



Maximum : 33°C SUNSET
Today 07:27 PM
Minimum : 19°C SUNRISE
Humidity : 49% Tomorrow 05:46 AM



News Digest

Twin Grenade Attacks In Shopian

SRINAGAR- Suspected militants carried out two grenade attacks on government forces in South Kashmir's Shopian district on Wednesday. A senior Police officer said that militants' lobbed grenade in Bonbazar area of the south Kashmir township this morning followed by firing on forces, however in this incident no loss of life or injury has been reported. ● P-02

Ac Creates 3 More Secretary Posts

SRINAGAR: The Administrative Council (AC), which met here under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, G C Murmu, accorded sanction to the creation of three posts of Secretary to the Government in the Super Time Scale of Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Service. The creation of these posts will be helpful in assigning ● P-02

Govt Notifies Rules For Domiciles Entry

SRINAGAR: The Government has asked all the authorities competent to issue Domicile Certificates in terms of Jammu and Kashmir Grant of Domicile Certificate (Procedure) Rules, 2020, to enter the details of all such Domicile Certificates which are issued offline into the application ● P-02

CISF Takes Over Leh Airport Security

Leh: The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) on Wednesday took over the security of the Leh airport, the country's highest-altitude commercial aerodrome in the newly created Union Territory of Ladakh. A contingent of 185 CISF personnel will provide round-the-clock, armed security to the strategic and "hypersensitive" ● P-02

2 Teens Killed In Hit-And-Run Accident

Srinagar: Two teenage girls were killed in a hit-and-run accident in Pampore town of south Kashmir's Pulwama district, official sources said Wednesday. Three teenage girls identified as Nazila, Tabin Nazir and Nadiya Rafiq were walking on a road in Tulbagh area of Pampore on Tuesday evening when a speedy vehicle (JK13F-0346) mowed them ● P-02

Raj Bhavan Cancels 'At Home' On Aug 15

Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor G C Murmu will not host 'At Home' function on August 15 at the Raj Bhavan this year in view of coronavirus pandemic. In a statement issued here, an official spokesperson said that 'At Home' function on August 15 hosted by the Raj Bhavan, Srinagar, as per past practice, stands cancelled. "The decision was taken after ● P-02

Minor Drowns In River Jhelum

Srinagar: A minor boy on Wednesday drowned in river Jhelum in the border town of Uri in Baramulla district. 10-year-old Mohammad Moneen of Siliikote was taking a bath in river Jhelum near his relative's house in Gingal area on Wednesday afternoon when he was swept away by the gushing waters, officials said. SHO Uri Mohammad Ashraf said that the rescue operation has ● P-02

Lt Governor GC Murmu Resigns



SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Girish Chandra Murmu on Wednesday tendered his resignation after nine months as the head of administration of the Union Territory. However there was no official word on the development till late on Wednesday.

According to sources, he could be the next Comptroller and Auditor General of India after Rajesh Mehrishi retires this week.

While reports said Murmu has sent his resignation to President Ram Nath Kovind, there was no confirmation whether it has been accepted or rejected.

Meanwhile speculations are rife that the outgoing CAG Rajiv Mehrishi is likely to replace Murmu as new LG of Jammu and Kashmir. Mehrishi is considered to be close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and has also dealt with ● P-02

GOC Briefs LG On Kashmir Situation

SRINAGAR: General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C) Northern Command, Lt Gen Y K Joshi on Wednesday briefed Lieutenant Governor, Girish Chandra Murmu about the prevailing situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

The LG and Lt Gen Joshi discussed about various important issues pertaining to the prevailing security scenario and the overall security management in Jammu and Kashmir, an official spokesperson said.

"Lt Gen Y K Joshi briefed the LG about the security situation in the forward areas and hinterland of J&K and the successful anti-militancy operations being conducted by the Army," he said.

Murmu, he said stressed on the high importance for ● P-02

Another August 5 & People In Kashmir Remain Locked Indoors

SRINAGAR- Curfew-like restrictions remained enforced across Kashmir on Wednesday, the first anniversary of revocation of semi-autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Police and CRPF personnel were deployed in strength all across the Valley, especially Srinagar city and major towns, to keep a lid on any form of protests, even as no one had called for them.

The officials said police vehicles, fitted with public address system, went around localities soon after day break announcing imposition of strict restrictions for combating COVID-19 spread.

"There is a ban on assembly of more than three persons and people are requested not to violate the law and stay indoors," the police said.

Barricades have been set up at hundreds of places in the valley including Srinagar city to regulate movement of essential services and emergencies, while concertina wires have been laid to block some parts of the roads, the officials said.

Authorities in Srinagar had on Monday announced that curfew will be imposed in Srinagar city "in view of inputs about violent protests endangering public life and property as the separatist and Pakistan-sponsored groups were planning to observe 5 August as a Black Day."

However, the order imposing curfew was suddenly ● PAGE 02



Transformation Underway In J&K, Ladakh: Jaishankar

A transformation is underway in Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday on the first anniversary of the Centre's decision to revoke the special status of the region. Taking to Twitter, Jaishankar highlighted application ● P-02

Stop Clampdown In Kashmir: Amnesty

Asking government of India to "urgently stop the protracted clampdown" in Jammu and Kashmir, prominent human rights watchdog Amnesty International on Wednesday demanded release of all political leaders, journalists and activists, besides restoration of high speed internet ● P-02

Press Freedom Violations Unworthy Of A Democracy: RSF

Claiming that the working has been "hell" for journalists in Kashmir for the past year, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on Wednesday slammed government of India over its alleged press freedom violations in Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. "Working has been hell for ● P-02

We Closely Follow Situation In Kashmir: China Says India's Unilateral Move In Kashmir 'Illegal, Invalid'

Press Trust Of India

BEIJING: China on Wednesday hoped that India and Pakistan can "properly" handle their differences through dialogue, improve relations and jointly safeguard peace, stability and development of both the countries and the wider region.

Responding to a question raised by a Pakistani correspon-

Kashmir Annexation Does Not Contribute To Peace: Turkey

The annexation of Jammu and Kashmir does not contribute to peace and stability in the region, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Wednesday on the occasion of the first anniversary of India's decision of revoking the seven-decade-long semi-autonomous status of the Himalayan ● P-02

dent on the completion of one-year of the revocation of special status to Jammu and Kashmir and its bifurcation into ● PAGE 02

CRPF Man, 10 More Die Of Covid-19 In J&K

Observer Monitoring Desk

SRINAGAR: A Paramilitary CRPF man and ten others on Wednesday died of Covid-19 in Jammu and Kashmir, raising the number of fatalities in the Union Territory to 428 since the pandemic breakout, officials said.

Among them, three deaths were reported from Srinagar, two each from Anantnag and Budgam including a CRPF trooper besides one each from Bandipora, Kupwara, Baramulla and Jammu division's Udhampur district.

With these deaths, the toll due to the virus in Kashmir stands at—397 and 31 in Jammu. Official sources said a 43-year-old woman from Ramnagar Udhampur died at ASCOMS (Batra) hospital.

"She was a cancer patient and tested positive for the novel coronavirus subsequently," Regarding the CRPF trooper, they said, he belonged to 176 battalion. He had tested covid-19 negative on July 25 but his X-ray showed bilateral lower pneumonia. He was shifted first to BSF hospital and later to SKIMS Soura where his Covid-19 test was found positive.

"He succumbed due to cardiac arrest," official sources said. They said that a 50-year-old woman from Kupwara died this

90 New Arrivals Among 559 More Test +ive

Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday recorded 559 new coronavirus cases, taking the total number of infected people to 22,955, even as 9 COVID-19 patients died during the last ● P-02

morning at CD hospital, one of the exclusive facilities for the management of the covid-19 patients. Admitted on July 28, the woman was suffering from ● PAGE 02

25,000 Non-Local Workers Return To J&K

Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR: A total of 25,000 non-Kashmiri migrant workers, out of the 40,000, who had left Jammu and Kashmir after the coronavirus outbreak, have returned to the Union Territory for work, a top official said on Wednesday.

A total of 3.2 lakh people, including the migrant workers, arrived in Jammu and Kashmir from outside since the nationwide lockdown came into effect on March 25, and all of them were subjected to COVID-19 tests.

"A total of 25,000 non-Kashmiri migrant workers, who had gone to their respective states after the coronavirus outbreak, have returned

PM Attends Ram Temple 'Bhoomi Pujan'

Wait Of Centuries Has Ended: Modi

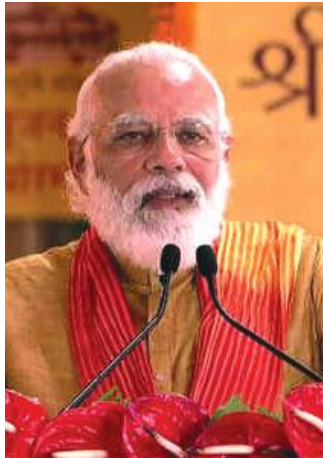
Press Trust Of India

AYODHYA- The wait of centuries has ended, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after performing the groundbreaking ceremony here for a temple at the spot where many devout Hindus believe Lord Ram was born.

Across the country, people remained glued to their television sets as Modi performed rituals at the Ram Janmabhoomi, the site of a bitter Hindu-Muslim conflict that lasted decades before being settled by the Supreme Court last year.

Beginning his speech with Jai Siya Ram, the prime minister told the gathering that a grand temple will now be built for Ram Lalla, the infant Ram, who had been living in a temporary tent for years.

Many people made sacrifices for the Ram temple. I pay my respects to all of them, the prime minister said in the speech that followed the laying of



the foundation for the Ram temple.

He also released a postage stamp to mark the event, an occasion which is also being seen as an ideological victory of the BJP over its rivals.

Some of the leaders of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, ● PAGE 02

A PUJA HAS BEEN GOING ON NON-stop for three days. The 'Ram darbar' has been decorated. A replica of the 'shila' (foundation stone) has been prepared and it will be sent to Ayodhya along with other material,"

Govt Curbs Foil NC Meet

Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR- A meeting of some political parties called by Jammu and Kashmir's veteran leader Farooq Abdullah on Wednesday to discuss the situation arising out of the abrogation of Article 370 provisions a year ago could not be held due to strict restrictions imposed by authorities, his National Conference said.

Abdullah had invited leaders of several political parties to his residence on Gupkar Road to chalk out a joint political strategy for restoration of the special status through democratic means.

National Conference MP from Anantnag in south Kashmir Hassan Masoodi and PDP's Rajya Sabha member Fayaz Mir were turned away from Gupkar Road citing re-

BJP Members Celebrate, Hoist Tricolour

The BJP's Kashmir unit on Wednesday celebrated the first anniversary of the revocation of special status of Jammu and Kashmir and accused those protesting the constitutional changes of being sympathisers of the ISIS, BJP ● P-02

strictions imposed by the authorities due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the district, NC leaders said.

CPI(M) leader M Y Tarigami, NC MP from Baramulla in north Kashmir Akbar Lone and Abdullah's nephew Muzaffar Shah, who heads the ● PAGE 02

We Want People To Become Their Own 'Bhagyavidhaata': LG

JAMMU: The Jammu and Kashmir administration will focus on strengthening and empowering panchayati raj institutions in the coming days to address issues of misgovernance and corruption, Lieutenant Governor Girish Chander Murmu has said.

Effective implementation of the three-tier panchayati raj system will help "mainstreaming of the public participation" in the decision-making process and development of the Union Territory, he said.

"The implementation of panchayati raj system is our biggest target now. We are going to do it. It is our mission. Empowering this setup is our biggest dream. We will ensure its implementation," Murmu told PTL. ● P-02

Auqib Javed

GHULAM HASSAN who held the grand old party National Conference's fort during Kashmir's tumultuous years couldn't fathom the last summer's summons from a nearby police station in downtown Srinagar. Even as the top party leaders were already detained, he thought it was out of question to hound those who always risked their lives to prepare the political turf for New Delhi in Kashmir.

"And yet," Hassan recalls, a year after the summons, "I was told that I'm no longer a free man for the sake of law and order in Kashmir."

As votaries of Kashmir's special status, Hassan's tribe was jailed and released only after they "signed a bond of silence".

"We've been flag-bearers of the idea of India in Kashmir and for

Article 370: A Year On, Mess In Kashmir's Mainstream

that, we've faced social boycott, assassination bids and lost our colleagues to militant gun," the emotive NC leader says.

"All those sacrifices, however, were rendered useless last year when we were treated as separatists."

These political detentions took place after New Delhi revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bi-furcated the erstwhile state into two union territories—Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh on 5 August, 2019.

The decision was a huge setback for local politicians, who from the years were making Article 370 as their 'political bible'.

Article 370 and 35-A had granted semi-autonomous status to J&K, allowing a separate constitution and



state flag, the power to legislate in all matters except finance, defence, foreign affairs and commu-

nications; and guarantee property rights to residents.

Following their removal, the gov-

ernment imposed military clampdown for over 4 months. The region was completely cut-off from the

outside world—mobile phones, internet and other communications were blocked.

Several political leaders, separatists and youth across the erstwhile state were arrested. Many mainstream political leaders were detained in Hotel Centaur, which was later declared as a sub-jail.

Although many politicians have been released since then, over a dozen leaders are still under house detention, including the former BJP ally and ex-chief minister, Mehbooba Mufti.

As Hassan terms it, the crack-

down on Delhi's traditional allies in the region has "dented the image of the mainstream politics" in J&K.

"The BJP government's posturing is telling," Hassan says. "They

no longer need us anytime soon. If they can jail PM Modi's 'younger brother', Sajjad Lone, and release him from house detention just 5 days before first anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370, then one can only imagine about others."

Political Steney

Analysts and political commentators in Kashmir believe that the ruling BJP government wants to run Kashmir from New Delhi only.

Sheikh Showkat Hussain, a political analyst and law professor, believes that New Delhi has used the "so called mainstream leadership" in J&K as "Steney"—only needed when its use arises.

"It seems they [BJP] have felt that the local mainstream camp doesn't come up with their expectations despite nurturing and pampering them for decades," Prof Hussain told Kashmir Observer. "These leaders are being punished as ● PAGE 02

Lt Governor GC Murmu Resigns

Kashmir affairs as he held the post of home secretary at the Centre for nearly two years after the NDA government came to power. Murmu was appointed as the first L-G of Jammu and Kashmir last October after the formation of the new Union Territory under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. His resignation came on the day the ruling BJP commemorated the first anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, which scrapped Jammu and Kashmir's special status and divided it into two Union Territories. Earlier on Wednesday, Army commander of Northern Command had called on Murmu and discussed the overall security management of the Union Territory.

Murmu is a 1985 batch Indian Administrative Service officer of the Gujarat cadre. He also served as the principal secretary to PM Narendra Modi during his tenure as the chief minister of Gujarat.

Another August 5 & People...

withdrawn on Tuesday evening. An official spokesman said the decision to revoke the curfew order was taken as Tuesday passed off without any untoward incident.

Transformation Underway...

of progressive laws, delivery of social justice, empowerment and support for vulnerable sections and rolling out of development projects as part of the transformation. The external affairs minister listed expansion of education and employment opportunities and advancement of women's rights as other takeaways. "A transformation underway in Jammu & Kashmir and in Ladakh," he said.

On August 5 last year, the Centre announced its decision to withdraw special powers of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcate the state into two union territories.

Stop Clampdown In Kashmir...

in the Union Territory. The human rights body also asked government to deconstruct prisons and launch a prompt and independent investigation into the attacks on journalists in Jammu & Kashmir, a statement issued by AI said today. "Over the last one year the Government of India has been systematically dismantling all avenues for justice for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. With zero representation, protracted internet restrictions, arbitrary use of some of India's most stringent laws, verbal orders of detention and crippling of the local media – most of this disproportionately higher in Kashmir - it's been a complete year since we have heard the people of Jammu and Kashmir speak," said Avinash Kumar, Executive Director, Amnesty International India. On 5 August 2019, the Government of India unilaterally revoked Article 370 of the Indian Constitution which guaranteed special autonomy to Jammu & Kashmir and bifurcated the state into two separate union territories, bringing the region under the direct control of the central government.

"All these amendments and changes were made amidst a complete communication clampdown, restrictions on movement and mass detentions in the region," Amnesty statement said. The rights body further said that it acknowledges that the Government of India may have legitimate security concerns which may merit reasonable restrictions on the right to freedom of expression in certain circumstances. "But these restrictions must always be limited in duration and demonstrably proportionate as set out under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which India is a state party," the Amnesty handout read.

"However, in an absolute violation of India's international obligations, the entire population of Kashmir has been deprived of their right to freedom of expression and opinion through protracted communication restrictions since the last one year. This has been compounded by a censored media, continuing detention of political leaders, arbitrary restrictions due to the pandemic with little to no redressal," it added. The International rights body also accused government of restricting flow of information from the region through use of repressive laws such as the Jammu & Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)

"Amnesty International India documented physical attacks on, harassment and intimidation of at least 18 journalists since 5 August 2019. The draconian media policy introduced by the government in the region which openly aims to create "a sustained narrative on the functioning of the government in media" by checking on "anti-national activities, fake news and plagiarism" has further extinguished independent media in the region," the Amnesty statement said. It further added that after gathering information from various digital and print media, Amnesty International India has found that at least 70 political leaders - cutting across a wide political spectrum - were placed under administrative detention.

"While most of those arrested have been subsequently released, many continue to be in detention on the basis of verbal orders or repressive laws such as the PSA. This is in complete violation of their fair trial rights guaranteed by the ICCPR and Indian Constitution," the handout read. "Their release, made possible through signing of bonds that restrict them from indulging in any political activity including making political speeches, is also as problematic as their detentions. Under international law, political speech cannot be prohibited unless it constitutes a direct threat to public order, which has not been adequately demonstrated by the Indian government in the orders accessed by Amnesty International India," it added.

The rights watchdog also alleged that the government policies during the COVID-19 pandemic have further marginalised the people of Jammu & Kashmir and severely affected their access to justice. Between 2016 and 2019, Amnesty International said, it has a found that more than 300 habeas corpus petitions were filed against unlawful detentions before the Srinagar wing of the J&K High Court.

"However, as on 4 August 2020, only 11 habeas corpus petitions have been filed. This sharp fall may be attributed to the punitive emergency measures invoked by the government to curb the COVID-19 pandemic but also the lack of hi-speed internet required for uninterrupted online hearings," the Amnesty statement said.

It also expressed concern over the closure of the State Human Rights Commission along with six other commissions, including the State Commission for Protection of Women and Child Rights, saying the move has further left the people of Jammu & Kashmir with absolutely no redressal for their human rights violations. "The Government's ruthless attempts to create a public opinion of 'normalcy' while curbing the freedom of independent press, imprisoning the entire political leadership, arbitrarily arresting those likely to dissent and imposing communication restrictions have usurped the voice of the region," Executive Director, Amnesty International India. He demanded restoration of 4G mobile internet, end of criminal investigations against journalists under PSA and UAPA and withdrawal of the new media policy, immediate and unconditionally release all persons, including political leaders, allegedly deprived of their freedom solely for the peaceful enjoyment of their rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, belief or equality and non-discrimination as they should not have been detained in the first place. "A rights-respecting government must know that an end to the abuses in Jammu & Kashmir cannot come without the involvement of its people," Kumar added.

Press Freedom Violations...

journalists in Kashmir for the past year," said Daniel Bastard, the head of RSF's Asia-Pacific desk, in a statement issued here.

"Drastic controls on information, obstructing the dissemination of articles and videos, intimidation by the security forces in the field, every kind of judicial harassment and violation of the confidentiality of sources – the list of press freedom violations by the Indian authorities in Kashmir is unworthy of a democracy. If Narendra Modi's government maintains these policies, it will go down in history as the one that deprived 8 million citizens of reliable news and information in mid-pandemic," he added.

Bastard said that on the first anniversary of revocation of J&K's special status, RSF has examined the current state of press freedom in this northern territory with the help of its journalists.

"In the light of their alarming accounts, RSF calls on the Indian government to immediately change its policy or go down in history as a regime that deprived the region's 8 million inhabitants of reliable news and information at the height of a pandemic," he said.

The head of RSF's Asia-Pacific desk also said that the streets of Srinagar, the Kashmiri capital, were completely deserted this morning and

that the only human presence were the paramilitaries who are occupying the city and patrolling all of Jammu and Kashmir. "For Kashmir's citizens, this is a sad reminder of what happened a year ago, on 5 August 2019, when it became one of the world's biggest news and information black holes, with all forms of communication – Internet, mobile data, TV and fixed-line telephone – suddenly suspended. The Kashmir Valley, from which foreign reporters had already been barred for several months, was cut off from the world. As RSF pointed out in February, New Delhi has succeeded in imposing the longest e-curfew in history," the RSF said. The International journalists' body also cited example of south Kashmir journalist Qazi Shibli of the prevailing situation in the Valley in which journalists were being harassed.

"The police confirmed yesterday that he is being held in Srinagar prison but gave no reason for his arrest. He was released in April after being detained provisionally for nine months for nothing more than a tweet," the RSF statement said. "Aside from this kind of police harassment, Kashmir's journalists are subjected to far more pernicious curbs on their freedom, starting with the suspension of high-speed mobile Internet," it added. The RSF quoted several journalists working in Kashmir complaining about harassment by government forces, and difficulties in performing professional duties in absence of high speed internet. "There have been incidents in which reporters and photojournalists were roughed up by cops although they were just doing their jobs as journalists," Srinagar-based freelancer Syed Ali Safvi told RSF. "Harassing reporters by summoning them to police stations poses a serious threat to the free flow of information."

Safwat Zargar, who reports for the Scroll.in news portal, told RSF that the very idea that journalists have to go to a government facility to use the Internet at a time when people around the world are working from home and practicing physical distancing is "just terrible." "This Internet ban not only jeopardizes the lives of these journalists but also puts their families at risk," he said. "And the absurdity is that the government wants us journalists to be thankful that they created this centre."

We Closely Follow Situation...

two union territories–Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh–Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said peaceful coexistence between India and Pakistan serves the fundamental interests of both the countries and the international community. "China closely follows the situation in the Kashmir region. Our position is consistent and clear. This issue is a dispute left over from history between Pakistan and India. That is an objective fact established by UN Charter, Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements between Pakistan and India," he said. "Any unilateral change to the status quo is illegal and invalid. This issue should be properly resolved peacefully through dialogue and consultation between the parties concerned," he told a regular foreign ministry briefing here. China last year had called the Indian move as "unacceptable." "Pakistan and India are neighbours that cannot be moved away. Peaceful coexistence serves the fundamental interests of both and the common aspiration of the international community," "China hopes that they can properly handle the differences through dialogue, improve relations and jointly safeguard peace, stability and development of both countries and the wider region," the spokesman added.

The comments by the spokesman came amid the border face-off between India and China in eastern Ladakh.

Kashmir Annexation Does...

region. "It is observed that practices implemented over the last year – since the abolishment of the article [370] of the Indian constitution that granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir -- have further complicated the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and not served to peace and stability in the region," said Hami Aksoy in a statement. Aksoy further reiterated Turkey's call for dialogue to resolve the issue under the UN charters and resolutions. On Aug. 5 last year, the Indian government scrapped the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and split the state into two Union Territories. The move was followed by a communication blockade and a harsh crackdown during which thousands of people, including three former Chief Ministers were detained.

GOC Briefs LG On Kashmir...

maintaining close and effective synergy between the Army and other Security Forces in combating anti-militant activities, besides dealing with any emergent situations in an effective manner for maintaining peace and harmony in J&K. "He commended the role being played by the Army for ensuring a secure environment for the people of J&K and the comprehensive measures being taken by the Security Forces in containing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in the UT," the official spokesperson said. General Officer Commanding (GOC) 15 Corps, Lieutenant General, B.S Raju was also present on the occasion.

Wait Of Centuries Has...

including former deputy prime minister L K Advani were not at among the 175 people invited to the venue, with the organizers keeping the guest list short because of the threat of COVID-19. Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust head Nriyta Gopal Das were on the dais along with the PM, consecrating the very first bricks that will go into building the temple.

Sending out the message that "Ram is everywhere, Ram belongs to all", Modi said the temple symbolises India's rich heritage and will be an inspiration to all of humanity. Despite efforts to eradicate Lord Ram's existence, he lives in our hearts and is the basis of our culture, Modi said. Citing Lord Ram's message, Modi said the more powerful India gets, the more it will be loved and remain peaceful. "Social harmony was the core principle of Lord Ram's governance," the prime minister said. The construction of the Ram temple is an instrument to unite the country, he said, adding that it will lift the economy of the entire region. "We have to join stones for the construction of Ram temple with mutual love, brotherhood," he said, asserting that everyone's sentiments have to be taken care of.

The groundbreaking in Ayodhya was marked by smaller events elsewhere – from the blowing of a conch at a jewellery shop beyond the barricades in Ayodhya itself to more elaborate rituals in Delhi's Chhatrapur temple complex. Devotees started arriving there around 6 am, just after the morning puja ended, temple's administrator Kishor Chawla said. "A puja has been going on non-stop for three days. The 'Ram darbar' has been decorated. A replica of the 'shila' (foundation stone) has been prepared and it will be sent to Ayodhya along with other material," he said. President Ram Nath Kovind said the foundation-laying ceremony defines India's spirit of harmony.

Being built in tune with law, it defines India's spirit of social harmony and people's zeal. It will be a testimony to ideals of RamRajya and a symbol of modern India," he tweeted. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said Ram is the ultimate embodiment of supreme human values. "Ram is love, he can never appear in hatred. Ram is compassion, he can never appear in cruelty. Ram is justice, he can never appear in injustice," he said. The prime minister arrived in Ayodhya in a helicopter and was received by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He offered prayers at the Hanumangarhi temple before travelling the Ram Jannabhoomi site, where he first prayed before the deity of Ram Lalla. He also planted a parijat (Indian night jasmine) sapling, before the bhoomi puja began.

Lord Ram revered in many countries like Indonesia, temple will inspire humanity: PM Modi Lord Ram is revered in several countries, including Indonesia which has the largest Muslim population, and the temple here will serve as an inspiration for the entire humanity till eternity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday.

Addressing a gathering after the ground-breaking ceremony of the temple at the spot where many devout Hindus believe Lord Ram was born, he listed the Ramayanas popular in countries such as Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Nepal. He said references to Lord Ram are also found in Iran and China, and 'Ram Kathas' are popular in several countries. There are so many countries in the world where Lord Ram is worshipped and people consider themselves attached to him. The country with the world's largest Muslim population is Indonesia and even there various Ramayanas are popular and Ram is revered, Modi said.

In Sri Lanka, the story of Ramayana by the name 'Janki Haran' is told, while Nepal's ties with Ram are connected through 'Mata Janki', the prime minister said. "Like this, there are several countries where Ram is part of their beliefs and past," he said. "I believe that the Ram temple to be built here will inspire the entire humanity till eternity," Modi said. He noted that it is important that the message of Lord Ram, Ram temple and of our age-old tradition reaches the entire world. Keeping

this in mind, the 'Ram circuit' is being made in the country, Modi said.

Govt Curbs Foil NC Meet...

Awami National Conference, were stopped at their residences and not allowed to go out, they said. Former chief minister and Abdullah's son Omar Abdullah took to Twitter to say that the authorities in Kashmir did not allow the meeting to take place. Omar Abdullah, who is the vice president of the NC, said the Gupkar Road – leading to his residence and that of his father – was sealed by the authorities. "One year on, this is Gupkar road today – police vehicles opposite our gates, concertina wire strung across the road at regular intervals and no vehicles allowed. My father had called a meeting of leaders of MAINSTREAM parties to deliberate on the current situation," Omar Abdullah said on Twitter, along with two pictures of the deserted road.

The former chief minister said, "Clearly the meeting is not being allowed to go ahead. The BJP gets to announce a 15 day celebration to mark 5th Aug and a handful of us aren't allowed to meet in my father's lawn. So much for BJP national leaders wondering why there is no political activity." The NC leader said the authorities were "still too afraid" to allow them to meet or carry out any normal political activity. "One year later the authorities are still too afraid to allow us to meet much less carry out any normal political activity. This fear speaks volumes about the true situation on the ground in Kashmir," he said in another tweet. The senior Abdullah had called a similar meeting a day before the Centre's move last year where the leaders of the valley-based political parties came up with a 'Gupkar Declaration' in which they resolved to fight against any attempts to abrogate the constitutional provisions that guaranteed the special status to Jammu and Kashmir or any move to trifurcate the state using democratic means. Meanwhile, PDP president Mehbooba Mufti's daughter Iltija Mufti said "prolonged enforced silence" would not "suppress" the emotions of the people of Kashmir forever. "A year ago we witnessed how a majoritarian govt mutilated and robbed JK in broad daylight. Seasons may have changed but the betrayal will never be forgiven or forgotten. Prolonged enforced silence wont suppress emotions forever," Iltija posted on her mother's Twitter handle which she has been using since Mehbooba was taken into custody in August last year

BJP Members Celebrate...

leaders and workers unfurled the national flag at the party office and distributed sweets. "We are celebrating the completion of one year of abrogation of Article 370 (provisions) and the positive changes that it brought in Jammu and Kashmir," BJP leader Altaf Thakur told reporters at the party office in Jawahar Nagar here.

Thakur said the abrogation of Article 370 provisions of the Constitution, which accorded special status to Jammu and Kashmir, had brought about many positive changes and put an end to stone pelting in Kashmir. "There used to be stone pelting during encounters that has stopped. There used to be ISIS flag, Pakistani flag...that has stopped. That is what we are celebrating," he added.

On some political parties in Kashmir observing 'Black Day' on Wednesday, Thakur said they were sympathisers of the ISIS. "Those who are in love with black are sympathisers of ISIS... They should think what they are supporting," he said.

CRPF Man, 10 More Die...

pneumonia with hypertension and hypothyroidism, they said. "She was on ventilator and had a sudden cardiopulmonary arrest," they added. Among others, the fatalities include a 70-year-old from Serhama Bijbehara, a 55-year-old man from Pattan Baramulla, a 65-year-old man from S K Colony Anantnag and a 50-year-old from Srinagar, the officials said. The woman from Sirhama Bijbehara, a surgical patient was admitted on July 25, died at SKIMS today while the 65-year-old resident from SK Colony area of the south Kashmir district, admitted on August 2, died last night at the tertiary care hospital. Regarding the 55-year-old from Pattan, officials said that he was a resident of Goshugh area and was suffering from bilateral pneumonia. He was admitted to SMHS hospital on July 27 and died on today. Also, sample of a 50-year-old man from Srinagar's Bemina area who also died at SMHS hospital has returned positive posthumously. Srinagar district with 141 deaths tops the list followed by Baramulla (74), Budgam (33), Kulgam (29), Anantnag (28), Shopian (23), Pulwama (24), Kupwara (22), Jammu (21), Bandipora (16), Ganderbal (7), two each in Rajouri, Doda and Udhampur besides one each in Ramban, Samba, Poonch, and Kathua. (With GNS inputs)

90 New Arrivals Among...

24 hours in the union territory, officials said. "Nine people, who were COVID-19 positive, have died over the past 24 hours in Jammu and Kashmir," the officials said. They said while one death took place in Jammu region, eight were reported from the Kashmir valley. The coronavirus death toll in the union territory has now risen to 426 of which 395 are from the valley and 31 from Jammu region, they said.

Of the new coronavirus cases, 96 are from Jammu region while 463 are from the valley, they said. There are now 7285 active cases in the union territory, while 15,244 patients have recovered from the infection, they added. The cases detected on Wednesday included 90 people who had returned to the union territory recently.

At 160, Srinagar district in central Kashmir recorded the highest number of positive cases followed by 105 in Pulwama District of south Kashmir.

25,000 Non-Local Workers ...

trains for the transportation of the migrant workers. Jammu and Kashmir has carried out COVID-19 tests of these 3.2 lakh people, including the migrant workers, who have returned to the UT. Of these, 29,963 had arrived at the Jammu airport till August 4 and 48,680 in Srinagar airport. A total of 41,680 arrived at the railway station in Jammu while the rest came by road. "Jammu and Kashmir is the only state which is carrying out COVID-19 test under the real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) method," spokesperson of the Jammu and Kashmir government Rohit Kansal said.

"We are doing the highest testing and our mortality is lowest," he said. Jammu and Kashmir has so far done a total of 6.63 lakh testing. Testing for per million people is 50,853. The mortality rate in the Union Territory is 1.9 per cent. In Jammu and Kashmir, so far 22,396 people have tested positive for COVID-19 of which 14,856 have recovered. A total of 417 patients have succumbed to the deadly virus in the UT.

We Want People To Become...

He said three-tier panchayati raj institutions – district chairpersons, block chairpersons and village-level panch and sarpanch -- have the potential to create a "new political power-cum-governance structure". It will be an alternative model of governance and development and bring peace in Jammu and Kashmir. "It gives people a sense of belonging. The people in local areas becomes their own 'bhagyaavidhaata'," he said. They will keep a tab on governance, administration and development, and bridge the gap between the government and the people, he said. Elections to panchayati raj institutions are not held regularly and thousands of vacancies remain to be filled. Since assuming office, Lieutenant Governor Murmu has taken a host of measures to strengthen the panchayati raj system. On August 4, Murmu approved the creation of Block Development Fund of Rs 25 lakh which will be at the disposal of block development council chairpersons.

The administration last week announced a life insurance cover of Rs 25 lakh each to all elected members of panchayati raj institutions and urban local bodies of the union territory in case of death due to a militancy-related incident. The decision is aimed at strengthening the grassroots democracy by providing a sense of security to the elected members of local bodies who are under constant threat from militants. In this regard, the government on December 19 last year accorded sanction for paying Rs 15,000 per month emoluments to chairpersons of Block Development Councils. The BDC chairpersons will get Rs 13,000 honorarium, Rs 1,500 travel allowance and Rs 500 per month as telephone, mobile usage charges. The government also increased the monthly honorarium of sarpanch from Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,000 per month.

Last month, the administration amended rules to give block development council chairpersons a status equivalent to that of an Army brigadier. According to the warrant of precedence issued by the Hospitality and Protocol Department of Jammu and Kashmir, BDC chairpersons have been placed at serial number 28. They are placed alongside district magistrates, district and sessions judge, major heads of depart-

ments, presidents of municipal committees and municipal councils and officers of the rank of brigadier.

Article 370: A Year On, Mess...

they failed to contain the resistance in Kashmir. But we can't say they've been forsaken forever. Probably, there was dispute on degree of collaboration. New Delhi wants absolute collaboration in Kashmir." Hussain argues that Gol has used the regional parties whenever it needs them, and the local unionists were always willing to be used. "Centre's stance towards Kashmiri politicians has changed now," the professor said. "They either want them to work on their terms and conditions, or simply render them useless."

'We all feel betrayed'

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)'s Waheed Para agrees with the arguments of Hussain, saying that New Delhi has erased its 70 years of investment in Kashmir. "We're also trying to understand now what has been our role since decades," Parra told Kashmir Observer. "We all feel betrayed and think who we are, and where is our space." Since last one year, the PDP youth president says, BJP has achieved nothing in J&K, and has only pushed people to the wall.

'Delhi Can't Erase History'

However, NC spokesman, Imran Nabi Dar, believes that the mainstream politics is trying its bit despite facing hounding and detentions. "Detention is the part of politics," Dar told Kashmir Observer. "And that doesn't mean parties have no future in J&K. We're fighting for restoration of special status. New Delhi can't erase history."

'All Politics Is Local'

Prominent political analyst, Prof. Siddiq Wahid, believes that New Delhi can't rule directly on J&K without local politicians. "BJP feels it can afford to be arrogant because of the lack of any real challenge to the majoritarian politics that they have introduced in India," Prof. Wahid told Kashmir Observer. "But, as the saying goes, 'all politics is local'; so domination is not as easy as Delhi thinks if they go against this logic." However, the former vice chancellor of IUST doesn't see bright future for local politicians, unless they're able to be the "definers" of politics in Kashmir.

'Mainstream wiped out'

Senior Srinagar-based scribe, Rashid Maqbool, asserts the so-called mainstream politics has been completely wiped out in a single move post 5 August "by the power which has created it over 70 years". "But now," Maqbool told Kashmir Observer, "New Delhi is desperate to re-start political process in J&K, just like it was in 1995, when it brought back Dr. Farooq Abdullah. But now see the fate of the man!"

Maqbool feels that Gol might be fed up with its old allies and wants to create a new breed of "yes men" in Kashmir.

'End of Soft Separatism'

Senior journalist Riyaz Malik echoes the views of his colleague, Rashid Maqbool. "Be it NC's Autonomy or PDP's Self Rule, everything was smashed down by 5 August decision," Malik, who edits the prominent Urdu daily published from Srinagar, told Kashmir Observer. Malik says the "soft separatism" politics has run its course in the valley now.

"Revocation of special status was an actual loss for local political parties and its revival is the only reason they can be relevant again," he says. "Local parties can't do politics in Kashmir without special status."

Shaky Ground

Even as some unionist leaders have broken their silence recently, their party foot-soldiers don't seem much keen after passing through a harrowing time since last summer.

"Lip service apart, Kashmir's mainstream politics is in deep mess due to Delhi's aggression," Hassan, the NC man from Downtown Srinagar, says.

"Unless government of India restores pre-August 5 position in J&K, nobody is going to take us seriously on ground."

Twin Grenade Attacks...

Soon after the attack, government forces cordoned off the area to nab the attackers. However, when the search operation was in progress, militants hurled another grenade towards the state forces, a police official told local news agency GNS. However, no one was injured in the attack. The search operation was in progress in the area when the last reports came in.

Ac Creates 3 More Secretary...

charges of some departments to the officers belonging to the Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Service which will help in effective public delivery of services and further strengthen the resolve of Government in providing effective and efficient administration.

Govt Notifies Rules For...

/portal simultaneously to ensure accuracy in the data collection, real time monitoring as also avoid chances of any misuse. An order issued here by the General Administration Department in this regard said, "The matter has been reviewed and keeping in consideration the requirement for capturing of data of Domicile Certificates, it has been decided that the Competent Authorities shall enter the details of the certificates issued manually for which the portal is being enabled." As per the Order, the applicants can apply for grant of Domicile Certificates both physically or through electronic mode by applying online on the portal www.jk.gov.in/jkservices and the Competent Authorities can also issue the certificates manually as well as electronically.

CISF Takes Over Leh Airport...

airport, located at 3,256 metres above sea level, a senior officer of the paramilitary force said. The Kushok Bakula Rimpochee Airport, operated by the Airports Authority of India (AAI), is the 64th civil airport to be brought under the cover of the CISF. It was being guarded by the local police till now. Ladakh became a UT on October 31 after the central government on August 5 last year revoked the special status given to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The CISF, the 1.62 lakh personnel strong paramilitary, is designated as the national civil aviation security force. A formal induction ceremony was held at the airport that was attended by CISF Director General (DG) Rajesh Ranjan, its special DG (airports) M A Ganapathy and airport director Sonam Norbu among others. Norbu handed over a ceremonial key of the airport to CISF Deputy Commandant and chief airport security officer Sanket Gaikwar, the officer said. DG Ranjan, the CISF officer said, "emphasised that coordinated efforts are to be made by all government agencies and stakeholders to ensure security of the Leh airport."

Ranjan also asked his personnel to ensure "zero error" security at the facility. On Tuesday, he had inaugurated barracks for the CISF personnel who will be posted to guard the facility and he reviewed other operational systems of the airport. Air India, Vistara, GoAir and SpiceJet operate commercial passenger flights between Leh and Delhi. Commercial operations began at this "tourist intensive" airport in 1978.

A new passenger terminal is being built here at a cost of Rs 480 crore and is expected to be completed by September next year.

The CISF contingent will provide 24x7 armed cover to the facility and will check passengers while approaching the facility, at the terminal gates followed by comprehensive checks and body frisking ahead of boarding a flight.

2 Teens Killed In Hit-And-Run...

down, official sources said. The driver of the vehicle fled away from the spot leaving the three young girls in a pool of blood. The injured girls were removed by locals to the sub-district hospital Pamphore for treatment. However, one of the girls Nazila succumbed to her injuries. Another teen Tabin Nazir breathed her last at SMHS Hospital, while Nadika Rafiq is being treated upon there. A police official told a local news agency KNT that a hunt has been launched to nab the driver. "A team has been constituted to identify the owner of the vehicle and he will be arrested," he added.

Raj Bhavan Cancels 'At Home'...

assessing the current circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and keeping in view the compliance of all healthcare protocols and SOPs notified by the Central and the UT Government," the official spokesperson added.

Minor Drowns In River Jhelum...

been launched. "We have even told the NHPC to close down the dam so that his body can be retrieved," he said.

Engineering Wings Reorganized For Quality, Cost Control in Projects

- A dozen in-house engineering wings in various departments abolished; SIDCO, SICOP to stop work for others
- PWD, PHE, RDD and PDD to be the main construction deptts

SRINAGAR, AUGUST 05: In a decision with significant structural change in Engineering Wings of various departments and their working, the Administrative Council which met here today under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, G C Murmu, sanctioned the merger/subsuming of in-house engineering wings in various departments/organizations like Tourism, School, Higher and Technical Education, Agriculture Production, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry & Fisheries, Floriculture, Hospitality & Protocol, Estates, DMRRR, Forest, Transport and SKIMS in PW(R&B) Department with effect from 1.12.2020.

The Administrative Council in its decision directed that the user departments whose engineering wings are being subsumed shall, however, retain the power of prioritization and identification of works and their administrative approvals.

Primarily, this decision will bring better quality, faster execution and lower costs in construction projects.



The decision is aimed at addressing issues being faced by various existing in-house engineering wings which broadly include shifting of focus of departments from their core objective to construction activities, mushrooming of engineering wings, inconsistency in the estimation processes due to unrevised SoPs, absence of uniform standards & procedures and poor implementation.

The Administrative Council further directed constitution of

a Committee of concerned Administrative Secretaries along with domain experts to work out modalities for merger/repatriation/deputation of staff from the subsumed wings to PWD, Jal Shakti or PDD as the case may be. The Committee is required to submit its recommendation by 15.09.2020.

The Administrative Council also decided to constitute a Committee under the chairmanship of Administrative Secretary, Public Works to suggest

restructuring of PWD (R&B) with additional units/wings/verticals to cater to the needs of regional units and specialized wings. The Committee shall also examine the possibility of delineating the boundaries of the engineering divisions which will be co-terminus with the boundaries of districts.

Taking note of inconsistency in the existing norms/procedures/SOPs governing the aspect of accord of administrative approvals, estimation,

tendering, work allotment and procurement of material, the Administrative Council has asked for constitution of a Committee under the chairmanship of Administrative Secretary, Planning, to suggest reforms in the existing norms/procedures/SOPs and submit a draft SOP by 30.09.2020.

Further, the Administrative Council also decided that the mandate of specialized wings of SIDCO and SICOP shall be clearly delineated and these wings shall restrict their activities to their mandate.

Taking cognizance of HRM issues of engineering wings having been adversely impacted by issues of ad-hoc promotions, non-finalization of seniorities and outdated recruitment rules affecting career progression, the Administrative Council decided to constitute a Committee to revisit all HRM related issues concerning engineering departments. The Committee shall submit its report along with its recommendations by 15.10.2020.

Ladakh administration unveils transfer policy

Srinagar: Nearly nine months after re-organisation of the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir, the administration of Ladakh has unveiled a policy for effecting transfers of employees in the Union Territory.

Under the new policy, the administration of Ladakh UT has delegated powers to Chief Executive Councillors of two Hill Councils for effecting transfers of 12502 district, divisional and district cadre pots.

Notwithstanding the delegation of powers, the UT administration can transfer of officers/officials of any cadre, level, department, in the interest of administration.

It also reserves the right to modify, cancel or put in abeyance any transfer order made by any authority, "in the interest of administration".

Under the policy, the respective CECs with the prior approval of their executive council have sole powers to effect transfers of officials holding 9182 identified district cadre posts.

The respective CECs can also effect transfers of officials holding 2193 divisional cadre level posts identified under the policy with the prior approval of their executive council.

However, inter-district transfers in respect of all divisional cadre posts can be made by the director/ divisional head of department, the policy states.

They will also be empowered to effect transfers at divisional level for other than 2193 posts identified in the policy.

According to the document the UT administration will have powers to make transfers of officials holding UT cadre post.

Under the policy, the CECs with prior approval of their executive council will have powers to effect transfers of officers holding identified 1127 posts of UT cadre.

The directors and HODs have also been empowered to effect inter-district transfers in respect of level-8 to level-10A posts of UT cadre.

COVID-19: Jammu takes lead over Kashmir in fight against deadly pandemic

Officials say timely contact tracing, cooperation from people helped ensure effective fight against virus

Jammu: The Jammu province of the Union Territory has so far successfully managed to prevent the deadly COVID-19 from spreading as less number of cases and deaths compared to Kashmir province has been recorded in the region from past four months of the pandemic.

Only 5104 cases out of the total 22,396 cases detected in the Union Territory till August 04 evening were recorded in the Jammu province as per the data available.

J&K has recorded over 415 deaths due to the virus while only 30 among them have occurred in the Jammu province.

Of 30 deaths in Jammu province, 21 have been recorded in the winter capital of the Union Territory alone, the data further revealed.

In Jammu province, several districts have managed to contain the spread of virus further after a few districts of Jammu province witnessed a spike in the number of COVID cases.

District Magistrate Poonch, Rahul Yadav says that the battle against COVID19 is fought on multi-fronts. "Timely aggressive contact tracing, strict enforcement of restrictions wherever required and public support are basic things to combat the virus," DM Poonch said.

He also said that awareness among the people is another basic need, which helps in containing the spread of the virus.

Yadav further stated that co-operation from the public is of most importance because in the end its people who have to follow the precautions to keep this virus away from their village and keep their families safe.

Block Medical Officer (BMO) Kandi, Rajouri, Dr. Iqbal Malik termed aggressive contact tracing as a main weapon in the fight against pandemic.

"Almost three weeks ago, we came to know that a patient in home isolation has been tested positive after which we decided

to go for aggressive contact tracing and the District Magistrate ordered immediate sealing of the entire area," BMO said.

He added that for almost a week, they came up with mobile sample collection centers in areas of Draj, Kewal, Phalni and tested thousands of people and more than five dozen cases were reported and now there are no new cases in the area from the last few days.

"Aggressive contact tracing is must to contain the virus," BMO said. When asked about public co-operation, BMO also termed awareness among masses and their constructive approach is imperative to fight against CoronaVirus.

"Regular exercise especially Yoga related exercises that increase air space volume in lungs, healthy lifestyle, healthy and nutritious diet that boosts immunity and most importantly safety precautions like use of face masks and social distancing are must for people," BMO further added—(KNO)

Kendriya Vidyalaya to come up at Kreeri, Baramulla

SRINAGAR, AUGUST 05: The Administrative Council (AC), which met here under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, G C Murmu, approved allotment and transfer of land measuring 50 kanals to the School Education Department at village Hail Jageer, Tehsil Kreeri in District Baramulla for construction of Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV).

Once operational, the school will cater to the educational needs of the children of far flung areas of district Baramulla and adjacent areas by providing quality education as envisaged under the constitutional right of education.

Gold price rises to Rs 54,830, silver falls to Rs 66,855

New Delhi: Gold prices rose by Rs 97 to Rs 54,830 per 10 gram in the national capital on Tuesday amid rupee depreciation, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal had closed at Rs 54,733 per 10 gram on Monday.

Silver prices were almost flat at Rs 66,855 per kg, marginally lower by Rs 5 from its previous closing price of Rs 66,860 per kg.

"Spot gold prices for 24 carat in Delhi were trading up by Rs 97 with rupee depreciation," HDFC Securities Senior Analyst (Commodities) Tapan Patel said.

The rupee pared some of its initial losses and settled 3 paise down at 75.04 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday.

4-year integrated B.Ed degree to be minimum requirement for teaching

Srinagar: The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has said that the minimum qualification for teaching will be a four-year integrated B.Ed. degree.

The MHRD has also stated that the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) will be formulated by the NCTE in consultation with NCERT by 2030.

This was stated by MHRD in the recently approved National Education Policy (NEP).

As per the NEP-2020, the MHRD has stated that in the long term, the minimal degree requirement for all permanent tenured teachers will be the four-year integrated B.Ed. degree.

"However, to promote local knowledge and expertise, schools or school complexes will be permitted and indeed supported with suitable resources to hire local eminent persons or experts as specialized instructors in various subjects, such as traditional local arts, vocational crafts, entrepreneurship, agriculture, or any other subject where local expertise exists, and would benefit students and help preserve and promote local knowledge," it reads.

In the NEP, it was mentioned that by 2030, the minimum degree qualification for teaching will be a four-year liberal integrated B.Ed. degree that teaches a range of knowledge content and pedagogy, and



Union HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank speaks during a press conference on the new NEP in New Delhi (PTI)

includes strong practicum training in the form of student teaching at local schools.

"The two-year B.Ed. will be intended only for those who have already obtained Bachelor's Degrees in other specialized subjects," it reads.

The MHRD in the NEP also said that these B.Ed. programmes may also be replaced by suitably adapted to one-year B.Ed. programmes for

those who have completed the equivalent of four-year multidisciplinary bachelor's degree or who have obtained a master's degree in a specialty and wish to become a subject teacher in that specialty.

"All such B.Ed. degrees would be offered only by accredited multidisciplinary higher educational institutions offering four-year integrated B.Ed. programmes," NEP reads.

DIAL-EMMA



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

AIRPORTS

SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311



RAILWAYS

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



HIGHWAY STATUS



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



HIJRI
CALENDAR

15 Zil-Haj
1441

PRAYERS

FAJR	4: 10
ZUHR	12: 37
ASR	5:30
Magrib	7:32
ISHA	9:03

This Day In History

- 1990 - President Ghulam Ishaq Kahn dismisses Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan
- 1990 - UN Security Council votes 13-0 (2 abstentions Cuba and Yemen) to place economic sanctions against Iraq
- 1995 - Thousands gather in Hiroshima for the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of the city
- 1996 - NASA announces that life may have existed on Mars after examining meteorite ALH84001, thought to be from Mars
- 1996 - Korean Air Flight 801 crashes in the United States territory of Guam, killing 228 people
- 1997 - Sri Lanka slams world record 952 for 6 in the 1st cricket Test against India in Colombo; Sanath Jayasuriya 340, Roshan Mahanama 225 - record partnership 576
- 1997 - Microsoft announces it will invest \$150 million in Apple Computer Inc
- 2008 - A military junta led by Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz stages a coup d'etat in Mauritania, overthrowing president Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi
- 2011 - A helicopter containing members of Navy SEAL 6 is shot down in Afghanistan killing 38
- 2013 18 people are killed and 55 are wounded by a car bomb explosion in Damascus, Syria
- 2013 - 25 people are killed and 60 are wounded by a series of car bombs in Baghdad, Iraq
- 2018 - South Sudan peace accord signed between South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar in Sudan attempting to end 5 years of civil war

From KO Archives

Yatris flee Pahalgam after massacre

OBSERVER NEWS SERVICE

PAHALGAM: Hundreds of panic-stricken Hindu pilgrims were today fleeing this picturesque tourist resort, which has been converted into the base camp for the annual pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave up in the mountains, a day after suspected militants killed 33 devotees on their way to the holy cave.

Pahalgam witnessed the worst of a series of overnight massacres by suspected militants across the state which claimed a total of 100 lives, mostly Hindu civilians

Officials said two suspected militants swooped down from forests overlooking Pahalgam, some 100 km south of Srinagar, and shot dead 31 people. They

Were killed in the retaliatory fire by the security forces. The incident took place at a community kitchen (langar) on a road in the close vicinity of a security camp with an army camp just at a stone's throw.

"I could hear gunmen firing at the tents for at least 10 minutes without interruption," said Sanjeev Parishar of New Delhi, who added that local Muslims had helped the wounded in Pahalgam to go to hospital.

Nissa Shah, a local Muslim shawl-vendor, said "I was doing brisk business when all of a sudden firing started from two points. At least a dozen people were hit by bullets and three died on the spot."

Ashok Kumar, a surviving pilgrim, was in a state, of shock. "The shooting started at around 6:45 p.m. I rushed towards my burs but a bullet hit me in the leg: "It is due to God that I am still alive," he said. Speaking of the attackers, Kumar said: "They were firing at will and they looked visibly relaxed."

Though the officials claimed the attackers to be foreign militants, police sources, on condition of anonymity, said the two persons were local youth from Anantnag, one of them a student of Aligarh Muslim University. The other youth was identified as Shabbir Ahmad Shah. One of rifles with a Lashker-e-Taiba sticker put on it, had been placed by the side of a 'slain youth.

Hundreds of pilgrim-packed cars, buses, trucks and jeeps were seen leaving this town, even as the sky was overcast. This is a valley of destruction," said Akash Chaad, a Chandigarh yatri.

Atma Ram, a Bihari pilgrim said he did not visit the Amarnath shrine. "I had come for darshan, But I am totally scared and have decided to return home without having it" Witnesses said blood-soaked clothes, caps and foot-wear still littered the camp where the gunmen struck. Police brought in sniffer dogs to the site today to look for concealed explosives.

Meanwhile, scores of Kashmiri Muslims were flocking to Pahalgam on Wednesday to check on the condition of friends and relatives who ran shops or businesses in the resort town 1 have failed to trace my two sons," worried Srinagar housewife Farida Banu said.

(Kashmir Observer, August 06, 2000)

KASHMIR
OBSERVER

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Way forward

The first anniversary of the revocation of Article 370 passed off without any incident. The Valley, however, woke up to severe restrictions despite the fact that the government had withdrawn its earlier order imposing the curfew in the region on the day. In a review on Tuesday, the administration had lifted the curfew but let Section 144 and Covid-19 restrictions remain in place. On ground though it made little difference to the situation. The curfew-like restrictions remained in force on the ground. This brings up the question why did the government withdraw the curfew order when it didn't mean it? Former J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti in a tweet termed the order to lift the curfew a "hogwash" a result of the government's preference not to "leave a paper trail" for its actions.

Be that as it may, the anniversary passed along the expected lines. Kashmir continued to be under a heavy lockdown. One thing that once again stood out is the absence of any political activity. The politicians were corralled in their homes. At the same time, no mainstream political party had announced any programme for the day. National Conference leader and the former J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had in a recent interview said that they will observe the anniversary as a day of mourning in their homes. On the separatist side, former chairman of one of the two Hurriyat factions Syed Ali Shah Geelani had called for a complete strike on August 5. Similarly, the anniversary was observed as "Youm-i-Istehsal (Day of Exploitation)" in Pakistan. Incidentally, on the occasion Pakistan issued a new map that showed J&K as its part.

If anything, all these developments create an unsettling sense of uncertainty about Kashmir and the region as whole. One can't but feel deeply concerned about the direction of the situation. A year after the withdrawal of the Article 370, the people in Kashmir haven't come to terms with the drastically altered situation in the region. It has made regional situation also very fraught. More so, with China through its incursions in Ladakh also asserting itself as a party to the longstanding conflict over Kashmir. India, Pakistan relations have already plumbed new depths and it seems unlikely that the neighbours could back to any kind of engagement anytime soon. This has only increased the odds of a bigger conflict between the neighbours. Hence the urgent need to lower the temperatures by taking some confidence building measures. And to start with New Delhi can start a political outreach to Kashmir and later on reach out to Pakistan for a resumption of long stalled dialogue.

OTHER OPINION

Next, in the Valley

A year after the BJP-led NDA government made Article 370 redundant, withdrew the special status of Jammu & Kashmir, and bifurcated the state into two Union territories, the fait accompli has seeped in. The Union territory of J&K may become a state again, but there will be no turning back the clock on Article 370. For the BJP, it was the fulfilment of a long-standing ideological promise to "integrate" the Muslim-majority state with the rest of the country. By all accounts, the move has been met with acquiescence, if not support, across the country — no national political party has prominently protested the Centre's move, nor any regional parties outside J&K. In the past year, there has been no visible outpouring of protest in J&K, no major militant strikes.

That does not mean, of course, that the seven-decade-old problem has been resolved or that the people have accepted the changes imposed on them. The reality is, they have not yet been allowed to express themselves through institutions of representation or governance. Indeed, what began as a departure from democratic norm — the NDA government decided on the state's future by cutting out the people, their political leaders and even the BJP's own allies — has played out over the year in the imprisonment of political leaders and hundreds of others, effectively erasing the degrees of difference between the mainstream and separatists and those in between. Curbs on the press, routinely calling journalists to the police station, deepen the distrust.

While many leaders have been released since, the detention of former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti under the Public Safety Act has just been extended by three months and many others continue to be in official and unofficial detention. The lockdown imposed on August 5 last year has segued into a second lockdown, induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though 2G has been restored, the unavailability of high speed internet has made life and work difficult, for businessmen who need to communicate with partners outside the state, for those applying for jobs and college seats, to those trying to download information on the pandemic. Students, too, have suffered. There is an air of uncertainty. Militancy continues — local young men are easy recruits even as cross-border infiltration has come down.

Except for the decision to make new domicile rules in keeping with the abrogation of 35A that defined "permanent residents", and the delimitation exercise, the government has appeared unclear on a roadmap ahead.

It should be clear to it that the continuing political vacuum in the Valley can only cause damage. There is a limit to how much, or how long, panchayats from a flawed election can be propped up in place of an elected Assembly. Though the Election Commission took exception to his comments, Lieutenant Governor G C Murmu was right in saying that elections could follow the completion of delimitation. The government must expedite the restoration of political processes in J&K. It must release Mehbooba Mufti and others who are still in detention. It must restore all freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution, including the right to free speech, which in this day and age, includes access to the Internet. Most importantly, it must set the stage for the people to elect their representatives.

Indian Express

NEELOFAR QURESHI

By taking Kashmir to UNSC and ending up failing to get any support for its "principled stand" challenging abrogation of Article 370, hasn't Islamabad ended up reinforcing New Delhi's stand that Kashmir is a bilateral Indo-Pak issue and that UNSC or any other nation or organisation has no role to play in its resolution?

Article 370 Abrogation And Pak Response

Islamabad may have observed August 5 as 'Yaum-i-Istehsal' for Kashmir with a special song for the occasion but far from restoring Article 370, New Delhi is looking forward to holding the next round of elections in J&K

Those who grew up believing Pakistan's assertion that India was in "illegal occupation" of J&K were taken by surprise when New Delhi abrogated Articles 370, 35A of Indian Constitution and bifurcated the state into two Union Territories. However, the pro-Pakistan camp felt reassured when Pakistan's Foreign Office announced it had summoned Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan Ajay Bisaria and that "the Foreign Secretary conveyed Pakistan's unequivocal rejection of these illegal actions as they are in breach of international law and several UN Security Council resolutions." Those in Kashmir supporting secession were confident that since these "illegal actions" were "in breach of international law and several UN Security Council resolutions," Islamabad would be able to convince both UNSC and the global community to put pressure on New Delhi to reverse its unilateral abrogation of Articles 370, 35A and divide J&K into two Union Territories.

Another reason why secessionists didn't lose heart after abrogation of Article 370 was their belief in Pakistan's claim that it's stand on Kashmir was "principled" and thus, they were confident that when Islamabad brought India's "illegal actions" to the notice of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and International Court of Justice (ICJ), both would direct New Delhi to withdraw its August 5 order. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan also announced that he would travel the world as "Kashmir ka safir (Kashmir's ambassador) and promised to "forcefully present Kashmir issue like never before" at the UNGA annual meet in September. Unfortunately, while Islamabad's attempt to seek intervention of UNSC in this matter failed, its much-publicised plan to take up this issue to ICJ didn't even take off. As far as Khan's UNGA address is concerned, Islamabad and the Hurriyat may have lauded it as a 'big victory', but this claim is questionable as abrogation of Article 370 hasn't been reversed.

There was no public outcry in Kashmir when Article 370 was abrogated and Hurriyat leaders claim that they were unable to mobilise public opinion against the August 5, 2019 order since they were under detention. However, this explanation isn't very convincing because in the past, Hurriyat leaders have been able to organise massive protests even when they were caged. Thus, this strange behaviour does raise suspicions that their silence could be part of a secret deal with the center related to the ongoing National Investigation Agency



(NIA) investigation into their alleged hawala money transactions.

Militants were the only ones in Kashmir who were active after New Delhi abrogated Article 370. However, they started a new trend of targeting apple traders and migrant workers, which wasn't appreciated by the public and continued killing of locals on suspicion of being informers only added to public resentment. It also sent a negative message to the international community by linking the 'self-determination' movement with terrorism. United Jihad Council chief and Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) supreme Syed Salahuddin has always boasted of how militants are giving security forces a tough fight and keeps assuring us that the 'armed struggle' would achieve its aim of driving them out of Kashmir. However, just recently, while paying tributes to HM commander Riyaz Naikoo killed by security forces in an encounter, Salahuddin publicly confessed that "The enemy (Indian army) is in a strong position" in Kashmir.

Ever since Article 370 has been abrogated, all Islamabad has been able to do is to feed Kashmiris with hollow promises. While Prime Minister Khan announced observance 'Kashmir solidarity Day' on a weekly basis, Pakistan army chief General Qamar Bajwa promised that the army is prepared to go "to any extent" for the sake of Kashmiris. Unfortunately, while observing Kashmir solidarity day every week has achieved nothing, Gen Bajwa's assurance remains unfulfilled. And now, just a few days before the first anniversary of the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A, Pakistan has 'presented' us with yet another catch-phrase of 'Yaum-i-Istehsal' (Day of Exploitation). However, by doing so hasn't Islamabad indirectly accepted that despite its "principled stand" on Kashmir, it hasn't been able to do anything to reverse abrogation of

Articles 370 by India?

In hindsight, it appears that Islamabad's response to New Delhi's abrogation of Articles 370 was ill-planned and thus proved ineffective. It's immediate reaction of downgrading diplomatic relations and suspending bilateral trade with India were unwise moves as they made no difference to New Delhi. Next, it's evident that by end September last year, Khan had realised that Islamabad's inability to generate support against Article 370 abrogation and he openly admitted this by saying, "even if the rest of the world is not standing by Kashmiris, Pakistan is." However, rather than do something about this, Islamabad decided to take this issue to UNSC, which was another big blunder because with Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi telling Pakistanis "not to live in a fool's paradise" since UNSC members wouldn't be "waiting for you with garlands in their hands," it's evident that Islamabad also knew that nothing would come out of this issue at UNSC.

By taking Kashmir to UNSC and failing to get any support for its "principled stand" challenging abrogation of Article 370, hasn't Islamabad ended up reinforcing New Delhi's position that Kashmir is a bilateral Indo-Pak issue and that UNSC or any other nation or organisation has no role to play in its resolution? Lastly, Islamabad's decision not to approach ICJ in this matter has been interpreted by the international community as an indication that Islamabad had no legal basis to justify its opposition to the abrogation of Article 370. Thus, while Islamabad may have observed August 5 as 'Yaum-i-Istehsal' for Kashmir with a special song for this occasion prepared by the military's media wing, Inter Services Public Relations, far from restoring Article 370, New Delhi is looking forward to holding the next round of elections in J&K.



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Women in Science, Engineering and Technology Businesses

The economic and developmental significance of participation of women in entrepreneurial activities has attracted great policy interest. Young women are highly under-represented in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) businesses both at the national and international levels. Women owned ventures tend to be concentrated in traditional sectors like retail and lifestyle and service sectors like professional services, hospitality etc. The technology field still remains colossally male-dominated.

This prompts the question, why? This is primarily due to the effect of "specific identities" associated with both technology and entrepreneurship. An entrepreneur, particularly, a technologist, is often written and spoken about of as it were gender-neutral in general discourses, but are actually located and symbolically associated with the male universe. Technology Entrepreneurship represents a merging of two supposedly male-spheres. This means that in order to venture and function in this non-traditional field, women technopreneurs have to

work harder.

Research also indicates that in Science, Engineering and Technology academia, cultural values, norms and beliefs by and large have persistently been and still continue to be hostile to females. Women encounter innumerable industry as well as organizational level resistance ranging from age and gender stereotyping to financial discrimination. Also, in addition to being highly competitive, the SET Sector is perceived to be intensely political.

Qualitative studies pertaining to women Technopreneurship indicate that as opposed to "glass ceilings" encountered in the corporate settings, women technopreneurs experience "labyrinth walls" (meaning broad multi-faceted resistance to women leadership) and "thorny floors" characterized by criticism, non-compliance and sabotage from opposite gender subordinates. Women in Science, Engineering and Technology business, demographically a minority, frequently experience and encounter the problematic perceptual tendencies associated with Tokenism, i.e., Visibility, Contrast and Assimilation.

In addition to this, working in the technopreneurial field can be very de-

manding as tech-jobs are many a times considered to be 'extreme' in terms of nature of the work, the physical effort required, long working hours and travel time which women cannot easily sustain since they are still chiefly responsible for managing the household, family and children (mounting work-life balance issues). The paucity of female role models, female mentors in SET is yet another deterrent. Career in SET is often rejected due to dearth of information, awareness and lack of role models who offer guidance and a realistic preview of what it means to venture into a male-dominated field.

Lastly, the broader conservative and biased society which continues to discourage women from pursuing Science, Engineering and Technology pursuits in a subtle manner by incessantly pressing women to conform to their feminine identities can also be faulted and blamed for disproportionate representation of women in the SET businesses.

These reasons can also be attributed to be substantially responsible for the 'leaky pipeline', that is, large number of women entering the sector by taking up jobs in SET and subsequently dropping out.

Nevertheless, many "intentional-ist and headstrong" women have despite the odds ventured into the technopreneurial field and made inroads into heavily male-dominated fields such as in the manufacturing, agri-tech, construction industry. These women perceive the technopreneurial field to be highly merit-driven where establishing oneself as a plausible competitor is a must to gain acceptance and recognition.

A prerequisite to facilitate Women Technopreneurship and overcome these challenges and barriers is a renewed Entrepreneurship policy focus which provides support specific to Women Technology business, non-gendered policy discourses and promotion of distinguished and successful female role models via various new technologies and platforms for they can act as a source of inspiration for the young, aspiring, potential women technopreneurs.

(The author is a JRF in Management and is pursuing her Doctorate in Women Technopreneurship at the Department of Management Studies, University of Kashmir. Contact: Iqrashaf1406@gmail.com)

August 5, 2019: ‘When No News Came from Home’

ZAID BIN SHABIR

On this day, last year, snapped communication channels tormented many Kashmiris studying, working outside the valley. A student from Srinagar studying journalism in Punjab narrates how the day became a timeline of trauma, nightmares and anxiety for Kashmiri students far from home.

INSIDE the confines of an acoustic foam-walled studio, I was sitting on a steel chair, heedlessly listening to a teacher’s lecture on “Indian Media’s bias towards BJP”. It was the blistering morning of August 5, 2019, and sitting next to me was a friend from Assam. He was enquiring about the sudden communication blackout and a new curfew imposed in the valley from the midnight of August 4.

These questions heightened my anxiety. The fretful state had first gripped me a week ago when advisories asking tourists to leave the valley suddenly fared online. Some in the tightlipped administration equated the leaked circulars with the “well-planned militant attack”. The possible execution of some prominent Kashmiri captives in Delhi’s Tihar Jail was also doing rounds. Additional reinforcement in one of the world’s most militarised zones further fuelled speculations.

Rumours, it seemed, were never so wild in Kashmir. The author like many Kashmiri students studying outside the valley kept checking his phone for some news from home

Even though students were strictly prohibited from using cellphones in class, I’d my eyes and fingers constantly swiping through the social media profiles just to read news update from my homeland. My dejected face had itself coerced the Punjabi teacher to allow me to use the cellphone.

But that day, Kashmir’s vibrant virtual space was dead silent. News channels were only babbling over the 4th August’s midnight video of police enforcing another uncertain curfew in Kashmir.

Elders back home say that since the notorious Jagmohan era, these uninvited curfews were continuously used by the establishment to punish Kashmiris whenever there was a rise of reason and rage in Vale.

But that day, since there were no specific protests scheduled, it created more panic in Kashmir. And when even landline phones were snapped, the entire region became an incommunicado village.

In that air-conditioned college room, I was constantly thinking of my family, friends, colleagues and my aunt battling stage-4 brain tumour. They were all snuffed out from the rest of the world, coercing them to live this new ordeal on their own.

Kashmir was turned into this acoustic foam-walled room from where the voices were barred to disseminate.

While scrolling down the broken display of my phone, my eyes were caught to the sudden pop-up, “Amit Shah was about to speak on Kashmir emergency in Parliament.”

The tranquil class was flaring with these pop-ups, all hands trying to take out their phones from pockets. The eager teacher himself wanted to know the reason behind the ongoing Kashmir fuss that had caught an international eye. The lecture came to an end early that day.

The fate of Kashmir was written on the paper lying 825 kilometres away in the hands of Home Minister of India in New Delhi.

Within a few minutes from the start of Parliament’s Live coverage, Shah started to read the provident speech from the white paper with colorful sticky notes.

As my palpitations gradually fluttered with sweat pouring down the right side of my face, Shah numbed every Kashmiri listening to him, “Article 370 was now a history”.

The reason behind sudden advisories, additional

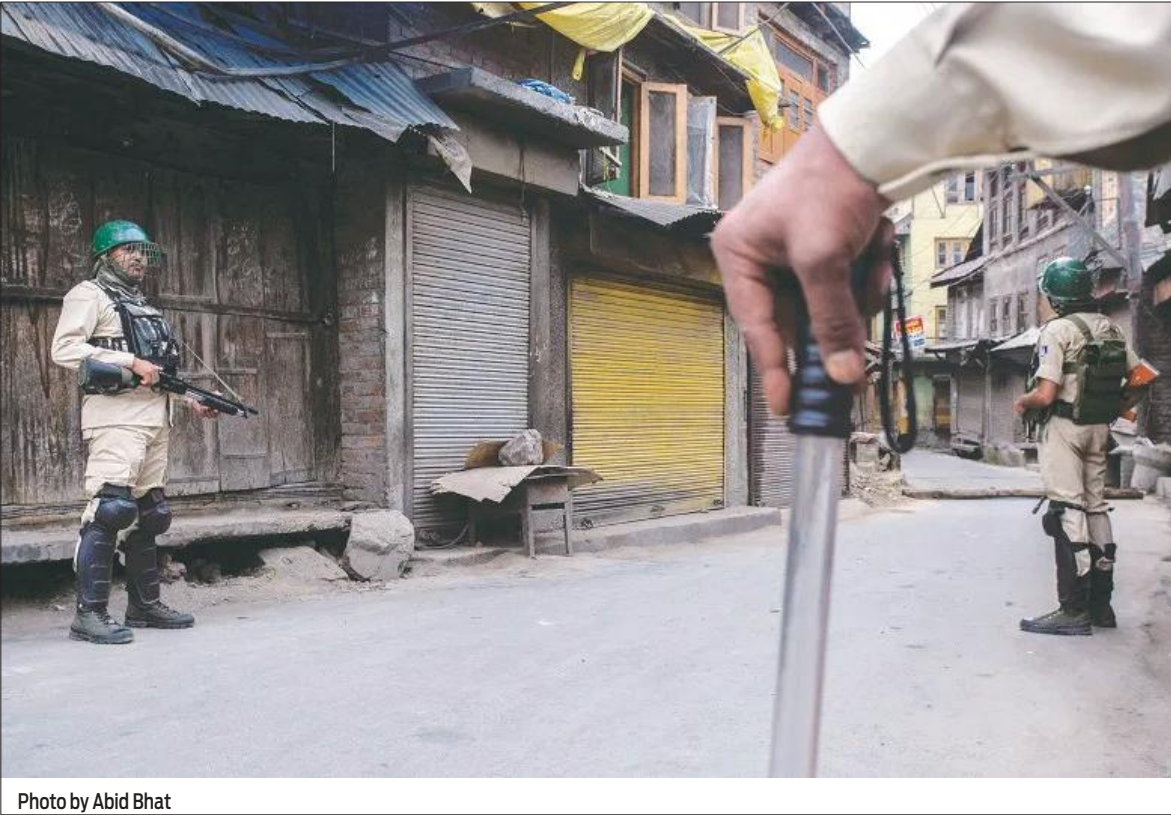


Photo by Abid Bhat

troops, curfew, and communication clampdown became clear. The so-called terrorist attack was nothing but a diversion to introduce a new tactic of penalising Kashmiris.

While Kashmiri bodies were being tainted, many faces around me were exhilarated. But some foreign students were still perplexed on Shah’s seemingly endless speech.

Anxiety, suffocation, longing and agony had already pushed me to the brink. I wanted to cry and share this ordeal with someone who was suffering from the same fate. But there was no Kashmiri except me in the class of 40.

I immediately absconded from the class where the majority celebrated this unilateral revocation of Article 370 and failed to understand this nightmare.

After walking for more than 15 minutes, I reached the roadside bistro where other Kashmiri friends had assembled with a despair face. Many sat on steel benches, some on tables, and others lost in their own agony. All yearned for their loved ones back in the valley. Like others, I had patently believed that Kashmir was once again turned into a land of mourning.

For days, I kept thinking about my family, the unfinished conversations, and goodbyes. They were all haunting me. “What if my Aunt was no more in this world? Had destiny prefixed a lonely burial for her,” I wondered, while being surrounded by non-Kashmiris who were provokingly planning to buy land near Dal Lake.

Some international news organizations were suggesting that several Kashmiri civilians including juveniles as young as ten were arrested during the night raids and incarcerated for crimes they never committed. New Delhi’s allies in Kashmir were also locked up, at secretive makeshift jails, making the valley a faceless territory.

Amid all this, there was no information of my family living in the world’s largest open-air prison. The nights were seemingly endless, the anxiety attack and horrific thoughts had already taken over my sleep. The valley was completely silent, with military siege in power. Kashmiris were forced on the abandoned path where Fundamental Rights had no value.

Far from their loved ones, Kashmiri students outside the valley were passing through an imaginable pain. Many were losing hope of their family members being alive, others breaking down in tears while seeing their family pictures, and the rest of us were psychologically traumatised from the daily incitement from non-Kashmiri students and bistro owners for their vicious sexist comments for Kashmiri girls.

In between, satellite numbers were shared on some official social media accounts back home. After finding the prescribed number for my area, I tried calling them a few hundred times, all in vain. The service seemed ironic. It was like faking sympathy after inflicting massive pain on a person.

But that didn’t stop the patriotic media to add insult to our injury. They kept running headlines like “Kashmiris are celebrating this historic move” — when no news was coming from mountains we call home.

It was simply too much for the likes of me to take. Due to the communication clampdown back home, many of us were now running out of means. After left with just Rs 500 in my pocket, I abandoned the daily lectures for over a fortnight. The same was happening with other Kashmiri compatriots.

After a month of remaining oblivious about my family’s whereabouts, I finally received a call from our family landline.

It was my sister, saying, “We’re all alive”, before the line went dead again.

Gardening Has A Relationship With Sky

At special moments, the sky becomes a flower bed in the firmament

Adrian Higgins

People don’t look at the sky anymore, a problem that predates even the chin-down screen age. This is odd, when you consider that the sky is the largest single natural element in our lives.

Even within the concrete canyons of the city, there’s plenty of sky to go around. Grab it, I say. It’s mesmerising, it’s beautiful, it’s free.

If you take a few minutes to study the heavens, you will see some amazing things: eagles, vultures, a formation of geese. Contrails are like wet lines of paint, intersecting, shifting and diffusing. Clouds, in all their variation, will tell you the direction of the next weather front and hint at its ferocity.

Without the aquatic plant coverage of summer, the water court mirrors the sky and amplifies its winter role. The colour of the air is different, and as clouds move across the sky, they move from one edge of the frame to the other

- Adrian Higgins

I am amazed whenever I feel a slight breeze on the ground and look up to see a raging current aloft, the clouds pushed violently by strong rivers of air.

Magical skies of the year

I’m thinking about the sky now because the next few weeks offer what I believe are the most dramatic, vivid and magical skies of the year. The truly thrilling times are around dawn and dusk, when you can get colours that are astonishing in themselves and mind-boggling in their combinations.

A few years ago, I witnessed a sunrise over the Potomac River that was a calico of indigo, purple, violet and orange and of such mystical intensity that I half expected to see Charlton Heston emerge in a winged chariot.

For the gardener, the subdued nature of the land-



scape reinforces the aerial display, and, at special moments, the sky becomes a flower bed in the firmament.

Just as architects will orient a house to take in a view of the lake, the mountains or the ocean, the landscape designer can play to the sky. It helps to have a viewing point, indoors or out, and to be mindful that the sun rises in the southeast and sets in the southwest.

Sky on a plate

An open meadow will hand you the sky on a plate, but some sort of frame will give the vista coherence. In a small urban backyard, that might be the 15-foot gap between a holly and a magnolia.

The artist James Turrell has spent a career ex-

ploring light and space and is known for his Skyspace works that force a focused view of the sky. Artists, like gardeners, learn how to see nature. On canvas, no one brings the dreamy qualities of the sky alive quite like Ren Magritte.

Perhaps it is those shared garden-art perceptions that make me think of the Glenstone Museum in the Washington suburb of Potomac, Maryland, as a place where the sky plays such an important role.

You cannot view Jeff Koons’ quirky “Split-Rocker,” either from afar in silhouette or close up against its (in-season) fabric of flowers, without seeing its place against the sky.

The cluster of galleries in the main building is

centred around a large-scale water garden that is wholly enclosed by the circle of connected galleries to form a Turrell-like frame for the sky.

Without the aquatic plant coverage of summer, the water court mirrors the sky and amplifies its winter role. The colour of the air is different, and as clouds move across the sky, they move from one edge of the frame to the other.

Unfettered horizon

You don’t need an entirely open space or an unfettered horizon to appreciate the value of the winter sky. Watching the waning afternoon light through a woodland demonstrates that this is at best a dance between the opalescent sky and the black-branched tree.

Sometimes the sky is grey and sunless, a feeble pewter glow so ably depicted in Dutch landscape paintings. Such paintings speak to the long, dark, hard winters of the north.

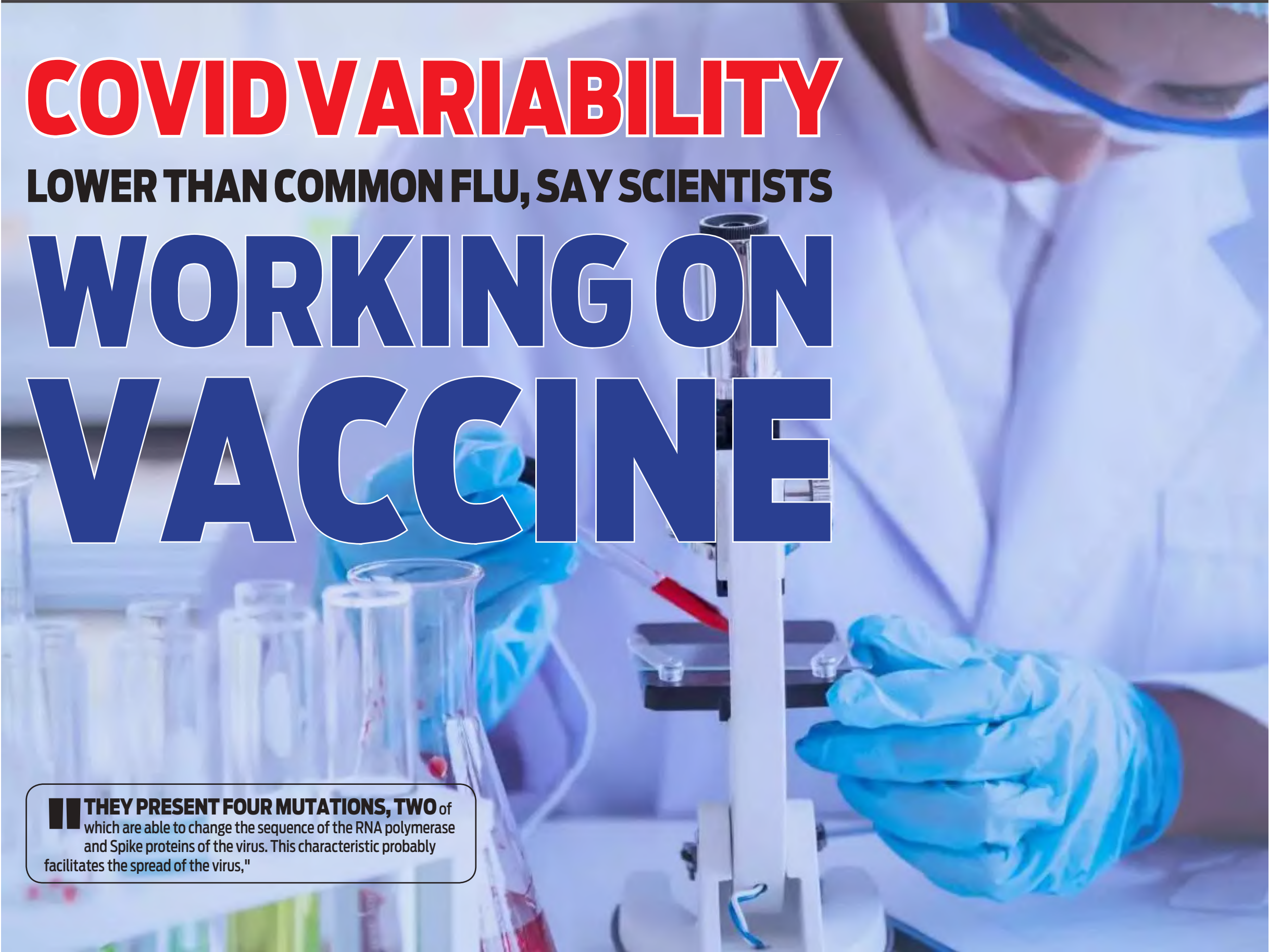
You will find a stark example of this at the National Gallery of Art, where visitors to the West Building are greeted by a large-scale landscape by Jacob Maris, which depicts a bleak wintry scene across a canal.

The title has as much breadth as the picture: “View of the Mill and Bridge on the Noordwest Buitensingel in The Hague” (1873). A hint of sun is caught in the chilly water and a pair of windmills allude to the icy winds from the North Sea. Two figures, a woman and child, are bundled against the elements. Such a day should hasten us all to shelter.

But on the type of dry, warm days that now seem so common, we can at least look up and look around and realise that, at least for the next few weeks, the sky’s the limit.

Adrian Higgins is a columnist with an interest in gardening

Washington Post



COVID VARIABILITY

LOWER THAN COMMON FLU, SAY SCIENTISTS

WORKING ON VACCINE

THEY PRESENT FOUR MUTATIONS, TWO of which are able to change the sequence of the RNA polymerase and Spike proteins of the virus. This characteristic probably facilitates the spread of the virus,"

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI: In some "good news" for scientists working on a viable vaccine for COVID-19, the latest study has found that the SARS-CoV-2 virus behind the disease shows little variability, despite having at least six strains. Published in the journal *Frontiers in Microbiology*, the "most extensive" study ever carried out on SARS-CoV-2 sequencing drew from the analysis of 48,635 coronavirus genomes, which were isolated by researchers in labs all over the world.

The researchers at the University of Bologna in Italy mapped the spread and the mutations of the virus during its journey to all continents.

The findings show that the novel coronavirus presents little variability, approximately seven mutations per sample.

Common influenza has a variability rate that is more than double, the researchers said.

"The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus is presumably already optimised to affect human beings, and this explains its low evolutionary change," said Federico Giorgi, a researcher at the University of Bologna, and coordinator of the study.

"This means that the treatments we are developing, including a vaccine, might be effective against all the virus strains," Federico Giorgi said.

The researchers noted that currently there are six strains of the novel coronavirus.

The original one is the L strain, that appeared in Wuhan in December 2019. Its first mutation -- the S strain -- appeared at the beginning of 2020, while, since mid-January, we have had strains V and G, they said.

To date strain G is the most widespread: it mutated into strains GR and GH at the end of February, according to the researchers.

"Strain G and its related strains GR and GH are by far the most widespread, representing 74 per cent of all gene sequences we analysed," said Federico Giorgi.

"They present four mutations, two of which are able to change the sequence of the RNA polymerase and Spike proteins of the virus. This characteristic probably facilitates the spread of the virus," he said.

Besides the six main coronavirus strains, researchers identified some infrequent mutations that, they said, are not worrying at the moment but should be monitored.

Child Sleep Problems Linked To Impaired Academic And Psychosocial Functioning

Agencies

Irrespective of whether children have sleep problems since birth or not, a new study by researchers at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) has found that sleep disturbances at any age are associated with diminished well-being by the time the children are 10 or 11 years old.

The findings, which were published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, suggest health care providers should screen children for sleep problems at every age and intervene early when a sleep problem is identified.

"Our study shows that although those with persistent sleep problems have the greatest impairments when it comes to broad child well-being, even those with mild sleep problems over time experience some psychosocial impairments," said Ariel A. Williamson, PhD, a psychologist in the Sleep Center and faculty member at PolicyLab and the Center for Pediatric Clinical Effectiveness at CHOP.

"The range of impairments across academic and psychosocial domains in middle childhood indicate that it is important to screen for sleep problems consistently over the course of a child's development, especially to target children who experience persistent sleep problems over time," added Williamson.

The researchers examined data from an Australian birth cohort involving more than 5,000 patients. Caregivers reported on whether their children had sleep problems at multiple points in time, from birth through 10 or 11 years of age.

To assess child well-being, which included psychosocial measures like self-control and emotional/behavioral health and academic performance measures, the researchers used a combination of reports from caregivers and teachers as well as child-completed assessments.

In analyzing caregiver-reported sleep behaviors, the researchers found five distinct sleep problem trajectories, or patterns that characterized child sleep problems over time: persistent sleep problems through middle childhood (7.7 percent), limited infant/preschool sleep problems (9.0 percent), increased middle childhood sleep problems (17.0 percent), mild sleep problems over time (14.4 percent) and no sleep problems (51.9 percent).

Using those with no sleep problems as a benchmark, the researchers found that children with persistent sleep problems had the greatest impairments across all outcomes except in their perceptual reasoning skills.



Study Suggests Eating Well In Sustainable Way More Important During Pandemic

Agencies

Experts from Flinders University, Australia say that in the midst of a global pandemic, eating well in a sustainable way is more important now than ever.

"Eating local" and growing your own fruit and vegetables can save money, provide families and local producers with vital income -- and also improve health and immunity.

"The COVID-19 pandemic provides many good reasons to eat in healthier and more sustainable ways," says Flinders University researcher Associate Professor Kaye Mehta.

"Gardening or being part of a community gardening or local food swap group lifts social connection, reduces anxiety and stress and improves mental health by nurturing plants out in the fresh air."

In a new study, the researchers warn the Australian diet is not sustainable, with high rates of eating meat, excessive packaging and food waste and unhealthy consumption levels.

But how much time do people spend weighing up food decisions for their nutritional content, environmental sustainability and fairness, ask Flinders University nutrition and public health experts in a new paper in the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*.

"At the supermarket and when you eat out, do you investigate where the food comes from? In an ideal world, the food supply would not only be healthy but also be environmentally and socially sustainable," Associate Professor Mehta says.

"Our dietary choices are made within a complex, powerful and unsustainable food system, which contributes to rising problems of food insecurity, malnutrition, chronic disease, climate change, loss of biodiversity and unfair food trade practices," she says in the new study of food literacy awareness at Flinders University.

The researchers put these questions to the test by running a two-week online course examining aspects of the food system, including:

- * The links between food production and greenhouse gas emissions
- * The environmental effects of 'food miles' or distance travelled by the produce
- * Power, profits and fair prices for farmers
- * The association between the industrial food system and current public health nutrition problems and more.



Games Could Be Used To Study Law Of Motions In Mind: Study

Agencies

Researchers from the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, have successfully established relationships between games and laws of motions in mind through an analogy of physics and game refinement theory.

Establishing several physics quantities (such as mass, speed, and acceleration) relative to the game progress model allowed for the player's entertainment experiences for a specific game to be determined through the Newtonian laws of motion, specifically the Force, Momentum, and Potential Energy.

Such a law of motion reveals the feeling of a player in their mind. Mapping different games originated from different cultures to the state of the human mind; a measure of sophistication that leads to a natural yet pleasurable experience.

Uncovering the fundamental mechanisms of game playing mechanisms had been the primary goal in the IIDA laboratory. Game refinement theory is the fruit of labour for several years--the relationships between game progress and entertainment experience from the perspective of game design. Several sub-branch of the study had been explored through board games (e.g., Chess, Go, etc.), sports (e.g., Basketball, Table tennis, etc.), and video game (e.g., action games).

From a non-game context had also been previously explored (such as business, education, and loyalty programs). Interestingly, all of those studies found that game refinement measure converges to approximately similar "zone" value (a region named as the noble uncertainty). Based on the notion of the uncertainty of the game outcome and gamified experience, several models have been introduced to fundamentally capture the essence of game playing in a variety of contexts.

The move selection model and scoring model were established for the board games and sports, via the ratio of solved uncertainty over the game's length. Hence, the game refinement (GR) measure can be obtained concerning the magnitude of gravitational acceleration felt in mind. Then, the notion of speed in the game was established.



Hundreds Of Peru Women, Girls Gone Missing During Virus Lockdown

Agencies

Lima : Hundreds of women and girls have gone missing and are feared dead in Peru since a lockdown was imposed to curb the spread of the new coronavirus.

From March 16 through June 30, a total of 915 people - 606 girls and 309 women - were reported missing, according to authorities.

Last week, Peru's women's ministry said 1,200 women and girls had been reported missing during the pandemic - a higher figure that included the month of July.

"The figures are really quite alarming," Isabel Ortiz, a top women's rights official, told the Reuters news agency on Tuesday.

"We know the numbers of women and girls who have disappeared, but we don't have detailed information about how many have been found," she said. "We don't have proper and up-to-date records."

The Andean nation home to 33 million people has long had a domestic violence problem, but the home confinement measures because of the pandemic has made the situation worse, said Eliana Revollar, who leads the women's rights office of the National Ombudsman's office, an independent

body that monitors Peru's human rights.

Peru is one of the hardest virus-hit Latin American nations, with more than 430,000 COVID-19 cases and 20,000 related deaths.

Hospitals are struggling to cope with the rising number of patients and healthcare workers have protested against a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Before COVID-19, five women were reported missing in Peru every single day, but since the lockdown, that number has surged to eight a day.

The women's ministry said the government was working to eradicate violence against women and had increased funding this year for gender-based violence prevention programmes.

Countries worldwide have reported increases in domestic violence under coronavirus lockdowns, prompting the United Nations to call for urgent government action.

Before the pandemic, hundreds of thousands of women throughout Latin America, including Peru, were staging mass street demonstrations demanding that their governments should act against gender-based violence.

After UAE, Saudi to use dogs to sniff out COVID at airports

Agencies

Riyadh: The role of sniffer dogs in airport security is a long and gloried one. Whether it is to detect bombs, bed bugs, drugs or even SIM cards, sniffer dogs have played a vital role in the line of defence at an airport.

Now, Saudi Arabia may follow suit after airports in the United Arab Emirates started deploying dogs that can sniff out the scent of coronavirus from infected passengers.

With international flights resuming in Saudi Arabia, the customs department has trained dogs—Jack Terriers as well as other breeds—to detect passengers

tional, becoming the first country to do so in the process. Samples taken from passengers are taken to another room where they are sniffed by dogs—with results being delivered in less than one minute according to the Dubai Police.

Numerous studies have shown that dogs are able to discern signs of coronavirus infection if trained to do so, being able to isolate the scent of infection from a patient's sweat—even if they are otherwise asymptomatic.

With over 300 million scent receptors, compared to the six million found in humans, dogs are much more able to discern individual scents.



that may be infected by the SARS-Cov-2 virus, Arab News reported.

The training has been done in collaboration with the country's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and has been 80 per cent successful so far, Mohammed Al-Salloum, director of the National Center for Living Means at Saudi Customs, told Arab News, adding that final preparations were ongoing to start deploying dog teams across airports in the kingdom.

Likewise, the United Arab Emirates has already deployed sniffer dog squads at the Dubai Interna-

Both the UAE and KSA were home to millions of expatriate workers before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. A Saudi Labour Market Developments report by Jadwa Investment estimated that up to 1.2 million expat workers would leave the kingdom in 2020. Likewise, around 150,000 Indians had registered to leave the UAE on repatriation flights back to India as of June. The UAE alone is expected to shed 900,000 jobs and lose 10 per cent of its expats due to the COVID-19-induced exodus.



Lebanon Puts Port Officials Under House Arrest, Declares State Of Emergency After Explosion

Agencies

Beirut: The Lebanese government says it is putting an unspecified number of Beirut port officials under house arrest pending an investigation into how 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate came to be stored at the port for years.

The move comes amid speculation that negligence was to blame for Tuesday's explosion that killed more than 100 people.

It was announced following a cabinet meeting Wednesday during which the government declared a two-week state of emergency, effectively giving the military full powers during this time.

President Michel Aoun vowed before the meeting that the investigation would be transparent and that those responsible will be punished.

"There are no words to describe the catastrophe that hit Beirut last night," he said.

State prosecutor Ghassan Oueidat ordered security agencies to start an immediate investigation and collect all reports and letters related to the materials stored at the port as well as lists of people in charge of maintenance, storage and protection of the hangar.

Interior Minister Mohammed Fahmi had earlier told a local TV station that it appeared the blast was caused by the detonation of the ammonium nitrate that had

been stored ever since it was confiscated from a cargo ship in 2014.

Ammonium nitrate is a common ingredient in fertilizer but can also be highly explosive.

'Massive cleanup operation'

Meanwhile, residents of Beirut awoke to a scene of utter devastation after the explosion.

In the hard-hit Achrafieh district, civil defence workers and soldiers were working on locating missing people and clearing the rubble. At least one man was still pinned under stones from an old building that had collapsed. Volunteers hooked him up to an oxygen tank to help him breathe while others tried to free his leg.

The blast destroyed numerous apartment buildings, potentially leaving large numbers of people homeless at a time when many Lebanese have lost their jobs and seen their savings evaporate because of a currency crisis. The explosion also raises concerns about how Lebanon will continue to import nearly all of its vital goods with its main port devastated.

An official with the Lebanese Red Cross said at least 100 people were killed and more than 4,000 were wounded.

"There's glass absolutely everywhere," said CBC News contributor Rebecca Collard. "Basically, what we have this morning

in Beirut is a massive cleanup operation."

Rescue workers were attempting to dig through rubble to locate anyone trapped, Collard said, making it likely the current toll of dead and injured will increase.

Scores of people were missing, with relatives pleading on social media for help locating loved ones. An Instagram page called "Locating Victims Beirut" sprang up with photos of missing people, and radio presenters read the names of missing or wounded people throughout the night.

Among those confirmed dead was Nazir Najarian, a businessman who moved back to Lebanon from Montreal two years ago. Najarian's wife and two kids are still living in Montreal, according to Aref Salem, a city councillor for the Montreal borough of Saint-Laurent. Sami Basbous, also from the Montreal area, was not seriously injured but was shaken by the blast.

"My body was thrown and I felt breathless," he said. "It really felt like nothing I've ever experienced before."

It was unclear what caused the blast, which appeared to have been triggered by a fire and struck with the force of an earthquake. It was the most powerful explosion ever seen in the city, which was on the front lines of the 1975-1990 civil war.

Hezbollah Urges Unity To Overcome 'National Tragedy'

Agencies

Beirut: The Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement has called for unity to overcome what it describes as "national tragedy" following a deadly blast in Beirut.

In a statement released few hours after the massive explosion at Beirut Port on Tuesday, Hezbollah offered "deepest condolences over the national tragedy which took place in Lebanon in these hard times," and urged national unity among all the Lebanese.

"This grievous disaster, along with its unprecedented repercussions and damage it had caused on several levels, requires a national stand by all Lebanese people and powers in a bid to overcome this ordeal," the Lebanese resistance movement underlined.

The blast ripped through the Lebanese capital on Tuesday, leaving more than 100 people dead and nearly 4,000 others injured. Several smaller explosions were heard before the bigger one occurred.

Footage shared on social media captured the moment of the bigger explosion, with a colossal shock wave seen traveling fast across several hundreds of meters and shrouding the area in thick smoke.

The huge explosion inflicted enormous material damage to the surrounding buildings and structures. Hezbollah also on Tuesday hailed medical and rescue teams over their efforts to help those harmed by the blast, expressing readiness to offer all kinds of assistance to Lebanese citizens in this regard.

"We put all capabilities to serve our honored people and

dear citizens when necessary," the Lebanese resistance movement said.

Moreover, Hezbollah announced that a speech scheduled to be delivered by the movement's Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on Wednesday was adjourned to another date that will be revealed later, citing the national mourning which Lebanon is witnessing over the massive explosions.

Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab announced three days of national mourning for the victims of the deadly blast in Lebanon, declaring a state of emergency across the country for two weeks. Diab also vowed that those responsible for the massive blast in Beirut would be held to account, calling for international assistance to help the country, which is already beset by economic crises.

Malaysian police raid Al Jazeera office over documentary on migrants

Agencies

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian police raided the office of news broadcaster Al Jazeera and two local TV stations on Tuesday, seizing computers as part of an investigation into a documentary on undocumented migrants that enraged the government.

Al Jazeera, a Qatari-state owned broadcaster, said in a statement that police seized two computers during the raid, which it called a "troubling escalation" in a government crackdown on media freedom. It urged Malaysian authorities to cease the criminal investigation.

Police opened an investigation last month into the Al Jazeera documentary on the treatment of undocumented migrants after officials complained it was inaccurate and

a statement. The two local TV stations had reportedly aired the video.

Huzir said the raids were conducted jointly with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, which is also investigating the stations.

He said police seized computers which will be sent for further analysis and took statements from witnesses during the raids. "No individual or entity will be spared from action if they have violated the law," he said.

Al Jazeera said the raid was "an attack on press freedom as a whole" and urged Malaysian authorities to cease the criminal investigation.

"Conducting a raid on our office and seizing computers is a troubling escalation in the authorities' crackdown on media



biased. Seven Al Jazeera staff members have been grilled by police as part of the probe for alleged sedition, defamation and violating the Communications and Multimedia Act.

Police obtained court warrants to search the offices of Al Jazeera as well as local broadcasters Astro and UnifiTV, criminal investigation chief Huzir Mohamed said in

freedom and shows the lengths they are prepared to take to try to intimidate journalists," said Giles Trendle, managing director of Al Jazeera English.

"Al Jazeera stands by our journalists and we stand by our reporting. Our staff did their jobs and they've got nothing to answer for or apologize for. Journalism is not a crime," he said.

Indian-Origin Woman Researcher Killed While Jogging In US

Agencies

Washington: A 43-year-old Indian-origin woman researcher in the US was killed while she was out jogging in Plano, a suburb near Dallas, and police have initiated a homicide investigation, according to media reports.

According to the police, Sarmistha Sen, who was based in Plano, Texas, was randomly attacked and killed while jogging on August 1 near the Chisholm Trail Park.

Her body was found lying in the creek-area near Legacy Drive and Marchman Way by a passer-by, according to a report in the WFAA.com.

Sen was a pharmacist and researcher who studied molecular biology and worked with cancer patients.

She originally was from Sindri in Jharkhand and moved to Plano after her marriage to Arindam Roy. She has two young sons.

According to the Dallasnews.com, a person of interest in the case has been arrested on a burglary charge.

The suspect is identified as 29-year old Bakari Moncrief and is being held on a \$1 million bond for the burglary charge.

We have our suspicions, but we have to have proof, Plano police spokesperson David Tilley said.

And that's what they're looking for right now is trying to obtain proof as to whether or not this individual is or is not responsible for her death, he said.

Police say around the same time of the murder, someone broke into a house nearby on the 3400 block of Michael Drive, fox4news.com reported.

This is not something we see and definitely something very very random," Plano police spokesperson David Tilley was quoted as saying by the WFAA.com.

"For something like this to happen, clearly it concerns all of us. And we're very hopeful that this is going to be an isolated incident," he said.

The medical examiner has not released the cause of death, and police are not saying how Sen died. An athlete, Sen used to run the popular Chisholm Trail nearly every morning before her children woke up, the report in the fox4news.com said.

The incident led to an outpouring of grief and support for the family. Her family says she went for her regular run on Saturday morning and never came back.

NEWS MAKERS

US Teen Accused Of Massive Twitter Hack Pleads Not Guilty

Washington: The suspected teenage mastermind of a huge Twitter hack pled not guilty Tuesday to allegations he hijacked celebrity accounts to swindle people out of more than \$100,000 in a cryptocurrency scheme.

The 17-year-old Tampa, Florida resident pled not guilty before a state court, during a short hearing conducted via videoconference, according to the Tampa Bay Times newspaper.

He was arrested Friday along with two others, aged 19 and 22, one of whom lives in Britain, and was charged with cyber fraud.

Investigators viewed the 17-year-old as the mastermind behind the mid-July cyberattack that rocked Twitter.

Hackers who accessed doz-



ens of high-profile Twitter accounts gained access to the system with an attack that tricked a handful of employees into giving up their credentials, according to a company update.

The hackers "targeted a small number of employees through a phone spear phishing attack," according to a Twitter Support statement.

The official accounts of Apple, Uber, Kanye West, Bill Gates, Barack Obama and others were also affected.

The incident has raised concerns about the security of the platform increasingly used for conversations on politics and public affairs, particularly as the US presidential election in November approaches.

The massive hack of users from Elon Musk to Joe Biden affected at least 130 accounts, with tweets posted by the usurpers duping people into sending \$100,000 in Bitcoin, supposedly in exchange for double the amount sent.

Washington: Instead of speeding off in a \$200,000 Lamborghini Urus, a Texas man got a slower ride to jail Tuesday after US authorities arrested him for using \$1.6 million in government pandemic aid to go on a spending spree.

Lee Price III, 29, was charged with fraud after he secured two government loans under the Paycheck Protection Program to pay employees he did not have, the Justice Department said in a statement.

Instead he spent the funds on lavish goods like a sports car and a Rolex watch, as well as real estate, an F-350 pickup truck, and thousands of dollars



at Houston strip clubs, the statement said.

Price secured two loans: Price Enterprises Holdings allegedly received more than \$900,000, while 713 Construction was ap-

proved for over \$700,000, but neither has employees and "the individual listed as CEO on the 713 Construction loan application died in April 2020, a month before the application was

submitted," according to the complaint.

Congress approved the PPP program in late March to help small businesses survive the coronavirus pandemic, granting loans that could be forgiven if they were used to pay wages, rent and utilities.

Lee Price III, 29, was charged with fraud after he secured two government loans under the Paycheck Protection Program to pay employees he did not have, the Justice Department said in a statement.

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