



Maximum : 23°C
Minimum : 13°C
Humidity : 58%

SUNSET
Today 07:21 PM
SUNRISE
Tomorrow 05:34 AM



INTENSIVE FARMING MAY LEAD TO ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANT PATHOGENS, HIGHER RISK OF EPIDEMICS: SCIENTISTS

Intensive farming techniques have led to a common antibiotic-resistant pathogen to become capable of infecting both cattle and humans, according to a study which suggests the need to check agriculture practices for such outbreaks. The scientists, including those from the University of Sheffield in the UK, investigated the evolution of *Campylobacter jejuni*, a bacterium carried by chickens and cattle, and a leading cause of food poisoning. Based on their findings, published in the journal PNAS, the researchers said the bacterium is able to infect more than one species because

.....LIFE & TIMES

P6

News Digest

15 TH RAMAZAN		
IFTAR	SEHRI	
TODAY	TOMMOROW	
FIQAH HANAFIYA	07:23	04:00
FIQAH JAFARIYA	07:34	08:58

IAF Mig-29 Crashes In Punjab

Nawanshahr (Punjab)- A Mig-29 fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) crashed in Chuharpur village here on Friday due to a technical snag and burst into flames, officials said. The pilot ejected safely and has been rescued, they said. "A fighter jet crashed in Chuharpur village here," Nawanshahr ● P-02

30 More BSF Men Test Covid Positive

New Delhi: Thirty more Border Security Force personnel, including two posted at its headquarters in Delhi, have tested positive for COVID-19, taking the overall infections in the force to 223, officials said on Friday. The border guarding force has the maximum confirmed cases of the disease among the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), also known ● P-02

Migrant Workers Ransack Mill In Kathua

Jammu: Jammu and Kashmir Police Friday lobbied teargas shells and resorted to lathicharge to disperse over 5,000 workers of the Chenab Textile Mill, who first ransacked their administrative block in protest over the deduction of their wages by the management and then ● P-02

Forces Launch CASO In Shopian Village

Shopian: Government Forces Friday launched a Cordon and Search Operation (CASO) in a village in South Kashmir after receiving inputs about the presence of militants, official sources said. They said on a tip off about the presence of militants, soldiers from 62 Rashtriya Rifles, Special Operation Group (SOG) of Jammu and Kashmir police and ● P-02

Siblings Injured In Rajouri Mishap

Rajouri: Three persons were on Friday injured after the vehicle they were travelling in met with an accident in Kewal village of Budhal on Rajouri Budhal road. Officials said that an accident took place on Friday evening when a vehicle bearing registration number JK11D-5720 skidded off the road at Kewal. Police said that three persons ● P-02

J&K Covid-19 Tally Rises To 823 14 Industrial Unit Workers Among 30 Test Positive

Ailing Father Of 32-Yr-Old Victim From Srinagar, Woman Who Delivered Inside Car In Kulgam Also Among Fresh Cases; 29 More People Recover

Agencies

SRINAGAR: The number of positive cases for Covid-19 in Jammu and Kashmir crossed 800-mark on Friday with 30 new cases reported from five districts of the Kashmir Valley.

Official sources said Budgam district reported 15 fresh cases, Kulgam 8, Ganderbal and Srinagar three each while Baramulla reported one case. With these cases, the overall tally has gone upto 823-755 in Kashmir and 68 in Jammu. Among them 450 are active positive as 364 have recovered while 9 others have died.

Farooq Jan, Medical Superintendent SKIMS said that seven cases were confirmed at Viral Diagnostic Lab of the tertiary care



KO-Photo by Abid Bhat

hospital.

However, bulk of these cases, 23, were confirmed at Covid-19 testing lab at CD hospital, sources said.

Among the fresh cases, they said, include 15 from Budgam district and 14 of them are workers at FIL Industries Limited at Rengreth which deals with agrochemicals and fruit juice concentrates etc.

Besides, the new cases include pregnant woman and 25-year-old who had delivered baby inside a

car while she was being taken to Kulgam hospital where she was admitted later, officials said.

Divisional Commissioner Kashmir P K Pole said Industries Department "might have given the permission" to FIL Industries to carry operations under essential services category.

However, he said, social distancing measures are still to be undertaken and strictly followed.

The 15 cases from Budgam include 5 persons from ●PAGE 02

MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT OF DISTRICT HOSPITAL KULGAM confirmed that the 25-year-old woman delivered inside the vehicle and was later admitted to Kulgam hospital. "The doctor and nurses who came in contact with the woman have been moved to quarantine," he said, adding, "The woman is under treatment".

JK Govt Arranges Spl Trains To Bring Back Stranded Residents

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR- The Jammu and Kashmir government is arranging special trains for its residents stranded across the country due to the lockdown and will bear the cost of the tickets, even as 30,000 people have so far returned to the UT with proper regulation, the Home Department said on Friday.

"Train services are being arranged for stranded persons of J-K, particularly from far off places. These trains will start arriving shortly and necessary coordination with the sending states as also with Railway authorities is going on," a statement from the UT's Home Department said.

It said the Jammu and Kashmir government has decided to bear the cost of the tickets.

He said that after the announcement made by the Ministry of Home Affairs on April 29, 2020 of allowing movement of stranded persons with certain conditions, the Government has issued a SOP on April 30, 2020.

"Further, Government of J&K has collected details of stranded persons who wish to return to J&K by providing web links for registration. Arrangements are being made for their arrival in an orderly manner while adhering to the norms of social distancing and undertaking testing so as to ensure that timely action is taken to prevent any spread of Covid-19 in the UT of J&K".

He said that approximately 30,000 persons have entered ●PAGE 02



KO-Photo by Abid Bhat

Flight From Dhaka Lands In Srinagar With 167 Students

SRINAGAR: A special flight, carrying 167 medical students hailing from Jammu and Kashmir, arrived here from Bangladesh capital Dhaka on Friday as part of the government efforts to bring back nationals stranded abroad. "Total 167 students arrived at Srinagar airport in the special flight from Dhaka this afternoon," an official said. ● P-02

Stranded Kashmiri's in Dubai Want Direct Flight to Srinagar

SRINAGAR: Hundreds of Kashmiri's stranded in Dubai and other emirates of the UAE have urged Indian authorities to arrange direct flights from Dubai to Srinagar for their smooth return to Kashmir.

Shakeel Ahmad a representative of stranded Kashmiri's appealed Indian authorities to ensure their

return to Kashmir without any further delay. He said there are almost 400 Kashmiri's stranded in Dubai alone and they include elderly, kids, pregnant women and other patients suffering from different ailments. "All stranded Kashmiri's are in distress as their repeated pleas didn't yield any

positive response so far", he said.

According to Shakeel they have been informed by the Indian Consulate in Dubai they travel will be facilitated only upto New Delhi. "We fear that incoming Kashmiri's will be quarantined in an 'unfavourable' atmosphere there and that would be beyond the ●PAGE 02

16 Migrant Workers Crushed To Death In Sleep By Train In Maharashtra

KO Web Desk

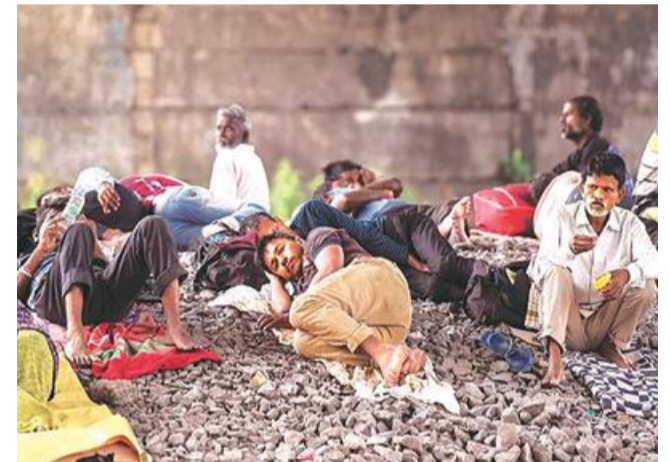
AURANGABAD- At least 16 migrant workers sleeping on rail tracks were crushed to death by a goods train in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra on Friday morning, police said.

Tens of thousands of people have been walking home from India's big cities after being laid off because of the lockdown to contain the spread of the novel coro-

"They had been walking all night, they were exhausted and fell asleep on the tracks," a police officer said.

The workers, who were walking to Bhusawal from Jalna in central Maharashtra had fallen asleep on the track, an official at the Karmad police station told PTI.

"The labourers, working in a steel factory in Jalna, left for their home state on foot last night. They came till Karmad and slept off on



navirus since late March.

Under the lockdown, all public transport has been suspended so migrant workers heading home often have to walk long distances to get there.

The government has extended the lockdown until May 17.

the tracks as they were tired," police officer Santosh Khetmalas said.

Fourteen workers lost their lives in the accident, while two others were injured, he said, adding three labourers who were also part of the group survived as they were sleeping some ●PAGE 02

THEY HAD BEEN WALKING ALL NIGHT, they were exhausted and fell asleep on the tracks,"

Mobile Voice Calls Restored

SMS, Internet Services Remain Shut In Kashmir

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Authorities on Friday tightened restrictions across Kashmir Valley even as mobile vice calls were restored late in the night while mobile internet continued to remain shut in the Kashmir Valley on the third day following the killing of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen Commander Riyaz Naikoo along with associate in a gunfight on May 6.

Barring minor clashes in Beighpora Awantipora in Pulwama district, the home town

of the slain commander and Nasrullahpora Budgam, the situation remained peaceful across Kashmir Valley, the officials said.

Reports said there a group of protesters pelted stones on deployments of police and paramilitary forces at Beighpora and adjoining areas. However, police and paramilitary forces chased them away by firing few teargas canisters. However there were no reports about any serious injury to anyone in the incident.

Naikoo and his associate Adil Ahmad were killed ●PAGE 02

DSP, PSO Among Several Injured In Budgam Clashes

A Deputy Superintendent of Police and his PSO were among several persons injured in clashes in Nasrullahpora locality in central Kashmir's Budgam district. SSP Budgam Nagpure Amod said some miscreants were forcing shops dealing with essential commodities to shut and a police team headed by Deputy Superintendent of Police Fayaz Hussain visited the locality to disperse them. He said DySP Fayaz sustained head injury while his PSO also suffered injury and were removed to hospital. ● P-02

J&K Witnesses Decline In Infant Mortality Rate

IMR Down From 52 Per 1000 Live Births In 2005 To 22 In 2018

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: J&K has been able to achieve 'remarkable improvement' in multiple indicators related to maternal and child health in the recent years—with notable progress in reducing infant mortality rate (IMR).

The infant mortality rate has been reduced from 52 (2005) to 22 (2018) as per the latest data released by Registrar General of India in SRS Bulletin today. The current national average of infant mortality rate stands at 32 much higher than that of the J&K State.

Shri Atal Dullo, Financial Commissioner to Govt. Health & Medical Education Department and Shri

Bhupinder Kumar, Mission Director NHM, J&K has appreciated the efforts of Govt. Medical Colleges; Directorate of Health Services, Family Welfare, ISMall the field functionaries including doctors, paramedical staff, ASHA workers & Programme Management Unit staff for their continued efforts to improve maternal and new born care in the State which has resulted in continuous decrease in Infant Mortality Rate. They have stressed for sustained efforts in future for better health care service delivery so as to further improve the maternal and child health indicators in the coming years.

The entire Health and Medical Education Department ●PAGE 02

Revival Of Construction And Economic Activities High Level Meet Discusses Post Lockdown Action Plan

Observer News Service

JAMMU: Lieutenant Governor, Girish Chandra Murmu Friday chaired a high level meeting at Raj Bhavan to discuss the overall strategy and effective steps to be taken to ensure the revival of construction and other economic activities in J&K, besides the regular assessment of efforts of the government for prevention, containment, and management of COVID-19.

BVR Subrahmanyam, Chief Secretary; A. K. Mehta, Financial Commissioner, Finance, Bipul Pathak, Principal Secretary to Lieutenant Governor; Dheeraj Gupta, Principal Secretary, Housing and Urban



Development; Shailendra Kumar (R&B), Manoj Kumar Dwivedi, Commissioner/Secretary, Industries and Commerce, Ajeet Kumar Sahu; Commissioner Secretary, Jal Shakti Department and Sheetal Nanda, Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, attended the meeting.

As part of the proactive approach, the Governor directed officers to do an objective assessment of the situation and plan accordingly for ensuring the revival of economic activity. He emphasized on devising meticulous strategies after the initial assessment and called for intuitive, innovative, and ●PAGE 02

Police Officers Comment On CRPF Sparks Controversy

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: A comment made by Kashmir inspector general of police Vijay Kumar on the CRPF's role in counter-terrorism operations has stirred a controversy among the forces deployed in the valley, officials said on Friday.

They said IGP Kumar, during a meeting of joint forces at the district police lines in Baramulla on April 29 chaired by DGP Dilbag Singh, reportedly commented that the paramilitary force is a showpiece and the actual operations are conducted by the Army, its elite unit Rashtriya Rifles (RR) with the help of intelligence generated by the state police.

Kumar, a 1997-batch Indian Po-

lice Service officer, is stated to have said that the work of CRPF in Kashmir operations has not been good and he knows it better as he himself had served in the paramilitary force on deputation earlier. Officials said senior CRPF officers present in the meeting did not take the comments kindly and they later confronted Kumar about his "unpleasant" utterances against their force.

Senior state police officials said the issue has created controversy after a section of security forces commanders said the comment was aimed to create a rift among sister forces working against militancy and terrorism in Kashmir Valley.

As the issue refused to die down and senior CRPF commanders ●PAGE 02



KO-Photos by Abid Bhat

CURFEW-LIKE RESTRICTIONS have been imposed across the Kashmir valley on Friday as authorities apprehend street protests against the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Riyaz Naikoo in an encounter with state forces.

14 Industrial Unit Workers Among 30 Test Positive

Main Budgam—aged 20, 27, 30, 32, and 35, 3 from Khan Sahib area—aged 22, 26 and 29, two from Narkara—aged 22 and 26, a 41-year-old from Lallipora, a 20-year-old from Beerwah, 26-year-old from Freshwar, 27-year-old from Khansahib and 30-year-old from Lapora Chadoora (tested at SKIMS).

Eight cases from Kulgam include a 30-year-old pregnant woman besides a 25-year-old woman delivered inside the vehicle and was later admitted to local hospital Besides two men—25-year-old having travel history to Himachal Pradesh and 36-year-old man from Manzgam, a 55-year-old man from Chakbadwani with travel history to Amritsar, 32-year-old man from Dooru which actually fall in Anantnag but comes under Kulgam health authorities while two others—58-year-old and 30-year-old— are from Urhanhal area.

Medical Superintendent of District Hospital Kulgam confirmed that the 25-year-old woman delivered inside the vehicle and was later admitted to Kulgam hospital. "The doctor and nurses who came in contact with the woman have been moved to quarantine," he said, adding, "The woman is under treatment".

Meanwhile, two days after a 32-year-old man from Alamgiri Bazar Srinagar died of the novel coronavirus, his ailing father who is presently admitted in Oncology ward of the Super Specialty Hospital (SSH) Shireen Bagh here, and one of their relatives (60), a resident of Hawal, tested positive for the disease. The other case in Srinagar is a 45-year-old woman from Qamarwari Srinagar who works at SSH, sources said.

The three cases reported in Ganderbal district include three men—two of them aged 23 each and other 25-year-old, from Chanthan and Urpash areas.

With these cases, Bandipora has 134 positive cases (58active) followed by Srinagar with 129 cases (50 active), Anantnag 122 (120 active), Baramulla 106 (61 active), Shopian 98 (51 active), Kupwara 69 (36 active), Budgam 46 (33 active), Ganderbal 19 (5 active), 20 Kulgam (15 active) and Pulwama 12 (8 active)

Similarly, Jammu has 31 positive cases and all but 5 of them have recovered followed by Udhampur 22 (2 Active), Samba 7 (3 active), Rajouri 4 (1 active) while Kathua, Kishtwar, Ramban and Reasi district have one case each.

The officials informed that 29 more patients have recovered, taking the number of such people to 364.

Government said 88067 travellers and persons in contact with suspected cases have been enlisted for surveillance which included 18477 persons in home quarantine including facilities operated by government, 186 in Hospital Quarantine, 450 in Hospital isolation and 8724 under home surveillance. Besides, 60221 persons have completed their surveillance period. (GNS)

UN Chief Says Pandemic Is Unleashing A ‘Tsunami...

institutions to focus on digital literacy at a time when extremists are seeking to prey on captive and potentially despairing audiences.

He called on the media, especially social media, to remove racist, misogynist and other harmful content, on civil society to strengthen their outreach to vulnerable people, and on religious figures to serve as models of mutual respect.

And I ask everyone, everywhere, to stand up against hate, treat each other with dignity and take every opportunity to spread kindness, Guterres said.

The secretary-general stressed that COVID-19 does not care who we are, where we live, what we believe or about any other distinction. His global appeal to address and counter COVID-19-related hate speech follows his April 23 message calling the coronavirus pandemic a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis.

Guterres said then that the pandemic has seen disproportionate effects on certain communities, the rise of hate speech, the targeting of vulnerable groups, and the risks of heavy-handed security responses undermining the health response.

With rising ethno-nationalism, populism, authoritarianism and a push back against human rights in some countries, the crisis can provide a pretext to adopt repressive measures for purposes unrelated to the pandemic, he warned.

In February, Guterres issued a call to action to countries, businesses and people to help renew and revive human rights across the globe, laying out a seven-point plan amid concerns about climate change, conflict and repression.

16 Migrant Workers Crushed To Death In Sleep

distance away from the rail tracks.

Two of the injured later died in hospital, one report said.

The migrant workers, rendered jobless due to the coronavirus-enforced lockdown and desperate to go to their native places, were walking along the rail tracks apparently to escape police attention.

Distraught and penniless migrant workers have often faced police wrath in India for being out in the lockdown with videos on social media showing ruthless beatings and humiliation meted out to workers walking home.

Many are trudging great distances in the blistering heat through fields and forests to get home.

Because of the lockdown, they were probably not expecting any trains to be moving, an official said.

A video clip from the scene of the tragedy shows the bodies of workers lying on the tracks and nearby with their meagre personal belongings scattered around.

The opposition and activists have pointed out that the government has arranged planes to bring back Indians from overseas, while leaving migrant workers stranded in big cities with little food or cash.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his "anguish at the loss of lives" in the accident. "All possible assistance required is being provided," he tweeted.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, said he was "shocked by the deaths of migrant workers". "We should be ashamed of how we treat our nation-builders," he said.

Over the past week, some state governments facing public pressure organised trains and buses to bring back migrant workers.

Mobile Voice Calls Restored

in an encounter in Beighpora on Wednesday following which authorities snapped mobile telephone and Internet services in the Valley.

Inspector General of Police Kashmir Vijay Kumar told reporters here that the measure has been taken as a precautionary measure to prevent problems of "law and order". He said that the services would be restored as and when situation improves and a decision in this regard would be taken at a review meeting.

Soon after the news about Naikoo's killing spread, restrictions were also imposed in most parts of the Valley including this summer capital of J&K.

Even though the Kashmir is under the coronavirus lockdown from last 49 days, additional police and paramilitary forces personnel have been deployed in many sensitive and vulnerable areas of the valley for ensuring peace, they said.

One civilian was killed and at least 25 people suffered injuries after government forces alleged resorted to live ammunition and fired pellets to disperse protesters in Awantipora soon after Naikoo's killing. 16 of the injured were shifted to SMHS hospital in Srinagar and four suffered bullet while 12 others had pellet injuries.

Barring Pulwama, Cellular Services Restored

Meanwhile mobile voice calls services were restored by the government on Friday night after remaining suspended for three days in the Kashmir Valley. However, the SMS and internet services remained suspended across Kashmir.

Only Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) mobile phone and landline services were working in the Valley, where curfew-like restrictions remained imposed in some areas to maintain law and order.

However, the government on late Friday night restored the services across Kashmir barring Pulwama district in South Kashmir.

DSP, PSO Among Several Injured In Budgam Clashes

The SSP said that action will be taken against the "miscreants". Asked if people were offering prayers in absentia for the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen Commander killed in Budgam, he responded in negative.

Meanwhile, Police used batons and tear smoke shells to chase away the protesters in which several persons suffered minor injuries and were treated locally, official sources added.

JK Govt Arranges Spl Trains To Bring Back Stranded...

the UT, with proper regulation, from Lakanpur.

"During the period, migrant workers, students and stranded persons from the States of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab have already returned to J&K" he said adding that the stranded persons in the States/UTs of Haryana, Uttarakhand, Chandigarh and Delhi have been permitted to return, in a regulated manner, with effect from May 07, 2020 and this process will continue for a week. 'Simultaneously, train services are being arranged for stranded persons of J&K, particularly from far off places, he informed and added that these trains will start arriving shortly.

"Necessary coordination with the sending states as also with the Railway authorities is going on" he added and cautioned that nobody should move in a hurry without passes issued with the consent of J&K Government as else he/ she will be quarantined for 21 days at Kathua.

He said that the Government has decided to bear the cost of tickets and the returnees will not need to make any payments for their return journey by train.

"The UT of J&K has taken umpteen measures for controlling the spread of Covid-19, with frontline workers working untiringly. In this backdrop, it is necessary that the return is managed such that these efforts do not get adversely affected", he said and added "The Government reassures all the stranded persons of J&K that it is taking every possible step for their early return to their homes."

The Nodal Officer said that the Government is fully aware of the details of the stranded persons of J&K at various places across the country, not only through the web links started by the Government of J&K but also from the data shared by the sending States/UTs. "Immediately on finalization of arrangements, they shall be notified about the issuance of passes and travel details. In case any difficulties are being faced at the current place of their stay, they may contact the helpline numbers that have been publicized by the Government so that they are facilitated," he added.

Flight From Dhaka Lands

In Srinagar With 167...

Officials said the students underwent screening at the airport after which they were sent to administrative quarantine for a period of 14 days as mandated under the guidelines issued for curbing the spread of COVID-19.

Srinagar Deputy Commissioner Shahid Iqbal Chaudhary expressed his gratitude to the Indian High Commission in Dhaka for the "tremendous efforts" in getting these students home.

"Profound gratitude to Indian High Commission @ihcdhaka for tremendous efforts. More to follow. For convenience of students — bulk tickets next," Chaudhary said in a tweet.

Stranded Kashmiri's in Dubai Want Direct Flight...

patience of elders and pregnant women. Moreover the high temperatures in Delhi are an additional problem for many".

Shakeel further added that they assured the officials at the Indian Consulate that stranded Kashmiri's should be airlifted directly to Srinagar after which they will voluntarily put themselves before authorities for medical formalities.

When contacted Baseer Ahmad Khan, Advisor to Lt Governor said he will take up the issue with administration and try utmost to ease out hardships faced by Kashmiri's stranded in the UAE.

J&K Witnesses Decline In Infant Mortality Rate...

with active support from National Health Mission (NHM) has put strenuous efforts to provide essential newborn care at Government health institutions across the Union Territory through Facility Based & Home Based Newborn Care. Special New-born Care Units (SNCU) have been established in 27 District/other equivalent Hospitals, 3 NICUs, New Born Stabilization Units (NBSUs) in 65 CHCs level and New Born Corners (NBCCs) in 264 delivery points with financial and technical support from National Health Mission. The progress in scaling up the interventions to save the lives of the newborn has substantially accelerated during recent times leading to reduction in Child Mortality Indicators, some of the measure in this regard include, strengthening of NICUs, SNCUs strengthening of labour Rooms in peripheral public health institutions, implementation of Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram, hiring of manpower etc.

It is pertinent to mention here that, in order to further decrease Infant Mortality Rate in the J&K UT to single digit by 2022 an action plan has been developed& is being implemented at various levels. The action plan enlists the community based and health facility based interventions for accelerating rate of decline.

Revival Of Construction And Economic Activities...

workable strategies to ensure restoration of construction activities without the deficiency of men and material.

While taking stock of the current situation of local labourers being brought back to J&K, the Lt Governor called for providing all facilities to ensure their smooth transit to their respective areas. He further directed the officers to prepare a skill-set database of the incoming local labourers so that their re-employment avenues can be facilitated in the Union Territory only.

The Lt Governor directed the officers of Housing & Urban Development Department and Jal Shakti Department to work in tandem and ensure water supply remains continuous during the summer season and officials at the helm of affairs remain in reach and are responsive to the issues and demands of general public. He further exhorted officers to work with renewed zeal to ensure minimum disruption in view of the extraordinary situation.

Deliberations were also held on various important issues including the availability & smooth transportation of essential commodities; ensuring 100% testing of all incoming J&K residents; disbursement of the relief package among beneficiaries; effective operationalization of help-lines; ensuring hassle free transition of stranded persons from Lakanpur to respective districts.

Police Officers Comment On Crpf Sparks Controversy

sought high-level intervention, the Kashmir zone of the J&K Police issued a tweet on Friday specifically praising the role of the country's largest paramilitary force.

"#DGP J&K Shri Dilbagh Singh complimented role of #BSF, #CRPF, #SSB, #HTBP & #CISF deployed on the various assignment in J&K. Specially #CRPF has played a significant role both in maintaining #L&O (law and order) and #CI (counter insurgency) grids," it said.

IAF Mig-29 Crashes In Punjab

Deputy Commissioner Vinay Bublani told PTI over phone.

The crash took place around 10:40 am, according to Hoshiarpur Senior Superintendent of Police Gaurav Garg.

"The pilot is perfectly fine," he said, adding that he was taken to the community health centre at Garhshankar in Hoshiarpur district.

The aircraft took off from Adampur Air Force base in Jaland-

har, the officials said.

Two fire tenders were pressed into service as it burst into flames after the crash, they said.

An IAF spokesperson said the Mig-29 aircraft was on a training mission.

"The aircraft had developed a technical snag and the pilot ejected safely as he was unable to control the aircraft," he said.

The official said the pilot has been rescued by a helicopter and a court of inquiry ordered to investigate the cause of the accident.

Senior officials of Nawanshahr and Hoshiarpur districts reached the spot.

Chuharpur village is located at the border of the two districts.

30 More BSF Men Test Covid Positive...

as paramilitary forces. The CAPFs have over 500 active COVID-19 cases at present.

"Thirty new cases of COVID-19 (six from Delhi and 24 from Tripura) have been reported from different establishments. All of them are under the best available medical care at AIIMS-Jhajjar and G B Pant Hospital, Agartala," BSF spokesperson Shubendu Bhardwaj said in a statement.

Out of the six fresh cases from Delhi, two were posted at the BSF's headquarters in the national capital and four were posted at other units in the city.

One more floor in the eight-storeyed headquarters of the force in CGO complex on the Lodhi Road has been shut, the officials said.

Two other floors were sealed earlier after a personal staff of an additional director general (ADG) rank officer and a head constable posted in the personnel affairs wing tested positive for coronavirus, they said.

An assistant sub-inspector rank officer, also working at the head office, had succumbed to the disease recently.

The officials expressed concern over the increasing number of COVID-19 cases at the force's headquarters, which is functioning on a reduced strength.

The total number of cases in the BSF now stands at 223. Two jawans have recovered, while two have died.

Among the infected cases, over 80 per cent of the BSF troops of a company deployed in Jamia and Chandni Mahal areas of the national capital have tested positive for the dreaded virus till now.

Out of the 94 personnel in that company, more than 75 have contracted the infection, a senior official said.

The other major cases are from a single BSF unit based in Tripura.

"All instructions and directions of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare are being strictly followed. Frequencies of sanitisation efforts of workplaces/barracks have been increased," the spokesperson said.

"In addition to existing apparatus of sanitisation, water cannons are being used for quick disinfection of buildings and establishments, and BSF personnel are being repeatedly sensitized to firmly adhere to preventive measures," he added.

Migrant Workers Ransack Mill In Kathua...

damaged a police gypsy along the Jammu-Pathankot national highway when police tried to intervene.

Trouble started around 8.45 am when a mob of nearly 3,000-strong workers living in jhuggis outside the CTM, part of Birla Group of Industries, entered the administrative block and started ransacking the office furniture and records. They threw the furniture and office files out on the national highway passing outside the industrial unit.

In the meantime, workers working inside the unit also came out and joined the protesters in raising slogans against the management. The protesters accused the management of being indifferent to factory workers' plight, asking how they can run their families with such a meager amount.

Forces Launch Caso In Shopian Village...

CRPF launched a joint search operation at Karewa Shadab area of district Shopian. All exit points were sealed and house to house searches launched, they further said adding that additional forces were deployed in the adjacent area to prevent any law and order problem.

During the search operation, door to door searches were conducted and the identity cards of the people were checked.

Sources said that the operation was called off after no contact with any militant was established.

Siblings Injured In Rajouri Mishap...

travelling in the vehicle sustained injuries, adding that all the injured were rushed to Budhal Primary Health Center for treatment.

The injured persons were identified as Mohammad Nazir, son of Abdul Rashid Thakur of Upper Rajnager Budhal, Mohammad Rafiq and his brother Mudaris Iqbal, sons of Ghulam Mohammad of Dandote.

Two of the injured were later shifted to Rajouri hospital for advanced treatment, police said, adding that a case under relevant sections of law has been registered in Budhal Police Station.

Orderly At Secretariat Test Positive For Covid-19

Dir Expenditure, Some Staffers Go For Self Quarantine; SMC Sanitises Building

SRINAGAR: An orderly posted in Civil Secretariat, the highest seat of the government here, has tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

A senior officer and some staffers have already gone in self-quarantine as soon as news about the orderly testing positive was communicated by the health authorities.

Sources said that the orderly, a resident of Manasbal, had carried dusting etc in the office of the Director Expenditure on Sunday, a day before Durbar Move offices opened here. He had also visited the office next and carried his job despite instructions by the concerned authorities who had told him not to visit the office as he showed up symptoms normally associated with the disease.

When contacted Tariq Khan, Director Expenditure, said that

orderly's brother is battling cancer and is admitted at Super Specialty Hospital Shireen Bagh and "he would visit him regularly."

"He was told to not come to the office already. As a precautionary measure, I have gone to self-quarantine," he said.

The Director said that on inquiring into reasons for him visiting the secretariat despite instructions it has come to fore that he was following the case of his brother, a cancer patient, for monetary assistance.

This is the first case when any employee at the secretariat has tested positive. Following it, Srinagar Municipal Corporation carried out sanitisation at third and fourth of the large building which also houses among others the offices of lieutenant governor,

Covid Infect Employee Tries To Escape From Hospital

Srinagar: A Government employee who had tested positive recently for Covid-19 infection tried to escape from the Chest Disease Hospital, however, he was identified on the gate and taken back to the ward.

A government employee from Safapora, Sumbal who works in Planning Department

before declaring positive had attended his duties at Civil Secretariat Srinagar. The said employee was admitted at Chest Disease Hospital Srinagar for treatment while at Civil Secretariat, scores of employees were put in quarantine who had reportedly come into his contact.

Sources said that the infected employee tried to escape from the hospital but his attempt was foiled. "He was spotted by a Para-medical staffer and taken back inside the hospital," said an insider. Dr Naveed, Head of Department Chest Disease Hospital said, he doesn't know and will ascertain facts. (KNT)

his advisors besides top bureaucrats.

A senior officer at the secretariat said that immediate measures were required to be

taken for the safety of others. "The CRPF personnel posted at the entrance would frisk every individual. The employee would have roamed around

while visiting the secretariat," he said, adding, "The government needs to move swiftly to see who needed to be isolated in wake of the incident."



NON LOCAL LABOURERS undergoing tests for Covid-19 at SMHS hospital before departure for their home states- KO Photo Abid Bhat

Ganderbal: Puttermulla And Pahlipora Declared Red Zones

GANDERBAL: The District Administration Ganderbal today declared village Puttermulla and Pahlipora of Tehsil Lar as Red Zones and its surrounding villages Kondbal and Batporaas Buffer Zones after two COVID-19 positive cases one each from village Puttermulla and Pahlipora have been detected on 06 May 2020 from CD Hospital Srinagar and Bone and Joint Hospital Srinagar respectively.

Invoking prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC and Disaster Management Act, 2005, District Magistrate Ganderbal Shafqat Iqbal said that there would be no inward and outward movement of any person from the villages declared Red Zones and the people would

stay in their homes to ensure complete lockdown and warned stern action against the violators as per provisions relevant Act.

The District Magistrate Ganderbal, Shafqat Iqbal, SSP Ganderbal, Khalil Poswal and ADM Ganderbal Farooq Ahmad Baba visited the areas to monitor the situation and said that it becomes imperative to take stringent precautionary measures of complete lockdown by declaring villages as Red Zones and surrounding villages as Buffer Zones to break transmission of the disease in the area.

Besides 37 people from Puttermulla and Pahlipora have been quarantined who are the primary contacts as per the initial reports, he added.

8 More COVID-19 Patients Discharged In Shopian

SHOPIAN: The number of active novel coronavirus cases in Shopian district has come down to 63 on Thursday with eight patients discharged from the District Hospital Shopian upon their recovery and send to administrative quarantine by the District Administration Shopian. The patients had significantly responded to the treatment at the COVID-19 designated hospital and subsequently recovered. A total of 98 persons had tested positive in the district and had been admitted to the designated COVID-19 Hospitals. The remaining 63 are being treated at the designated hospital. The discharged patients were seen off by the Medical Superintendent and other concerned to boost their confidence and do away with any social stigma.

3 More Villages Declared Red Zones In Pulwama

PULWAMA: As three new positive cases of COVID-19 surfaced in the district; District Authorities, today declared Larkipora village of Tehsil Awantipora; Naibugh village of Tehsil Tral and 300 meter radius of Nambalbal Pampore were as Red Zones. Villages including Padgampora, Ghat Tokuna, Beighpora, Malangpora, Dangerpora and Goripora; Ameerabad, Sherabad, Dadsara and Nowdal; Kadalbal, Drangbal, Tulbagh Neibugh Bagandar and Frestabal as buffer Zones in Tehsil Awantipora, Tral and Pampore respectively.

Invoking prohibitory orders under Epidemic Diseases Act 1897, Section 144 of the CrPC and Disaster Management Act, 2005, District Authorities said that there would be no inward and outward movement of any person from the villages declared as Red zone and the people shall stay indoors to ensure complete lockdown. He warned of stern action against violators as per provision of relevant Acts.

The order was issued in view of 03 more persons from the district were tested positive of COVID-19 on May 07, taking the total no positive cases to 09 in the district. Among the three positive cases, one is a resident of Pampore who is admitted in Srinagar hospital from last one month undergoing a treatment for a fracture.

Contact tracing of family members and relatives who have visited the person has been initiated.

Another elderly male from Larkipora, Padgampora who has been intermittently visiting Srinagar hospital for Liver treatment has tested positive for COVID-19. Aggressive contact tracing of all the contacts

has been initiated. Meanwhile a 60 year old lady from Naibugh, Nowdal Tral who was operated and later on discharged from a Srinagar hospital 10 days back has reported positive for Corona Virus.

The family members of the positive case are already in Quarantine and further contacts are being traced.

The DM said that it becomes imperative to take stringent precautionary measures including declaring village as Red zone and surrounding villages as a buffer zone to break transmission of the disease in the area.

DM directed the officials concerned to ensure supply of essential commodities as per laid down protocols in the villages falling in Red Zones and Buffer Zones.

Earlier, 25 villages including Khaigam, Sangerwani, Abhama, Rohmoo, Gusso, Fraspipora, Drabgam Bala, Drabgam Payeen, Shairbagh, Dardpora and Gori-check of Tehsil Rajpora and Gudoor, Chandgam, Pinglena and Parigam of Tehsil Pulwama, Reshipora, Chirat, Monviji, Banderpora, Chirat, Wandakpora, Kakapora, Town of Tehsil Kakapora, Sambora, AlochiBagh and Hatwari of Tehsil Pampore, a portion of IGC Lassipora were declared Red Zones and are continuously under strict restrictions and people have been advised to abide by the orders and any violation shall invoke section 269 IPC (unlawfully or negligently doing something which is likely to spread infection of any dangerous disease to life), section 270 IPC (malignant act likely to spread infection of dangerous disease to life), section 271 IPC (knowingly disobeying any quarantine rule) and section 188 IPC (for disobeying the Government orders).

Grocery Supplies Streamlined In 25 Zones Of Srinagar

SRINAGAR : Food Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs (FCS&CA) Department Friday said that along with District Administration Srinagar it has been able to devise an effective mechanism to provide ration and groceries to the general public.

FCS&CA says that there is no shortage and all essentials like ration, fuel, gas and other commodities are adequately stocked for two months.

The Department has already distributed two months ration for the month of April and May to all consumers. Presently, the Department is distributing free ration to BPL, AAY and PHH categories for the month of May and June.

"The exercise would involve free distribution to 8.70 lakh families with distribution of 4.2 lakh quintals of ration, out of which free ration for the month of May has already been distributed and the ration for June is being distributed", says Bashir Ahmad Khan Director FCS & CA department. "The Department is also distributing one kg of pulses to the BPL, AAY and PHH families", he added.

While giving details, Syed Sajjad

Qadri Nodal Officer and OSD in the office of DC Srinagar said that for addressing public grievances a toll free number 6006333308 is working to receive the grievances with regard to ration, power supply, water supply, medical needs etc. "The people contact control room on the given number as and when they need any help from the District Administration", he informed.

Explaining the supply chain management in District Srinagar for making available groceries to the people, the Nodal Officer said that Srinagar district has been divided into 25 zones and 25 supermarkets have been roped in to supply groceries and the contact numbers of these stores have been publicized. "These supermarkets are catering to the public within 3 km radius and making home deliveries. Besides, around 100 stand-alone grocery shops are operating within one kilometer radius and also making home delivery of essential items. Stocks of these grocery shops are being replenished through super-stockists and C&F agencies, Nodal Officer dealing with the matter explained.

Gurez Students, Patients Stranded In Bandipora Stage Protest



BANDIPORA: Hundreds of stranded students and patients from border Gurez region are up in arms against Bandipora district administration for not allowing them to leave for the native place.

Scores of these people staged a protest against district administration outside DC office Bandipora and alleged that authorities are showing callousness towards their plight.

"Earlier District Administration Bandipora issued an order stating that in wake of Covid-19 threat, first employees and patients from Gurez stuck in Valley will be allowed to go to Gurez and after some-

time, the students and others can visit their native places. Two days after this order, administration backtracked and rescinded the order," the protesters said adding that they are facing tremendous hardships.

The stranded passengers, including patients and students, said they are stuck in different parts of Kashmir Valley but are not getting any assistance from authorities.

The protesters demanded that they should be airlifted or allowed to visit Gurez by road. "Why we have been stopped here and not allowed to move on. This is ridiculous," said a protesting student.

Two Teachers suspended in Pulwama

PULWAMA: On the directions of District Magistrate Dr Raghav Langer, Additional Deputy Commissioner/ADM Pulwama today suspended two teachers for non-compliance of directions under section 34 and 65 of Disaster Management Act, 2005. The two Teachers namely Mr. Mohammad Azad Koka, Teacher PS Kulpora and Mr. Gh Hassan Dar, Teacher HS Dogripora, Members of Cluster-wise Health Surveillance Team Panzgam have been placed under suspension with immediate effect and shall remain attached with the office of Tehsildar/Executive Magistrate 1st class Awantipora till further orders.

Additional Deputy Commissioner/ADM Pulwama further instructed Tehsildar Awantipora to file charge sheets against the officials and conduct full-fledged enquiry to locate the circumstances underlying such non-compliance and dereliction of duties and furnish the conclusions with specific recommendations for disciplinary action under service rules/ lodging of FIR under section 51(b) read with section 188 IPC.

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

- 1502 - Christopher Columbus leaves Spain on his 4th and final trip to the New World
- 1915 - German & French fight Battle of Artois
- 1916 - British-France Sykes-Picot conference over division of Turkey
- 1922 - The International Astronomical Union formally adopt Annie Jump Cannon's stellar classification system, which with only minor changes, is still used today
- 1944 - Russians recapture Crimea by taking Sevastopol
- 1945 - World War II: Partisans liberate Ljubljana.
- 1945 - World War II: Hermann Goering is captured by the United States Army
- 1945 - World War II: The Soviet Union marks Victory Day
- 1945 - World War II: The Channel Islands are formally liberated by the British
- 1955 - German Federal Republic (West Germany) joins NATO
- 1956 --First ascent of Manaslu, the world's eighth-highest mountain.
- 1956 - War Reparations and Peace Settlement between Philippines and Japan was finally signed at Malacañang Palace under Magsaysay administration
- 1960 - Nigeria becomes a member of British Commonwealth
- 1960 - US becomes the first country to legalize the birth control pill
- 1965 - Luna 5 launched (USSR) 1st attempt to soft land on Moon (fails)
- 1966 - China performs nuclear test at Lop Nor, PRC
- 1974 - US House of Representatives Judiciary Committee begins formal hearings on Nixon impeachment
- 1978 - Corpse of kidnapped Italian ex-premier Aldo Moro found
- 1987 - 183 die aboard a Polish jetliner that crashes in Warsaw
- 1989 - Journalist petition Chinese government for freedom of press
- 1992 - Armenian forces capture Shusha, marking a major turning point in the Karabakh War USA
- 1993 - Landslide in Nambija Ecuador, kills 300
- 1995 - Kinshasa, Zaire under quarantine after an outbreak of Ebola virus
- 1997 - 1st US ambassador since Saigon fell arrives in Vietnam
- 2002 - 38-day stand-off in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem comes to an end when Palestinians inside agree to have 13 suspected militants among them deported
- 2002 - In Kaspysk, Russia, a remote-controlled bomb explodes during a holiday parade killing 43 and injuring at least 130
- 2004 - Chechen president Akhmad Kadyrov is killed in a land mine bomb blast under a VIP stage during a World War II memorial victory parade in Grozny, Chechnya
- 2005 - Liberal commentary website The Huffington Post is launched
- 2006 - Estonia ratifies the European Constitution.
- 2009 - Jacob Zuma is sworn in as President of South Africa
- 2012 - A Russian passenger jet disappears with 45 people on board

From KO Archives

Major Among 7 Killed In JK

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR - An army major and a Congress block president were among, seven persons killed as militants set off three explosions and clashed with security forces at various places, in Jammu and Kashmir. The army major was killed when militants ambushed a search party at Pazipora-Batpora village of Handwara in the border district of Kupwara late last night, an official spokesman said.

He said an unidentified militant, believed to be a foreigner, was also killed in the retaliatory fire. Some arms and ammunition were recovered from him. In a separate incident, militants detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) at Donipora-Sangam, 45 kms from here on Srinagar-Jammu National Highway, this morning killing an army jawan, the spokesman said. Hizb-ul-Mujahideen militant outfit has claimed the responsibility for the blast.

Militants abducted and later hanged to death Congress block president and village head Abdul Rahim Paul in Tangmarg area Of Baramulla district, the spokesman said. Paul, a resident of Kuthama, was abducted by militants from his house last night and his body was found hanging from an electric pole at Saraipul today, he said. The spokesman said militants kidnapped one Ghulam Mohammad Lone from his house at Basman- Wadwan in Doda district on Wednesday and later killed him. In a separate incident, three security personnel were injured in a landmine explosion triggered by militants at Dachi-Makhvuri in Mandi sector of Poonch district last night, the spokesman said. He said militant's also carried a grenade explosion at Nai Basti in Anantnag district when CRPF personnel were patrolling the village, injuring a civilian Shabir Ahmad Bhat. Security forces recovered 24 under barrel grenade launcher (UBGL) grenades, ten IED switches and 1740 rounds of all ammunition during search operations at Bindigala and Nanyan in Noushera sector of Rijotin district last night, the spokesman said.

(Kashmir Observer, 09 May, 2005)

KASHMIR OBSERVER

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

Lift Communication Blackout

Government has once again plunged Kashmir into a communication blackout following the killing Hizbul Mujahideen operational chief Riyaz Naikoo. Since Wednesday afternoon, Kashmir has suspended mobile internet and calling services including even the sms. There's thus a sense of de javu. We are back to the morning of August 5 when the government enforced a Valley-wide security lockdown and a communication blockade in the wake of the revocation of Article 370 that granted Kashmir autonomy under the constitution. Suspension of communication has become a handy tool with the government to maintain peace following a development that is likely to make people angry. Naikoo's killing has triggered protests in Awantipora and in some parts of the Valley. There are reports of injuries suffered by the protesters.

By clamping down on mobile internet and calling services, the government has sought to pre-empt the spread of protests. And it has valid reasons for it. The killing of the popular Hizb commander Burhan Wani had touched off a Valley-wide unrest in the Valley that led to killing of around hundred people and blinding of several hundred. The unrest had continued for six months. Even that time also, the government had imposed a communication blackout - albeit, leaving the calling services open - but that had done little to reign in the situation. This time too, there have been protests in South Kashmir despite the suspension of internet.

That said, a sweeping communication gag for general masses at a time when we are grappling with the pandemic is an extreme step and uncalled for. It has disrupted the administrative efforts to counter the spread of Covid-19. Given its population versus Covid-19 ratio, Kashmir is among the worst affected places in India. Despite more than a month of lockdown, the authorities are far from flattening the curve. Now, with suspension of means of communication, the efforts to reach the potential Covid-19 suspects have come to a halt. Does Government have no concern for hundreds of patients who may be in need to be ferried to hospitals. And over and above this all, people have no way to contact their loved ones in hospitals and quarantine centres. They cannot visit them due to the need to maintain social distancing.

One hopes that the government realizes the difficulties faced by the common man in the absence of phones and internet and takes steps to restore them. Least it can do is to open up phone lines. Prolonging the communication gag as was done after withdrawal of Article 370 would be tantamount to playing with the lives of people in the time of a pandemic.

OTHER OPINION

A Thousand Words

In every story, there are facts and sometimes, there is the truth. The five Indian photographers who won the Pulitzer prize for their work both broke news and presented the grim realities of the times we live in. Channi Anand, Dar Yasin and Mukhtar Khan from the news wire service Associated Press (AP) were recognised in the feature photography category for their images that captured the humanity, brutality and even the terrible beauty of the suffering in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370. In addition, Anushree Fadnavis and Adnan Abidi were awarded in the breaking news photography category for their work covering the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests.

J&K and Hong Kong are different from one another, but in both, voices in a small pocket of a large, powerful nation-state are attempting to make themselves heard. Yasin's image of a protestor in the Valley, trying to mount an armoured vehicle with a stone in hand, says more about anger, humanity, politics and tragedy than words ever could.

And for all the images of violence, Khan's photograph of Indian forces keeping vigil as Kashmiri citizens pray, holds more hope than all the platitudes of politicians about "one India". And perhaps the most powerful of all, the hurt, almost deadpan expression on the face of six-year-old Muneefa Nazir, whose right eye was injured by a marble ball, allegedly from firing by Indian forces.

The images certainly present more than facts. They reveal something of what it means to be human beings under siege, of what living in the shadow of violence looks and even feels like. And most of all, without the words and clichés that are used to talk about conflict, they have the power to evoke an honest reckoning.

(The Indian Express)

Stimulus Package For Post Lockdown Life



In locked down India, poor migrants are on a long march back home

Shariq-us-Sabah

ON 23rd of March 2020, Government of India announced a country wide 21-day lockdown. People of India were given total of four hours to prepare for the lockdown that would be strictly enforced for next three weeks. Prime minister Narendra Modi in his address liked the fight against coronavirus to epic war of Mahabharata, which he said will be won in 21 days.

On 23rd of March 2020, Government of India announced a country wide 21-day lockdown. People of India were given total of four hours to prepare for the lockdown that would be strictly enforced for next three weeks. Prime minister Narendra Modi in his address likened the fight against coronavirus to epic war of Mahabharata, which he said will be won in 21 days.

Soon there was a mad rush of people scrambling to stock groceries, masks, sanitizers, etc. Amongst other vulnerable groups, the government totally forgot to account some fifty million migrant labourers spread all over India. These labourers rely on daily wages for their dinner. With no work, scanty or no savings, and no place to stay (as majority of these workers live either at construction sites or at factories where they work), tens of thousands of migrant labourers started their journey back to their villages on foot. The images of long serpentine trail of human beings, of all age groups, religions, regions, united by their hopelessness and poverty, were starkly reminiscent of the 1947 post partition migration. The unfolding humanitarian crisis, perhaps not anticipated by the government, forced it to act, but the help arrived too late and was too little.

At the time of writing this Article, we are in the midst the 3rd Phase of lockdown and it is scheduled to conclude on 17th of May. Though the government has allowed the stranded migrants, students and tourists to return to their homes by arranged surface transport, hundreds of thousands are unable to avail the facility given the long distances they have to travel. This begs a question. Was not the government aware of massive number of migrant labourers spread across Indian states? And what was its plan for their evacuation? After the lockdown was announced, a humanitarian crisis unfolded, forcing people into starvation, joblessness, poverty, destitution and depression. This is apart from the health infrastructural crisis. In my opinion, the policy measures announced, and that which is needed but not announced by the government is self-destructive and akin to shooting at one's own foot. Economists all over the world are advocating the urgent need for a suitable stimulus package to revive the economy. The COVID-19 catastrophe is bound to be at least as bad as 2008 global financial crisis, if not worse. India's current healthcare expenditure is below 1.5% of GDP even as the health sector is marred by a shortage of doctors, primary health care centres, Super Speciality hospitals, ventilators and lab technicians.

What is the situation?

As per the CMIE data, India's unemployment rate has surged to 27.11% for the week ended May 3 from the level of 6.74% in the week ended March 15. The largest hit in employment is witnessed in unorganized sector and in MSMEs. Several Economists have predicted that India's GDP Growth will be in a negative territory which will be die to sharp slowing down of all economic indicators. There is a strong link between disability, loss of employment and impoverishment. Disabilities today have quadrupled, because of destruction of long duration employment and it is now translating into rising poverty. India desperately needs an all-encompassing, well-structured and inclusive stimulus package. United States has announced a package of 10% of its GDP, and, close home, few Asian countries have announced a package of up to 15% of their GDP. While India certainly cannot risk spending in double digits for its stimulus package (because of inflationary risks), but a meagre Rs.1.76 Lakh Crore package, majority of which is repackaged, is impossibly and woefully low.

What the Government must do?

A meticulous fiscal stimulus plan is needed to boost consumption demand, to cushion the shock and to help the economy revive.

The fiscal package must aggressively target those in informal sector and MSMEs. MSMEs must be protected by providing it with a moratorium on loans for 3 months along with interest waiver. This will help both the Bank's balance sheet and the MSMEs will also stay afloat.

The fiscal package must include

A direct and unconditional cash transfer of Rs. 2000 per month for 3 months, to the bottom 60% of Indian population. This will create the demand in the economy, which is rapidly shrinking.

RBI must devise a framework where there is no coercive action on bankers when they lend loans that later become NPAs. A balanced regulation is utmost required to unclog the impending liquidity squeeze in the financial system. Mere rate adjustments will not help. Every sector of the economy is in a dire need of credit.

All State governments must immediately issue temporary Ration Cards to the bottom 40% of India's population, and the Union government must order FCI to offload the grains and distribute it amongst the poor. The Current bumper Rabi harvest will refill the FCI godowns.

The Central government must reduce excise duties on Petrol (by Rs 20 per litre) and on Diesel (by Rs 25 per litre) and pass on the benefits of lower prices of Crude to the consumers (\$23.86 a barrel currently).

The government needs to incentivize the external sector of trade and commerce.

Is it fiscally doable?

Yes, the government will have to delay certain gratifications to do that. The money can be made available if we reallocate some of the budgeted capital expenditure and rationalize expenditure. We can certainly defer Central Vista Project and save Rs.20,000 Crore outright. Similar beautification projects, statue building etc must be deferred indefinitely. The Oil bonanza is helping the government have a huge windfall gain for the past six years. The Government has already suspended MPLADS, Dearness Allowances. It must bring in a COVID Solidarity tax and can raise funds by issuing bonds to the public. If nothing, it can always print money. We also don't have to worry much about the inflationary pressure right now because we have sufficient food stock, a stable foreign exchange and low fuel.

The government must suit up and announce a fiscal stimulus to the tune of 5-8% of GDP quickly. We have lost a lot of time already, and, we cannot afford being frugal or lackadaisical. Desperate times require desperate solutions. We need to break free from textbook fiscal norms and go beyond the standard practice.

Author is an economist and policy executive. He can be reached at shariqussabah@gmail.com



OBSERVER
MAIL

All letters intended for publication must include the writer's name and address, even if a pseudonym is used. Letters are edited as clarity, space and accuracy of expression require. Our publishing a letter does not mean we agree with everything or even anything in it. -EDITOR

MAIL YOUR LETTERS

P.O.Box #337, GPO, Srinagar-190001
email: editpage.ko@gmail.com

From War Profits To Peace Dividends

HUMAN history appears to be a long story of wars, one after another, almost no break in between. Prior to the 20th century, war used to be a necessity of the times. But from the 20th century onwards, following a revolution in human affairs, war has become totally unnecessary. War has now become a complete anachronism. All that for the sake of which in the past people would go to war, can now be obtained without war and in a much better way. Compared to the violent means that were used in ancient times, peaceful means are much more effective and result oriented in the present world.

Why did so many wars happen in ancient times? The reason for this was ambitious people could not see before them any way other than waging war against others to obtain their objectives. They went to war because it seemed to them that they had no alternative to war in order to secure their goals. This was the mind set of the people of that time. They were at the lower rung of the ladder

of the civilisation. They couldn't think above this. For them, it was necessary to get what they wanted through the wars, even though there was bloodshed on the large scale.

In ancient times politically ambitious people ruling over countries would wage wars to satisfy desire for power or extend their rule. Another very significant change occurred in the economic sphere. For thousands of years, almost the entire economy was dependent on agriculture. In other words, it was a land-based economy. Those who owned land were considered wealthy and powerful, while those who were landless, were considered poor and powerless. Further, under the ancient political system, the king and those whom he had granted land grants, were considered to be the actual owners of the land. In such a situation, for a person with great economic ambitions, there seemed to be only way to satisfy his desires : that was to fight with the owners of the land and grab their land. In this regard a person who

had no land had just two choices: either to remain content with being landless or to fight against the owners of the land and try to grab their land.

Then came revolutionary changes and that left no excuse for anyone to go to war. A person or group or country can now obtain their economic or political objectives by availing of the vastly expanded opportunities that have now been made possible, using peaceful means alone. In such a situation, there is no need for war at all. War and violence would now only indicate a complex lack of awareness of the ample possibilities that are today available for obtaining one's objectives using peaceful means alone. Today, war has been rendered utterly ineffective and reality has dawned that peace has much greater dividends.

Two recent examples serve an example of changing time. In January President trump made a folly by ordering the assassination of Iran's Major General Qasem Soleimani. This sparked massive tension in the region and situation turned so volatile that a destructive war seemed inevitable. It was at the most

critical juncture that better sense prevailed in Washington and Trump was made to backtrack on his threat of devastating war if Iran retaliated. Iran did respond and targeted US bases in Iraq albeit without eliciting a promised US response. Knowing fully the calamitous consequences of modern-day war, soon heads of both the countries unequivocally declared that they do not want to go to war. The US President realising the mood in Iran declared, "The fact that we have this great military and equipment.... doesn't mean we have to use it. We don't want to use it." (TIME magazine January 20, 2020). This episode makes it clear that the age of war is over. The second example of this optimism came on February 29 when the US and the Taliban signed one of the most important deals in their bilateral history. Both sides decided to give peace a chance. That shows both are now aware that war is not an option.

Syed Mustafa Ahmad
Syedmustafaahmad9@gmail.com.
Hajibagh, Zainakote
Srinagar

Kashmir's Nomads Under Lockdown

How Inconsistent Lockdown Rules Have Disrupted Seasonal Migration Of Nomadic Pastoral Tribes

Firdous Hassan,
IndiaSpend.com

“The Bakarwals mostly rear the Australian Merino breed and local Poonchi and Kernai sheep, which cannot stand summer temperatures of the plains. “These breeds are used to colder regions and if the migration doesn’t start in time, the Bakarwals and Gujjars will have to face major losses in coming days,”



In the first week of April every year, Basharat Ali, 50, leaves his home in Chadwa village of Udhampur district in Jammu along with his flock of around 800 sheep for a 50-day trek, through the Pir Panjal range, to the high-altitude pastures of Gurez in Northern Kashmir. His family follows him in hired trucks, with tents, food and essentials, along with around 300 goats and a couple of buffaloes.

This clan of Bakarwals, the nomadic pastoralists of Jammu and Kashmir, then follow well-worn mountain trails, setting up camps and allowing their animals to graze in the rich Himalayan pastures until the start of autumn. Around September, they wind their way down. For the animals, especially the sheep, this escape from the summer heat of the plains and its dry grasslands is a must.

This year, however, the nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19 has disrupted the long spring migration of hundreds of thousands of Bakarwals and Gujjars, another nomadic pastoral tribe. Almost half of them are only starting out now, nearly a month late, after the government gave full permission on April 23, for the pastoralists to use vehicles to transport their families and animals. IndiaSpend has reviewed copies of the permits.

This delay will have a cascading effect on the lives of the nomadic communities and their traditional businesses, which are closely aligned with the seasons, festivals and land use patterns of the region.

The biggest impact of the delayed “transhumance”, the term for seasonal migration of livestock, will be reduced food availability for the animals, said Javaid Rahi, an expert on the nomadic pastoral tribes of the region and a member of the community himself. “Those who migrate late will end up spending most of their time travelling,” said Rahi. “They won’t be able to cover all the pastures in time, which means the livestock won’t get enough grass to eat.”

The Bakarwals mostly rear the Australian Merino breed and local Poonchi and Kernai sheep, which cannot stand summer temperatures of the plains. “These breeds are used to colder regions and if the migration doesn’t start in time, the Bakarwals and Gujjars will have to face major losses in coming days,” Rahi said.

The migration of Gujjars and Bakarwals will continue to be impacted until the contagion subsides, said Abdul Salam Mir, director, Department of Sheep Husbandry, Kashmir. “If more people migrate, it can be problematic. They have to restrict their number till Kashmir becomes Covid-19-free,” Mir said, pointing out that facilitation and medical centres have been set up for the herders.

The Bakarwals now fear having to pass Covid-19-hit red zones along the way, community representatives told IndiaSpend. Jammu and Kashmir together have already reported 614 cases

– more than its neighbours Punjab at 357 and Himachal Pradesh at 40 – as of April 30.

Up to 1.5 million Gujjars and Bakarwals live in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh – around 11.9% of the region’s total population as per the 2011 Census. In Jammu, the 810,800 Gujjars and Bakarwals comprise more than 54% of the tribal population. The other nomadic herders in the state are the Gaddis and the Sippis, but their seasonal migration is limited and only across districts.

Covid-19 fears

Deputy commissioners across Jammu and Kashmir have been directed to facilitate the migration of Gujjars and Bakarwals, Jammu and Kashmir spokesperson Rohit Kansal told IndiaSpend. “We have passed the orders,” he said.

But Tanveer Ahmad, a resident of Udhampur who took his herd of 400 sheep, reported from Rajouri that he was getting distress calls from community members who had run out of provisions and medical supplies. “There is no shop that is open. We are managing with what we took from home and we are afraid to enter localities for fear of the virus,” he said. “The government has failed to set up medical facilities and hasn’t even deputed enough officials to provide ration and food packets.”

Around 800,000 Bakarwals and Gujjars, nearly 50% of the state’s nomadic population, had been left behind in Jammu because of partial permission to migrate in early April, Zaid Parwaz Choudhary, the president of the Gujjar Bakarwal Welfare Conference, told IndiaSpend.

On March 21, restrictions were imposed under Section 144 throughout Jammu and Kashmir to prevent the spread of the pandemic. By April 16, the government had eased the rules enough to allow migration. But two days later, on April 18, an advisory followed from the Department of Sheep Husbandry of Kashmir declaring that the families of the herders – including the elderly, women and children – should not be allowed to travel, in order to prevent chances of infection.

“All can join them only after the pandemic is over,” the advisory said. It also suggested that the Gujjars and Bakarwals “establish separate transit camps en route their migration” and that “intermingling of transit camps should altogether be avoided”.

For the tribes, this annual journey is unthinkable without their clans. “Migration for the Bakarwals and Gujjars means our entire dera [settlement] along with families moves,” said Ali who will be accompanied by an associate instead of his family.

So set are the patterns and timing of the migration that by the time the lockdown was enforced on March 24, Basharat Ali had already assembled all he needed for the six-month trek with his animals. His clothes were in a cloth bag and his family had packed essentials such as rice, oil and a few dried vegetables in a jute bag. The provisions were enough for two weeks, when he hoped the lockdown would end.

Shortage of fodder

Another advisory from the deputy commissioner of Rajouri district asked for written permits for movement – “mattoos” – from tehsildars. The process of securing permits further delayed the migration schedules, said Basharat Ali.

This delay could have a serious impact on the wellbeing of the animals, said the Bakarwals. The temperatures in the Jammu region had risen above 30 degree Celsius and the jungles were overrun with herbs, some of which, the shepherds believe, are poisonous for the animals. So families were taking turns to visit surrounding forests to collect fodder.

Kalakote resident Mohammad Farooq, 65, and his two brothers, Mohammad Ibrahim, 60, and Mohammad Sarfaraz, 35, had no choice but to trek to the neighbouring jungle and collect fod-



der for their livestock because they were afraid of letting their animals graze on poisonous outgrowth. “The concerned tehsildar has not issued us permission to graze our sheep,” said Farooq. “Even vehicles are not allowed yet to ferry our livestock and families.”

Social distancing norms

In Basharat Ali’s village in Majalta block, only 1,500 of the 3,000 Bakarwals had started migrating and that too without their families. Those left behind who can now leave were worried about passing localities that have reported Covid-19

cases, said Chaudhary Mohammad Iqbal Phambra, the area representative of the Bakarwals.

The manner in which the herders migrate anyway allows for social distancing, said Phambra. “Shepherds migrate with the sheep, while their goats and cows are ferried in vehicles,” he explained. “Once we reach our destination, each family sets up its own temporary tent. Only three or four men manage the movement of the sheep.”

The use of vehicles actually helps maintain social distancing, he said. “We don’t need to pass populated areas or stay there, we reach our destination directly,” he pointed out. On April 16, the Jammu and Kashmir Board for Development of Gujjars and Bakarwals had suggested to the police department that the vehicles of migrating families be allowed to pass through the highway linking Jammu to Kashmir.

“You are requested to issue necessary directions for hassle-free movement of these families along with the vehicles for transportation of pet animals and family members of the migratory families,” the letter said. But the state had not relented.

No grazing lands left

When the Bakarwals are in Jammu, they leave grazing lands from local farmers, who cannot cultivate these lands during the winter. But since the migration has been delayed, the farmers have started sowing maize and wheat in Jammu, and the livestock are no longer allowed to graze in the fields, said Chowdhary of the Gujjar Bakarwal Welfare Conference.

“Now that these fields are being used for cultivating crops, the livestock of the Gujjars and Bakarwals are starving in Jammu areas,” said Chowdhary.

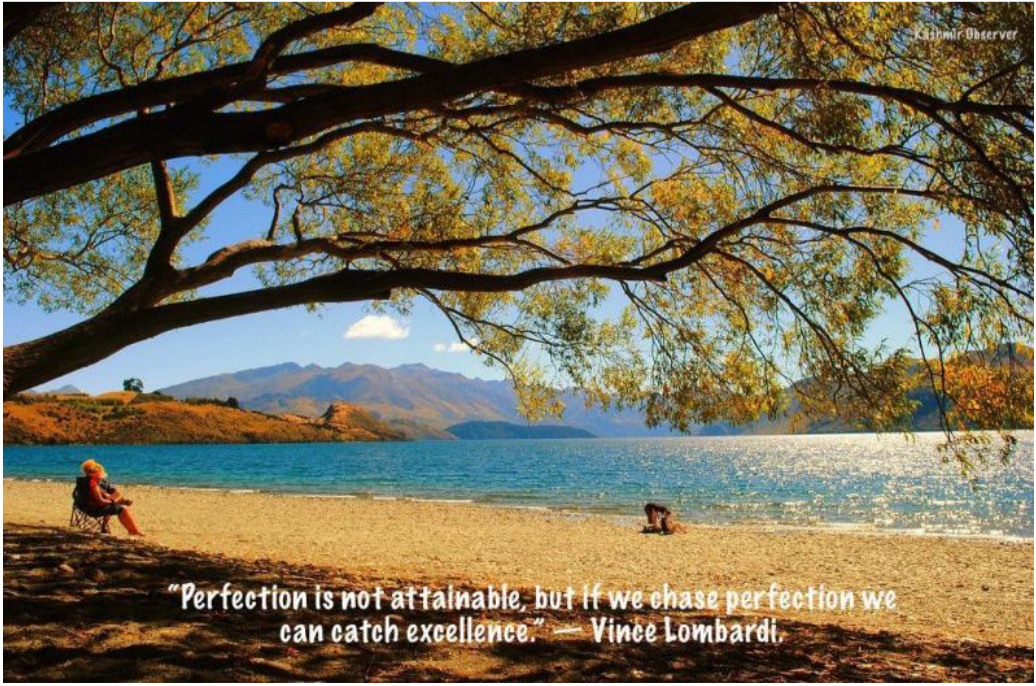
Normally, the Bakarwals could pay extra to the farmers to extend the lease, said Kavita Suri of Jammu University, who has done extensive research on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. The money for the lease comes from the sale of animals, which has not been possible this year, said Suri, who has authored the book, The Gujjars and Bakarwals of J&K: In the Shadows of Conflict.

“While returning from the pastures in Kashmir, they sell their sheep for Eid festivities and this pays them enough to lease the lands in Jammu and to manage their daily expenses,” she said.

Pastures in Jammu region have already shrunk over the years, said researcher Javed Rahi, due to

the implementation of the J&K State Lands (vesting of ownership to the occupants) Act of 2001, popularly referred to as the Roshni scheme. Under this, the government vested the ownership of land in its occupants and consequently, most grazing lands were given over to commercial purposes over the last 10 years. The Act was scrapped in November 2018 but the Bakarwals said that the damage was done.

Rahi cited the establishment of two universities on these lands – the Baba Ghulam Shah University in Rajouri and the Jammu University. In Rajouri,



“Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence.” — Vince Lombardi.

In Pursuit Of Perfection

Dr. Raashid Ali

THE IDEA of something being perfect is an illusion. The idea of perfection can really trammel us from the feats and triumphs. If we are always waiting to reach perfection, we will never be happy. Rather we should shoot for excellence and flamboyance and not perfection. Perfection is an impeccable state where everything is unerringly accurate. Since perfect things are without faults or flaws so how can we even think of being Perfect? We always bust a gut to “Perfect” ourselves, but we don’t have a hunch of this thing that perfection would ever try to perfect the imperfect. A perfect life has many phenom-

enal essences to each and every individual. It can be perfection in things we do; it can be having everything perfect around and feeling perfect.

We have this pipe dream about everything.... Perfect life, perfect relationships, perfect career, and perfect amount of money that we need to earn, no matter what. Do you really feel these things make us perfect? This question here is very abstruse because, not just are there a multifold perspectives but a numerous amount of people are having the same musing about Real Perfection. In short this word perfection blow hot and cold with the dogmas of faith.

Nothing is perfect in this world. We all are perfectly imperfect, and that is perfectly agreeable. We were sent in this universe not

to become the perfect people, but to accept our imperfections and to work out on them. Acceptance of our faults takes us pretty near in changing them, may be not an about turn transfiguration, but at least a step closer to perfection. So we need to brush up ourselves from dawn to dusk.

A perfect human being is someone who educates himself or herself every day to become a better person. A perfect person is someone who accepts the flaws and tries to improve every single day. Don’t perfect yourself just because other people want you to be perfect. Those people who tell you how to look perfect, even those people are imperfect.

Just prick up ears, hang on the words that, “YOU DON’T HAVE TO LOOK GOOD FOR PEOPLE.” You

don’t have to be perfect just because other people want you to be so. Your soul has to be spick and span from inside and your intent unblurred. This is all what one should yearn for and this is all what one should have eyes at.

When you make someone grin like a Cheshire cat or when you bash to do something up for the people around you. When you don’t have time to bust someone’s chops and when you go through someone’s throes and woes. Those things will make you an unfeigned perfectionist. Then see how these deeds will hook you up with people and will perk up your life. Thus have a profound thought about these idiosyncrasies and pull out all the stops to run after imperfections rather than running after being perfect.

Intensive Farming May Lead To Antibiotic-Resistant Pathogens, Higher Risk Of Epidemics: SCIENTISTS



Press Trust Of India

LONDON: Intensive farming techniques have led to a common antibiotic-resistant pathogen to become capable of infecting both cattle and humans, according to a study which suggests the need to check agriculture practices for such outbreaks.

The scientists, including those from the University of Sheffield in the UK, investigated the evolution of *Campylobacter jejuni*, a bacterium carried by chickens and cattle, and a leading cause of food poisoning.

Based on their findings, published in the journal PNAS, the researchers said the bacterium is able to infect more than one species because of its ability to transfer genes, and adapt quickly to new host environments.

They said overuse of antibiotics, high animal numbers, and low genetic diversity caused by intensive farming techniques increase the likelihood of these pathogens becoming a major public health risk.

These bacteria are often resistant to antibiotics, due to use of the drugs in farming, and can be transferred to people when they eat undercooked meat and poultry, the scientists said.

When they assessed the genetic evolution of the pathogen, the researchers found that cattle-specific strains of the bacterium emerged at the same time as a dramatic rise in cattle numbers in the 20th century.

The scientists suggest that changes in cattle diet, anatomy, and physiology triggered the transfer of genes between general

and cattle-specific strains of the pathogen.

They noted that this helped the bacterium to cross the species barrier and infect humans, triggering a major public health problem.

"Human pathogens carried in animals are an increasing threat and our findings highlight how their adaptability can allow them to switch hosts and exploit intensive farming practices," said Professor Dave Kelly, who led the study at the University of Sheffield.

Kelly said human activities have had a profound effect on the Earth's ecosystems and biodiversity, particularly among livestock species, such as cattle.

"Escalating livestock numbers and global trade have been linked with the emergence of zoonotic diseases that pose a significant threat to both animal and human health, with the current COVID-19 pandemic being the most dramatic and serious example to date," he added.

According to study co-author Sam Sheppard from the University of Bath in the UK, cattle infected with the pathogen pose a major public health risk for humans.

"There are an estimated 1.5 billion cattle on Earth, each producing around 30 kilogrammes of manure each day.

If roughly 20 per cent of these are carrying *Campylobacter*, that amounts to a huge potential public health risk," Sheppard said.

The scientists believe that the finding is a wake-up call to be more responsible about farming methods, "so we can reduce the risk of outbreaks of problematic pathogens in the future."

THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 1.5 billion cattle on Earth, each producing around 30 kilogrammes of manure each day.

Amid COVID-19 Lockdown, 'Loss Of Pleasure' In Teen Sleep



Agencies

Owing to increased screen time amid the COVID-19 self-isolation requirements there is a certain 'loss of pleasure' in sleep of teenagers that causes negative mood. A global study of more than 350,000 teens shows that this lack of sleep can affect mental health, causing anhedonia (or loss of pleasure), anxiety, anger and significantly increasing the risk of depression.

The results just published in Sleep Medicine Reviews connects less sleep with a 55% increased chance of mood deficits and double the risk of reduced positive mood.

From Asia to Australia, New Zealand, Europe and North America, sleep clearly was a modifiable risk factor that can improve or depress mood in adolescents, says Flinders University sleep researcher Dr Michelle Short.

"Sleep duration significantly predicts mood deficits on all mood states, including increased depression, anxiety, anger, negative affect and reduced positive affect," she said, with

less sleep linked to an 83% higher chance or anger, 62% increased risk of depressed mood, and 41% higher risk of anxiety.

"Fortunately, there are many interventions individuals, family, the community and even public policy can encourage to maintain regular sleep in this at-risk population to reduce the likelihood of these problems spilling over into mental health issues needing clinical treatment," she says.

The researchers also recommend increased parental/guardian regulation of sleep and technology use, delayed school starting times, and monitoring academic and other pressures such as out-of-hours tutoring do not impede sleep routine.

Dr Short says that "while positive mood doesn't get much attention, it is still clinically relevant as one of the key symptoms of depression in anhedonia (loss of pleasure)."

"It is imperative that greater focus is given to sleep as for prevention and early intervention for mood deficits," the study concludes.

Hydroxychloroquine No Wonder Drug For Treating COVID-19, Can Be Fatal: Experts

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI- As countries around the world explore the potential of hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 patients, several experts have sounded a note of warning to say it is not a wonder drug and may even be fatal in some cases.

While frantic efforts are underway to develop a vaccine and doctors all over try and control the spread of the disease for which there is yet no cure, hydroxychloroquine, or HCQ, has emerged as a prime focus area of treatment.

This reliance on HCQ must immediately stop, the experts say, adding their voices to the growing debate to stress that there is no scientific evidence to prove that it is beneficial in treating COVID-19.



It is only on anecdotal evidence that doctors are using HCQ along with other antiviral medication (used in HIV and other viral infections) as empiric therapy to treat

COVID-19 patients as there is no definite treatment available yet, said M C Misra, former director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Delhi and one

of India's top surgeons.

However, there have been reports of some patients developing cardiac arrhythmias due to hydroxychloroquine which can cause sudden cardiac death, Misra told PTL.

Yudhyavir Singh, a core member of AIIMS' COVID-19 team deployed at the hospital's trauma centre, agreed.

Globally, some deaths have been reported due to the administration of HCQ alone and along with azithromycin as well. HCQ blocks the potassium channel and potentially prolongs the QTc (heartbeat) with consequences of sudden cardiac arrest death and various arrhythmias. This has also been documented in prominent studies, he explained.

The assistant professor of an-

aesthesia at AIIMS said there are contradictory reports on HCQ usage for treating COVID-19.

As the pandemic spreads and the urgency for effective treatment of COVID-19 mounts, several countries, including the US, have started relying heavily on HCQ, majorly used in the treatment of malaria and rheumatoid arthritis.

India has become the biggest supplier of the drug and has fulfilled large orders from countries such as the US, UAE and UK.

With US President Donald Trump touting the anti-malaria drug as a definite cure for COVID-19, his administration has stockpiled millions of doses of HCQ despite the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issuing a safety communication regarding the known side effects of the drug.

Heating May Effectively Disinfect N95 Masks For Reuse: Study

Press Trust Of India

Heating may be the best way to disinfect N95 masks for reuse, according to a study which found that doing so preserves their filtration efficiency for 50 cycles.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, N95 face masks have been in short supply, said the researchers, including those from Stanford University in California, US.

Health care workers, in particular, desperately need these masks to protect themselves from the respiratory droplets of infected patients, they said.

Because of the shortage, many have to wear the same mask repeatedly, according to the researchers.

The study, published in the journal ACS Nano, tested several methods for disinfecting N95 materials, finding that heating them preserves their



filtration efficiency for 50 cycles of disinfection.

The researchers noted that N95 masks contain a layer of "meltblown" polypropylene fibres that form a porous, breathable network.

To help capture smaller particles that could slip through the holes, the fibres are electrostatically charged, they said.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended several methods for disinfecting N95 masks, such as heating, ultraviolet (UV) radiation and bleach treatment, the researchers said.

However, so far these methods have not been tested ex-

tensively, especially for multiple rounds of disinfection, they said.

The researchers wanted to compare five of the methods that could reasonably be used within a hospital setting to see how mask materials hold up to repeated disinfections.

While analysing N95 masks, they examined pieces of the meltblown fabric used to make these masks.

The researchers treated the material with a particular disinfectant and compared its ability to filter aerosol particles -- resembling respiratory droplets, but lacking coronavirus -- before and after disinfection.

The team found that spraying the fabric with an ethanol or chlorine bleach solution drastically reduced the filtration efficiency after only one treatment, from about 96 per cent to 56 per cent (ethanol) or 73 per cent (bleach).

Researchers Find Strenuous Exercise Safe For People At High Risk Of Knee Arthritis

Agencies

While strenuous physical activities such as jogging, cycling, singles tennis and skiing may be challenging to people at high risk for knee osteoarthritis (OA), a recent study that followed high-risk individuals for 10 years showed vigorous exercise did not increase their risk of developing OA and may even protect them from it.

"Our study findings convey a reassuring message that adults at high risk for knee OA may safely engage in long-term strenuous physical activity at a moderate level to improve their general health and well-

being," said Alison Chang, associate professor of physical therapy and human movement sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

The results of the study will be published in the journal JAMA Network Open.

Osteoarthritis is the most common joint disorder in the United States, affecting an estimated 32.5 million adults, according to the Centers for Disease Control. The knee is the most commonly affected joint. The lifetime risk of developing symptomatic, radiographic knee OA (as diagnosed on an x-ray) is approximately 38% to 45%. The estimated median age of diagnosis is 55 years.



World In 2020 Resembles 1918 Despite Science Advance

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

In the years between two lethal pandemics, one the mis-named 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 U.S. didn't.

But the ways to avoid getting sick and what to do when sick are little changed. The failure of U.S. 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 Wilson'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 Spanish 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."

In the manner of the day, there just had to be a catchy rhyme in circulation, too: "Cover up each cough and sneeze. If you don't you'll spread disease."

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 U.S., 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 U.S. Army or U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 overemphasized. ... 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. Tracking by Johns Hopkins University shows the continuing COVID-19 pandemic has killed more than 250,000 people globally, more than 68,000 in the United States.

Bad Science

In 1918, the surgeon general noted in a handbill that "a person who has only a mild attack of the disease himself may give a very severe attack to others." The warning is just as applicable to the coronavirus, especially

as scientists learned large numbers of people with COVID-19 may spread it despite no obvious symptoms. Exactly how often the new virus kills can't be determined without better counts of the infected; some estimates put the 1918 flu's death rate at 2.5%.

Blue's public notice also warned people to avoid charlatans and only get medicine from doctors.

Physicians, though, didn't always know what they were doing. Medical journals at the time describe a rash of unusual treatments, some in the league of Trump's amateur theories about disinfectant, blasts of lights and an unapproved drug that has both potential benefits and risks.

One 1918-era doctor recommended that people sniff a boric acid and sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) powder to rinse out nasal passages. Others prescribed quinine, strychnine and a poisonous garden plant called Digitalis to help circulation, as well as drugs derived from iodine for "internal disinfection," according to Laura Spinney, who wrote the 2017 book "Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of

Rare Saudi Resistance Hits Futuristic Megacity Project

A rare revolt by a Saudi tribe has spelt fresh trouble for a planned Red Sea megacity, a linchpin of the crown prince's economic vision already beset by low oil prices.

The \$500 billion Neom project, set to be built from scratch along the kingdom's picturesque western coast, is billed as a futuristic cityscape evocative of a sci-fi blockbuster — with everything from flying taxis to robot-maids.

Economic analysts have long questioned its viability in the era of cheap oil.

But Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's dream project hit a new roadblock last month when a member of the local Huwaitat tribe was gunned down after he refused to give up his land for the project.

Before the shootout, Abdulraheem al-Huwaiti posted a series of scathing videos in which he likened the forced displacement of his sprawling tribe, based in the northwestern Tabuk province for generations, to "state terrorism".

He presciently claimed his opposition would get him killed.

Saudi Arabia's state security agency said the "wanted" man died in an exchange of fire with state forces after he resisted arrest, adding that a cache of weapons had been recovered from his house.

Many other members of the Bedouin tribe, who commonly own guns, were detained for spreading anti-displacement slogans and refusing to sign relocation documents, multiple activists said.

It exposes a rare domestic clash with the government that has a reputation for crushing dissent, while it grapples with



the twin economic blow of historic low crude prices and a coronavirus-led shutdown.

Neom has said 20,000 people would need to be relocated to clear room for construction as it presses ahead with its target to complete its first sites by 2023.

'Deep cuts'

The government is preparing emergency plans to slash spending as crude prices drop, with Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan warning of "painful" measures and an "extremely long" list of affected budget items.

He did not specify whether Neom will be among them. Even before the crisis, the project — first announced in 2017 — has struggled to attract investment.

"I will be surprised if cuts are not made — deep cuts in capital expenditure for Neom," a Saudi source associated with the project told AFP. "Given the sums required, it cannot but be delayed in many aspects."

The source added that the government is offering "generous compensation in cash" to those displaced by the project in addition to "new properties" within the kingdom.

In a bid to placate the community, Neom has also launched "social responsibility programmes" including university scholarships and vocational training programmes, the source said.

Modi Govt Request To Test Ganges For Virus Cure Declined

NEW DELHI: India's top medical research body has turned down a proposal by the Modi government to test water from the Ganges river as a cure for coronavirus. ThePrint news portal said on Thursday.

It said the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) turned down the government's "request" to conduct research on a theory that Gangajal, or water from Ganges river, could possibly cure Covid-19.

Speaking to ThePrint, a source in the ICMR said the agency has refused to get involved as it is focussing on the Covid-19 battle and doesn't want to waste time on other research amid the pandemic.

The move came after the country's apex medical research body received a "request" from the Ministry of Jal Shakti to conduct "further research" on a proposal by an NGO, Atulya Ganga, said an ICMR official, who didn't wish to be named.

In its letter last month, Mr Atulya had cited the presence of a "ninja virus", called bacteriophage, in Ganges water that could cure Covid-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus. Bacteriophage is a special type of virus that eats harmful bacteria, the letter said.

According to ThePrint, the NGO asked the government on April 3 to conduct a study on the possibility of this virus acting as a cure. It sent a copy each to the ministry and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The ministry's National Mission for Clean Ganga, the department administering the Modi government's



ambitious Namami Gange programme, then wrote to ICMR on April 30 requesting a clinical trial.

The ICMR then held a meeting to discuss the idea, but refused to proceed, offering only its "help" to the NGO, ThePrint said. "We had indeed received a letter from the Ministry of Jal Shakti for such research. The experts at ICMR also held a meeting on this matter. Then we asked those proposing this research that you should tell us about hospitals and doctors that are ready and willing to conduct some research on it. We will certainly help them in this regard," said the ICMR official.

"As of now we are still treating plasma therapy as a trial for treatment for corona (Covid-19), then how can we so quickly accept a virus called bacteriophage, found in the water of Ganges, as a cure? Right now, there is no logic in the argument that the virus

found in Ganga's water can indeed fight the coronavirus disease," added the official.

However, he added that if the ministry takes an initiative into the matter then ICMR will extend its assistance to it.

Speaking to ThePrint, Dr Rajnikant Srivastava, ICMR's head of the Department of Research Management, Policy Planning and Communication, in Delhi and Director of Regional Medical Research Centre, Gorakhpur, said: "A presentation was made after the Jal Shakti ministry's proposal. The matter is at a very preliminary stage. Nothing has been decided on the future course of action. We will support the Jal Shakti ministry in all the work it does on this front."

A senior official of the Ministry of Jal Shakti, meanwhile, said there are several special properties in the river and many people were demanding research on them

European Union Offers More Than USD 163 Million Aid Package To Pakistan

Islamabad: The European Union has offered an aid package of more than USD 163 million to cash-strapped Pakistan to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and to boost the country's economic and security developments, the EU mission here said in a statement.

Pakistan has reported 25,837 coronavirus cases and 594 deaths, the health authorities said on Friday.

Androulla Kaminara, the EU Ambassador to Pakistan, met Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday to reiterate the 27-member economic bloc's commitment to support Pakistan during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis, according to a statement by the EU.

"She presented the 26 billion Pakistan Rupees (over USD 163 million) COVID-19 package that the EU has put together in support to Pakistan," according to the statement.

It said that the EU was "directing more than 26 billion Pakistan Rupees (over USD 163 million) towards the short and medium term response in the emerging health crisis in Pakistan and into strengthening the preparedness of Pakistan's people for its social and economic impact, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable."

Ambassador Kaminara and the Prime Minister also discussed how Pakistan and the EU can further benefit from a stronger political partnership in light of the political, economic and security developments.

"A longstanding friend and partner of Pakistan, the European

The H1N1 virus raced through the masses in what has been called the world's deadliest parade. As officials insisted there was nothing to be alarmed about, people were seeing neighbors sicken and die with astonishing speed and mass graves being dug.

"It's just the flu" had worn thin as the mantra of officialdom.

Late that November, sirens wailed in San Francisco to sound the all-clear after six weeks of lockdown and tell people they could remove their masks. San Francisco, like many cities in the West, had been largely spared the first wave and spent the interval preparing for Round 2, mandating masks and jailing people who didn't comply.

They had a rhyme for that, too, of course: "Obey the laws, and wear the gauze. Protect your jaws from septic paws."

The precautions paid off with a death rate lower than in afflicted cities elsewhere. But the city relaxed too soon.

In December, thousands of new cases erupted. A wave spilling into the new year was underway. San Francisco's death toll mounted by more than 1,000. It was the last lashing by the Spanish flu, and a less lethal one.

The brutal lessons of 1918 and 1919? To Barry, who was enlisted 15 years ago in a Bush administration drive to prepare all levels of government for pandemics, they are to respond early, relax cautiously, tell people the truth.

Instead he has seen denial followed by a chaotic federal response and leadership vacuum as Washington and the states compete for the same medical essentials and now move fitfully toward reopening.

"Now we have plans, even war-gamed the plans, spent billions preparing for just what is happening, federal agencies have been tasked to handle all these things, and we get ... next to nothing," he said.

NEWS MAKERS

WORLD, AMERICA

To Mask Or Not To Mask?

PARIS: Donald Trump has not donned one. Emmanuel Macron boasted a small French flag on his. Slovakia's president made a fashion statement by sporting a fuchsia-coloured one to match her outfit.

As the world starts emerging from coronavirus lockdowns, political leaders are being closely scrutinised over their choice to wear a mask — or not — as many people question seemingly mixed messages about the value of face coverings as infection barriers.

Many Western governments counselled against face masks for the general public at the start of the outbreak, which has now claimed more than a quarter of a million lives worldwide.

But as people start returning to work despite the absence of a treatment or vaccine, masks are now being encouraged or



even required as a critical anti-virus tool, along with hand washing and social distancing. As government advice has changed, leaders have had to decide: to cover up or not? "The decision to wear or forgo a mask in public is based on what message the leader wants to convey," behavioural scientist Jacqueline Gollan of Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois, told AFP.

"They are more likely to wear a mask if the leader believes in promoting public health. They may forgo the mask if the leader believes that they should convey

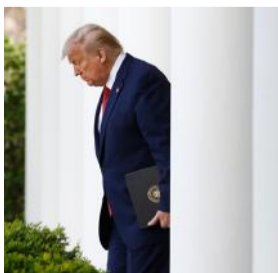
that the risk of transmission is low and things are normalised," she said. Some have started to appear in public in simple medical masks or more protective N95 or FFP2 masks, others are opting for the washable fabric ones that many governments are encouraging the public to wear. But a handful, including US President Trump and Brazil's leader Jair Bolsonaro, are bucking the trend and going about bare-faced.

'Complex message'

Whatever a leader's motivation, "it sets an example that many people will follow, whether that is to comply with or ignore the advice" on mask-wearing, said Claudia Pagliari, an eHealth researcher at the University of Edinburgh.

Over 50 countries now require people to cover their faces when they leave home, especially on public transport and in shops.

Trump Says Will Be Tested For Coronavirus Daily After Military Aide Tests Positive



US President Donald Trump has decided that he will be tested daily for the coronavirus after one of his valets tested positive for the deadly disease.

A military aide of Trump, whom the White House officials

described as a personal valet, tested positive for coronavirus.

The valet, a member of the military, would have had very close contact with Trump, and assisted him with his food, clothes and other personal needs, CBS News reported.

Trump, however, denied having close contact with the sick valet. "I've had very little personal contact with this gentleman," Trump told reporters on Thursday in the Oval Office. "I know who he is, good person, but I've had very little contact."

[Vice President Mike Pence] has had very little contact with him. But Mike was tested and I was tested. We were

both tested," Trump said.

Responding to questions, Trump said he, the vice president and other staff of the White House would be tested for coronavirus every day.

"I just had a test. In fact, I had one yesterday and one today, and it is negative. Mike just had a test and it is negative," he said on a day when the US passed yet another grim milestone of having 75,000 deaths due to the coronavirus. "But they do the tests and it just shows you that the fallacy -- it is what I have been saying -- testing is not a perfect art. No matter what you do, testing is not a perfect art.

So we test once a week. Now we are going to go testing once a day. But even when you test once a day, somebody could -- something happens where they catch something," the president said. Trump repeated that Americans were "warriors" in their efforts to overcome the pandemic that has ravaged the US economy. "We're all warriors together," he said. "I am, you are, we all are."

According to Johns Hopkins University, the US reported over 76,000 deaths and has above 1,256,000 cases of coronavirus infections, making the country the worst hit by the pandemic.

Moody's Investors Service Sees India's Economic Growth At Zero' In FY21



Press Trust of India

MUMBAI- Moody's Investors Service on Friday said it estimates India's GDP growth to hit zero' in FY21 and pointed to a wide fiscal deficit, high government debt, weak social and physical infrastructure, and a fragile financial sector.

The quality of India's economic growth has declined in recent years, demonstrated by financial stress among rural households, relatively low productivity and weak job creation, the agency said.

In its forecast for FY21, the agency estimated India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth at zero, meaning the country's economic growth will remain flat this financial year, and the same is seen accelerating to 6.6 per cent in FY22.

In its credit opinion which comes following the change in the forecast, Moody's warned that the COVID-19 "shock will exacerbate an already material slowdown in economic growth, which has significantly reduced prospects for durable fiscal consolidation".

Analysts across the board have been certain about the heavy economic toll that the pandemic will take on the country.

Moody's local arm Icra has pegged for a contraction of up to 2 per cent in the growth as a result of the crisis, which has seen the country being put under a lockdown for nearly two months to arrest the spread of infections.

Late last month, Moody's had slashed its calendar year 2020 GDP growth forecast to 0.2 per cent.

Its negative outlook on the sovereign rating, which was revised last in November 2019 from stable, reflects increasing risks that economic growth will remain significantly lower than in the past, it said, adding that this takes into account the deep shock triggered by the virus outbreak.

Meanwhile, India's credit strengths include a large and diverse economy, favourable demographic potential and a stable domestic financing base to fund the government debt, it noted.

In March, the government had announced a relief package worth Rs 1.7 lakh crore, and there are speculations of another follow-up package in the offing.

These measures will reduce the depth and duration of India's growth slowdown, but there is a probability of an "entrenched weakening" on prolonged financial stress among rural households, weak job creation and a credit crunch among non-bank financial institutions, it said.

Reform prospects, which can take care of some of the concerns with the Indian economy, have "diminished", the agency said.

It further warned that a downgrade in the rating could happen if the fiscal metrics weakened materially, and made it clear that a "negative" outlook indicates that an upgrade in the rating is unlikely in the near term.

COVID-19: Single-Day Jump Of 3,390 Cases Takes India Total To 56,342

The death toll due to COVID-19 rose to 1,886 and the number of cases climbed to 56,342 in the country on Friday, registering an increase of 103 fatalities and 3,390 infections in the last 24 hours, according to the Union health ministry.

The number of active COVID-19 cases stood at 37,916. While 16,539 people have recovered, one patient has migrated, it said.

"Thus, around 29.35 per cent patients have recovered so far," a senior health ministry official said.

The total cases include 111 foreign nationals.

The total of 103 deaths reported since Thursday morning include 43 in Maharashtra; 29 in Gujarat; eight in Madhya Pradesh; seven in West Bengal; five in Rajasthan; two each in Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh and one each in Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

Of the 1,886 fatalities, Maharashtra tops the tally with 694 fatalities, Gujarat comes second with 425 deaths, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 193, West Bengal at 151, Rajasthan at 97, Delhi at 66, Uttar Pradesh at 62 and Andhra Pradesh at 38.

The death toll reached 37 in Tamil Nadu, 30 in Karnataka while Telangana has reported 29 fatalities due to the respiratory disease. Punjab has registered 28 COVID-19 deaths, Jammu and Kashmir nine, Haryana seven, Bihar five and Kerala four.

Jharkhand has recorded three COVID-19 fatalities. Odisha and Himachal Pradesh have reported two deaths each.

Meghalaya, Chandigarh, Assam and Uttarakhand have reported one fatality each, according to the ministry data.

According to the health ministry data updated in the morning, the highest number of confirmed cases in the country is from Maharashtra at 17,974, followed by Gujarat at 7,012, Delhi at 5,980, Tamil Nadu at 5,409, Rajasthan at 3,427, Madhya Pradesh at 3,252 and Uttar Pradesh at 3,071.

The number of COVID-19 cases has gone up to 1,847 in Andhra Pradesh and 1,644 in Punjab.

The tally has risen to 1,548 in West Bengal, 1,123 in Telangana, 793 in Jammu and Kashmir, 705 in Karnataka, 625 in Haryana and 550 in Bihar.

Kerala has reported 503 coronavirus cases so far, while Odisha has 219. A total of 135 people have been infected with the virus in Chandigarh and 132 in Jharkhand.

Tripura has reported 65 cases, Uttarakhand has 61, Chhattisgarh has 59, Assam has 54, Himachal Pradesh has 46 and Ladakh has 42.

Thirty-three COVID-19 cases have been reported from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Meghalaya has registered 12 cases, Puducherry has nine, while Goa has seven.

Manipur has two cases. Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Dadra and Nagar Haveli have reported one case each.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research)," the ministry said on its website. State-wise distribution is subject to further verification and reconciliation, it said.

26 Employees Of Pharma Firm Cadila Test Covid-Positive In Ahmedabad, Unit Shut

As many as 26 employees of Cadila Pharmaceuticals have tested positive for coronavirus in Gujarat's Ahmedabad district, a district official said on Thursday.

At least 26 employees of the company's manufacturing unit at Dholka town in the district tested positive for the virus on Wednesday, district development officer Arun Mahesh Babu said.

Following the development, 95 employees of that unit, who may have come in contact with the infected personnel, have been put under home quarantine, he said.

Both the manufacturing unit and the entire Dholka town have been sanitised, the official added.

Meanwhile, in a release issued on Thursday, Cadila Pharmaceuticals confirmed the reports and said the manufacturing unit has been shut and sanitation process has been initiated.

"Recently, 26 employees from our Dholka facility tested positive for Covid-19. Following this, we have closed our operations, and are undertaking deep sanitisation of the plant and its surroundings," company's statement read.



Due To Coronavirus Lockdown, Pakistan Players Give Birth To Zoom Cricket

Bored during Pakistan's coronavirus lockdown, Test batsman Shan Masood put on his helmet, picked up his bat -- and Zoom cricket was born.

Masood, 30, was video-chatting with teammates when they grabbed their cricket gear and pretended to play a match.

"A couple of us guys were talking on Zoom and it was pretty late at night and somebody just picked up a ball," Masood told AFP.

"He had a ball (in) his hand and eventually all of us got kitted up and we played... a made-up cricket match."

"So that was quite a funny moment where I kind of had my helmet on. Hassan Ali was seaming into the ball, Imam ul Haq was fielding, Wahab Riaz was the captain," he added.

"(We) just made it into a funny little incident." Cricket, like most other sport, is on hold during the pandemic, much to the frustration of players and fans.

Masood said Pakistan's squad had been training at home -- sometimes using staircases and armchairs as gym equipment -- to prepare for cricket's return.

"Everyone's been training, everyone's been being good, and also that we have to take into account that this is the month of Ramadan and it's harder to train," said Masood.

"Hopefully that whenever this thing ends... all this hard work that we're putting in right now, even with uncertainty around, it (will) be translated into cricketing performances."

HOPEFULLY THAT WHENEVER THIS THING ends... all this hard work that we're putting in right now, even with uncertainty around, it (will) be translated into cricketing performances."



Vitamin D Linked To Low COVID-19 Death Rate In European Countries: Study

Scientists have found an association between low average levels of vitamin D, and high numbers of COVID-19 cases and mortality rates across 20 European countries, and call for dedicated studies to probe into the relationship.

Based on earlier studies, the researchers, including Lee Smith of Anglia Ruskin University in the UK, said there is an association between low levels of vitamin D and susceptibility to acute respiratory tract infections.

In the current research, they said vitamin D modulates the response of white blood cells, preventing them from releasing too many inflammatory molecules called cytokines which are produced in excess in patients with severe COVID-19.

Italy and Spain have both experienced high COVID-19 mortality rates, and according to the new study, both countries have lower average vitamin D levels than most northern European countries.

They said this is partly because people in southern Europe, particularly the elderly, avoid strong sun, while skin pigmentation also reduces natural vitamin D synthesis.

The highest average levels of vitamin D are found in northern Europe, due to the consumption of cod liver oil, and vitamin D supplements, and possibly less sun avoidance, the researchers said.

They said Scandinavian nations are among the countries with the lowest number of COVID-19 cases and mortality rates per head of population in Europe.

"We found a significant crude relationship between average vitamin D levels and the number COVID-19 cases, and particularly COVID-19 mortality rates, per head of population across the 20 European countries," Lee Smith, study co-author from Anglia Ruskin University, said.

The researchers said Vitamin D has been shown to protect against acute respiratory infections, and older adults, the group most deficient in vitamin D, are also the ones most seriously affected by COVID-19.

"A previous study found that 75 per cent of people in institutions, such as hospitals and care homes, were severely deficient in vitamin D," Smith said.

We suggest it would be advisable to perform dedicated studies looking at vitamin D levels in COVID-19 patients with different degrees of disease severity," he added.

Citing the limitations of the study, the researchers said the number of cases in each country is affected by the number of tests performed, as well as the different measures taken by each country to prevent the spread of infection.

"Importantly, one must remember correlation does not necessarily mean causation," said study co-author Petre Cristian Ilie from Queen Elizabeth Hospital in the UK.



SBI Hikes Home Loan Rates By Up To 30 Bps; Other Lenders May Follow Suit

MUMBAI: State Bank of India (SBI) has raised its home loan rates that are linked to repo rate by up to 30 basis points, a move which may be followed by other lenders.

The country's largest lender has also hiked effective interest rates on personal loans against the property by 30 basis points.

The decision to increase margin has been taken amid market indications of increased credit risk for borrowers and realty firms in the wake of coronavirus pandemic, according to a senior official.

With market leader SBI making the move, other lenders are also likely to follow suit.

While SBI has kept the external benchmark-linked lending rate constant at 7.05 percent, the increase in home loan rates has been done by raising margins by up to 30 basis points across various home loan products.

The new rates came into effect from 1 May, as per the information available on its website.

SBI has been offering home loan and few other loans including personal loan against property and reverse mortgage since October last year to new borrowers.

In the wake of the pandemic and subsequent nationwide lockdown, there has been a disruption in economic activities as well as in income for many individuals and companies.

The senior official at the SBI said spread is the credit risk premium and an increase in spread reflects stress due to COVID-19 impact in the market.

The financial market indicates that there is some increase in risk perception for borrowers and the real estate firms which is getting reflected in the credit risk premium charged by the bank, the official said.

Despite the increase in the spread, SBI continues to provide home loan at the most competitive rate. The revision by SBI comes just a month after it had reduced home loan rates by 75 basis points.

The bank had last revised its External Benchmark Linked Lending Rate (EBR) and Repo Linked Lending Rate (RLLR) on 1 April, 2020, immediately after the RBI announced a reduction in repo rate by 75 basis points.

For home loans of up to Rs 75 lakh, SBI has increased the spread by 20 basis points. For home loans up to Rs 30 lakh, the effective rate, which is EBR plus spread, now stands at 7.40 percent as against 7.20 percent on 1 April, 2020.

The effective rate for home loans above Rs 30 lakh and up to Rs 75 lakh has been increased to 7.65 percent from an earlier rate of 7.45 percent. For home loans above Rs 75 lakh, the new rate stands at 7.75 percent as against 7.55 percent earlier.

