly, selection list in line with the laid down selection criteria was prepared which has been approved by the SSB today in its meeting referred to above.

The Board also took up the 192 cases of withheld recommendations in respect of Naib Tehsildars, Junior Staff Nurses, Paramedical positions relating to the Government Medical Colleges and recently released Junior Assistant list pertaining to District Doda for deliberation. Out of aforesaid withheld recommendations cases, the Board approved 20 withheld recommendations of Naib Tehsildars and 150 recommendations relating to various posts of new GMCs for release. Similarly, about 12 recommendations were decided to be released for various posts of other categories.

JK Cements Employees Without Salary For 13 Months

Agencies

SRINAGAR: The families of over 500-employees working in Jammu and Kashmir Cement Limited are passing through trying times in the present Covid-19 lockdown as the Corporation has failed to pay their salaries for last 14 months.

Reports said that there are around 550 employees working with the Corporation and nobody has received salary since almost 14 months. The factory has an installed capacity of 1200 metric tons per day and produces 700 tons of cement on average.

The employees accused Corporation of inflicting miseries on their families by withholding salaries. "My pockets have dried up, and I am unable to make both ends meet. The coldhearted response of authorities is taking a toll on our families," an employee of the Corporation said.

The employees lamented that they are unable to pay off their debts as their savings have exhausted. "Some of us even sold the

jewellery of our wives to run their families. Others have got into debt," another employee said.

He added that in the present lockdown situation some families are worst affected as they are unable to even by essential items.

To worsen things for the employees the Corporation has not deposited their provident fund despite deducting it from their salaries.

The Corporation has accumulated heavy losses over the last five-seven years and that is the reason behind its inability to release salaries. The Corporation was a profit making till the financial year 2012-13.

However, the loss suffered by the Corporation, a top official said, is mainly due to the mismanagement. "It is a golden mine. The reason behind its downfall is official apathy," an official said.

The corporation was once a profitable Public Sector undertaking in the State. The insiders of the corporation appealed LG GC Murmu to intervene into the matter as early as possible so that hundreds of

families are not adversely affected.

The insiders said that they have approached the Management many times, but they always responded by saying that the corporation has no funds for salaries.

"Although the company faced so many ups and downs from past many years but the present situation is very worrying. The employees are very worried and feel their future is insecure" they said.

JKCL has a monopoly on sale and supply of cement to government funded projects and departments. As per government orders, the state agencies have to give first preference to JKCL for purchase of cement.

Managing Director Ishiyag Drabu when contacted admitted that the 13 months' salary of employees is pending. "We have released their one month salary. We have submitted 50 crore revival proposal to the government which is under active consideration," the MD said and added that the corporation has also recommended 4 months' salary in the revival plan.

DIAL-EMMA



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

AIRPORTS

SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311 ✈

RAILWAYS



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

HIGHWAY STATUS



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

This Day in History

- 1945 - World War II: British troops enter Utrecht, Netherlands
- 1945 - World War II: Unconditional German surrender to the Allies signed by General Alfred Jodl at Rheims
- 1947 - General MacArthur approves Japanese constitution
- 1947 - Paraguayan government unleashes contra revolt
- 1954 - French surrender to Vietnam after 55-day siege at Dien Bien Phu
- 1954 - US, Great Britain & France reject Russian membership of NATO
- 1955 - USSR signs peace treaty with France & Great Britain
- 1963 - SETC Telstar 2 launched (apogee 6,700 miles (10,800 km))
- 1975 - Small Astronomy Satellite Explorer 53 launched to study X-rays
- 1986 - Iraq bombs a Tehran oil refiner
- 1992 - US space shuttle STS-49 launched (maiden voyage of Endeavour)
- 1993 - South Africa agrees to multi-racial elections
- 1998 - Mercedes-Benz buys Chrysler for \$US40 billion and forms DaimlerChrysler in the then largest industrial merger in history
- 1999 - Kosovo War: In Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, three Chinese citizens are killed and 20 wounded when a NATO aircraft bombs the Chinese embassy in Belgrade
- 1999 - Pope John Paul II travels to Romania becoming the first pope to visit a predominantly Eastern Orthodox country since the Great Schism in 1054.
- 2008 - Dmitry Medvedev is sworn in as the 3rd President of the Russian Federation
- 2012 - NATO air strike kills 14 and wounds 6 civilians in Afghanistan's Badghis Province

From KO Archives

Pak Repeats 'Out Of Box', Solution For J&K

New Delhi: Pakistan today said "without compromising on principles" it was willing to think out of the box solutions to find a lasting settlement to the Kashmir issue and felt this can be achieved within a "reasonable time frame" given the flexibility shown by both sides.

"This issue needs to be resolved and given the flexibility, sincerity and purposefulness on both sides, there is no reason it cannot be resolved within a reasonable time frame," Pakistan High Commissioner Aziz Ahmed Khan stated here.

Addressing the Delhi Study • Circle on Indo-Pak relations, he said Pakistan was committed to a just and lasting settlement of this issue. "Without compromising on principles, Pakistan has expressed a willingness to think out of the box," he said.

Pakistan, he said, was clear that had there been no Kashmir issue. Indo-Pak ties would have been totally different from what they have been for the last 57 years.

He said the joint statements issued in January, 2004 and last month after the meeting between President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sets out a whole flurry of activity which would keep both sides active in the coming weeks.

Most the confidence building measures would help in creating mutual understanding and goodwill and create an atmosphere which would be conducive towards the solution of the mif re difficult issues, he said.

Khan recalled Musharraf's remarks here last month that the Kashmir issue must be resolved and that otherwise, it will raise its head at a different time under a different leadership.

"We have an opportunity to make history....Let us move ahead with the determination to resolve the issue and open a new chapter in our relations," he stressed.

On Siachen, he said the two sides had reached an agreement in 1989. "Unfortunately, the agreement could not be implemented. We believe that the agreement provides a viable and reasonable way out from this senseless pursuit at such dangerous heights?"

He said on Sir Creek, a "readymade solution" was before the two countries. "We just need to agree on it and move on to other issues." On the economic front, he said the two countries have tremendous capacity to contribute to each other's prosperity.

Referring to the proposed, gas pipeline from Iran to India through Pakistan, he said it promises to bring economic gain to all the three countries.

"We look forward to the Indian Petroleum Minister's visit to Pakistan later this month in connection with this project," he said.

Khan said after over five decades of a bedeviled relationship the two sides were at a stage where a bright future beckoned them, "where there is hope and willingness to bury our acrimonious past, resolve all issues in a fair, equitable and a just manner and start a new relationship which leads the people of our two countries, indeed, the peoples of all of South Asia to peace and prosperity.

KASHMIR OBSERVER

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Legal Counsel: Tasaduq Khwaja
Switchboard: (0194) 2106304
Editorial: (0194) 2502327
Email editorial: editor@kashmirobsvr.net

Rising Graph Of Violence

At a time when J&K and the country are pre-occupied with fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, eight security personnel, two militants and a civilian lost their lives in fresh violence in Handwara. Earlier five militants and five soldiers including four para commandos had died in an encounter at Kupwara. Three CRPF jawans have also lost their lives in ambush in Sopore. This shows a steeply rising graph of violence in Kashmir and doesn't augur well for the summer ahead.

Security forces haven't suffered such a huge loss in the ongoing violence since February 2019 when 40 CRPF personnel lost their lives in a suicide attack on the bus ferrying them from Jammu. Also, the violence has blown up in our face at a time when militancy in Kashmir had been giving all indications of being in retreat. According to police estimate there are around 250 active militants in Kashmir, of which around sixty have been killed since January. Besides, recent months have witnessed a drop in Kashmiri youth taking to arms that was expected to lead to a progressive dwindling of the number of militants.

But Handwara violence has turned these calculations on their head. It has made it clear that the militancy is here to stay as the infiltration remains an ongoing phenomenon, the hi-tech border fencing notwithstanding. And the militants that are crossing over are highly trained and battle-hardened. What is also important is that almost all the militants who carried out these attacks or were killed are Kashmiris. This should be of serious concern for the security agencies. This means there is a renewed local recruitment into militancy.

Import of rising North Kashmir violence, however, goes beyond its heavy toll. Its significance lies in that the militancy in the Valley is not a lost cause that it was expected to be in the wake of nullification of J&K autonomy – doing so, may have, on the contrary enhanced the rationale for an armed struggle. That infiltration is taking place regardless and the militants who are coming include Kashmiris should make the authorities take note. And if the influx of militants continues, as looks likely, it could confront New Delhi with a formidable challenge in the months to come. As it is, the Covid-19 pandemic hasn't stopped the flow and the melting snow along the LoC is likely to give fillip to these arrivals.

One way for New Delhi to tackle is to go down the predictable route: kill more militants and suffer intermittent losses of security personnel and occasionally strike Pakistan too. We have run this gamut many a time and eventually it ends up nowhere. Time for Centre is to think out of box and try political outreach instead, something that in the past has opened up possibilities of peace in the region.

OTHER OPINION

Covid & MSME

On Monday, the Nikkei India Purchasing Managers Index survey revealed that the manufacturing PMI fell to a record low of 27.4 in April, down from 51.8 in March. Of particular concern during this period of economic distress is the condition of the micro, small and medium enterprises. As a series of reports in this paper has highlighted, for many of these small businesses, the difficulty of staying afloat is rising with each passing day. MSMEs are likely to be the most affected by this economic downturn, both sparked and accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic, as they don't have the buffers of the bigger firms or access to cheap capital to help them tide over this period. With demand collapsing, and unlikely to rebound strongly in the near term, it will be increasingly difficult for these businesses to meet their obligations such as repayment of loans or wages to their employees. According to TransUnion Cibil, MSME loans worth Rs 2.3 lakh crore are at a higher risk of becoming non-performing. Further, the working capital requirements of these firms will rise as payment cycles are likely to be stretched, creating additional cash flow problems. This situation is unlikely to revert to normal in the near term even as restrictions on large parts of the country are lifted.

To ease the firms' financial distress during this period, the Reserve Bank of India has announced several measures such as a moratorium on term loans, and easier working capital financing. Some public sector banks have also opened up emergency credit lines for businesses. However, the government response so far has been muted. Some measures have been announced, but they were mostly regulatory and administrative in nature. Reportedly, the government is working on a package to address the needs of the MSMEs. There are concerns over an across-the-board provision of relief measures and the open-endedness of such a package. There will also be issues of targeting.

And providing support to MSMEs operating in the informal economy will pose challenges. Yet the delay in announcing a relief package is surprising. Governments across the world have announced various measures ranging from wage support to direct subsidies to help these businesses tide over these difficult times. But, in India, more than a month after the national lockdown was announced, there is still no blueprint of how the government intends to support these businesses during this period.

There are several possible options for the government to consider. To begin with, all dues owned by governments and public sector undertakings to MSMEs can be immediately cleared. This will help ease their immediate cash flow woes. Second, with banks turning risk averse, credit flow to MSMEs is likely to be depressed as solvency concerns will dominate. In such a situation, the government could step in. It could set up a credit guarantee fund that backstops loans to MSMEs. There is a strong case for urgent government intervention – the costs of intervening early on will be much less than the price of delayed action.

(THE INDIAN EXPRESS)

Is It Time To Bite The Bullet And End Lockdowns?

The Experience Of The Interwar Period Suggests That Avoiding The Hard Questions Is A Recipe For Disaster

Harold James

Policymakers today will face a temptation to extend the emergency and defer the eventual reckoning and distribution of costs. After all, it is not clear what would even constitute an end to the Covid-19 crisis, given that there could be recurrent waves of infection, as happened with the influenza pandemic that began at the end of WWI.

WHEN (and how) to end the Covid-19 lockdown has become the leading political question in every afflicted country. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has gone so far as to describe the increasingly intense debate as a collection of "discussion orgies."

At the heart of the issue is the question of how to distribute the soaring economic and fiscal costs associated with the crisis. The closest historical analogy is to the twentieth century's interwar period, which offered a crash course in navigating extreme fiscal circumstances.

Like the Covid-19 crisis, World War I was a prolonged affair, lasting much longer than people initially expected. In the summer of 1914, many assumed that it would all be over by Christmas. Likewise, in early 2020, many hoped that a brief shutdown would stop the spread of the virus in its tracks. In both cases, the economic shock was grossly underestimated at the outset.

WWI triggered two completely different kinds of national response, though this wasn't apparent initially. Each brought long-term disruption, but one was far more calamitous than the other.

No belligerent could pay for the massive military mobilisation through taxation alone, so the war was funded through borrowing, and much of that was eventually monetised by central banks. Such action was necessary and appropriate for dealing with the emergency, and central bankers duly congratulated themselves for their can-do attitude and patriotism in the face of extenuating circumstances.

The impact on budgets was relatively uniform across countries. By the last year of the war, military expenditures as a share of deficits were around 70 per cent in Italy, the United States, and the United Kingdom, 80 per cent in France, and over 90 per cent in Germany. Price increases in each country were also broadly comparable: they more than doubled, but there was no radical inflation

outside of Russia.

The bigger differences emerged after the war. The UK and the US, facing massive debt-servicing costs from their wartime liabilities, tried to return to normal as quickly as possible. That meant pursuing a balanced budget through substantial tax increases, including unprecedentedly high tax rates for the rich. This approach – the modern world's first experience of induced austerity – choked off demand and triggered an exceptionally deep but short-lived recession.

By contrast, a defeated Germany, like almost every other central European country, feared severe deflation. With the population exhausted and demoralised by the conflict and its outcome, the government was not inclined to impose new taxes. Policymakers considered social programmes necessary for maintaining domestic peace and order, so they relied on the central bank to do the financing, and continued to spend freely on welfare payments and public-sector employment.

Unlike the UK and the US, the German government assumed that the wartime emergency had not ended; the peace was merely an extension of the conflict. Policy discussions continued to feature emergency measures and the radical rhetoric that had been used to justify similar policies during the war. Of course, Germany's policy response eventually produced hyperinflation, and much more profound social disintegration thereafter.

Policymakers today will face a similar temptation to extend the emergency and defer the eventual reckoning and distribution of costs. After all, it is not clear what would even constitute an end to the Covid-19 crisis, given that there could be recurrent waves of infection, as happened with the influenza pandemic that began at the end of WWI.

Moreover, the response to the 2008 global financial crisis set a terrible precedent. As with any wartime mobilisation, emergency actions to deal with the immediate crisis were clearly needed. But a perception of fragility and vul-

nerability remained long after the emergency had passed, because many countries were unwilling or unable to pursue debt reduction through write downs, for fear that doing so would trigger a new wave of financial turmoil.

As in the aftermath of 2008, policymakers today are committed to doing "whatever it takes." While major central banks have the firepower to deal with the immediate liquidity crisis, the hard part will come with the allocation of costs. These costs will include not just the increased spending to deal with the medical emergency, but also the losses incurred by businesses affected by the lockdown. If private enterprises are not bailed out, the question shifts to the fate of their workers. Will temporary measures to compensate for displaced workers' lost income become new permanent features of the welfare state? Will countries start embracing some form of universal minimum or basic income?

The 1920s were also a time of radical social-policy experimentation. The lesson from that period is that such programs cannot be financed simply through a continuation of emergency measures. To be sustained, they eventually must be priced correctly and funded through taxation (or, in some cases, with the help of debt cancellation).

Obviously, when confronting an emergency, one shouldn't think about the bill. But nor can one ignore what comes next. Those now calling for an immediate end to the lockdown have an obligation to speak frankly and openly about how costs will be distributed in the future. So far, this debate has been evaded. The experience of the interwar period suggests that avoiding the hard questions is a recipe for disaster. -Project Syndicate

Harold James is Professor of History and International Affairs at Princeton University and a senior fellow at the Center for International Governance Innovation.

Enough of Restrictions, Restore 4G Now

Abid Hussain Rather

The Jammu and Kashmir administration while opposing the restoration of 4G internet services said that right to internet access is not a fundamental right and the administration can curtail the freedom of speech and the right to trade through the internet. The administration told that these restrictions are only to protect the sovereignty, integrity and security of the country. Looking at the present situation everyone of us is well aware about the necessity and importance of restoration of 4G services in the Union Territory. The slow internet speed is hampering the works of doctors, journalists, students and others in the coronavirus pandemic lockdown. When the people of the Jammu and Kashmir are in dire need of 4G internet services, the administration is opposing its restoration on the ground that the high speed internet allows the miscreants to misuse of data services.

The administration is of the view that 4G internet services will increase the use of social media and circulation of other propaganda material which may result in law and order problem in the UT but the same administration has already ordered for the complete lockdown in the UT and people are restricted to their homes and as such there are least chances of such problems. Instead the common masses should have full access to accurate information through 4G internet in order to tackle the spread of Covid-19 and the res-



toration of the 4G should have been the priority. As the people are locked in their houses, the fast internet service can play an important role in carrying out the important activities at houses thus avoiding people to gather at public places which in turn results in least social interaction. The administration is of the opinion that the miscreants are using internet to support fallacious proxy wars by raising money, recruiting and spreading false ideologies, but perhaps they are unaware about the fact that all these activities can be carried out at 2G speed also. When we look at the past five months since the restoration of 2G services, no such activities have been observed on large scale in the union territory. There has been a great control on the spread of rumors and false information through the social media by the efforts of cyber crime wing of police department from

past eight months. Instead of blocking 4G internet service on the whole it is better to pin point the black sheeps and rumor mongers who spread the false information and rumors on social media and put them behind the bars and spare common masses from the sufferings of 4G internet service restrictions.

The doctors in Jammu and Kashmir are unable to access important information and guidelines for combating the virus and practices recommended by WHO. They are unable to guide the common masses through internet media as it is impossible for them to deliver online video messages to common people at 2G internet speed. As the administration has already ordered for the closure of all the educational institutions because of coronavirus pandemic, the authorities ordered for the online conduction of classes but

it seems to be a day dream because of low speed of internet as the teachers are unable to upload the videos on internet and students find it impossible to watch the videos at 2G speed. Access to high speed internet is also important for human rights activists, defenders and media journalists for carrying out their work and delivering essential information to the common people. Restoration of 4G internet service is also essential for trade and commerce amid lockdown in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The economic sector of the UT has already suffered a great loss in the past eight months due to political unrest and now due to lockdown. Restoration of 4G internet can help to a great extent in minimizing and recouping this loss.

Keeping in view the present critical situation, the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the

stakeholders from different fields are demanding for the restoration of the 4G internet service and it was urged that 4G internet should be declared as essential service under Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) but the administration is turning a deaf ear to their demands. Though access to 4G internet is not a fundamental right but it has become a basic and essential necessity in the present pandemic situation. It is one of the important sources which can help us to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and which can help us to minimize the losses in education and economic sectors. The people of Jammu and Kashmir have already suffered a lot during past eight months due to abnormal political conditions and restrictions on internet services. They have got mentally frustrated and psychologically depressed. The students have suffered irreparable losses and their careers are at stake. It is high time to restore the 4G internet service in the Union Territory for the major relief of common masses in general and student community in particular. The administration should find some other ways and means to deal with the miscreants and should restore 4G internet service as soon as possible as the 4G internet service has become a basic necessity in the modern times specially in the present pandemic situation.

(The author teaches Geography at GDC Kulgam. He can be reached at rather1294@gmail.com)

Iranian President Dubs Trump's Exit From Nuclear Deal 'Stupid Mistake'

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that United States President Donald Trump made a stupid mistake by pulling out of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. Rouhani called on Washington to lift its sanctions.

Trump pulled the United States out of the pact in 2018, arguing it did not go far enough to constrain Tehran's missile

programme and influence in the region.

"Trump made a stupid mistake by exiting the nuclear deal," said Rouhani.

"If America wants to return to the deal, it should lift all the sanctions on Tehran and compensate for the reimposition of sanctions...Iran will give a crushing response if the arms embargo on Tehran is extended," Rouhani added.



Sikh Doctors In Canada Make 'Extremely Difficult Decision' To Shave Beards To Serve COVID19 Patients



TORONTO: Two Sikh doctor brothers in Canada have made an "extremely difficult decision" to shave off their beards, an article of faith in Sikhism, so as to wear the medical-grade protective masks necessary to treat patients suffering from the deadly coronavirus in the country, according to media reports.

Montreal physician Sanjeet Singh-Saluja and his brother Rajee, a neurosurgeon at the McGill University Health Centre's (MUHC) Montreal General and Royal Victoria hospitals, decided to shave their beards after consulting with religious advisers, family and friends, the Brantford Expositor reported.

"As a Sikh man, his beard is an important part of his identity but it was impeding his ability to wear a mask. After much thought, he made the difficult decision to shave his beard off," the MUHC said in a statement.

"We could choose not to work, but in a time when healthcare workers are falling sick, we would be adding stress to an already taxed system. We could decide to simply refuse to see COVID-19 patients until viable protection is available to us, but that goes against our oath as physicians and against the principles of SEVA," he said in a video posted on the MUHC website.

"It was an extremely difficult decision for us, but one that we felt was absolutely necessary in this time of need," Singh-Saluja said.

"It's a decision that has left me

with much sadness. This was something that had been so much part of my identity. I look at myself in the mirror very differently now. Every morning when I see myself, it's a bit of a shock," he was quoted as saying by the Montreal Gazette.

"Originally when my brother and I did this, my brother wanted to keep it very quiet and didn't want any publicity," Singh-Saluja said, adding that "We still have a really hard time with it," he said.

Singh-Saluja has dealt with all sorts of outbreaks over the years, but the coronavirus is in a class all its own, and hence the necessity for the N95 mask now.

"But because COVID-19 has become so rampant in our community, it just wasn't feasible anymore (not to wear a N95 mask). There are so many people coming in. I felt I just couldn't sit on the sidelines. This was an exception to the rule, so we had to do what we had to do to help out," he said.

His brother Rajee was in a similar predicament and would no longer have been able to operate on COVID-19 patients, the report said.

Healthcare workers are coping with the acute shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) across the world. Canada is facing major medical gear shortage as many countries have restricted exports.

The total number of coronavirus cases in Canada has reached 62,035 with 4,043 deaths, according to the health authorities.

The country's hardest-hit provinces are Ontario and Quebec. PTI



Global COVID-19 Cases Near 3.7Mn Mark, With Over 257K Deaths

The US's death toll from the pandemic has surpassed the 71,000 mark, and Britain on Tuesday took over Italy for the first time in registering the highest number of COVID-19 fatalities in Europe, reporting 29,501 deaths so far. Reports also pointed to the likelihood that the actual number of infections and fatalities were considerably higher than officially registered.

The following are the latest updates from the global outbreak by region:

Europe

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Germany surged by 947 to 164,807, according to data from the country's Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for infectious diseases released on Wednesday. Fatalities also rose by 165 to 6,996.

Italy's death toll from the contagion also climbed by 236 on Tuesday, compared to only 195 cases the previous day, its Civil Protection Agency announced.

France documented more than 300 coronavirus-linked deaths for the second day in a row on Tuesday.

Spain, meanwhile, reported its third day in a row of fatalities under 200, though a record number of its citizens filed for social security benefits for April, Reuters reported.

The Americas

In Brazil, an increasing number of major cities started coronavirus lockdowns on Tuesday in an effort to contain the outbreak in Latin America's hardest-hit country, which has 105,222 confirmed cases and 7,288 deaths.

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has compared the virus to "a little flu," but the reaction of the nation's 27 state and district governments has differed. Most have imposed some form of business restrictions in which non-essential services and commerce are forbidden, while stopping short of mandating an official lockdown, which would limit people's movement.

In Ecuador, one of the nation's indigenous communities — the Sienkopi nation — has expressed serious concern that it could be wiped out as coronavirus infections rise in its territory, prompting dozens of its members to flee into the Amazon rainforest for shelter from the outbreak, which has so far killed nearly 1,600 in the country.

Human rights organizations working in Ecuador's Amazonian regions emphasized that Ecuador's Health Ministry was neglecting communities like the Sienkopi, who have yet to receive tests or medical supplies despite their vulnerability.

Mexico, meanwhile, has officially registered some 25,000 cases of coronavirus and almost 2,300 deaths by Monday, although the Mexican Health Ministry has repeatedly said the true number of infections is probably several times higher than that.

This is while the country's Deputy Health Minister Hugo Lopez-Gatell has claimed victory in the battle against the coronavirus, even as he warned of a second wave of seasonal illness in October.

Peru's President Martin Vizcarra confirmed on Tuesday that cases of the new coronavirus in the country had now surpassed the 50,000 mark.

Asia-Pacific

Coronavirus cases across Asia surpassed the quarter-of-a-million mark on Tuesday, driven by the outbreaks in Singapore, India, and Pakistan, even though China, South Korea, and Japan have significantly contained the spread of the disease.

Indonesia reported its highest daily rise in infections on Tuesday with 484 new cases, taking the total to 12,071.

India, meanwhile, has recorded 46,432 cases and 1,568 confirmed deaths from the virus, with more than 2,000 new cases over recent days as its largest cities have maintained tight restrictions despite the end of a nationwide lockdown on Sunday.

Germany To Reopen All Shops And Schools In May

Germany will take new steps towards normalisation in May, including reopening shops and schools after weeks of shutdown imposed to control the spread of the coronavirus, according to a draft agreement seen by AFP Wednesday.

"Even after initial steps to open up were introduced from April 20, the number of new infections remained low," the document read, with "no new wave of infection" so far detected — justifying the series of bolder reopening steps.

So far, only certain children like those soon facing exams had been allowed to return to class.

But now kindergartens and primary schools will also reopen from next week.

"Step-by-step, schools should make possible education of all pupils while implementing appropriate hygiene measures and upholding distancing rules," the document read.

Chancellor Angela Merkel and premiers from Germany's 16 federal states are expected to sign off on the text later Wednesday.

Meanwhile it will be up to the individual regions to decide how to proceed with reopening universities.



Regarding shops, the politicians said all could reopen but requirements "for hygiene, managing entry and avoiding queues forming" would be imposed.

So far only shops up to a floor space of 800 square metres had been authorised to resume sales.

States will also have a free hand over whether to reopen restaurants beginning on May 9, as well as on decisions affecting theatres, concert halls, nightclubs and gyms.

Meanwhile the one major coronavirus restriction set to remain in place — likely for several

months — is a ban on large gatherings like sports matches, cultural events or festivals.

Such events will remain forbidden until "at least August 31", according to the text.

What's more, lockdown measures will be reimposed if the number of coronavirus infections begins to mount again.

If more than 50 new infections per 100,000 inhabitants are detected within seven days, the affected city or district must impose "a corresponding lockdown plan".

Italian Researchers Claim To Have Developed World's First Coronavirus Vaccine

Italian researchers claim to have successfully developed a vaccine to contain coronavirus (Covid-19) which is likely to work on humans, a report said.

Luigi Aurisicchio, CEO of Takeda, the firm developing the medication, said that a coronavirus candidate vaccine has neutralised the virus in human cells for the first time, the Arab News reported.

"This is the most advanced stage of testing of a candidate vaccine created in Italy. Human tests are expected after this summer," Aurisicchio was quoted as saying to Italian news agency ANSA.

"According to the Spallanzani

Hospital, as far as we know we are the first in the world so far to have demonstrated neutralisation of the coronavirus by a vaccine. We expect this to happen in humans too," he added.

The researchers experimented with the vaccine on mice that had successfully developed antibodies that blocked the virus from infecting the cells. They further observed that the five vaccine candidates generated a large number of antibodies, and selected two with the best results.

All of the vaccine candidates currently being developed are

based on the genetic material of DNA protein "spike", the molecular tip used by the coronavirus to enter human cells.

They are injected with the so-called "electroporation" technique, which consists of an intramuscular injection followed by a brief electrical impulse, helping the vaccine break into the cells and activating the immune system, the report said.

Researchers believe that this makes their vaccine particularly effective

for generating functional antibodies against the "spike" protein, in particular in the lung cells, which are the most vulnerable to coronavirus.

"We are working hard for a vaccine coming from Italian research, with an all-Italian and innovative technology, tested in Italy and made available to everyone," Aurisicchio was quoted by the Arab News report.

"In order to reach this goal, we need the support of national and international institutions and partners who may help us speed up the process," he noted.

The total number of Covid-19 infections, fatalities and recoveries since the pandemic began has risen to 213,013 in the country.



Women Hail Victory As Sudan Bans Genital Cutting



KHARTOUM: Hakam Ibrahim was seven when, like most Sudanese girls, she became a victim of female genital mutilation -- an age-old practice deemed as horrific that the post-revolution government is now banning.

A mother-of-four in her 40s, Ibrahim vividly recalls the traumatic experience of what remains a widespread ritual in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia despite a concerted human rights campaign to end it.

The night before it happened, Ibrahim remembers, women from her neighbourhood in the capital Khartoum were singing and ululating as they drew ceremonial henna tattoos on her hands.

On the day itself, she was taken to a small room where a woman in a white robe performed the operation to remove Ibrahim's external genitalia.

"I was put on a bed and felt excruciating pain jolting through my body," she told AFP. "The pain lasted an entire week."

The practice has long been viewed, especially in rural communities, as a "rite of passage" for girls and a way to preserve their chastity.

In Sudan nearly nine out of 10 girls fall victim to what is known as FGM or genital cutting, according to the United Nations.

In its most brutal form, it involves the removal of the labia and clitoris, often in unsanitary conditions and without anesthesia.

The wound is then sewn shut, often causing cysts and infections and leaving women to suffer se-

vere pain during sex and childbirth complications later in life.

Rights groups have for years decried as barbaric the practice which can lead to myriad physical, psychological and sexual complications and, in the most tragic cases, death.

Rights violation

Last week, Sudan's cabinet approved amendments to the criminal code that would punish those who perform the operation with up to three years in prison and a fine.

It is expected to soon be ratified by Sudan's transitional authorities.

The watershed move is part of reforms that have come since the ouster more than a year ago of strongman Omar al-Bashir after mass demonstrations in which women took a leading role.

"It is a very important step for Sudanese women and shows that we have come a long way," said women's rights activist Zeinab Badredin.

The United Nations Children's Fund also welcomed the landmark decision.

"This practice is not only a violation of every girl child's rights, but it also is harmful and has serious consequences for a girl's physical and mental health," said Abdullah Fadil, the UNICEF Representative in Khartoum.

The UN says FGM is widespread in many countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia, affecting the lives of millions of girls and women.



Police said the boy, who was not identified, had managed to drive about two to three miles (three to five kilometers) from his home before he was stopped and his parents contacted.

"The family reported that the boy's older sibling was watching him that morning, the sibling fell asleep and the boy took the keys to the SUV off of a hook in their home," the statement said.

NEWS MAKERS

First Hindu Youth Joins Pakistan Air Force

ISLAMABAD: In a first, a Pakistani Hindu youth has become the first person from the minority community to join the Pakistan Air Force.

Rahul Dev has been recruited as a General Duty Pilot Officer, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) said in a tweet.

Dev hails from Tharparkar district of Sindh province.

Sharing the picture of the young man, the PAF recently tweeted, "Good news during #COVID19 tense situation. Thar rocked again..Congratulations #RahulDev who hails from very remote village of Tharparkar has been selected as GD



exact age is not known, those inducted in PAF at his level are often around 20.

The official Radio Pakistan on Wednesday said it is "for the first time in Pakistan's history"

that a Hindu youth has been recruited as a general duty pilot officer in PAF.

The Express Tribune in a report published on Wednesday said the induction showed that the PAF was breaking barriers.

Last year, Kainat Junaid became the first woman from Khyber-Pakthunkhwa province to have been selected for fighter pilot training.

Junaid not only secured the top position in PAF's test for General Duty Pilot, but also became Pakistan's first female fighter pilot to serve the country alongside her father.

Her father Ahmed Junaid is a Squadron Leader in the PAF. PTI

Five-year-old pulled over in US while driving to California

A police officer in the western US state of Utah was stunned after stopping what he thought was an impaired driver on a highway only to find a five-year-old behind the wheel.

The Utah Highway Patrol said the boy told the trooper who pulled him over on Monday that he left home following an argument with his mother who had refused to buy him a Lamborghini.

"He decided he'd take the car and go to California to buy one himself," the Highway Patrol said in a tweet. "He might have been short on the purchase amount, as he only had \$3."

In a dashcam video of the inci-

dent released by the department, the SUV the boy was driving is seen weaving across the freeway as other vehicles and trucks speed by.

The car then pulls over to the left side of the highway after trooper Rick Morgan activates his siren.

"As Trp. Morgan approached the driver-side of the vehicle on foot, he noted that it was strange that he could not see the head of the driver from the rear window," the Highway Patrol said in a statement released Tuesday.

Morgan in the video is heard asking the boy for his age.

"You're five years old?" he exclaims. "Wow... Where did you learn how to drive a car?"

COVID VIRUS-AFFLICTED 2020

Looks Like 1918 Spanish Flu
Despite Science's March

Agencies

WASHINGTON- Despite a century's progress in science, 2020 is looking a lot like 1918.

In the years between two lethal pandemics, one the misnamed Spanish flu, the other COVID-19, the world learned about viruses, cured various diseases, made effective vaccines, developed instant communications and created elaborate public-health networks.

Yet here we are again, face-

masked to the max. And still unable to crush an insidious yet avoidable infectious disease before hundreds of thousands die from it.

As in 1918, people are again hearing hollow assurances at odds with the reality of hospitals and morgues filling up and bank accounts draining.

The ancient common sense of quarantining is back. So is quackery: Rub raw onions on your chest, they said in 1918. How about disinfectant in your veins now? mused President

Donald Trump, drawing gasps instead of laughs over what he weakly tried to pass off as a joke.

In 1918, no one had a vaccine, treatment or cure for the great flu pandemic as it ravaged the world and killed more than 50 million people. No one has any of that for the coronavirus, either.

Modern science quickly identified today's new coronavirus, mapped its genetic code and developed a diagnostic test, tapping knowledge no one had in 1918. That has given people more

of a fighting chance to stay out of harm's way, at least in countries that deployed tests quickly, which the US didn't.

But the ways to avoid getting sick and what to do when sick are little changed. The failure of US presidents to take the threat seriously from the start also joins past to present.

Trump all but declared victory before infection took root in his country and he's delivered a stream of misinformation ever since. President Woodrow Wil-

son's principal failure was his silence.

Not once, historians say, did Wilson publicly speak about a disease that was killing Americans grotesquely and in huge numbers, even though he contracted it himself and was never the same after.

Wilson fixated on America's parallel fight in World War I like "a dog with a bone," says John M. Barry, author of "The Great Influenza." The suspected ground zero of the 1918 flu ranges from Kansas to China. But it was clear to U.S. officials even in 1918 that it didn't start in Spain.

The pandemic took on Spain's name only because its free press ambitiously reported the devastation in the disease's early 1918 wave while government officials and a complicit press in countries at war — the U.S. among them — played it down in a time of jingoism, censorship and denial.

Like COVID-19, the 1918 pandemic came from a respiratory virus that jumped from animals to people, was transmitted the same way, and had similar pathology, Barry said by email. Social distancing, hand-washing and masks were leading control

measures then and now.

Medical advice from then also resonates today: "If you get it, stay at home, rest in bed, keep warm, drink hot drinks and stay quiet until the symptoms are past," said Dr. John Dill Robertson, Chicago health commissioner in 1918.

"Then continue to be careful,

for the greatest danger is from pneumonia or some kindred disease after the influenza is gone."

But there were also marked differences between the viruses of 1918 and 2020.

The Spanish flu was particularly dangerous to healthy people aged 20 to 40 — the prime generation of military service — paradoxically because of their vibrant immune systems.

When such people got infected, their antibodies went after the virus like soldiers spilling from the trenches of Europe's killing fields. "The immune system was throwing every weapon it had at the virus," Barry said.

"The battlefield was the lung. The lung was being destroyed in that battle," Young soldiers and sailors massed at military camps in the US, sailed for Europe on ships stuffed to the gunwales with humanity, fought side by side in

the trenches and came home in victory to adoring crowds.

The toll was enormous, on them and the people they infected. The Spanish flu could just as easily have been called the US Army or US Navy flu instead. Or the German or British flu, for that matter.

Among those who died in the pandemic was Friedrich Trump, Donald Trump's paternal grandfather. Among those who contracted it and recovered were the wartime leaders of Britain and Germany as well as of the United States, British and Spanish kings and the future US president, Franklin Roosevelt, when he was assistant Navy secretary. But the toll was heavier on average people and the poor, crowded in tenements, street cars and sweaty factories.

They could not all live by the words of the 1918 US surgeon general, Rupert Blue: "Keep out of crowds and stuffy places as much as possible. ... The value of fresh air through open windows cannot be overemphasised. ... Make every possible effort to breathe as much pure air as possible." An estimated 675,000 Americans died in the pandemic, which is thought to have infected one-third of the global population. (AP)

THEN CONTINUE TO BE CAREFUL,
for the greatest danger is from pneumonia or
some kindred disease after the influenza is gone."

After Apple Watch,
This Necklace Can Detect
Abnormal Heart Rhythm Too

Agencies

Researchers have developed an ingenious necklace which detects abnormal heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation (AFib), an irregular heartbeat that can lead to serious complications such as stroke, heart failure and heart attacks.

One of the major causes of stroke is unrecognised and untreated atrial fibrillation. Approximately 25 per cent of all strokes are caused by atrial fibrillation.

While it is the most common heart rhythm disturbance, atrial fibrillation is often symptomless and intermittent, making its detection and diagnosis challenging. Innovative methods for detection are therefore needed.

"The wearable necklace-ECG (electrocardiogram) provides a new and easy method for detecting an abnormal heart rhythm or atrial fibrillation, which is a fast-growing public health problem," said study author Elmeri Santala from the University of Eastern Finland.

The current study, scheduled to be showcased on EHRA Essentials 4 You, a scientific platform of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), examined the diagnostic accuracy of an ECG worn around the neck.

A single-lead ECG is embedded into the pendant.

To measure their heart rhythm, users start an application on their smartphone then place the necklace pendant between the palms of their hands or between the palm and the chest for 30 seconds.

Data are automatically sent to a cloud service and analysed for atrial fibrilla-



tion using artificial intelligence (AI). Within a few seconds, the smartphone application displays the results of the analysis. An ECG report is also generated for physicians to confirm the diagnosis.

The study enrolled 145 adults who used the necklace to measure their own heart rhythm. Participants simultaneously underwent a three-lead ECG recording as a 'gold standard' comparison.

Two cardiologists analysed all ECG readings without knowing the initial rhythm (i.e. they were blinded to the 3-lead ECG recordings and initial 12-lead ECG). Automated AI analysis of the necklace ECG was also performed. The necklace produced ECG recordings with excellent quality to detect and diagnose atrial fibrillation. Atrial fibrillation diagnoses made by standard ECG measurement were also picked up by the necklace device with high accuracy - both the automated AI analysis and interpretation of the ECG report by a cardiologist.

"The necklace ECG is simple to use and allows repetitive self-monitoring of heart rhythm, thereby improving the likelihood of detecting atrial fibrillation," said Santala.

The ESC recommends screening for atrial fibrillation in people over 65 years of age and in those at high risk of stroke; automated analysis by the necklace ECG is well suited for this purpose, according to the study.

Researchers Find Antibody That Blocks
Infection By Coronavirus In Cells

Agencies

LONDON - Researchers have identified a fully human monoclonal antibody that prevents the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) virus from infecting cultured cells.

The discovery, detailed in the journal Nature Communications, is an initial step towards developing a fully human antibody to treat or prevent the respiratory disease COVID-19 caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2.

This research from Utrecht University, Erasmus Medical Center and Harbour BioMed (HBM) builds on the work they have done in the past on antibodies targeting the SARS-CoV that emerged in 2002/2003.

"Using this collection of SARS-CoV antibodies, we identified an antibody that also neu-

tralises infection of SARS-CoV-2 in cultured cells," said study co-lead author Berend-Jan Bosch, Associate Professor at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

"Such a neutralising antibody has the potential to alter the course of infection in the infected host, support virus clearance or protect an uninfected individual that is exposed to the virus," Bosch added.

The researchers noted that the antibody binds to a domain that is conserved in both SARS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2, explaining its ability to neutralise both viruses.

This cross-neutralising feature of the antibody is very interesting and suggests it may have potential in mitigation of diseases caused by future-emerging related coronaviruses, Bosch said.



This discovery provides a strong foundation for additional research to characterise this antibody and begins development as a potential COVID-19 treatment.

"The antibody used in this work

is 'fully human,' allowing development to proceed more rapidly and reducing the potential for immune-related side effects," said study co-author Frank Grosveld. Conventional therapeutic

antibodies are first developed in other species and then must undergo additional work to 'humanize' them, according to the researchers.

The antibody was generated using Harbour BioMed's H2L2 transgenic mouse technology.

"This is groundbreaking research. Much more work is needed to assess whether this antibody can protect or reduce the severity of disease in humans," said Dr Jingsong Wang, Founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Harbour BioMed.

"We expect to advance the development of the antibody with partners. We believe our technology can contribute to addressing this most urgent public health need and we are pursuing several other research avenues," Wang noted.

Chronic Illness In Childhood
Linked To High Mental Problems

Agencies

Children with long-term health conditions may be more likely to experience mental illness in early adolescence than healthy kids, warn researchers.

In the study, published in the journal Development and Psychopathology, children reported to have chronic health problems showed higher rates of mental illness at 10 years, and those health problems continued to be associated with poor mental health at the ages of 13 and 15.

"This research provides the strongest evidence of it to date in the years of late childhood and early adolescence. The difference chronic conditions make to mental health is concerning, and the first impact



can be seen even before adolescence, in late childhood," said study author, Dr Ann Marie Brady from the Queen Mary University of London in the UK.

For the findings, the research team reviewed a sample of approximately 7000 children to investigate the occurrence of mental health disorders, including anxiety or depression, and chronic illness.

The measure of chronic illness was based on mothers assessing their child's health at 10 and 13.

Since chronic conditions are defined as those that cannot be cured but can be controlled by medication and other therapies and may have little disease activity, this measure included children presenting with minor health problems.

The researchers found that children with chronic health conditions were approximately twice as likely at 10 and at 13 to present with a mental health disorder than the control group (children reported by their mothers to be 'healthy, no problems').

At age 15, children with chronic health problems were 60 per cent more likely to present with such disorders.

To investigate this pattern further, the researchers looked at a subset of the children with chronic illness those who had been diagnosed with asthma.

Increasing Green Spaces
In Cities May Prevent
Premature Deaths

Agencies

Researchers now claim that planting trees and making urban environments greener can prevent many premature deaths every year.

The study, published in the journal The Lancet Planetary, analysed the impact of increasing green spaces on premature mortality in Philadelphia (US) and found that increasing the tree canopy to 30 per cent of land area in an entire city could prevent over 400 premature deaths every year and yield an estimated annual economic benefit of almost four billion dollars.

The research led by the Barcelona Institute for Global



Health (ISGlobal) and the US Forest Service, shown that green spaces in urban settings are associated with benefits for the physical and mental health of the city's residents.

A recent systematic review and meta-analysis, which included nine longitudinal studies involving over eight million people in seven different countries, found a significant association between an increase in green space around homes and a reduction in premature mortality.

Consumers Won't Benefit From Lower Crude Oil Prices As Govt Hikes Taxes On Fuel

NEW DELHI: India late on Tuesday increased its taxes and duties on petrol and diesel instead of passing on the benefit of lower

and diesel to moves in the international markets, where prices of fuel have declined substantially amid the slump in global crude oil demand.



crude oil prices to consumers, as the government moves to raise revenues in an economy that ground to a halt in the coronavirus crisis.

Taxes and duties on petrol and diesel were increased by 10 rupees/litre and 13 rupees/litre, respectively, but the federal government said in a statement that local pump prices would not be affected.

India pegs retail prices of petrol

Some state governments earlier on Tuesday sharply raised taxes on alcohol in a bid to bolster their own coffers that have also taken a hit amid the nationwide lockdown that began on March 25.

India reported more than 3,900 new infections of the novel coronavirus on Tuesday marking its highest single day increase in cases, and taking its tally to 46,711. The death toll in India stood at 1,583 people, the health ministry said.

Gold Prices Today Fall For 2Nd Day In A Row, But Silver Rates Rise



Gold prices in India edged lower today but remained in a narrow range after registering a moderate decline in the previous session. On MCX, June gold futures fell about 100 to 45,650 per 10 gram. Silver rates however perked up, with July futures on MCX rising 0.5% to 42,134. In global markets, gold prices slipped today as risk sentiment improved amid gradual reopening of many economies. A firmer dollar also weighed on prices.

Spot gold fell 0.1% to \$1,704.88 per ounce. Equities moved higher as many countries tentatively eased lockdowns this week. Among other precious metals, platinum slipped 0.2% to \$763.05 per ounce, while silver fell 0.1% to \$15.01 per ounce.

Against key rivals, the US dollar gained for a fourth straight session. A firmer dollar makes gold costlier for investors using other currencies and thus hurts demand.

Meanwhile, investment demand for gold continued to remain strong. The holdings of world's largest gold-backed exchange-traded fund, SPDR Gold Trust, rose 0.4% to 1,076.39

tonnes on Tuesday from 1,071.71 tonnes on Monday.

"Gold has managed to hold near \$1700/ounce level but is struggling to gain traction due to mixed factors. Supporting price is increased US-China tensions, concerns about health of major economies amid disappointing economic data, rising virus cases worldwide, loose monetary policy stance of major central banks and continuing ETF inflows," Kotak Securities said in a note.

"However, weighing on price is increasing efforts by countries to ease virus related restrictions to ease the economic distress and some recovery in US dollar index from recent lows," the brokerage added.

"Gold may witness choppy trade amid mixed factors however buy on dips is recommended amid persisting worries about health of major economies."

Jigar Trivedi, Research Analyst-Commodities Fundamental, Anand Nathi Shares & Stock Brokers, said: "More pressure came in as two of the world's biggest gold refiners, Valcambi and Argor-Heraeus, have restarted almost all operations after Switzerland relaxed coronavirus lockdown measures after a gap of almost 6 weeks."



Indian Retail Sector Loss Tops Rs 5.5 Lakh Cr Amid Lockdown

MUMBAI: Indian retail sector comprising around 7 crore traders has witnessed a loss of Rs 5.50 lakh crore since March 25 when the lockdown was imposed to contain the coronavirus infection, traders' body CAIT said on Tuesday.

Besides at least 20% of Indian retailers are likely to wind up their businesses in the next few months, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said.

Following these challenging times, the CAIT has urged the government to award a substantial package to traders to ensure their survival.

Covid-19 has caused a huge dent in retail trade which will have a devastating effect on the

whole country, CAIT secretary general Praveen Khandelwal said.

"Indian retailers do a daily business of around Rs 15,000 crore and since the country is in a lockdown there has been a huge loss of over Rs 5.50 lakh crore of business, which is done by 7 crore traders of the country. This will force around 1.5 crore traders to permanently down their shutters and a further 75 lakh traders, who are dependent on these 1.5 crore traders, will fold up in the medium term," he added.

At least 2.5 crore traders in India are micro and small in nature who do not have deep pockets to sustain this severe economic ca-

tastrophe, he added.

On the one hand, they are paying salaries, rentals, other monthly expenses and on the other hand, they will have to deal with a sharp dip in disposable income of consumers along with strict social distancing norms, which will not allow business to return to normalcy for at least 6-9 months, Khandelwal said.

The Indian economy was already passing through a recessionary phase and there was a significant downturn in demand across sectors, but this pandemic has delivered the knockout punch and washed away all hopes of revival, he added.

CAIT national president BC Bhartia urged the government to intervene otherwise the sector will suffer unprecedented damage. — PTI

Petrol, Diesel Under GST Unlikely In Near Future, Say BJP, Cong Leaders

BENGALURU: Indian industry is raising the pitch to bring petrol and diesel under the GST for sure, but BJP and Congress leaders indicated on Wednesday that it is unlikely to be fructified in the near future with states not willing to get on board.

Senior Congress leader M Veerappa Moily said his party held the view that the fuels have to be brought under the ambit of GST but added that now is not the time to do so as state finances are collapsing due to the adverse impact of the COVID-19-induced lockdown.

"The State finances will not permit that decision to be taken at this time of the crisis. Because States have been opposing that.

So, this is not the time to discuss or take a decision to bring them under GST", the former Union Oil Minister told PTI.

The former Karnataka Chief Minister said he does not expect forward movement on the proposal for a year or two due to unwillingness of the states.

BJP Spokesperson and Rajya Sabha member G V L Narasimha Rao said the Union Government had on many occasions proposed bringing petroleum and liquor under GST but the states were reluctant contending that they were their major source of revenue and they cannot allow these two items.

"So, the Central government was always willing and keen.

"But the State Governments had put their foot down.

"So, obviously, all decisions are



made by GST Council by consensus. We could not arrive at a consensus with State governments on this", Rao told PTI.

He, however, said, "This is a matter that can be considered in future GST council meetings. GST Council, whenever it meets, may relook at the possibility but States are reluctant.

"So, I don't think this fructifying in the near future". Industry body ASSOCHAM said on Tuesday sooner petrol and diesel are brought under the GST (Goods and Services Tax), better it would be for the Indian economy.

According to ASSOCHAM Secretary General Deepak Sood, governments, both at the Centre and States have been over-dependent on petrol and diesel for revenue.

"While this over-dependence needs to be brought down, there

is a strong case for a national parity for the prices of the automobile fuel", Sood said.

"Otherwise, the broader objective of a single market under the GST remains unfulfilled".

He said the industry has been seeking a bold stimulus package for providing immediate relief as it was reeling under the 42-day lockdown, due to the Covid-19 crisis.

One of the main reasons for the stimulus is to revive the demand by way of tax reductions.

"But, on the contrary, if taxes are raised, demand would be further depressed, giving a jolt to the economy", Sood said.

In any case, the crude oil prices have crashed to unprecedented lows, without the pump prices being reduced, against the spirit of the market-driven pricing policy, the ASSOCHAM said. PTI

Govt Hikes Excise Duty On Petrol, Diesel, But Pump Prices Won't Change

The government on Tuesday evening hiked the excise duty by a record Rs 10 per litre on petrol and Rs 13 per litre on diesel to garner Rs 1.6 lakh crore additional revenue as it repeated its time-tested formula of not passing on gains arising from a slump in international oil prices.

Retail prices of petrol and diesel will not be impacted by the tax changes as state-owned oil firms will adjust them against the recent fall in oil prices, industry officials said.

According to a notification issued by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, special additional excise duty on petrol has been hiked by Rs 2 per litre and road cess has been hiked by Rs 8 a litre.

In case of diesel, special additional excise duty has been hiked by Rs 5 per litre and road cess has been raised by Rs 8 a litre.

With this, the total incidence of excise duty on petrol has risen to Rs

arising from fall in international oil prices. It had raised excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 3 per litre each in March to garner about Rs 39,000 crore.

Petrol and diesel prices have not been revised since March 16 despite international oil prices falling to a two-decade low. The gains will now be adjusted against the excise duty hike.

Petrol costs Rs 71.26 a litre in Delhi and a litre of diesel comes for Rs 69.39.

The government had between November 2014 and January 2016 raised excise duty on petrol and diesel on nine occasions to take away gains arising from plummeting global oil prices.

In all, duty on petrol rate was hiked by Rs 11.77 per litre and that on diesel by 13.47 a litre in those 15 months that helped government's excise mop up more than double to Rs 2,42,000 crore in 2016-17 from Rs 99,000 crore in 2014-15.

It cut excise duty by Rs 2 in Octo-



ber 2017 and by Rs 1.50 a year later. But it raised excise duty by Rs 2 per litre in July 2019.

Government sources said the Centre has taken this step of increasing duty to raise some revenue in view of a tight fiscal situation. This would help in generating the resources to meet the expense of coronavirus fight.

This is the second time since March that the government has hiked excise duty to mop up gains

EU Forecasts 'Recession Of Historic Proportions' This Year

BRUSSELS: The European Union predicted Wednesday "a recession of historic proportions this year" due to the impact of the coronavirus with a drop in output of more than 7 per cent, as it released its first official forecast of the damage the pandemic is inflicting on the bloc's economy.

The 27-nation EU economy is predicted to contract by 7.5 per cent this year, before growing by about 6 per cent in 2021.

The group of 19 nations using the euro as their currency will see a record decline of 7.75 per cent this year, and grow by 6.25 per cent in 2021, the European Commission said in its Spring economic forecast.

"Europe is experiencing an economic shock without precedent since the Great Depression," EU Economy Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said in a statement.

More than 1.1 million people have contracted the virus across Europe and over 137,000 have died, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

Unclear outbreak data, low testing rates and the strain on health care systems mean the true scale of the pandemic is much greater.

With the spread slowing in most European countries, people are cautiously venturing out from confinement and gradually returning to work, but strict health measures remain in place amid concern of a second wave of outbreaks and any return to something like normal life is at least months away.

The pandemic has hurt consumer

spending, industrial output, investment, trade, capital flows and supply chains. It has also hit jobs.

The unemployment rate across the 27-nation EU is forecast to rise from 6.7 per cent in 2019 to 9 per cent in 2020 but then fall to around 8 per cent in 2021, the commission said.

While the virus hit every member country, the extent of the damage it ultimately inflicts will depend on the evolution of the disease in each of them, the resilience of their economies and what policies they put in place to respond.

Gentiloni said that the depth of the recession and the strength of recovery will be uneven across the world's biggest trading bloc.

Much will depend, he said, on "the speed at which lockdowns can be lifted, the importance of services like tourism in each economy and by each country's financial resources.

Such divergence poses a threat to the single market and the euro area — yet it can be mitigated through decisive, joint European action."

How quickly things can change.

On February 13, the commission had predicted "a path of steady, moderate growth" this year and next of 1.2 per cent.

At that time, uncertainty over U.S. trade policy and a Brexit trade deal plus tensions in Latin America and the Middle East were the main threats. The coronavirus outbreak in China was noted at the time as "a new downside risk" but the commission's assumption less than three months ago was "that the outbreak peaks in the first quarter, with relatively limited global spillovers." (AP) IND

NEWS MAKERS

Lufthansa Says Losing \$1 Million Per Hour As Bailout Talks Enter Final Stretch

Lufthansa shareholders on Tuesday agreed to not distribute 298 million euros (\$323 million) in retained profits as a dividend for 2019, as the airline enters the final stretch of negotiations for a 10 billion euro bailout.

Lufthansa needs to be rescued after coronavirus travel bans forced the German group to ground 700 of its aircraft, leading to a 99% drop in passenger numbers and causing the group to lose about 1 million euros (\$1.1 million) in liquidity reserves per hour.

Some 10,000 shareholders followed the meeting online, representing 33.19% of the share capital, Lufthansa said.

The carrier, which is preparing to restart passenger flights slowly from June, is currently in talks with the German, Austrian, Swiss and Belgian authorities about a roughly 10 billion euro bailout. Chief Executive Carsten Spohr said that he expected to clinch a deal with Germany shortly.

"Our focus is on stabilising Lufthansa in its current form and not on acquiring other airlines. We are not planning a takeover at this time," he said, adding that consolidation among European airlines will slow down due to government bailouts.

Lufthansa's rescue deal is expected to give Germany a 25.1% stake in the airline as well as su-



pervisory board representation, people close to the matter said. Separately, Lufthansa is ex-

pected to receive about 5 billion euros in non-voting capital as well as roughly 3 billion in

state-backed loans, they added.

The exact size of the rescue deal as well as the possible

contribution from Switzerland, Austria and Belgium is still unclear, the sources said.

Spohr is expected to visit Brussels this week, according to Belgian daily L'Echo. The airline is seeking 290 million euros in financial aid from the Belgian state. In exchange, Belgium wants guarantees on the future of Brussels Airlines and the development of the Brussels airport.

Spohr said that despite the bailout the German government was not interested in taking an active role in the company, after he had earlier warned about possible state interference.

Klaus Schmidt, head of the council of economic advisers to the federal economy ministry,

said at a ministry briefing on Tuesday, that the government should not weigh into discussions, for example, on whether Lufthansa's Germanwings division should be shuttered.

To reduce its cash outflows, Lufthansa — which is taking a 2020 hit of about 1 billion euros from crude oil hedging — said at the meeting that it had asked Airbus and Boeing to postpone aircraft deliveries.

Lufthansa is sticking to its plan to sell its catering activities, Spohr said, adding that further asset sales were not planned and a potential listing of its Lufthansa Technik business would currently only be possible at a massive discount.

548 Doctors, Nurses, Paramedics Infected With COVID-19 Across India: Report

Coronavirus has infected around 548 doctors, nurses and paramedics across the country so far, according to data maintained by the Centre, official sources said on Wednesday.

The figure does not include field workers, ward boys, sanitation workers, security guards, lab attendants, peons, laundry and kitchen staff among others.

According to an official source, it has not been ascertained from where these doctors, nurses and paramedic staff have acquired the infection. The figure includes doctors, nurses and paramedics from Centre-run and state government-run facilities across states and union territories.

"No epidemiological in-

vestigation of the cases were done. So there is no clear segregation on how many contracted the disease at workplace and how many got it from the community," the official source said.

Several doctors, who tested positive for Covid-19, are also reported to have died



so far at the AIIMS. Besides, some security guards have also been infected in the premier hospital.

Besides, several healthcare workers working in various central and Delhi government hospitals have also been infected by the disease, according to the data.

Locals Clash With Police Over Covid-19 Victim's Cremation In Gujarat



Two policemen and an ambulance driver were injured when a mob allegedly attacked them to stop a civic team from performing the last rites of a COVID-19 victim at a crematorium in Gujarat's Anand district, officials said on Wednesday.

The incident took place in Vallabh-Vidyanagar town on Tuesday night, following which 56 people residing near the electric crematorium were arrested, Deputy Superintendent of Police B D Jadeja said.

"Nearly 100 locals residing near the crematorium in Hariom Nagar area surrounded a Khambhat civic team that reached there on Tuesday night with the body of a person who died of coronavirus at a hospital in Karamsad," he said.

They asked the civic personnel to take the body somewhere else, claiming its cremation will spread coronavirus in the area, Jadeja said.

Before police reached the spot, the mob, armed with sticks and stones, allegedly attacked the driver of the ambulance in which the body was kept. The locals

also broke window panes of a car belonging to the Khambhat municipality, police sub-inspector T R Gadhi said.

"Though officials tried to convince the locals that they were following all the safety protocols and guidelines for coronavirus, the mob did not listen. When the police reached the spot, they also hurled stones the security personnel," he said.

"A head constable and a Home Guard received head injuries," Gadhi said, adding the police lobbed a tear-gas shell and baton-charged the mob to disperse them following which the situation was later brought under control.

The ambulance driver also sustained injuries in the attack, Jadeja said.

Fifty six people from the area were arrested and booked on charges of rioting, assault, criminal conspiracy, attempt to murder and under provisions of the Disaster Management Act, Gadhi said.

The civic team later performed last rites of COVID-19 victim at the crematorium, he added. PTI



30 BSF Jawans Test Positive For Coronavirus In Jodhpur

JODHPUR: Thirty BSF jawans, forming part of a company deployed earlier in the Walled City area in Delhi on internal security duty, tested positive for Covid-19 here on Wednesday, an official of the border guarding force said.

According to the BSF official, all these jawans were the part of a BSF company comprising 65 jawans, which had been sent to Delhi from Jaipur on internal security duty and

had been put up at the Jama Masjid in the national capital.

The entire company was air-lifted to Jodhpur on Monday and was quarantined at the BSF's Subsidiary Training Center (STC) here after some of the jawans of the company deployed in the walled city area in New Delhi tested corona positive.

"Their samples were taken on Tuesday after their arrival at Jodhpur and had been sent to AIIMS for examination. The report was released by AIIMS on Wednesday morning, in which they were tested positive," the BSF official said.

All of them have now been admitted in the AIIMS for treatment, he said, adding the remaining Jawans continue to be quarantined at the STC, which is well-equipped for the purpose and the administration here has been taking proper care of all the jawans. PTI

'What After May 17?' Sonia Asks Modi Govt; Congress CMS Strategise Exit Plan For Lockdown

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday questioned the government over the criteria it adopted to judge how long the COVID-19-induced lockdown will continue.

Addressing a meeting of chief ministers of states where the Congress is in power, she asked "what after May 17?" The third phase of the lockdown ends on May 17.

Former prime minister Manmohan Singh and former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi were part of the meeting.

"After May 17th, What? and After May 17th, How?...what criteria is GoI (government of India) using to judge how long the lockdown is to continue...," Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala quoted Sonia Gandhi as saying in the video conference with CMs.



He said Chattisgarh is one state where 80 per cent of Small Industries have restarted and nearly 85,000 workers have returned to work.

Hey Wait, Don't Click On That Aarogya Setu Link; It Could Be A Pak Spy Trap

BHUBANESWAR: The Commissionerate of Police, Bhubaneswar-Cuttack on Wednesday issued a cyber security alert and told people to download the Aarogya Setu application only from the Google Play Store and Apple App store.

The alert was issued because some people were receiving SMS or WhatsApp messages containing a link to download the Aarogya Setu App. "Please do not click on the link to download Aarogya Setu App," the police cautioned on its twitter handle.

If you receive such links, delete it, the police advised. But if you've already downloaded the app from such a link, it would be better to do a factory reset of your phone to protect it.

"These links are malicious and leading to download of an App called ChatMe on the screen, which is being used by Pakistan-based groups to



take away data," the Commissionerate of Police said.

Commissioner of Police Sudhansu Sarangi said the police issued the cyber security alert based on inputs from intelligence agencies.

Cong Blames 'Namaste Trump' Event For COVID-19 Spread In Guj

AHMEDABAD: The Gujarat Congress on Wednesday alleged that the 'Namaste Trump' event organised by the state BJP government in on February 24 here was responsible for the spread of coronavirus in the state.

State Congress president Amit Chavda said his party wants an independent probe through a Special Investigation Team (SIT) into this, and will approach the Gujarat High Court soon against government's "criminal negligence".

However, the state BJP unit dismissed the allegation as baseless, saying the event was organised well before the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic, and the first coronavirus case in the state was reported nearly a month after the event.

On February 24, US President Donald Trump along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi took part in road show in Ahmedabad which was attended by thousands of people.

After the road show, the two leaders addressed a gathering of over one lakh people at Motera cricket stadium, run by Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA).

Gujarat reported its first coronavirus cases on March 20, when samples of a man from Rajkot and a woman from Surat tested positive for the disease.

Chavda in a video message said, "In January itself, WHO clearly said the coronavirus spreads from one person to another. It had asked all the countries to refrain from organising large gatherings. Despite such warning, 'Namaste Trump' was planned for political gains and permission was also granted by the Gujarat government."

He alleged that the coronavirus entered Gujarat and spread among people due

to this mega event as thousands of foreigners came to Ahmedabad ahead of Trump's visit.

"People were asked to stand shoulder to shoulder on the road to greet the leaders. Lakhs of people were brought to the stadium in buses. This triggered spread of the virus. This event was not a mistake, but a criminal negligence. The 'Namaste Trump' event was responsible for community transmission of the virus," Chavda alleged.

"We will soon file a petition in the Gujarat High Court demanding a judicial inquiry in it through an SIT having field experts as its members. We will demand action against the government, GCA and the 'Trump Abhivadan Samiti' (committee formed to organise the event) through this petition," he added.

However, Gujarat BJP spokesman Prashant Vala termed the allegations as "baseless".

"Chavda needs to understand that before Trump visits any country, a US team conducts a thorough inspection of the areas well in advance to ensure there are no security and health related risks, such as viral infection. Without such clearance, Trump never visits any country," he said.

Moreover, coronavirus was not declared a pandemic by WHO when the 'Namaste Teump' event took place, he said.

The event took place on February 24, and the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, he said.

"The first coronavirus cases in Gujarat was reported on March 20, almost a month after the event. Chavda is making baseless allegations for vote bank politics," Vala said.

Gujarat has so far reported 6,245 COVID-19 cases and 368 deaths. PTI

Covid-19 Lockdown Dents Kerala Temples' Coffers

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: COVID-19 has struck Kerala temples' revenue hard. The state of affairs of temples is pretty bad, says N.Vasu, the president of Travancore Devasom Board (TDB) expressing concern over payment of salaries to its staff.

The TDB headquartered in the state capital owns 1,248 temples in the southern districts of the state, including the famed Sabarimala temple. Following the coronavirus outbreak that gave way to the nation-wide lockdown, all its temples were shut for the devotees, since March 21.

The TDB has on its roll about 5,000 employees and 4,000 pensioners. While they managed to pay all of them in April, Vasu said things might get tougher in the coming months as expenses remain the same while the revenue has been badly affected.

"We require about Rs 100 million (Dh4.8 million) for the conduct of the pujas, though the temple is closed for devotees," said Vasu.



TDB's biggest earner is the Sabarimala temple. It opens every month for a few days. This time around with the Vishu festivities cancelled - that is one of the largest crowd puller for the Lord Ayyappa shrine - amid the lockdown period, it has created another dent and left the TDB poorer by around Rs 400 million.

"Never before has such a thing happened," lamented Vasu.

In the state budget, a sum of Rs 1 billion crore has been set aside for the TDB, of which Rs 300 million has already been given to them and now they are expecting to get the remaining and another Rs 1 billion in addition, so as to help them to tide over their difficult times.

NEWS MAKER

DENVER: Washington agriculture authorities are asking residents to be on the lookout for an invasive giant wasp with an "excruciating" sting that attacks honeybee colonies, leaving thousands of bees without hives.

"The Asian giant hornet been called the most venomous, intimidating insect in the world, and it even scares away other hornets," said Timothy Lawrence, director of the Island County extension office at Washington State University.

Asian giant hornets originating in South Korea were first reported last fall near Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Then, residents in Blaine, Wash., near the Canadian border, used an invasive species app to report wasps that were confirmed to be Asian giant hornets from Japan, the state agriculture department said.

n infestation of the new giant wasps could be devastating for beekeepers who bring their hives to the state to pollinate Northwest Pacific crops like cherries, blueberries and apples.

"Commercial beekeepers have 300 to 400 hives in the area. They may not want to go to certain counties if this infestation takes hold," Lawrence said.

In Europe, the invasive yellow-legged Asian hornets, which also kill honeybees and other pollinators, has caused millions of dollars' worth of damage to crops in France and elsewhere after they gained a foothold.

The Asian giant hornets, also called "yak-killer hornets," measure about 2 inches long and have an orangeish-yellow face with large black eyes.

"They're like something out of a monster cartoon," Susan

Terrifying 'Murder Hornets' Invade US

Cobey, a bee breeder with WSU's Department of Entomology, said in a statement.

The Asian giant hornet's sting is described as excruciating, and they can sting repeatedly. Their quarter-inch stinger can penetrate beekeeping protective clothing, a state agriculture department warning said.

The wasps are dangerous if their underground nests are disturbed, or if a food source is threatened. Their venom, seven-times stronger than that of honeybees, can cause anaphylactic shock, but also can be lethal to people who are not allergic if victims are stung repeatedly.

"They give a warning before they sting. They snap their mandibles and make a clicking sound,"

Lawrence said. "But if you stick around to notice that, you're probably already in a world of hurt."

The wasps might have hitched a ride to the Pacific Coast in a container ship, but also could have been imported intentionally as an ingredient for a folk recipe for wasp venom in alcohol, made popular by Internet bodybuild-

ers, entomologists think.

The life cycle of the Asian giant hornet begins when a queen emerges from hibernation in April and feeds on plant sap and fruit, looking for a spot to build an underground nest, according to state fact sheets. By summer, queens have created a colony of worker wasps that spread out to seek food.

At the end of the summer, the hornets enter a "high-protein demand" phase when they attack honeybee colonies, killing off the adults to feast on the immature brood of pupa and larva, scientists say.

The hornets will leave piles of dead bees, most of them headless, outside their beehive. A few dozen hornets can kill an entire colony of 30,000 bees in a few hours.

Scientists will be hunting for queens this spring, wearing special reinforced suits from China, said Rian Wojahn, eradication coordinator for the pest program at the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

"The suits are made out of thick foam material with everything -- boots, gloves, hat -- attached," Wojahn said.

Trappers have set out bait bottles, filled with orange juice and rice wine, in coordination with

state beekeeper clubs.

The trappers will use heat cameras to find underground nests, Wojahn said. Wasps will be sedated with carbon dioxide fire extinguishers, and pest workers will dig out the nests.

Local entomologists worry about native bees and other pollinators that also might be threatened if the Asian giant hornet gets established, said Todd Murray, a Washington State University extension entomologist.

Global economies and travel between faraway parts of the world are making invasive species more common, Murray said.

"When we do get establishment of a new invasive species, it's a 'forever change,' and becomes something we learn to live with," he said. This is definitely a hornet I don't want to learn to live with."

