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# **News** Digest

#### **CRPF Trooper Shoots Self In Dalgate**

Srinagar: A paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force trooper was critically injured after he allegedly shoot himself with his service rifle at Dalgate in Central Kashmir's Srinagar district on Friday morning. A senior police officer said that the CRPF trooper from 61 Battalion fired upon himself with his service rifle at Dalgate, leaving him critically wounded. Identifying him as constable Parveen Munda, the officer said that he was immediately shifted to 92 base Hospital for treatment. Asked about the reasons for the trooper to take such an extreme step, the officer said the investigations have been started in this regard. (GNS)

#### **HC Srinagar Wing Shut** Over Covid-19

Srinagar: The Srinagar wing of the Jammu and Kashmir remained closed on Friday after come officials there tested positive for the novel coronavirus. The court premises have been closed on the orders by Chief Justice Gita Mittal in light of SOP issued by the government, "As informed by the Registry, some officials in Srinagar Wing of the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir have tested COVID positive. As per the SoPs issued by the Government access to the High Court Premises in Srinagar Wing of the High Court has to remain closed for two days for sanitization purpose," reads an order issued by the Chief Justice. 'No person except the sanitization workers will be permitted entry into the High Court premises on 17th and 18th of July," adds the order. • P-02

#### **Landslide Closes Srinagar-Leh Highway**

Srinagar: Two residential houses and a shopping complex were damaged after coming underneath a massive landslide in Kangan area of central Kashmir's Ganderbal district on Friday. The landslide also blocked the Srinagar-Leh highway, resulting in the suspension of the traffic on the strategic thoroughfare. Reports reaching here said that a major landslide ripped through the shops and residential houses in Bunibagh Kangan area along the Highway early morning. In the incident, as per reports, a chopping complex comprising of at least sixteen shops belonging to one Ali Mohammad Mir and two residential houses • P-02

#### **Aga Hasan Tests Positive** For Covid Infection

Budgam: Senior Hurriyat leader and president Anjuman-e-Sharie Shiayan Aga Syed Hasan Almosvi Alsafvi has been admitted to Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Science Soura after he was tested positive for Covid-19 infection. Family sources said that Aga Syed Hasan was not feeling well and he developed complications during the intervening night of July 16 and 17 at his Budgam home, after which he was shifted to SKIMS Srinagar. Doctors said Aga Syed Hasan has been tested positive and he has been admitted for Pneumonia and heart ailment in the hospital. He said that the condition of Aga was stable. Earlier, Aga Muntazir, the son of Aga Syed Hasan was ● P-02

# **Army, IAF Showcase Combat Readiness In Ladakh**

Defence Minister, Army Top Brass Witness War Games Near LAC

**Press Trust of India** 

STAKNA (LADAKH)- On his first visit to eastern Ladakh since the border row with China broke out. **Defence Minister Rajnath Singh** on Friday witnessed an intense military drill featuring attack helicopters, T-90 tanks, infantry combat vehicles and ground commandos here at a high-altitude forward base, seen as a message to Beijing that India will maintain a high-level of combat readiness to deal with any eventualities.

The projection of India"s military prowess in the region came in the midst of diplomatic and military talks between the two countries to resolve the border row that escalated manifold following a deadly clash in Galwan Valley.

The exercise showcased integrated combat prowess of the Army and the Indian Air Force in dealing with complex security challenges in the high-altitude terrain. → PAGE 02



#### Singh Reviews Security In Srinagar

Il the security agencies are doing a commendable job in Kashmir especially on the anti-militancy front but it is high time to use all technical support to plug infiltration completely and to clean Kashmir from the remaining militants, Defence Minister Rainath Singh told top army, police and other officers from the security grid of Kashmir during a high • P-02

#### ALSO, I GOT THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERACT WITH THEM.

am proud of these brave and courageous soldiers," he said and posted pictures of his interaction with the military personnel.

#### 2 Boys Drown While Swimming **In Anantnag**

ANANTNAG: Two minor boys drowned to death in Dadi Canal Khiram area of South Kashmir's Anantnag district on Friday af-

Officials said that two boys identified as Waseem Ahmad Bajard (12) son of Mohammad Ashraf Bajard, a resident of Galan Khiram and Abrar Ahmah Khatana (12) son of Mohammad Ashraf Khatana, a resident of Achdhar Khiram drowned in Sirhama following which locals tried to rescue them, but couldn't save their lives.

They said soon after the news spread, the locals gathered at the spot while teams of • P-02

# **Jaish Commander Among** 3 Militants Killed In Kulgam

3 Soldiers Sustain Received Injuries; US Made M-4 Carbine Recovered From Slain Militants

**Observer News Service** 

**KULGAM:** A Jaish-e-Muhammad commander was among three militants killed in an encounter with armed forces in Nagnad village of Damhal Hanjipora belt of South Kashmir's Kulgam district on Friday. A joint team of Police, army's 9 RR and CRPF launched a cordon and

search operation on specific information about the presence of militants in the area early this morning at around 4:30 am, police said. As the joint team of forces ap-

proached towards the suspected spot, the militants present fired



upon them triggering an encounter. mander and IED expert, Waleed killed after civilians were evacuated from the house," officials said.

Among the slain was JeM com-

"In the initial assault, two militants Bhai, who, according to police was were killed and one more was later—active since past 16 months in southern districts, a police officer said. From his possession a US made M-4 Carbine was recovered. ➤ PAGE 02

# 'Strategic Areas' For Armed Forces In J&K Get Govt Nod

Special Dispensation Approved For Regulating Construction In 'Strategic Areas'

**Observer News Service** 

**SRINAGAR:** The Administrative Council (AC) which met here under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, G C Murmu, gave its nod to the proposal of amending the Control of Building Operations Act, 1988 and the J&K Development Act, 1970 to provide for special dispensation for carrying out construction activities in Strategic Areas.

The amendments proposed by Housing & Urban Development Department will pave way for notifying certain areas as "strategic areas" in terms of the requirement of armed forces and in such areas, the regulation of construction activity shall be through a special dispensation. The move is aimed at simplifying the procedures **→PAGE 02** 

Roll Out Of Excise Policy 2020-21 Approved

#### **Annual License Fee, Additional** License Fee Introduced

of Lieutenant Governor, G C Murmu, approved the roll out of Excise Policy for the year liquor and alcoholic beverages. 2020-21 and implementation of policy measures to improve transparency and objectivity related to renewal, cancellation, transfer of licenses and penalties.

The new policy aims to rationalize the number of taxes, du-

**SRINAGAR:** The Administraties and other levies to optimize tive Council (AC), which met revenues for common good, here under the chairmanship and bring about greater social consciousness about the harm-

ful effects of consumption of

The policy envisages checking bootlegging of Bottled in Origin (BiO) brands from neighbouring states, besides providing choice of brands and a level playing field to those in the business.

Under this year's policy, ● P-02

#### **JKAC Okay's Housing** Policy-2020

2 Lakh Houses In **Next Few Years** 

The Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Council (AC), which met here under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor G C Murmu on Friday, accorded sanction to a policy on affordable housing, including slum development, in the Union territory. The Council approved adoption and notification of the J&K Housing, Affordable Housing, Slum Redevelopment and Rehabilitation and Township Policy, 2020.

"The policy envisages seven models of housing, ranging from in-situ slum redevelopment to integrated township, ● P-02

#### 3 Of Family Killed In LoC Shelling

**POONCH:** Three members of a family were killed in alleged ceasefire violation by Pakistan along the line of control in Poonch district of Jammu on Friday evening. Official sources said that a shell landed on the house of one Mohammad Rafiq in Karmara village adjacent to LoC in which the 58-year-old

**▲ At about 2120** hours, Pakistan initiated unprovoked ceasefire violation by firing with Small Arms & shelling with Mortars

along LoC in Gulpur sector. Army retaliated,"

owner, his wife Rafia Bi (50) and son Irfan (15) died on the spot. One person was also injured and he has been hospitalized, they said.

SSP Poonch Ramesh Angral confirmed the killings of the three family members.

"At about 2120 hours, Pakistan initiated unprovoked ceasefire violation by firing with Small Arms & shelling with Mortars along LoC in Gulpur sector. Army retaliated," an army official said. (GNS)

# Covid-19: 601 **More Test Positive**

Cases In Kashmir Cross 10K-Mark, Active Cases Around 6,000 In J&K

**Observer News Service** 

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir witnessed biggest spike of 601 positive cases of Noval Coronavirus on Friday and with this the number mounted to 12, 757 in J&K. The fresh positive cases included 86 persons who had returned to J&K from outside in last 24 hours.

Of the 601 new cases, 644 belong \(\square\) to Kashmir division while as 137 are from Jammu division, officials said. adding that the total number of positive cases in Kashmir division has reached to 10,113 including 4893 recoveries and ber of positive cases in Jammu division have reached to 2644 including 1665 recoveries and 18 deaths.

They added that a total number of active cases in Jammu and Kashmir are 5,968 including 5,007 from Kashmir division and 961 from Jammu division.

With 112 more recoveries,

the tally of recovered patients in Jammu and Kashmir has mounted to 6,558 which is 51.40 per cent of the total cases. "The cases tested positive in J&K include 152 from Srinagar, 10 from Kulgar from Baramulla, 82

from Shopian, 51 from Anantnag, 12 from Kupwara, 19 from Pulwama, 46 from Budgam, one from Bandipora and 29 from Ganderbal in Kashmir division while as 137 213 deaths while as total num- from Jammu >> PAGE 02

#### **J&K Records 9 More Deaths**

SRINAGAR: patients, who were tested positive for Covid-19 lost their battle to the deadly virus on Friday, taking the total number of people who died of the novel virus in J&K to 231.

Officials said that nine patients who died include a 65-year-old man from Parigam, Pulwama, a 58-year old male from Alnoor Colony Hyderpora, Srinagar, a 50year old male from Soibugh, Budgam, a 55-year old wom-

an from Sumbal Bandipora, a 65-year old male from Pampore Pulwama, a 75-year old man from Batamallo Srinagar, a 62-year old man from Hazratbal Srinagar, a 75-year old woman from Sonwar Srinagai and a 60-year old woman

from Taing Mohalla Shopian. They said that four deaths were reported from SKIMS. two each from JVC → PAGE 02

#### **J&K Bank Staffers Test Positive. Hars Shut**

Corporate Headquarters of the Jammu and Kashmir Bank in Srinagar was on Friday closed by the authorities to carry out a massive sanitisation drive for two days. The corporate office, situated near **Tourist Reception ● P-02** 

#### **Dean Academic Affairs KU Tests Positive**

**Authorities at Kashmir** University have closed one of the gates after **Dean Academic Affairs** was tested positive for Covid-19 infection. Deputy **Registrar Administration** has issued an order asking Dean College ● P-02

## **DAK Warns Of Possible Covid-19 Mutation In Kashmir**

Kashmir (DAK) on Friday warned of possible mutation of the Novel Coronavirus.

"Covid-19 is now behaving aggressively which gives us to understand that the virus has mutated," said DAK President and influenza expert Dr

Nisar ul Hassan in a statement. "Initially when the outbreak arrived at Kashmir valley, Covid-19 behaved very mildly and most patients who tested positive were asymptomatic," he said.

"But, over the past few weeks

**SRINAGAR:** Doctors Association the situation has taken a serious turn with a large number of seriously-ill patients getting admitted in hospitals," he added.

Dr Nisar said the sudden rise in cases and deaths could be because of a new strain of Covid-19 that might have undergone mutation.

"Covid-19 like other viruses tend to mutate," he said adding that "mutation is a change in virus that occurs when the virus replicates inside cells and mistakes are made in copying its genetic code."

Dr Nisar said scientists >> PAGE 02



# **Kashmir Inc No More Backs Govt On PSU Privatisation**

**Observer News Service** 

SRINAGAR: Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCC&I) on reports about the closure and privatization of Public Sector Undertak-

the privatization of PSUs was a long pending demand of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry prior to the constitutional changes to Jammu and Kashmir.

"The demand of the KCC&I was nepotism, mismanagement which had resulted in the raking up of liabilities of around 15,000 Crores and locked up critical economic assets of ture, land, manpower and sectoral construction material like »PAGE 02

potential of key areas," he said.

"In normal conditions, the KCC&I would have welcomed the step towards privatization but post the con-Friday expressed concern at press stitutional changes made to Jammu and Kashmir in August, 2019, it has instead become a cause of concern. ings (PSU) and Government owned After August 2019 the Government of Jammu and Kashmir has made chang-A KCC&I spokesperson said that es to the mining policy which opened up the sector for non-locals. Earlier the rights were exclusively reserved for the local stakeholders only," he said.

The spokesperson further stated that the subsequent auction of mineral blocks in Kashmir showed an based on the wanton waste of assets, alarming take-over of the business by a non-local syndicate.

"Local contractors and other persons associated with the business since decades stand deprived of their Kashmir in the shape of infrastruc- only source of income. The prices of Stamp Duty On Fresh Loans; Surcharge On Fixed Charge For Power Waived

# **Amnesty Scheme/Filing Of GST Returns Extended**

**SRINAGAR:** To tackle the slowdown of economy due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Administrative Council (AC) which met here under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, G C Murmu, in a focused policy intervention aimed to address concerns amongst various stake holders, approved a relief package to revive the economy.

Earlier, the Union Government rolled out a 20 lakh crore package under the umbrella of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan', sharply focusing MSMEs, priority sectors and vulnerable segments. However, the Jammu and Kashmir Government felt a need to consider similar hand holding measures for sectors/borrowers not covered under the Central Government package.

In order to clear the backlog of



has been extended upto 31st, October, 2020. Whereas, the date of filing of re-imbursement claims (GST returns/claims) for the period from January to March, 2020 has been extended to 15th October, 2020 and for the period April to June, 2020 to 15th November, 2020. In a normal course, the Industrial

units claiming GST re-imbursement on supply of goods during interstate movement were required to get the relevant electronic way bills sales tax/VAT arrears under the re- stamped and verified by the conlief package, the Amnesty scheme signee. However, considering the Council directed Finance »PAGE 02

issues due to COVID-19 pandemic, self attestation of claimants has been enabled and scanned copies of such documents verified by the consignee and attested by the claimants with a post dated cheque shall be accepted for re-imbursement for a period of 6 months. To enable smooth transition out

of the pandemic driven economic shock, under the relief package, the surcharge leviable on the fixed charges of all the industrial/commercial establishments in J&K for the period 31st March, 2020 to 31st October, 2020 shall be borne by the government.

Stamp duty on fresh lending under the Gol's/ J&K Government's package shall also be waived off under the relief package so that the cost of lending is reduced.

Moreover, the Administrative



# LT Governor For Decentralization Of Powers, Empowerment At **Grass Root Level**

SRINAGAR- Lieutenant Gover- Kunzar, Baramulla, Handwara separate cadre is in the offing for dress the needs of all, including nor, Girish Chandra Murmu to- and Devsar projected various ULB's and PRI's, he added. of powers for empowerment at to the welfare of ULB representagrass root level. He underlined tives and other issues of public Governor assured the members Groups. The Government is also the democratic set up at grass mentation of 74th Constitutional good governance.

ing with the members of the Coordination Committee of Munic- charies and provision of insuripal Chairpersons and Presidents ance cover to them; release of at the Raj Bhavan.

The members of the Commitcomprising of Irshad Ahmad, to implementing 74th Constitu- resentatives is under review to Altaf, Abdul Karim, Umar Kak- strengthen the grass-root demoroo, Masroor Banday and Mushtaq Ahmad from Dooru, Hajan,

day called for decentralization demands and issues pertaining the importance of strengthening importance including impleroot level to achieve the goal of Amendment & sanctioning of Order of Precedence; security cover The Lt Governor was interact- to ULB and PRI representatives; recruitment of Safai Karam-PMAY funds etc.

The Lt Governor observed that tee led by Mohammad Iqbal and the Government is committed Zahid Hussain Jan, Mohammad tional Amendment in order to cratic system by devolution and decentralization of powers and

and PRI representatives, the Lt of the delegation that the Government is taking a comprehensive review of the security concerns of the public representatives on threat perception basis and the issue would be addressed at the earliest.

Insurance cover has already been provided to all elected representatives, besides enhancement of honorarium of ULB repmake the working of the ULB's more effective, he said.

The Lt Governor said that the Government has recently passed Ganderbal, responsibilities to the ULB's. A a robust Housing Policy to ad-maintaining social distancing.

the people falling under Eco-On the issue of security to ULB nomically Weaker Section (EWS); Low Income and Middle Income coming up with the Cluster Housing for landless, he added.

> He also stated that the Government is transferring the State land to the ULB's for the developmental purpose at local level, as per requirements and priorities.

> The Lt Governor further asked the Committee members to spread awareness among the people for taking all necessary precautions with regard to the containing of COVID-19 by following all SOP's issued by the government from time to time, besides wearing face masks and

# **Dulloo Chairs 6Th Meeting Of JKMSCL BoDs** Approves Budget Estimates Worth Rs 827 Lakh For 2020-21

cation, Atal Dulloo, chaired 6th meeting of the Board of Directors of J&K Medical Supply Corporation Limited (JKMSCL) and reviewed functioning of the Corporation here today.

Mission Director, NHM, J&K,

Bhupinder Kumar, Principal Government Dental College, Dr. Rakesh Gupta, Director Health Services, Jammu, Dr. Renu Sharma, State Drug Controller, Lotika Khajuria, Director, Indian System of Medicines, Dr. Mohan Singh, Director Family Welfare, Dr. Chander Prakash, Managing Director, JKMSCL, Dr. Yashpal Sharma were present in the meeting while some senior level officers from Srinagar attended the meeting through video conferencing.

The Board took several important decisions relating to functioning of the JKMSCL and called upon the management to further streamline working JKMSCL to invoke Force Majeure formance of the Corporation.

timely procurement and supply of essential drugs and equipments.

Meanwhile, the Board approved revised budget estimates for the Financial Year 2019-20 for Rs. 709.10 lakh and the Financial Year 2020-21 for Rs. 827.00 lakh. Among other decisions, the Board approved minutes of the 5th meeting and decisions taken in it besides adopting financial statement for the year 2018-19 and approving financial statement the nod of the Board. for the year 2019-20 upto 30-

The Board authorized the MD

**JAMMU:** Financial Commis- of the Corporation to meet the Clause in case of all purchase sioner, Health & Medical Edu- supply requirement of medi- orders placed between 20-12cines and diagnostic equip- 2019 to 5-3-2020, according to ments to the government that the minimum delivery pehealth institutions across the riod would be upto 150 days (in UT. The Board stressed upon case of normal delivery period the need for a close coordi- of 60 days) and 180 days (in case nation between heads of the of normal delivery period of 90 institutions and JKMSCL for days) with a phased delivery of 50 per cent completion by 60 to 90 days, rest 30 per cent completion by 110 to 140 days and balance 20 per cent completion by 150 to 180 days respectively, without imposing LD.

> Other important proposed Budget Estimates for raised and discussed in the meeting included release of Security Deposits/Performance Security in favour of the Suppliers, Supply and installation of four Cold Storage Rooms at Drug Ware Houses of JKMSCL which also received

Director, JKMSCL, Dr. Yashpal Sharma, briefed the Board about the functioning and per-

# Army, IAF Showcase Combat... A large number of ground commandos, T-90 tanks, infantry

combat vehicles were part of the drill.

The Indian Air Force deployed a number of Apache, Rudra and Mi-17 V5 helicopters.

Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, Army Chief General MM Naravane, Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Yogesh Kumar Joshi, Commander of the 14 Corps Lt Gen Harinder Singh and several other senior Army officials were present on the oc-

Singh"s visit came days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi"s surprise trip to Ladakh on July 3 during which he also addressed troops and signalled the country"s firmness in dealing with the India-China border row.

"Witnessed the Fire and Fury of the Indian Army during the Para Dropping and other military demonstrations at Stakna near Leh today," Singh later tweeted.

"Also, I got the opportunity to interact with them. I am proud of these brave and courageous soldiers," he said and posted pictures of his interaction with the military personnel.

In an address to soldiers at another forward post later, Singh said any country hurting India"s pride and eyeing Indian territory would be given a befitting reply.

"I want to assure that no power in the world can touch even one inch of India"s land or can occupy it," he said.

Indian and Chinese troops were locked in a bitter standoff in multiple locations in eastern Ladakh for over eight weeks since

The tension escalated manifold after the violent clashes in Galwan Valley in which 20 Indian Army personnel were killed. However, following a series of diplomatic and military talks, the two sides began a mutual disengagement process on July 6 and withdrew troops from most of the friction points.

On Tuesday, senior commanders of the two armies held a fourth round of talks during which the Indian delegation conveyed a "very clear" message to the Chinese army that status quo ante must be restored in eastern Ladakh and China will have to follow all mutually agreed protocols for border management to bring back peace and tranquillity in border areas, according

The Indian Army on Thursday said both sides are committed to "complete disengagement" of troops, adding the process is "intricate" and that it requires "constant verification". PTI

#### Singh Reviews Security..

level security review meeting in Srinagar.

The meeting was attended by the Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, army chief MM Narvane, GoC 15 Corps Lieutenant General B S Raju, DGP Dilbagh Singh, CRPF special DG Zulfikar Hassan, J&K LG G C Murmu, Chief Secretary B V R Subramanyam besides a galaxy of officers from the civil administration also attended the meeting. Defence Minister hailed the efforts put in by the security

agencies including army, police and the CRPF on the anti-militancy front and praised all the agencies for maintaining synergy and conducting clean operations against militants.

"The Defence Minister asked the security top brass to continue anti-militancy operations at the same pace and ensure all the remaining militants are killed and at the same time infiltration is plugged on all routes in J&K," local news agencies quoting unnamed officials reported

According to these reports Defence Minister directed the troops to use all modern means including latest technical support to plug infiltration and ensure no militant manages to sneak in to Indian territory. Singh also stressed on "cleaning remaining militants from Kashmir soil and making the "region an abode of peace and tranquility for which it was known earlier."

Earlier, at the army's Srinagar-based 15 Corps headquarters, the Defence Minister was given a power-point presentation on the infiltration status and the progress made on the anti-militancy front. The 15 Corps commander Lt Gen B S Raju and DGP Dilbagh Singh briefed the Defence Minister on the prevailing security scenario in J&K, especially Kashmir. Sources privy to the meeting said that Singh was also apprised about the killing of top commanders of various outfits including Hizbul Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Defence Spokesman in Srinagar, Colonel Rajesh Kalia said that the Defence Minister was briefed in detail about the situation on the Line of Control, in the hinterland and successful anti-militancy operations. "The Defence Minister stated that the country was proud of the valour and patriotic spirit of the soldiers.

He urged all to continue to work hard to ensure security both on the Line of Control and in the hinterland," the defence spokesman said, adding that the Defence Minister also impressed upon the commanders to maintain strict vigil along the Line of Control and remain prepared to give a befitting reply to "any misadventure by the adversary."

# **2 Boys Drown While Swimming** police and local administration immediately started an opera-

tion to retrieve their bodies.

Pertinently, in the last 30 days, at least five persons including mother-daughter drowned in South Kashmir's Anantnag

Meanwhile, authorities in Anantnag imposed a complete ban on swimming and bathing in River Jhelum, its tributaries, nallahs, streams and other water bodies within the south Kashmir

"In view of threat to human lives due to drowning incidents while bathing/swimming in Rivers / Streams/ Nallahs; and as a precautionary measure, a blanket ban is hereby imposed on swimming / bathing in River Jehlum, its tributaries, nallahs, streams and other water bodies within Anantnag district forthwith," reads an order issued by deputy Commissioner Anantnag

"The Tehsildars (Executive Magistrates), Police Officers (SHOs) & Engineers of Jal Shakti Department shall keep strict vigil in their respective areas of jurisdiction to ensure implementation of the order in letter and spirit," the order, adds.

# Jaish Commander Among... "The identity of two other slain militants was being ascer-

An official said three soldiers, who received bullet and splinter injuries in the encounter are being treated at 92 base hospital Srinagar, where their condition is stable. This year so far, 140 militants have been killed of which 60 were killed alone in the southern districts of Kashmir. Meanwhile, as a precautionary measure, internet services were snapped in Kulgam district.

A police spokesman in a statement said that on a specific input generated by Kulgam Police regarding presence of militants in village Nagnad-Chimmer area of Kulgam, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by JKP, 9RR and 18Bn CRPF in

"The militants were given an opportunity to surrender, however they fired indiscriminately at the joint search party, which was retaliated leading to an encounter," the statement said. "In the ensuing encounter, three militants were killed and their bodies were retrieved from the site of encounter.

One of the killed militant has been identified as a Pakistani national Waleed, an IED expert and a most wanted militant," the statement read, adding that the identification of the other two killed militants is being ascertained. Police said all the three militants were associated with the militant outfit Jaish-e-Mu-

As per Police records, militant Walid was involved in several attacks including civilian atrocities. He was involved in the killing of 04 civilians in Kulgam. He was also involved in luring innocent youth to join militant ranks, statement reads.

Arms & ammunition including M-4 rifle, AK rifle, Pistol, Grenade Launcher, Grenades and other incriminating materials were recovered from the site of encounter. All the recovered materials have been taken into case records for further investigation and to probe their complicity in other crimes, statement

The bodies of the killed militant shall be sent to Handwara for their last rites after conducting medico-legal formalities in cluding collection of their DNA and in case any family claims the killed militant to be their kith or kin, they can come forward for their identification and participation in last rites at Handwara,

#### Covid-19: 601 More Test...

division including 16 from Jammu, 15 from Udhampur, 21 from Kathua, 12 from Rajouri, 41 from Ramban, 15 from Samba, four from Poonch, 10 from Kishtwar and three from Reasi," officials

Officials said that around 100 patients were tested positive at CD hospital on Friday including seven pregnant ladies.

As per officials figures, 2,486 positive cases including 59 deaths and 566 recoveries are from Srinagar, 1,464 including 48 deaths and 582 recoveries are from Baramulla, 1,113 including 700 recoveries and 23 deaths are from Kulgam, 1,055 including 18 deaths and 724 recoveries are from Shopian, 988 including 17 deaths and 646 recoveries are from Anantnag, 831 including 526 recoveries and 13 deaths are from Kupwara, 794 including 395 recoveries and 10 deaths are from Pulwama, 708 including 340 recoveries and 17 deaths are from Budgam, 423 including 313 recoveries and 04 deaths are from Bandipora, 251 including 101 recoveries and 04 death are from are from Ganderbal.

In Jammu division, 569 including 378 recoveries and 11 deaths are from Jammu district, 322 including 289 recoveries and one death from Udhampur, 349 including 237 recoveries and one death from Kathua, 318 including 214 recoveries are from Ramban, 333 including 98 recoveries and one death from Rajouri, 316 including 172 recoveries and one death from Samba, 152 including one death and 123 recoveries from Poonch, 154 including 82 recoveries and two deaths from Doda, 63 including 45 recoveries are from Reasi and 68 including 27 recoveries are

As per the daily information bulletin, 3,25,291 persons in Jammu and Kashmir are under observation while 37,924 persons have been kept under home quarantine besides that 5,968 persons are in hospital isolation while 13 persons are under hos-

According to the bulletin, 2,36,850 persons have completed surveillance period and 44,305 persons are under home surveillance besides that so far results of 489.382 samples are available.

Of 489,382, the number of samples tested negative stands at 4,76,625 while as 12,757 have been tested positive, among them 5,968 are active and 6,558 persons have recovered and 231 per-

#### J&K Records 9 More Deaths...

Bemina and SMHS and one from CD hospital.

A doctor from SKIMS Soura said that the elderly patient from Pulwama who was admitted on 14 July died at SKIMS on Thursday evening due to cardiopulmonary arrest. He said that the patient was suffering from bilateral pneumonia and other ail-

He said that 50-year-old male patient was admitted on July 15 and 55-year-old woman was admitted on 16th July and both

died at SKIMS on Friday. Patients were suffering from bilateral pneumonia and other ailments, he said.

A doctor from JVC Bemina said that the patient from Hyderpora who was admitted on 08 July who was on ventilator died at JVC Bemina at 12 am.

He said that the patient was a known case of hypothyroidism and was suffering from bilateral pneumonia with severe ARDS. Officials said that an elderly man from Pampore had died at SMHS on 13 July and was tested positive on Friday. They said that all remaining deceased persons were having several ailments including pneumonia and hypertension.

With nine more deaths, the death toll in I&K has reached to 231 including 18 from Jammu division and 213 from Kashmir

#### J&K Bank Staffers Test...

Centre (TRC) here was closed after many of its employees were tested positive for the Novel Coronavirus.

Officials said that the bank's corporate office was closed by the authorities to carry out a massive fumigation drive for two

days.

"The office will remain closed for days. During these two days,
"The office will be carried out at the office," a a massive sanitisation process will be carried out at the office," a top official in J&K Bank said.

He added that the office was closed at around 12:30 PM today after the officials from district administration asked them to close the office for a massive sanitisation drive, adding that the office will reopen on Monday. Earlier, this week, at least 26 employees at the Corporate office had tested positive for the

#### Dean Academic Affairs KU...

Development Council (DCDC), Ghulam Mohiuddin Dar (Sangami) to take the charge of Dean Academic Affairs at Kashmir University till (infected official) resumes his duties.

According to Dr Suraya, Medical Officer, Health Centre University of Kashmir contacts of infected official have been identified and their samples will be taken. She said that Administrative Block and other buildings of University have been fumigated and everything in under control.

She added that Sir Syed Gate of the University has been closed and not many activities are going in the Varsity in wake of the Covid threat.

Sources, said that infected official has attended various meetings in the Varsity in recent days and those meetings were attended by scores of teaching and non-teaching employees.

# **DAK Warns Of Possible ...** around the globe have discovered several mutations of the vi-

rus. "One significant mutation – named 'D614G' mutation was responsible for most infections in Europe and the United States,"

"The new dominant strain seems to infect humans more easily than the version of the virus that was present when the pandemic originated in China." he added.

Dr Nisar said it is vitally important to identify the possible mutated strain and to determine whether it has an impact on the spread of the virus and the development of the disease. He said the mutated version of the virus has implications.

"The PCR test which was developed for earlier strain may not detect the mutated strain because of genetic variation and we may have false negative results," Dr Nisar said.

"The mutated virus could evade the effectiveness of the vaccine and enable the virus to become resistant to antiviral medi-

#### 'Strategic Areas' For Armed...

and shall facilitate time bound development of infrastructure of strategic importance.

The approval has been granted keeping in view the strategic importance of certain locations and reconciling their security needs with developmental aspirations.

# Annual License Fee, Additional the Department has specified fixed number of licenses/ licensed

zones for Ex-servicemen, specially-abled persons, SC/ST/OBC and people belonging to economically weaker sections as per the criteria to be notified separately.

Further, the License Fee structure has also been revisited in the Draft Policy. A fixed component of 'Annual License Fee' has also been introduced, whereas, the existing per bottle license fee has been revised on higher side as 'Additional License Fee'.

The Excise Policy for the year 2019-20 was extended till June, 2020 in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic and now stands ex-

# JKAC Okay's Housing... to cater to the need of every section of society," an official

spokesperson said.

The new policy aims at promoting public-private partnerships for affordable housing and slum rehabilitation projects and provides platform for operation and maintenance of integrated/ special townships in a cooperative manner, he said.

The spokesperson said the policy includes minimum relocation of existing slum dwellers so as to maintain sanctity of ex-

isting economic and social linkages developed over a period of time in these informal settlements.

"Additionally, the policy also includes provisions for fast track approvals of housing in economically weaker section (EWS) and low-income group (LIG) categories. Besides, it provides for their incentivisation in the form of exemptions from building permit fee, land use conversion and external development charges," he

The policy also aims to provide rental housing, in which EWS families will be given dwelling unit on a licence basis for occupation and use for a particular period on making initial deposit and monthly charges, the spokesperson said.

The policy has been approved under the broader vision of meeting the growing requirement for affordable housing, slum redevelopment and rehabilitation and rental housing, for which an initial target has been set for construction of one lakh dwelling units over the next five years, he added.

#### Kashmir Inc No More Backs...

sand has also shown a sharp spike, in many cases consumers have complained of almost a hundred percent price hike. Thus, the change in policy is against public interest as well as the interests of the local stakeholders," he added.

"Now that policy decisions aimed at exposing of key economic assets of Kashmir to open bidding and auction are being put into action, it would be pertinent to raise questions regarding the protection and claim of the natives of Kashmir in this regard.

The Government of Jammu and Kashmir – in whatever constitutional form it may acquire - cannot ignore the views, feelings and sentiments of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. There has been a commitment of true empowerment of the people but illadvised policies could ultimately result in disempowerment of the people," he said.

Speaking of disempowerment, several political organisations have also described the move as "shocking" "appalling" and "unfortunate". Keeping in view the involvement of public interest, we feel that it is necessary to express our views in unambiguous

The KCC&I said that it had been time and again inviting their kind attention to the pathetic condition of the PSU's and the colossal drain the undertakings and corporations were causing to the economy of J&K. In many undertakings, mandatory annual audits were not carried out for decades.

It would be perhaps relevant to reproduce an excerpt from the joint press conference of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Jammu Chamber of Commerce given in Srinagar the year 2017 which reads as under: "....we are concerned at the losses to our economy being caused by the lack of accountability in the Public Sector Undertakings. A conservative estimate shows the current liabilities of these PSU's to be upwards of Rs 10,000 Crores. In addition, the locking up of resources in the shape of infrastructure, land, manpower and potential has a consolidated negative impact – primary and consequential running into lakhs of crores.....'

"There were several other red flags raised by the KCC&I. Decades of neglect and unproductive policies only transformed the condition of the PSU's from bad to worse. Instead of taking tangible and concrete steps towards stopping the drainage of capital, the PSU's and Corporations became rehabilitation centre's for out of work politicians and employment exchanges for party workers who were "adjusted" as Vice Chairmen of PSU's,"

The statement further reads that as many as 16 appointments were made with a reported consolidated pay of around Rs 1.5 lakhs per head, official bungalows, chauffeur driven vehicles, personal staff and other perks and benefits. "The PSUs became breeding grounds for politically motivated engagement of employees, nepotism and corruption.

We equally share the blame of allowing it to happen. The press statements of political parties have only focused on job losses and chosen to ignore the most discriminatory factor of the new policies which would result in the complete marginalization of the local stakeholders," he said.

# Amnesty Scheme/Filing... Department to come up with a proposal for interest subven-

tion for currently operating establishments, in consultation with Industries & Commerce Department. Industries Department was also directed to implement the policy of preference for local manufacturers in procurement through an appropriate

HC Srinagar Wing Shut...
Urgent cases listed today and tomorrow in Srinagar Wing of the High Court shall be taken up on consideration on 20th July. "Dates in other matters will be given by the concerned Bench Secretary and will be posted on the website of High Court of J&K on July 20," the order added.

#### Landslide Closes Srinagar-Leh belonging to Ghulam Hassan Mir and Ali Mohammad suffered

# **Aga Hasan Tests Positive...** tested positive. "Aga Muntazir is admitted at a clinic in Nagam and

his condition is stated to be stable," a family member said. KNT

# **Labour Dept Notifies J&K 'Self Certification Scheme'**

Certificate would authenticate that units don't compromise on safety, health, other welfare measures of workers: Bhagat

**Observer News Service** 

SRINAGAR, JULY 17: The Jammu and Kashmir government has framed the 'Self Certification Scheme' for industries and other establishments in order to liberalize the enforcement of labour laws in Jammu and Kashmir and to facilitate the employers and entrepreneurs.

The scheme, according to Labour and Employment, would also create conducive environment-cum-relationship between the government and the employers or entrepreneurs.

In this regard. Commissioner Secretary Labour & Employment Department (L&E), Saurabh Bhagat in a statement here explained that the objective of this scheme is to reduce the visits of government officials for inspection to those units who opt for this scheme without compromising on the safety, health, social security and welfare of the workers.

"This certificate would hold testimony to the fact that these units do not compromise on safety, health, social security and welfare of the workers." he added.

Following are the highlights of the Self Certification Scheme:

The Scheme is optional and any employer or entrepreneur can opt for this scheme after depositing a security of Rs 5000 for small scale industries, Rs 10,000 for medium scale industries and Rs 20,000

count payee bank draft in favour of concerned district/divisional authorities of L&E Department.

They can apply online and submit the application at the department's website www.jklabour.com

According to the scheme the discrepancies in the application or enclosures will be communicated to the applicant framed there under.

After enrollment, the employer or entrepreneur shall file the Self Certification Return as per the Proforma prescribed in Annexure IV along with relevant documents and information. The Return can be filed between 1st of April & 30th of April every year on any working day between 10:30 am to 4:30 pm.

#### This certificate would hold testimony to the fact that these units do not compromise on safety, health, social security and welfare of the workers

within 30 days from the receipt of the application. The applicant would be considered as enrolled under the scheme, if no discrepancies were communicated. Once opted for the Scheme, the same will be valid for five years.

Also, the scheme would be valid for The Factories Act, 1948, Minimum Wages Act, 1948, Payment of Wages Act, 1936, Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970, Payment of Bonus Act 1965, Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986, Jammu and Kashmir Shops & Establishments Act, 1966, Inter-State Migrant Workmen (RECS) Act, 1979, Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961, Jammu & Kashmir Industrial Establishments (National & Festival) Holi-

Premature withdrawal from the scheme i.e., before five years or in case of detection of any violations by the employer/entrepreneur shall result in forfeiture

of the security deposit. Not more than twenty percent of the units that are covered under the scheme are picked up randomly for inspection per year. (Once inspected, the same unit is not likely to be inspected in the same year or in the next three years).

ments for the following work

oncrete drain / Edge wall at

However, on specific complaints, ac-

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PWD

For and on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor of Union Territory J&K

24/1380 of R&B/Vailoo/

www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given belo

Period of downloading of bidding documents

Bids must be accompanied with cost of Tender document in shape

R&B Division vailoo (tender inviting authority)

Date of Issue of Tender Notice

Date & time of opening of Bids

Executive Engineer R&B Division vailoo

automatically through an e mail message on their e

(tender receiving authority).

DIPK-3025/20

**NOTICE INVITING TENDERS** 

The Bidding documents Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Drawings, bill of quantiti

(B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the departmental website

The date and time of opening of Bids shall be notified on Web Site www.jktenders.gov.in and conveyed to the bidders

on same Web Site in the Office of Executive Engineer R&B Division vailoo (tender receiving authority).

The bids for the work shall remain valid for a period of 120 days from the date of opening of Technical bids

at 11.00 A.M in the Office of the

bids of Responsive bidders shall be opened online

Engineer R&B Division vailoo

from approved and eligible Contractors registered with J&K State Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/Central

cidents, dangerous occurrences and violation of Labour Laws, inspection may be conducted only with prior approval of Labour Commissioner-cum-Chief Inspector of Factories, Jammu & Kashmir.

The copy of the Scheme and all prescribed application forms and inspection procedure shall be available on www. jklabour.com.

Any application shall be submitted against payment of Application Fee (Rs 1000 for small scale industries, Rs 2000 for medium scale industries and Rs 5000 for large scale industries) by way of demand draft pledged to the concerned authority of the department.

Only the units having valid license/ registration under the Factories Act, 1948 and J&K Shops and Establishment Act, 1966 are eligible for this scheme.

Besides, Major Accident Hazard units and factories involving Hazardous processes or High Risk Industries under Section 2 (cb) of the Factories Act, 1948 shall not be covered under the self certi-

tendering/ DATED 14.07.2020

#### **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 BIJBHERA: 01932-228243 PAMPORE: 01933-294132 PATTAN: 01954-293507

#### **HIGHWAY STATUS**



Sgr-Jammu highway - ( Open ) Mughal Road - (Open)

OAZIGUND: 01951-296153

Srinagar-Leh- (Open)



1441

**ZUHR** 12: 37 **ASR** Magrib

**FAJR** 

7:45 ISHA 9:22

**PRAYERS** 

3:51

5:34

#### **This Day In History DIVISION VAILOO**

1922 - German-Russian treaty signed in Italy, Soviet Union recognized • 1925 - Adolf Hitler publishes Mein Kampf (original title was the catchy 'Four and a Half Years (of Struggle) Against Lies, Stupidity and Cow

ardice")
1929 - NY Yankees become 1st team to wear uniform numbers 1932 Belgium, Luxembourg & Netherlands sign Ouchy Convention, a

1932 - US & Canada sign a treaty to develop St Lawrence Seaway 1936 - Spanish Civil War: General Francisco Franco issues manifesto and leds uprising with army in Morocco.

1938 - Great Britain recognizes Italian annexation of Abyssinia AgreementTreaty of Interest 1939 - Stalin requests British, French & Russian anti-nazi pact

1942 - Japanese occupying army on Java installs film censorship 1943 - Swiss scientist Dr. Albert Hofmann discovers the psychedelic effects

1944 - British air raid on German convoy SW of Heligoland 1944 - British troops occupy Bourquebus hill range, Normandy

1945 - German troops in Groningen surrender 1945 - Red Army begins Battle of Berlin

1945 - US troops enter Nuremberg, Germany 1945 - US troops land on He Shima, Okinawa 1946 - 1st US launch

1955 -1st electric power generated from atomic energy sold commer-1963 - Failed military coup in Syria 1963 - The United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid releases

its second interim report pressing for international sanctions against South Africa, particularly the supply of arms, ammunition and petro-

1965 - Zond 3 launched to fly by Moon, enters solar orbit 1974 - World's tallest structure, 646 metre Polish radio mast, com-

1977 - Vietnam becomes member of UN

1978 - Egyptian & Israeli officials begin 2 days of talks 1980 - Rohini 1, 1st Indian satellite, launches into orbit

1986 -Videotapes released showing Titanic's sunken remains 1993 - Afghan president Ishaq Khan & prime minister Nawaz Sharif

· Bomb attack on Jewish center AMIA in Buenos Aires, 86 killed 1994 - Comet Shoemaker-Levy's largest collision with Jupiter leaves black spot 12.000 km across

1996 - The UN approves an Iraqi aid distribution plan, a major step forward in the direction of allowing Iraq to sell oil under Resolution 2012 - 14 people are killed after a bomb explosion at Pakistan's Or-

akzai Agency 2012 - Violence across Syria results in 97 deaths

2012 - Syrian suicide bombing kills three high profile government officials, including Syria's Minister of Defence

2012 - 24 people are killed after a ferry sinks off the coast of Zanzibar 2012 - Kim Jong-un is officially appointed Supreme Leader of North

Korea and given the rank of Marshal in the Korean People's Army 2014 - The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) call 18,000 additional reserves soldiers in campaign against Gaza

2015 -PayPal is spun off from eBay as a separate publicly traded company on the NASDAQ

#### From KO Archives

#### Australia frees Kashmiri detainee after 7 years

YDNEY - A Kashmiri youth, freed yesterday after spending a record of almost seven years in an Australian immigration detention, thanked the Prime Minister, John Howard, and the Immigration Minister, Amanda Van stone, for "showing me compassion".

Peter Qasim; was 24 when he arrived on Thursday Island via Papua New Guinea, in September 1998.

He is still in the Adelaide psychiatric hospital to which he

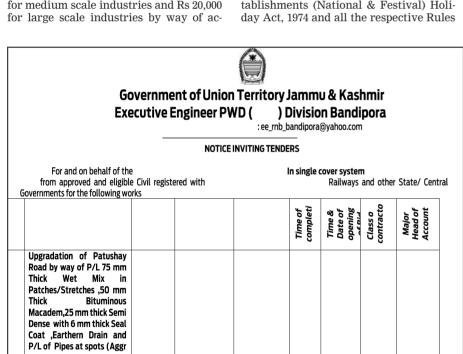
ago, but will leave early this week after being granted a visa to live in the community, with full health benefits and employment rights. A Christian couple from Adelaide's southern suburbs, Faye and David, who have visited him in Baxter detention centre near Port Augusta many times, were at his side yesterday, excited to be taking him home He calls them Mum and Dad, and thanked them and the

Liberal backbenchers who made his plight public, and other "loving, caring supporters" including the Sydney entrepreneur

"I have been living for almost seven years in a very hard situation," said Qasim, looking relaxed as he read slowly from a prepared statement. "I don't know what my future is now, but I am happy to have the chance to live a normal life. I never wanted to be a burden on Australia." Although his application for asylum was rejected, Qasim can live as an Australian citizen pending deportation. In reality, he has tried unsuccessfully to be deported for the past two years, and it is unlikely this will happen. Although he asserts he is a Kashmiri national, an orphan who fled the country after becoming involved with the separatist Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, no government will accept him and he is effectively stateless.

He has also applied for a permanent visa under a section of the Immigration Act that allows the minister to grant visas on humanitarian grounds.

(Kashmir Observer, 18 July, 2005)



The bidding documents consisting of qualifying information (B.O.Q), set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/ downloaded from the as per schedule of dates given below: Period of downloading of bidding Hard Copy shall be obtained only from the Bidder who is declared as Lowest Bidder (L1) at the time of opening of Tenders. The cost of tender documents will be collected through e hallan / Receipt. However the successful bidders will submit the same separately after the opening of NOTE:\_The bidders whose bid is greater than 15% below the Adv.Cost must upload Addl. Security performance in shape of CDR/FDR pledged to utive Engineer (R&B) Division Bandipora, besides Earnest Money O A.M in the Office of the Executive Engineer (R&B) Date & time of opening of Bids Note: The Bidder will mention the Contact No. and Bidder Name in the BoQ

(R&B) Division Bandipora

DIPK-3023/20

## Office Of The Chief Accounts Officer **District Fund Office Anantnag**

#### **TENDER NOTICE**

Dasti Quotations affixed with revenue stamps of Rs 5/- are invited from stationary dealer for supply of computer paper/stationary as per details given here under which should reach to this office by or before 20 July-2020 up to 03:00 PM. The rates quoted should be F.O.R inclusive of all taxes and duties District Fund Office Anantnag and should be fresh from cuttings & over writings. The element of GST should be shown distinctly in the tender. The rates quoted & approved by this office shall remain in force up to end of financial year 2020-21. The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any Quotation without assigning the reasons thereof. The Quotations will be opened on 21st July-2020 in this Office in presence of the Quotationers if they like to be present.

#### Specifications:

Computer Paper 80 Column 1000 Sheets Pack. Computer Paper 132 Column 1000 Sheets Pack.

NO. CAO/DFO/Adm/134 Dated:-11/07/2020

> Chief Accounts Officer, District Fund Office, Anantnag.

DIPK-3031/20



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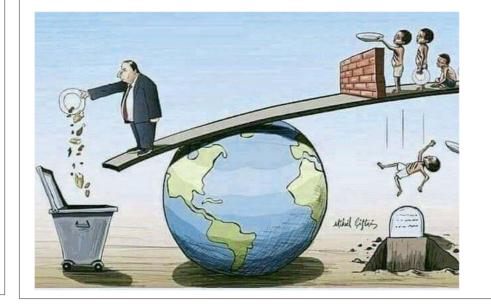
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#### NO HOLDS BARRED



During the 2009 swine flu pandemic, a few countries cornered the vaccine market, leaving the vast majority of the global population with no vaccine at all until the outbreak was effectively over. This scenario must be avoided at all costs during the current crisis,

# **Your Savings Are At Peril**

# The new FSDR Bill 2019 may wipe out your entire life savings

Asad Mirza

The common man is who is still reeling under the after shocks of digitisation, demonetisation and GST and now Corona's economic meltdown, is at his wits ends on where to keep his money safe from the very same people who are supposed to safeguard his money and financial interests.

hile the common man is trying to cope with daily financial woes for survival, due to the continued pandemic conditions affecting the overall economic situation of the country and previous economic decisions, there are some forces, which are working covertly against his financial survival.

We Indians have a very peculiar and praiseworthy trait amongst all of us, whether educated or uneducated. We strongly believe in savings and hording for the future, which most economists would agree is a very good financial habit, for the individual and his country too. India's household-sector savings are the biggest source of investment for the economy. The country's savings rate, or the share of gross domestic savings in the gross domestic product (GDP), has come down to 30.5% in 2018, as per available official data, as compared to nearly 37% in 2008.

Now, to invest these small savings, the small investors look towards either the nationalised banks or NBFCs or personal holdings. In fact a large number of these investors park their money with nationalised banks and now a days with private sector banks too. Thus, they are putting their trust in that financial entity, assured that they'd be able to access these savings when they need it or perhaps in their old age, besides getting an attractive or minimum rate of return.

However, according to economists and financial experts, as per some financial proposals termed as economic reforms, this is tend to change as some of these proposals are quite detrimental to the interests of the small investors and depositors.

#### New proposals

The government since 2017 has been trying to give the authority to regulate the country's banks to a new entity, a task, which so far has been performed very well by the RBI.

In an interview to a web channel, Thomas Franco former General Secretary of the All India Banks Officers Confederation (AIBOA), said that the government introduced the Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill (FRDI) in 2017, and it was presented before the parliament in 2017, 2018 and later withdrawn in 2019, but was rechristened as Financial Sector Development, Regulation and Resolution Bill 2019 and it may be introduced in the monsoon or winter session of the parliament, later this year for its approval.

Economists say that this bill did not come into being on its own but owes its genesis to the global financial upheavals. The process of saving commercial banks started with the 2008 US economic meltdown, when the US administration through the US Federal Reserve infused huge funds to save the American banking system. Subsequently, the US prevailed over the G-7 group to include more countries including India to constitute a Financial Stability Board, and circulated a note related to future bailout of the commercial banks. One recommendation was that no government will bail out the commercial banks but it will be done using the depositor's money.

One big difference between US, European and Indian banks is that in India public sector banks dominate the banking sector. And the trust or commitment to provide security to the depositors is through a sovereign guarantee. Besides these banks have to comply with various financial and regulatory laws, which have worked quite well so far.

#### FSDR 201

But the new FSDR bill will change all this, it has some major recommendations related to the bailing of the ailing banks, according to which a new Resolution Authority will issue rules relating to the bailout. According to Mr Franco as per the proposals, the depositors money will he used for the hailout instead of govern ment's or financial institutions' support, which in itself is wrong, further the authority can issue orders to write off big corporate loans but not small depositors' loans, thus putting small depositors in a precarious situation. This according to him is indeed dangerous and against the principle of safeguarding the interests of the small depositors, as the bill modifies repaying liabilities at the expense of small depositors. And this small depositors base in not small, Mr Franco stated adding that 68% of country's small depositors are senior citizens who have deposited their life savings with these banks for financial security.

Moreover, what is the need to constitute a new regulatory authority, when the RBI so far has handled this task quite efficiently? The answer to this according to Mr Franco is that as per the prevailing laws every bailout package recommended by the RBI is to be approved by the parliament. But the FSDR 2019 do away with this provision and empowers the new Regulatory Authority to recommend the future course of action for salvaging the ailing bank.

Experts say that this bill will practically take away the government's and RBI's control over nationalised banks besides eroding customer's faith in country's banks. First, everyone was asked to have a bank account, inducing them with transferring government's doles through the banks, in the name of digitalisation, and then new banking charges were thrust down the throat of new small depositors, imposing an unnecessary service burden and curtailed access to their own money. Mr Franco is of the view that what may happen is that this new constituted regulatory authority might one fine day decide that Bank A is not doing good, so it may put it on block and transfer it to corporate entity X, who himself might be a bigger defaulter of the same bank in the past, but due to its financial clout becomes the new owner instead of the public.

#### Policy framework in banking sector

Till 1990 we had no problem with our banking sector minus one or two small scams. Mr Franco asserts that it was only after 1990, when we went to the IMF and WB and changed our financial policies, assured by our leaders that within 3 years things will be right and we will be one of the strongest and developed economies of the world. But instead our spending was injudicious and priorities have shifted; we are not addressing it in the manner in which it should be done.

We still have 28% of our population living below poverty line; but we are not orienting our policies and programmes towards their upliftment because only a 1% minority which controls country's financial institutions and money, is increasing their assets by taking advantage of cheap loans by pubic sector banks. One of the country's biggest conglomerate owes Rs 275000 crores in outstanding to various PSBs but instead of evolving a mechanism to recover it or chasing other big-ticket defaulters, our regulatory bodies harass a common man who may have a small loan of Rs 10 lakhs only. And now plans are being put in motion to sell off the PSBs to those very corporates who owe these banks a large sum of money.

The common man is who is still reeling under the after shocks of digitisation, demonetisation and GST and now Corona's economic meltdown, is at his wits ends on where to keep his money safe from the very same people who are supposed to safeguard his money and financial interests.

The sum total is that instead of strengthening the present public sector banks through infusion of funds and evolving a rigorous mechanism to recover big ticket bad loans through strong regulations or recovery plans, the plans are afoot to handover the country's banking sector to the private sector through the back door, and what happened in countries like Chile and Peru, which adopted such machinations, might happen in India too, and its economy might crash so badly that it will not be able to recover. but may become dependent on dole outs from the IMF or the World Bank, as per their diktats.

(Asad Mirza is a Sr journalist and commentator based in New Delhi. He was also associated with BBC Urdu Service and Khaleej Times of Dubai. He writes on Muslims, educational, international affairs, interfaith and current affairs. Email: asad. mirza.nd@gmail.com)

# The Fastest Way Out of the Pandemic

As it stands, over 160 vaccine candidates are in preclinical or clinical development. There is no way to know which will pass clinical trials and be licensed

SETH BERKLEY, RICHARD HATCHETT,
SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN

very day, the COVID-19 pandemic costs the world thousands more lives and billions more dollars. The most efficient way to bring this crisis to an end – possibly as early as next year – is with a safe and effective vaccine, manufactured in large quantities and distributed globally. To avoid any unnecessary delays, governments should take this moment, while researchers work to develop the right formula, to prepare the ground for rapid production and broad, equitable deployment.

This is the principle on which the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility is based. Created by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the World Health Organization, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, this innovative platform aims to distribute at least two billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine by the end of 2021.

That many doses – which will be divided equitably among participating countries, regardless of their ability to pay – would cover some 20% of populations in participating countries. It would thus be sufficient to protect high-risk and vulnerable people and frontline health-care workers worldwide. (Additional doses would also be stockpiled, so that any future outbreak could be tackled before it spun out of control.)

As it stands, over 160 vaccine candidates are in preclinical or clinical development. There is no way to know which will pass clinical trials and be licensed

(failure rates of vaccines in early development are high). But we can ensure that, by the time one does, an effective framework for manufacture and deployment is in place. To that end, governments must invest in COVAX as soon as possible.

The problem is that governments may feel compelled to eschew cooperation, in favor of negotiating directly with vaccine manufacturers to claim the doses they need. Yes, governments are duty-bound to protect their own citizens above all. But this national approach carries serious risks, beginning with the possibility that a government may back the wrong vaccines.

Even if a government secures enough doses of an effective vaccine for its own population, some of its people – such as those who are immunocompromised and may not be able to be vaccinated – would be left exposed if other countries are unable to obtain enough vaccine. And this leaves aside the moral imperative of ensuring that people are not cut off from lifesaving drugs.

During the 2009 swine flu pandemic, a few countries cornered the vaccine market, leaving the vast majority of the global population with no vaccine at all until the outbreak was effectively over. This scenario must be avoided at all costs during the current crisis, not least because COVID-19 has a much higher infection and mortality rate.

By collaborating with global health agencies through COVAX, governments can ensure that everyone has equal access to COVID-19 vaccines. For countries that have secured bilateral deals with manufacturers, COVAX amounts to an insurance policy, in

case they bet on the wrong candidates. For countries that haven't secured any deals – the vast majority of the world – COVAX is the only way to avoid being pushed to the back of the line.

COVAX ensures that the benefits and risks of vaccine development are broadly shared. With the largest portfolio of vaccine candidates anywhere in the world, it gives participating governments the best odds of receiving a safe and effective vaccine as soon as it becomes available – and ensures that this moment comes much sooner.

When pharmaceutical companies are shouldering all of the financial risks, they will invest in scaling up production only after their vaccine has completed clinical trials and been approved. This approach may make business sense, but it does not make sense in the context of a rapidly moving global pandemic.

COVAX employs a radically different approach. In addition to using "push" financing – direct investment in research, development, and manufacturing – it uses "pull" financing, in the form of advance purchase commitments for large numbers of doses upon licensure. This provides powerful incentives for the private sector to support urgent vaccine development

Moreover, COVAX pools government resources to fund scaling up the most promising candidates even before clinical trials are completed. That way, when approval comes, large quantities of vaccine doses will be ready to go. Already, WHO is working with a range of stakeholders, including member states and civil-society organizations, to develop and implement a mechanism for equitable and fair allocation of vaccine doses, once they become available.

COVAX will support only vaccine candidates that are developed in accordance with the highest possible safety standards. By working with experts around the world to develop target product profiles, share best-practice testing models, facilitate multicountry clinical trials, and promote regulatory harmonization, COVAX will establish a new benchmark for rapid, safe, and efficacious vaccine development and delivery.

We cannot afford to leave our economies on their current path for much longer. As global GDP shrinks – the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank forecast about a 5% contraction in 2020 – poverty and hunger are rising sharply. With the world economy losing more than \$10 billion each day, shortening the pandemic by even a few days would more than offset the costs of COVAX. Global collaboration – where risks and benefits are shared equally – has never been a better value proposition.

Project Syndicate

(SETH BERKLEY Seth Berkley is CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

RICHARD HATCHETT Richard Hatchett is CEO of the Coalition for Epidemic PreparednessInnovations.

SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN SoumyaSwaminathan is Chief Scientist of the World Health Organization)

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

SHOWKAT GANAI

When plague commenced in Kashmir from a crime in early 1900, it created a chain of fascinating twists and turns in valley's epidemic history. Many such stories are now emerging as folktales in the locked down region.

hen an 'influential' woman pilgrim bypassed high security vigil at Srinagar Airport and subsequently became the first Covid-19 positive case in Kashmir on March 16, it reminded many of a veiled Kashmiri woman returning from a plague-ridden Rawalpindi on a tonga in 1903, and becoming the epidemic trigger in the valley.

Then, as now, Kashmir witnessed an emergency response to tackle an emergency situation. The contact tracing, quarantine quarters, the fear of community transfer were as much in vogue, as they are today.

But then, there's something more intriguing about Kashmir's plagued past which continues to fascinate people. Most of these stories have become the lockdown folklore in Kashmir now.

#### That Mythical Spider

As first epidemic record of Kashmir, Kalhana's Rajatarangini talks about Luta, a Sanskrit word for spider during the time of Jayapida (779-810 AD).

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

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

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

#### The Killer Grass

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

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

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

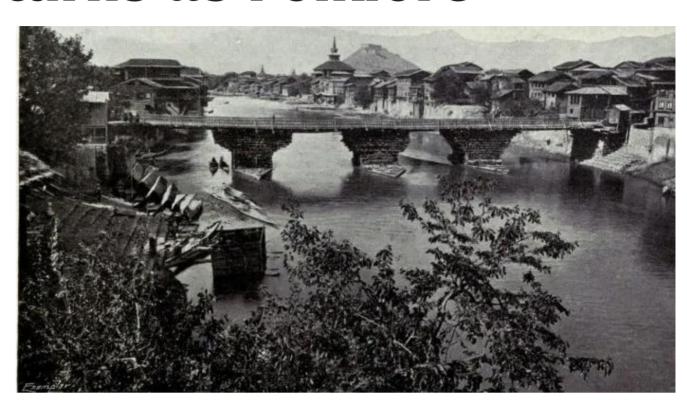
Things had come to such a pass, Jahangir notes, that due to fear of death, fathers would not approach their children, and children would not go near their fothers.

#### 'A Strong Wind of Destruction'

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

It came be known as "Wobah" in Kashmiri.

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



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

#### Circle and Burn

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

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

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

#### A Tonga Traveller

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

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

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

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

"He had been severely ill before coming from Uri and staying at the house of Subhan Bhat, a landlord relative of the

woman, living at Kralpura," Dr. A. Mitra, a Bengali-man, the then Chief Medical Officer Kashmir writes in The Indian Medical Gazette.

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

#### **Torched House**

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

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

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

#### An Erring Cop

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

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

Some say he put his mouth on the

finger of the deceased to bring out a ring, biting it with his teeth.

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

A Plague on Both Your Houses Soon, news came about death of several persons in two houses in Srinagar.

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

Nobody was sure how did this community transfer began.

"There're two possible explanations here," Mitra writes. "Either the relatives of deceased policeman had exhumed his body and reburied it at native place or they had found his hospital attendant brother who possibly died at Geru village and subsequently buried by the family in their locality."

#### Death on the Run

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

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

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

his year, the dawn chorus sounds different. In the dark hours before sunrise, my yard whistles, chips, hoots, and trills with deafening birdsong.

The birds carolling at my home — robins, mockingbirds, warblers, cardinals, titmice, finches — sound more numerous, boisterous and energetic than in past years, all singing raucously at the same time, like a poetry slam where everyone's reading at once.

Have the lockdowns resulted in more abundant birds? Is our behaviour changing theirs, making them bolder, louder, more present in our yards and parks, or is the birdsong just more audible because there's less ambient roar from cars, overhead jets, construction?

Or is it we who have changed, taking more notice of bird life now that our own lives have slowed?

Birds may have something important to tell us about what it takes to navigate this world, especially under difficult circumstances. In exploring new discoveries in bird science, I'm struck by how birds play, adapt, innovate, and especially, work together in tough times

- Jennifer Ackerman

The studies aren't in on the impact of shifting human patterns on bird activity during the pandemic. It will most likely take years before we have firm data. But the anecdotes, from all around the world, are in-

My friends in Australia and New Zealand tell me that since the lockdowns began, flocks of spine-tailed swifts have swelled, more fairy-wrens are popping up at their bird baths and kereru — big pigeons that swallow large fruit — are perching on their back fences.

"The lack of people is indeed being noticed by the wildlife," said Darryl Jones, an ecologist at Griffith University specialising in the interaction between humans and wildlife.

He points to the pair of very rare glossy black cockatoos that showed up on the vacant Griffith campus near Brisbane, along with more than 50 koalas in the nearby forest.

When the lockdowns were in full force, birds ap-

peared to be thriving with the dip in noise and light and air pollution, along with emptied-out parks and public gardens that are usually a crush of people and traffic congestion.

In the US, ravens normally on edge around their nests in Yosemite were more relaxed, even playful in the empty parking lots, and endangered piping plo-

# Why The Birds Are Singing In This Pandemic

We want to return to our lives and livelihoods, but not by sacrificing the natural world

JENNIFER ACKERMAN



vers had the beaches to themselves.

One friend of mine from New York wrote to say, "There seem to be birds everywhere in the city, more than usual, having parties in the bushes, quarrelling, singing."

Reduction of noise

The reduction in noise may have a more subtle but still beneficial effect. Birds sing in the early morning to mark their territory and attract mates. Their efforts, however, often coincide with the roar of early morning rush hour.

morning rush hour.

A few years ago, scientists from the University of Florida found that noisy highways prevented tufted

titmice and northern cardinals from hearing alarm calls from fellow birds, warning of dangerous predators in the area, putting them at greater risk of becoming prey.

Now that things are opening up, all of this may be changing. Those ravens in Yosemite parking lots and shorebirds nesting on once empty beaches must now contend with returning crowds. The human din is beginning again.

The more enduring change may be in human behaviour around birds. At the moment, most serious bird-watchers are not sashaying out to distant locations to spot a vagrant species or catch the big waves of migratory species passing through, but rather, observing more bird life close to home.

#### More spring than ever

A lot of us, even those of us who aren't hard-core birders, are turning more toward our yards and gardens, noting birds and bird activities we've never seen before — not because they're new, necessarily, but because we've just never paid such close attention. One neighbour walking her dog remarked that she's seeing more of spring than ever.

"I just saw an early indigo bunting flying through our yard," wrote a friend. "Ordinarily they don't love my neighbourhood and especially our overgrown yard, so I am ecstatic."

With any luck, this human shift may stick: People noticing the birds around them more and finding entertainment, solace, even wisdom in watching them going about their lives in a regular way, finding mates, building nests, raising young, resilient and persistent.

Birds may have something important to tell us about what it takes to navigate this world, especially under difficult circumstances. In exploring new discoveries in bird science, I'm struck by how birds play, adapt, innovate, and especially, work together in tough times.

Birds cooperate and collaborate in everything from hunting, courting, and migrating, to raising and defending their young, sometimes even across species lines.

We want to return to our lives and livelihoods, but not by sacrificing the natural world that supports us in body and in spirit

Jennifer Ackerman is a columnist who writes about science, nature, and human biology

The New York Times



**Agencies** 

ital image analysis technology, has shed light on artistic abilities. some of the challenges

medium of paint. concrete insight into the devel-

new research, using dig-tions for educators to improve and technical prowess and tend children's cognitive, spatial, and

children's paintings also serve as The research from Japan Ad- crucial artifacts of their percep- trained eye of an artist or critic. vanced Institute of Science and tions, as they contain the sum of

opment of children's psyches, tween objects in paintings repand importantly, offers sugges- resent painters' experiences to indicate shortcomings of either. These are often perceived Painting is a recreational and by viewers of paintings, but unchildren face when representing creative activity enjoyed by chil-til now, detailed evaluation and their imaginations through the dren across the world. However, analysis of children's art have tified and calculated. been subjective, relying on the

process by which children's display poor abilities to recog- participating in painting more paintings can be digitised, categorised, and then thoroughly tionships.

Handburg poor admitted to recognize that boys did.

This research analysed. Content, scale, patterns, details, and the relationpaintings are objectively quan-

The spatial relationships be- and tested a digital analysis have not received instruction toward painting; girls preferred on object size, and the ability to painting as a creative process.

tionships.

to imitate objects is identified as painters. Trends identified among the common to children's painting. subjects sampled, 182 girls and Statistical analysis of the boys jects outside could enhance their JAIST researchers Lan Yu and 234 boys in the Republic of Chi- and girls in this study indicated awareness of their natural envi- joyment and reducing children's Technology (JAIST), also offered what children see as "essential." Yukari Nagai have developed na, indicate that children who that they have different attitudes ronments. Focusing instruction perception of difficulty toward

This research has implications The younger the painter, the in art education, suggesting that less likely that he or she will have art teachers focus on several key ships between objects in the developed these cognitive abili- elements that are useful to the ties. Lack of detail and inability cognitive development of young

Guiding children to paint ob-

recognise and control it could remedy this crucial deficit in children's paintings.

Specifically training students to imitate objects could show significant results in the overall quality of children's paintings. And finally, instruction in composition and creative methods is correlated to increasing the en-

# Coronavirus: Physical Distancing May Help Ease Burden On Hospitals, But Only To A Point

STAY 1.5 METRES

**Press Trust Of India** 

cientists have found that longer periods of social distancing alone are not successful when it comes to slowing COVID-19 spread, an advance which may help make better decisions in countries where a second wave of the pandemic is expected.

"Conventional wisdom was, the more intense and longterm the social distancing, the more you will curb the disease spread," said Rajan Chakrabarty, a co-author of the study from Washington University in St. Louis in the US.

lished in the journal Chaos, allowed the authors to analyse any strategy that involves so- unbiased results that had not cial distancing requires other yet been affected by large-scale steps be taken in tandem.

"But that is true if you have you will give rise to a second wave," Chakrabarty said.

Payton Beeler, another coauthor of the study, noted ably would've done a better that if social distancing is the only measure taken, it must be short-term, more distancing in yielding the largest reducimplemented extremely care- and less hospital demand go fully in order for its benefits to hand in hand, the scientists said, be fully realized.

surge in COVID-19 cases and



distancing in place, they said.

The model also included the scientists explained. social distancing implemented details on how much people with contact tracing, isolation of different age groups interand testing. Without those, act, and how that affects the spread of transmission.

implemented earlier, we probjob," Chakrabarty said. Over the adding that this is only up to in most US states. Calibrating mand, the researchers noted.

ishing returns. Society would fits to hospital demand the longer it spent social distancing,

According to the researchers, if social distancing "alone" is to be implemented longer than two weeks, a moderate "Had social distancing been shut down, say between 50-70 per cent, could be more effective for the society than a stricter complete shut-down tion in medical demands.

Another strategy for flattening the curve involves acting inter-Their epidemiological model two weeks. After that, they said mittently, alternating between used data gathered by Johns the time spent distancing does strict social distancing and no Hopkins University in the US not benefit hospital demand as distancing to alleviate the strain between March 18 and March much. Society would have to on hospitals, the study noted. 29, a period marked by a rapid increase social distancing time According to the model, the exponentially in order to see a most efficient distancing- tothe onset of social distancing linear decrease in hospital de- no-distancing ratio is five to one, meaning one day of no distanc-

They said this leads to dimining for every five days at home. Had society acted in this way, the see smaller and smaller bene- researchers said the hospital burden could have been reduced by 80 per cent. "Bending the curve using social distancing alone is analogous to slowing down the front of a raging wildfire without extinguishing the glowing embers," said Chakrabarty.

'They are waiting to start their own fires once the wind carries them away," he said, adding however that his team's model cannot inform strategies going forward as it used data collected in March. But Chakrabarty added that it may be able to inform our actions if we find ourselves in a similar situation in the future.

"Next time, we must act faster, and be more aggressive when it comes to contact tracing and testing and isolation,"

# The Key To Slowing Ageing May Be In Your Genes, Blood Iron Levels

group of scientists has now identified the genes which are linked to ageing. Studying the genes could help explain why some people age at different rates to others.

The international study using genetic data from more than a million people suggests that maintaining healthy levels of iron in the blood could be a key to ageing better and living longer.

The findings could accelerate the development of drugs to reduce age-related diseases, extend healthy years of life, and increase the chances of living to old age free of disease, the researchers say.

Scientists from the University of Edinburgh and the Max Planck tremely long-lived people. Institute for Biology of Ageing in Germany focused on three measures linked to biological ageing



- lifespan, years of life lived free of disease (healthspan), and being extremely long-lived (longevity).

Biological ageing - the rate at which our bodies decline over time - varies between people and drives the world's most fatal diseases, including heart disease, dementia and cancers.

The researchers pooled information from three public datasets to enable analysis in unprecedented detail. The combined dataset was equivalent to studying 1.75 million lifespans or more than 60,000 ex-

gions of the genome linked to long lifespan, healthspan, and that more work is required.

longevity. They also found that gene sets linked to iron were overrepresented in their analysis of all three measures of ageing.

The researchers confirmed this using a statistical method known as Mendelian randomisation - that suggested that genes involved in metabolising iron in the blood are partly responsible for a healthy long life.

Blood iron is affected by diet and abnormally high or low levels are linked to age-related conditions such as Parkinson's disease, liver disease and a decline in the body's ability to fight

infection in older age. The researchers say that designing a drug that could mimic the influence of genetic variation on iron metabolism could be a The team pinpointed ten re- future step to overcome some of the effects of ageing, but caution

### **Pregnant Women Living Near Gas Flaring** Sites May Be At Higher Risk Of Preterm Birth

omen living near oil and gas production sites where natural gas is flared may be at a higher risk of giving birth preterm, a team of California researchers reported on Wednesday.

Analysis of more than 23,000 birth records from 2012 through 2015 reveals a 50% higher chance of pre-term birth for women living within three miles (5 km) of Texas' Eagle Ford shale basin than linking pollution with poorer for women who lived farther

away, according to the study. "Our study finds that living near flaring is harmful to pregnant women and babies," said



co-author Jill Johnston, an environmental health scientist at the University of Southern California.

The research, published in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives, adds to evidence who made up 55% of the study poppregnancy outcomes. Another study in June found a correlation between air pollution or higher outdoor temperatures and in- tory and cardiovascular illness, as creased chances of having a pre-

term or stillborn baby. Those findings, in the Journal of the American Medical Association, resulted from analyzing 70 studies covering 32 million births. It also found that black women were disproportionately at risk. In the new study. by scientists at USC and UCLA, the association between preterm births and flaring proximity was seen only among Hispanic and Latina women, ulation. No effect was seen among non-Hispanic White women, who comprised 37% of the total. Preterm babies are at higher risk of respirawell as developmental delays.

## World's 1st Phase 3 Clinical Trial Of COVID-19 **Inactivated Vaccine Begins**

Dubai: Phase III clinical trials of a COVID-19 vaccine in Abu Dhabi using up to 15,000 volunteers, the government in the capital of the United Arab **Emirates said on Thursday.** 

The human trial is a partnership between Sinopharm's China National Biotec Group (CNBG), Abu Dhabi-based artificial intelligence and cloud computing company Group 42 (G42) and the Abu Dhabi Department of Health.

The study, which began on Wednesday, is the world's first Phase III trial of an inactivated vaccine, G42 Healthcare CEO Ashish Koshv said. Inactivated vaccines are well known and have been used against diseases such as influenza and measles.

No COVID-19 vaccine has yet been approved for commercial use. According to a WHO summary of the state of vaccine development for CO-VID-19, there are 23 potential vaccines in human trials, with three of them in or starting large-scale late stage, or Phase III, trials to test efficacy.

The trial will test two vaccine strains and a placebo. Two doses three weeks apart will be administered and volunteers followed for a year, said Nawal Alkaabi, head of the UAE's COVID-19 Clinical Management Committee

Around 15,000 volunteers over three to six months will be recruited, initially in Abu Dhabi. They will be 18 to 60 years of age with no serious underlying medical issues and without previous COVID-19 infection, Alkaabi said.

Sinopharm chose the United Arab Emirates because around 200 different nationalities reside there and it has a focus on medical research and fighting the pandemic, Koshy said.

The UAE says it has conducted more than 4 million coronavirus infection tests on a population of around 9.6 million. It has recorded almost 56,000 cases of infection and 335 deaths.

Sinopharm secured approval for the trial in late June. The experimental vaccine passed Phases I and II of clinical trials with 100% of volunteers generating antibodies after two doses in 28 days, an Abu Dhabi government statement said.

China has been looking overseas to trial potential vaccines because of a lack of new patients at home. China's Sinovac Biotech is conducting Phase III trials of a vaccine in Brazil.

Sinopharm and G42 would not have access to patient data in the trial which would be conducted in Abu Dhabi state hospitals, G42 Healthcare research director Walid Zaher said, adding the UAE intended to manufacture any re sulting successful vaccine.

G42 is an Abu Dhabi-based artificial intelligence firm that has partnered with Chinese genomics company BGI to build a COVID-19 testing laboratory in the emirate and with Israeli contractors to develop technologies to help fight the disease.

Koshy said the company was privately owned but declined to say by whom.

Like other Gulf states the UAE has developed close ties with China, seeking capital and technology to diversify its economy away from hydrocarbon revenues.

However, key ally the United States has warned Gulf states to proceed with caution and to consider their relationship with



# **US Announces Policy Of All-Out Support For China's Rivals In Territorial Disputes**

Agencies

Washington: The United States says it will do everything it can to support China's rivals in territorial disputes, setting a one-size-fits-all, openly hostile policy toward Beijing.

We will support countries all across the world who recognize that China has violated their legal territorial claims as well — or maritime claims as well," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said at a news conference on Wednesday.

"We will go provide them the assistance we can, whether that's in multilateral bodies, whether that's in ASEAN, whether that's through legal responses, we will use all the tools we can," he said, referring to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The ASEAN is comprised of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Some of those countries are involved in territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. Japan, another US ally, is locked in a row with China in the East China Sea.

In response to Pompeo's remarks, Vietnam said it welcomed any view on the South China Sea that was in accordance with international law.

"Peace, stability, cooperation, and development in the South China Sea are the common aspirations and goals of countries in the region and the international community," said Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Le Thi Thu Hang

Pompeo's remarks on Wednesday were the latest forceful statement by the US President Donald Trump administration to challenge China, which he has increasingly cast as an enemy ahead of presidential elections in the US in November.

On Monday, the United States said it would treat Beijing's pur-

suit of resources in the South China Sea as "illegal." The United States has also threatened to impose sanctions on China over accusations of the exploitation of offshore resources in the South China Sea.

China slammed the US's earlier rejection of its territorial claims, calling on Washington to stop interfering in regional affairs.

Trillions of dollars' worth of goods annually transit through the South China Sea.

The United States routinely sends warships and warplanes to the South China Sea to assert what it calls its "right" to "freedom of navigation," ratcheting up tensions with China.

Relations between the United States and China have hit the lowest level in decades. The two are at loggerheads over a range of issues, including trade, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the coronavirus pandemic, besides the South China Sea.

#### **Boris Johnson Hopes For Return To Normality By Christmas**

Agencies

London: Britain could return to normality from the coronavirus outbreak by Christmas, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Friday, despite fears of a second wave of cases over winter.

Johnson sketched out a timetable for easing the remaining lockdown measures in England, including lifting homeworking guidance and reopening sports stadiums and live theatre.

"It is my strong and sincere hope that we will be able to review the outstanding restrictions and allow a more significant return to normality from November, at the earliest, possibly in time for Christmas," he said.

Current government guidance is for employees to work from home where they can.

But under the latest proposals, Johnson said employers can have "more discretion" and discuss with workers whether it is safe to return to the office from August 1.

Asked if that was at odds with his own government's advice, Johnson also said people could

worst, I strongly believe we should also hope for the best," he added.

#### Winter worries

Fears of a second wave of infections were raised this week when scientists said nearly 120,000 people could die in hospitals alone from September to June next year.

The warning was put forward as a "reasonable worst-case scenario" if no counter-measures were put in place

Johnson acknowledged the risks of reopening, particularly for winter when the NHS is often under greater strain because of seasonal flu outbreaks. But he said councils across

England would be given new powers to impose local restrictions quickly in the case of outbreaks, instead of a renewed nationwide lockdown.

Leicester, a city in central England, has been under local lockdown for the last two weeks because of a spike in cases.

Johnson gave sports fans something to cheer about by announcing the intention to allow



still continue to work from home. From the same date, most remaining leisure venues, includ-

ing skating rinks and casinos could also reopen, subject to social distancing regulations. Wedding receptions with up

to 30 guests would also be allowed. Johnson also said the staterun National Health Service (NHS) would receive an extra 3 billion pound (\$3.8 billion, 3.3 million euros) to prepare for a possible winter spike in cases.

"Even as we plan for the

crowds to return to stadiums, subject to successful test events, from October.

Mass gatherings have been banned since March, and the showpiece English Premier League has been played behind closed doors, without fans, since it resumed.

Among the pilot events will be the World Snooker Championship, the Glorious Goodwood horseracing festival and two county cricket friendly matches later this month.

# **Thori After PM Oli Claims**

Kathmandu: Nepal's archaeological department plans to start studies and excavation in Thori in the country's south after Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's claim that it is the "real birthplace" of Lord Ram, according to a media report on Thursday.

**Nepal Plans Excavation In** 

Several top Nepalese political leaders from different parties have slammed Mr Oli for making "senseless and irrelevant" remarks that Lord

Ram was born in Thori near Birguni and the real Ayodhya lies in Nepal. They have asked him to withdraw his controversial statement.

It As Real Ayodhya

Following Oli's remarks, the Department of Archaeology (DoA) has been discussing a possible archeological study in the area with different ministries. My Republica newspaper reported.

"The department has been holding several meetings with different ministries to discuss the possibility of starting archaeological stud-

ies in Thori of Birgunj," it quoted Ram Bahadur Kunwar, the spokesperson for the DOA, as saving.

DoA Director General Damodar Gautam said the department is serious about conducting archaeological studies in Thori after Prime Minister

"The department will discuss with experts and will come to a conclusion soon," said Gautam. However, the DoA doesn't have any basis to start any excavation at

Thori - the birthplace of Lord Ram, as claimed by Oli.

"It is our responsibility to carry out a study after such statements by the prime minister. Having said that, I cannot say that we have enough bases to prove that Ayodhya is in Nepal," according to Gautam.

In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Tuesday clarified that the remarks made by Prime Minister Oli "are not linked to any political subject and have no intention at all to hurt the feelings and sentiments

# **Australian Researchers Invent 20-Minute Coronavirus Blood Test**

Sydney: Researchers in Australia have devised a test that can determine novel coronavirus infection in about 20 minutes using blood samples in what they say is a world-first breakthrough.

The researchers at Monash Iniversity said their test can de termine if someone is currently infected and if they have been infected in the past.

"Short-term applications include rapid case identification and contact tracing to limit viral spread, while population screening to determine the extent of viral infection across communities is a longer-term need," the researchers said in a paper published in the journal ACS Sensors on Friday.

The research team was led by BioPRIA and Monash University's Chemical Engineering Department, including researchers from the ARC Centre of Excellence in Convergent BioNano Science and Technology (CBNS).

Their test, using 25 microli-



tres of plasma from blood samples. looks for agglutination, or a clustering of red blood cells, that the coronavirus causes

While the current swab test is used to identify people who are infected with the coronavirus, the agglutination assay - or analysis to detect the presence and amount of a substance in blood - can also determine if someone had been recently infected, after the infection is resolved, they said.

of samples can be tested every

hour, the researchers said, and they hope it can also be used to detect antibodies raised in response to vaccination to aid clinical trials.

A patent for the innovation has been filed and the researchers are seeking commercial and government support to scale up production.

The novel coronavirus has infected more than 13.8 million people around the world and killed nearly 600,000 since it emerged in China late last year. Australia has reported more than 11,000 cases and 116 deaths.

#### Tanker off UAE sought by US over Iran sanctions 'hijacked'

Agencies

DUBAI: An oil tanker sought by the US over allegedly circumhijacked on July 5 off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, a seafarers welfare organisation said on Wednesday.

Satellite photos showed the vessel in Iranian waters on Tuesday and two of its sailors remained in the Iranian capital

It wasn't immediately clear what happened aboard the Dominica-flagged MT Gulf Sky, though its reported hijacking comes after months of tensions between Iran and the US.

David Hammond, the CEO of the United Kingdom-based group Human Rights at Sea, said he took a witness statement from the captain of the MT Gulf Sky, confirming the ship had been hijacked.

Hammond said that 26 of the Indian sailors on board had made it back to India, while two remained in Tehran, without elabo rating.

We are delighted to hear that the crew are safe and well, which has been our fundamental concern from the outset," Hammond told The Associated Press

Hammond said that he had no other details on the vessel

TankerTrackers.com, a website tracking the oil trade at sea, said it saw the vessel in satellite photos on Tuesday in Iranian waters off Hormuz Island. Hormuz Island, near the port city of Bandar Abbas, is some 190 kilometres north of Khorfakkan, a city on the eastern coast of the United Arab Emirates where the vessel had been for months.

#### MAKERS N E W S

#### **Hackers Targeted** Around 130 **Accounts This** Week, Says Twitter

witter Inc said late on Thursday that hackers targeted about 130 accounts during the cyber attack this week, an incident in which profiles of many prominent personalities and organizations were compromised.

Twitter said that the hackers were able to gain control of a small number of accounts and send tweets from them. The company added that it was continuing to assess whether hackers were able to access private data of the targeted accounts.

Accounts of celebrities and political figures including Joe Biden, Kim Kardashian, Barack Obama and Elon Musk were hacked during the cyber attack on Wednesday.

## Trump Book Written By His Niece Sells **Nearly Million Copies On First Day**

EW YORK: A new book on Donald Trump written by his niece sold nearly a million copies on the first day it went on sale in the United States, its publisher said Thursday.

Mary Trump's "Too Much and LPHA Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man" is billed as the first unflattering portrayal of the US president by a family insider.

Mary, a psychologist whose father was Trump's oldest brother Fred, accuses the president of hubris and ignorance, and says he fits the clinical criteria for being a narcissist.

The 950,000 copies sold Tuesday, including pre-orders as well as audio and digital versions, "is a company record" for the Simon & Schuster publishing house, it said in a state-

The White House has dismissed the memoir as a "book of falsehoods".

The president's younger brother Robert Trump went to court to try to block publication, arguing that Mary



was violating a non-disclosure agreement signed in 2001 after the settlement of her grandfather's estate, but to no avail.

Simon & Schuster has ordered more copies printed, which will bring the number to 1.15 million for the American market alone. The book also tops Amazon's sales charts in Canada and Australia

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Dated:-16/07/2020

**Fury Of The Covid-19** 

**Context For Un's Rebirth** 

**Pandemic Provides** 

# **As India Virus Cases Hit One Million, How Doctors Are Suffering**

**GREATER NOIDA:** In suf- pitals are highly vulnerable. focating full protective gear inside an intensive care unit ciation, a voluntary group of with no air conditioning, doctor Showkat Nazir Wani is risking his life battling brutal heat and treating coronavirus patients.

Almost 100 doctors in India have died since the pandemic began, working punishingly long hours in temperatures that can top 40 degrees Celsius.

"Wearing this PPE kit at the temperature of 40 de-



grees, it's very difficult, I can say because you are drenched in sweat. Still, (we try) to do our best to save the lives of patients," Wani, a resident doctor at the private Sharda Hospital in Greater Noida outside New Delhi, said.

"It feels very hot and suffocating. But we have to wear it for our own safety," the 29-year-old said before rushing to attend to a patient battling a lung collapse.

India on Friday hit a million coronavirus cases, the third-highest total in the world, with no sign yet of the infection curve flattening as new cases emerge in rural areas. More than 25,000 people have died.

The country has some of the lowest per capita health care spending in the world and poorly paid staff working in dilapidated state hos-

The Indian Medical Assodoctors which says 99 physicians have died so far, this

week issued a "red alert". "Doctors need to take charge of the situation and ensure the safety of themselves, their families, their colleagues and staff," it said in a statement.

Nausea and dizziness

Sharda Hospital has been providing free treatment to COVID-19 patients under instructions from the state government, which means facilities are basic and many patients are poor.

Not all patients are in hospital gowns. One was on a bed wearing a bedraggled Tshirt with bloodstains.

Because there is no air conditioning, doctors and nurses are quickly drenched in sweat.

Since they are enveloped head-to-foot in plastic protective gear, the sweat can't evaporate to cool them

And as going to the toilet means removing all the gear and then putting a new set, some staff skimp on drinking enough water.

Nausea and dizziness can sometimes ensue, and in the long term the staff can risk serious problems including organ damage.

Abhishek Deshwal, who heads the hospital's intensive care unit, said working in such heat while wearing the body suits was "doubly stressful for the staff".

"But we are trying to do our best, we don't have any

## No Need For CBI Probe In **Sushant Singh Rajput Death Case: Anil Deshmukh**

for a CBI probe into the death case of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput as the Mumbai police were capable of handling the matter, said Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh on Friday.

The police were also examining the angle of "business director Mukesh Chhabra rivalry" in the case, he said.

Rajput, 34, was found dead in his Bandra apartment in Mumbai on June 14 and what the police claimed was a case of suicide. In the initial investigation, the Mumbai police had found that the actor was under medication for depression.

Thursday, jput's friend, actor Rhea Chakraborty, in a tweet, demanded a CBI inquiry to understand what "pressures" prompted Rajput to take the extreme step of suicide.

Chakraborty said though she has "complete faith" in the government, a CBI inquiry would help bring justice to the case.

said the Mumbai police were conducting a detailed inquiry into the actor's death and also recording statements of people concerned.

There was no need to give the case to the CBI. Our po- as cricketer Mahendra Singh

**NAGPUR:** There was no need way. We are also examining the angle of business rivalry," said Deshmukh.

So far, the police have recorded the statements of more than two dozen people, including Chakraborty, filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Bollywood casting and Rajput's family mem-



bers, as part of a probe into Talking to PTI, Deshmukh the suicide, which jolted the Hindi film industry.

Rajput starred in films such as 'Shuddh Desi Romance', 'Raabta', 'Kedarnath' and 'Sonchiriya'. But his most prominent role came lice officials are capable and doing the inquiry in right Dhoni: The Untold Story'. PTI



# Rajasthan Crisis: HC Puts On **Hold Speaker Action Against** Pilot, 18 Dissident MLAs

**JAIPUR:** Sachin Pilot and 18 other Congress dissident MLAs on Friday got a four-day reprieve from any action by the Assembly Speaker on the disqualification notices served on them, after the Rajasthan High Court extended its hearing on the issue to next week.

The Division Bench of the court, hearing the dissident MLAs' petition against the Speaker's notices, adjourned on Friday evening. It fixed the next hearing for 10 am on Monday.

The counsel for the Speaker assured the court that no order shall be passed on the notice till 5.30 pm on Tuesday.

Earlier, Speaker C P Joshi had written to the court that the notices will not be acted upon till 5 pm on Friday. The counsel agreed to extend this to 5 pm on Tuesday as the court is yet to give an order on the petition.

The petition had challenged the notices based on a Congress complaint that the MLAs should be disqualified from the Rajasthan Assembly for defying a party whip.

Mahanty and Justice Prakash Gupta also asked Congress chief whip Mahesh Joshi, who had filed the complaint before the Speaker, to respond

to the dissidents' petition by Saturday. The Pilot camp has argued that a resent in the House.

JAIPUR: The Congress on Friday

demanded that a case be lodged

against BJP leader and Union min-

ister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat,

accusing him of being involved in

The party also suspended rebel

MLAs Bhanwarlal Sharma and Vish-

vendra Singh from the party for al-

legedly being involved in the conspiracy to topple the government.

AICC spokesperson Randeep Sur-

jewala said that two audio record-

ings have surfaced in which the MLA

Sharma, union minister Shekhawat

and a BIP leader Sanjay Jain are pur-

portedly talking about the "conspir-

acy" to topple the government. He

demanded an FIR against the three

Joshi has given a complaint to the

Special Operation Group for regis-

horse trading of Rajasthan MLAs.



party whip applies only when the Assembly is in session.

In its complaint to the Speaker, the Congress had sought action against Pilot and the other dissidents un-The court of Chief Justice Indrajit der paragraph 2 (1) (a) of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution.

The provision disqualifies MLAs if they "voluntarily" give up the membership of the party which they rep-

**In Rajasthan Horse Trading: Congress** 



is the inference that can be drawn from the MLAs' conduct. But the the party.

Minister and the president of the state unit of the party after he rebelled against Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. PTI

tapes surfaced on Thursday, he had

termed them as fake and said the

#### dissident camp says Pilot never indicated any intention to leave Pilot was sacked as Deputy Chief

**BJP's Gajendra Singh Shekhawat Involved** 

snapped. Divisional Commissioner

ment, M Raju; IGP Kashmir, missioner Srinagar; Dr. Shahid Iqbal Choudhary; Chief Engineers, and senior officasion at TRC Srinagar.

the Jal Shakti department for immediate procurement of 10 more Mobile Gensets to strengthen the emergency response system in case of

He observed that every possible mechanism shall be explored to improve the water supply position in Jammu & Kashmir so that service is ensured even in case of natural disasters and

#### **And Reform: Modi** sserting that only re- all nations, while celebrating 75 years of the UN, to pledge to reform the global

formed multilateral-Lism can meet the aspirations of humanity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the United Nations was originally born from the furies of the Second World War and the fury of the COVID-19 pandemic provides the context for its

rebirth and reform.' Addressing the high-level segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) session via a video link, Modi said the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the UN is an opportunity to assess its role and relevance in today's world.

Noting that a lot has changed since its formation, he said the UN now brings together 193 member countries and along with its membership, the expecta-tions from the organisation have also grown.

At the same time, multilateralism is facing many challenges, he said in the address -- his first since India was overwhelmingly elected as a non-permanent member of the powerful Security Council last month.

"India firmly believes that the path to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity is through multilateralism... multilateralism However. needs to represent the reality of the contemporary world.

"Only reformed multilateralism with a reformed United Nations at its centre can meet the aspirations of humanity," Modi said. The prime minister urged

multilateral system.

He also called for enhancing the UN's relevance, its effectiveness, and to make it the basis of a new type of

human-centric globalisation. "The United Nations was originally born from the furies of the Second World War. Today, the fury of the pandemic provides the context for its rebirth and reform. Let us not lose this chance," he asserted.

Referring the COVID-19



has always prided itself as the first responder in the region—a friend in need.

"Be it earthquakes, cyclones or any other natural or man-made crisis, India has responded with speed and solidarity. In our joint fight against COVID, we have extended medical and other assistance to over 150 countries. "We also helped create a SAA-RC COVID emergency fund in our neighbourhood," he said.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has severely tested the resilience of all nations. In India, we have tried to make the fight against the pandemic a people's movement, by combining the efforts of government and society," he said.

## **LG Flags Off Mobile Gensets Fleet For Emergency Response & Disaster Relief**

**SRINAGAR:** Lieutenant Gov- extreme weather situations. ernor, Girish Chandra Murmu today flagged off ready to deploy Mobile Genset Fleet for emergency response and disaster relief in case of natural disasters and extreme weather events in Kashmir.

The 10 Gensets would be stationed in each district for any eventuality as a disaster preparedness measure. These gensets will prove extreme weather condi- added. tions when grid supply gets

Kashmir, Pandurang K. Pole; Secretary, Jal Shakti Depart-Vijay Kumar; Deputy Comcers were present on the oc-

any eventuality.

uninterrupted supply of the

As an immediate mea-

sure, the Government of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir apportioned an amount of Rs 2.00 cr under SDRF during 2019-20 for purchase of Mobile Gensets to meet the critical demand during power outages in emergency situations, besides providing power backup to a wide range of Lift Water Supply Schemes on to be very useful in other a rotational need basis, he

Secretary, Ial partment, M Raju informed the Lt Governor that the new Mobile Gensets from 50 KVA rating to 62.5 KVA are self-standing type provided with essential paraphernalia viz; parking canopies, waterproof camping tents, bedding, Kitchen Sets with LPG cooking arrangements etc. for the operational staff's The Lt Governor directed convenience in order to enable rapid deployment at short notice.

> The DG set carrier vehicles are also provided with GPS trackers to enable supervision by controlling officers from headquarter in real time.

Further, the department has created a transformer bank of 20 distribution transformers of varying capacities as an immediate relief in case of breakdown & troubleshooting.

#### NEWS MAKERS

# Man Nabbed While Trying To Sneak Into Pak To Meet Girlfriend

and their arrest.

A 20-year-old engineering student from Maharashtra was apprehended by the Border Security Force (BSF) in Gujarat's Rann of Kutch while he was trying to sneak into Pakistan on foot to meet a girl he had befriended on social media, officials said on Friday.

han Mohammad Siddiqui, is a resident of Khwajangar in Maharashtra's Osmanabad town, they said. "Siddiqui was held by the BSF on Thursday night and later handed over to the local

The man, identified as Zis-

tendent of Police, Parikshita Rathod, said. Maharashtra number was found abandoned near Dholavira village



found walking towards the border in a bid to enter Pakistan," Rathod added.

police," Kutch-East Superin-According to a police official from Maharashtra, Sid-"Police had issued an alert diqui had left his home in after a motorcycle with the Osmanabad on a motorcycle registration on July 11 to meet the girl in Pakistan as no means of public transport was available due

to the lockdown. "He went to Kutch on his motorcycle to cross the border

and enter Pakistan." he said. According to police sources, after his motorcycle got stuck in the sand, he started walking towards Pakistan.

The police official said that Siddiqui was in touch with a Pakistani girl through social media since the last few months and they were in love

"After his disappearance, his family members had approached the Osmanabad city police station and lodged a

Surjewala said chief whip Mahesh tration of FIR in the matter.

said Rajtilak Roshan, Superintendent of Police, Osmanabad. "Police launched a probe

missing person's complaint,"

and Siddiqui's social media accounts were examined, in which it came to light that he has left home to meet the girl in Pakistan," he said.

Based on his mobile phone records, the cyber wing of the Osmanabad police traced his whereabouts, the official said. He was traced near Kutch

and the details were shared with the Gujarat police, he said. According to another official, the information about Siddiqui was also shared with the BSF

officials and he was detained on Thursday night, just before he was trying to cross the border and enter Pakistan. The Osmanabad

said they have obtained some

the allegations. When the audio voice in it was not his.

Sharma has, however, denied

messages exchanged between Siddiqui and the Pakistani girl. A team of Osmanabad police has left for Kutch to take

his custody and bring him back home, the official said. Meanwhile, a statement issued by the BSF in Gujarat said that after he was caught, Siddiqui told them that he

was in love with a Karachi-

based girl.

"He wanted to go to Pakistan and had used Google Map for navigation. He was apprehended about 1.5 kms short of Indo-Pak international border when he was attempting to cross

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