



Maximum : 27°C
Minimum : 16°C
Humidity : 77%

SUNSET
Today 07:02 PM
SUNRISE
Tomorrow 06:02 AM

OBSERVER

08 Muharram-ul-Haraam | 1442 Hijri | Vol: 23 | Issue: 187 | Pages: 08 | Price: ₹3

www.kashmirobserver.net • twitter.com / kashmirobserver • facebook.com/kashmirobserver • Postal Regn: L/159/KO/SK/2014-2016

Contact: -0194-2502327
FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS &
YOUR COPY OF

News Digest

Siblings Held During CASO In Qamarwari

Srinagar- Two brothers from Barthana area of Qamarwari Srinagar were arrested during search operation and a pistol magazine along with 12 rounds of Ak47 was recovered from their possession, police said. A police officer said that a cordon-and-search-operation was launched in the Barthana area during which house of one Tariq Ahmad Hajam who is land broker by profession was raided, reported news agency GNS. During the searches, the police officer claimed that a pistol magazine and 12 rounds of Ak47 were recovered from the house. Besides Tariq police also arrested his brother Reyaz Ahmad Hajam, the police officer added. "Further investigations are underway," the officer added.

Cross-LoC Shelling Continues In Poonch

Jammu: India and Pakistani troops exchanged gunfire for the second consecutive day Thursday along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district. Pakistani troops violated the ceasefire by resorting to intense shelling in forward areas along the LoC in Poonch district on Thursday night, a defence spokesperson said. The Indian Army is retaliating strongly, he said. "Around 10 pm, Pakistan initiated unprovoked ceasefire violation by firing" P-02

Ex-Army Officer Shoots Wife

Srinagar: A retired Army captain allegedly shot at and critically wounded his wife in north Kashmir's Bandipora district, reports said Thursday. Ghulam Hassan Khan, a former army captain shot at and injured his wife identified as Fatima Begum following an altercation at their home in Sumlar village of the district on Wednesday late night, reports said. The woman received serious head injury was taken to the nearby hospital for treatment. However, the doctors there referred her to SKIMS Srinagar for advanced treatment. Meanwhile, officials said that a case has been registered and investigations have been started in this regard.

Minor Dies Of Drowning In Kulgam

Srinagar: A minor boy died of drowning in a Nallah in Damhal Hanjipora area of South Kashmir's Kulgam district on Thursday. Nine-year-old Nisar Ahmad Dar son of Gulzar Ahmad Dar drowned in Bushi Nallah in DK Marg area of the district, news agency KNO reported. The locals instantly started a rescue operation to save the boy. However, after hours of hectic efforts, the locals found lifeless body of the minor around 7:00 pm. Meanwhile, a police officer said the body of minor was handed over to his family for the last rites.

Govt Jobs Given To Kin Of Shelling Victims

Jammu: The Jammu and Kashmir administration on Thursday gave government jobs to the next of kin of three civilians who died in Pakistani shelling along the Line of Control (LoC), an official spokesman said. Deputy Commissioner, Poonch, Rahul Yadav handed over the appointment orders. The government jobs for the next of kin were cleared last month, the spokesman said. "These cases were approved by the district-level screening cum co-ordination committee at a meeting held on July 24 after which all the" P-02

CPJ, RSF Urge GOI To Uphold Press Freedom In Kashmir

Seek Immediate Release of Kashmiri Journalist Aasif Sultan

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) along with nearly 400 journalists and civil society members have written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking him to uphold the country's commitment to press freedom and release imprisoned Kashmiri journalist Aasif Sultan booked on alleged links to militancy.

In the letter, which has also been sent to Home Minister Amit Shah and Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, the ICJ and as many as 397 writers, journalists, aca-

demics, press freedom advocates, and civil society members have sought Sultan's release, who completed two years in prison on Thursday.

The signatories write that Sultan has been unjustly detained since August 27, 2018, under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, for his alleged complicity in "harboring known terrorists."

"But interviewing alleged militants or having sources who are critical of the government is within the scope of a journalist's job and does not implicate them in any crime. Events in Kashmir are of public interest, and covering them is a public" P-02

PAGE 1 Anchor

Crisis In Kashmir Construction: A Case Of 'Rs 1000 Crore' Bill

Sanika Athavale

MID 2018, an oddly familiar phrase was being reiterated in media and public discourses in Kashmir. A memory from four years ago – the devastating 2014 floods which had uprooted many lives and forced several others to rebuild theirs, had made the sinister term 'flood alert' intimate and recognizable to many Kashmiris.

During the monsoon-month of June that year, intermittent heavy rains had jolted authorities into taking 'safety measures' such as closing the Srinagar-Jammu highway and issuing a sincere warning to the communities living on the

banks of Jhelum river. Reportedly, 'small-scale evacuation' was also carried out to leave no stone unturned in ensuring safety to all citizens of the valley. Since three people had already lost their lives due to flash floods and landslides in Jammu, life – as controlled – was brought to a halt in Kashmir.

The well-remembered and feared instance of the 2014 floods had already transformed 'rainfall', from being a natural occurrence, into a bad spirit which haunted Kashmir and had to be combated with duas calling for the dispersion of grey clouds. Thus, anxious prayers and panic was brought alive in the minds of commoners watching the rash downpour, two years ago.



File Photo Of 2014 Floods

As a part of the 'safety measures', the 2018 administrative setup asked local contractors to rise to the occasion and help authorities in mitigating the damage

to life and property. This business community was asked to do "their bit for the public" by dedicating their services and resources to the construction of embankments

along Jhelum river.

They rose. They built. But now they wait in limbo.

The 'Rs 1000 Crore' Bill

"Since 2014", after the infamous floods wreaked havoc in Kashmir, Zeeshan Rehman informed that "a lot of 'rehabilitation work' amounting to Rs 1000 crore including macadamisation and school reconstruction was executed by civil contractors." Rehman is the Acting Chairperson of the Senior Contractors Coordination Committee (J&K).

According to him, 'rehabilitation work' had begun soon after the calamity and was completed over a period of one and a half years. "Post that, there have been many times when everyone here (Kash-

mir) has anticipated a flood because of unseasonal rain. Almost every time such fears rose, local contractors have been approached to take care of it," he added.

Owing to a similar condition in 2018, after the Jhelum rose above its 'danger mark', a syndicate of technocrats, representative of the then-Srinagar administration, had reached out to a group of civil contractors for building embankments along the river to prevent flooding and a '2014-like crisis'.

"There was no flood but the warning was given by the officials anyway. The chief engineers, superintendents engineers, etc. from departments such as Public Health Engineering (PHE)," P-02

Heavy Rains Give Respite From Heat, Raise Fear Of Floods



KO Photo Abid Bhat

☀️ THE WEATHER WILL IMPROVE AND WILL BE SUNNY FROM Friday Afternoon And Is Likely To Stay Dry Over The Next Few Days" —MeT Office

Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR: Incessant rain pounded Kashmir valley for the second straight day on Thursday sparking fears of floods even as landslides and flash floods disrupted traffic on major highways.

According to the Meteorological Department's weather forecast, there will be no immediate relief. The Met office on Wednesday had

Rains Batter Jammu, No Threat Of Floods

Incessant rains continued in most parts of Jammu and Kashmir for the third consecutive day on Thursday, leading to increase in the water level in major rivers and streams but there was no immediate threat of floods, officials said. The 270-km Jammu-Srinagar national highway, the only P-02

predicted "intense rainfall activity" for the next four days.

Srinagar recorded 147 mm of rainfall till 8:30 am this morning

since Wednesday and 19.6 mm during the Tuesday/Wednesday night, the officials said. Qazigund recorded 21.2 mm P-02

KP Delegation Meets Farooq, Support Gupkar Declaration

Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR: A delegation of Kashmiri Pandit entrepreneurs on Thursday called on National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah here and extended its support to Gupkar Declaration, a party spokesperson said.

Abdullah, who is also a Member of Parliament, assured his party's full support to the Kashmiri Pandit community.

A delegation of Kashmiri Pandit entrepreneurs called on the party president at his residence. Among other issues, the delegation extended its support to Gupkar Declaration, the spokesperson said.

The Gupkar Declaration is a

PDP Leaders Detained During Protest March

Several PDP leaders and supporters were detained on Thursday after they tried to take out a protest march here against the detention of Kashmiris, including politicians, officials said. The PDP leaders P-02

resolution issued after an all-party meeting on August 4, 2019 at the Gupkar residence of the NC president, a day before the Centre announced its decision to revoke J&K's special status P-02

Govt Warns Against Azadi Slogans During Muharram Processions

Restrictions On All Religious Processions In Kashmir To Continue: Div Com

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir administration on Thursday warned strict action against people who raise pro-freedom and anti-India slogans during Muharram processions in Kashmir.

Chairing a meeting here to take stock of Muharram arrangements, the Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Pandurang K Pole also said that restrictions shall continue on all religious processions and gatherings in all districts, an official spokesperson said.



File Photo

"The Div Com said that in the last few instances some anti-national elements tried to give different directions to a purely religious matter, which has been viewed seriously and all such elements shall be dealt" P-02

Police Foils 7th Muharram Procession In City

Government forces on Thursday used force to foil the attempt of people to take out the traditional 7th Muharram procession in Rainawari area of the city. Hundreds of people assembled at Shia dominated Hassanabad locality on Thursday afternoon and tried to march towards P-02

Madhav In Srinagar To Assess Situation

SRINAGAR: BJP general secretary Ram Madhav on Thursday arrived in the summer capital, Srinagar to assess the political situation in view of mainstream parties pressing for restoration of Article 370 and statehood in J&K.

This visit of Madhav, who is the point man for the saffron party in J&K, holds significance as it comes at a time when activities by other political parties, including National Conference (NC) and Congress, have started for the first time after August 5, 2019.

The visit also comes at a time when several BJP leaders have been targeted by militants.

Sources said that the BJP general secretary arrived here on Thursday afternoon. "From the airport, Mr Madhav went to circuit" P-02

1500 Structures In Prohibited Zones In Pahalgam: Govt

Agencies

SRINAGAR: The J&K High Court on Thursday said "financial incapacity" cited by the government for undertaking the relocation or rehabilitation of the built-up areas, hamlets existing within wildlife and forest zones in Pahalgam "cannot be compromised under any circumstances."

Hearing a Public Interest Litigation, a division bench of Chief Justice Gita Mittal and Justice Puneet Gupta it was the sole responsibility of the Government whose imperative duty lies in such conservation.

The observations by the court followed perusal of a status report filed by Mushtaq Ahmad Simnani, Chief

Executive Officer, Pahalgam Development Authority, stating that identification of the various zones including the non-construction areas within wildlife zones has been effected.

He stated that 1500 structures have been identified in the prohibited zones in the ground survey conducted by the Revenue Department.

Simnani has stated that the 1500 structures which presently exist in the no construction zones were constructed prior to the Master Plan 2005-25 when there was no such demarcation of zones.

In the report, he said that it has been decided and consequently incorporated in the revised Master Plan vide Chapter VII- 7.2 P-02

...LADAKH STAND-OFF

Troops Disengagement Only Achievable Through Reciprocal Means: MEA

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI/BEIJING: India on Thursday said a complete disengagement of troops in eastern Ladakh can be achieved only through mutually agreed reciprocal actions and also highlighted resolution of border incidents with China in the past through diplomacy.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said complete disengagement requires re-deployment of troops by each side towards their regular posts on their respective



File Photo

sides of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and this can be done only through mutually agreed actions.

At an online media briefing, Srivastava also talked about External

Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's reference, in a recent interview, to resolution of various border incidents in the past through diplomacy.

"I would also refer you" P-02

Crisis In Kashmir Construction...

Public Works (R&B), Irrigation and Flood Control (IFC), used to visit the Jhelum very often," Rehman explained.

Generally, contractors are awarded infrastructural projects after the concerned department issues a tender for the same. As most government processes have been digitised to mirror the pace of international institutions, even tenders are required to be issued electronically in Jammu and Kashmir – especially since the inception of J&K's e-tendering portal in 2011. "We guessed at that time that they did not have the time to float e-tenders because they told us to begin our work without issuing anything. We were told, at that time, in complete seriousness, that it was an emergency. We dutifully followed the government officers then, but they have been missing in the conversation ever since we appeared with our bills and liabilities from the projects we finished," he said. The committee of contractors that Rehman represents has alleged that the Department of Finance has been outrightly rejecting the bills presented by his peers from the 'rehabilitation work' they executed post 2014. The Department has reportedly claimed that the contractors cannot be compensated because most of their contracts were carried out without 'e-tendering'.

"The due process has not been followed, we are told. But the irony is that we were asked to do the work by officials and technocrats," he lamented. "The bills must contain the details of e-tendering, administrative approval, and technical sanction, otherwise they are being dismissed." Basheer Ahmad Khan, former president of Hot Mix Plant Owners Association, compared the extraordinary circumstances of 2018 to the unprecedented pandemic of 2020. He questioned if the administration had issued e-tenders, as per the formal process, to manufacture masks, sanitisers, etc. suggesting that the opposite had happened. "The same thing affected us in 2015. Government authorities told us to focus on completing the civil projects while assuring that our payments will happen as and when we finish our assignments. We trusted them but now an amount of Rs 309 crore is due from the Public Works Department (PWD) alone," he said.

Khan and Rehman have stated that the three ministers from the PDP-BJP coalition government of 2015-2018 – Haseeb Drabu, Naeem Akhtar, and Altaf Bukhari – have been responsible for ordering the infrastructure work, approaching the contractors, and forming the agreement. Commenting on his implication in the pending payments problem, Apni Party chief and ex-PWD minister of J&K, Altaf Bukhari told Kashmir Observer, "Yes, a lot of road restoration work along with other projects was completed after the floods and I would like to compliment all the contractors who helped the government at that time and finished their jobs efficiently. I am aware that, unfortunately, around 300 plus crores are due to them."

However, Bukhari added that there was little he could do after the government reshuffle in 2016 owing to Mufti Mohammed Syed's death. "We were asked to finish the projects on a war-footing-basis. This has been the case from 2014. Since the introduction of JK Pay Sys in early 2019, the officials in the Treasury Department tell us that without e-tendering, our bills will not be accepted. However, there is close to nothing we can do to change the past. We were contacted and employed by chief and superintendent engineers of different public departments. If something has gone wrong they are equally responsible if not more," Rehman declared.

The contractors asserted that they have always welcomed modernising initiatives like the 'JK Pay Sys' – which is being implemented in full swing since this financial year. But the moot point between the employing (government) and employed (contractors) parties has been whether 'work which was undertaken or completed before the institutional introduction of JK Pay Sys, should be scrutinised by the new rules'. They, at that time, were given administrative approvals and technical sanctions fulfilling two out of the three prerequisites of the new payments system. "So now when they ask us, 'why was there no e-tendering' before rejecting our bills, I wish to question their motive behind directing the query to us, contractors. Why ask us? Ask the ones who gave us the job, who also have to float the tenders as a part of their responsibility," he rued.

Altaf Bukhari has called this treatment "harassment" and expressed concerns over the "financial mismanagement in Jammu and Kashmir". Amin Khan, a mechanical contractor, also admitted to not having received his payment from the last three years. He said that a lot of contractors have been taking up tenders after applying for bank loans at a time when, he believes, the administration is issuing tenders without having any monetary funds to fulfill their part of the deal.

In September 2019, he had worked with the PHE and IFC departments (now collectively called as 'Jal Shakti') for Narendra Modi's 'Ghar Ghar Paani' scheme which promised citizens access to tapped water facilities. "Despite having completed my job and spent around Rs 15 lakhs, I haven't got a single penny that is to be rightfully paid to me," he solemnly said. "Bleated Bill"

"The 1000 crore figure is simply not true," Iftikhar Ahmad Kakroo, the Chief Engineer of Irrigation and Flood Control Department (IFC) told Kashmir Observer. "A lot of the dues have been paid back to the contractors that were employed in the specified period." As per this official, all dues have been cleared by the IFC department for 2014. "Yes, there is some liability for 2018. This was work that was undertaken to help the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) and I think that the outstanding amount is only a couple of crores," he said. Interestingly, Zeeshan Rehman alone has bills amounting to Rs 35 lakhs from 2018 and 7 lakhs from 2014, which need to be paid for by the IFC department.

However, Mazhar Hussain, the Director of Finance for the Public Works (R&B) Department, maintained that the "government has been very serious about clearing the liabilities" while citing the "new order" which presents a roadmap for clearing macadamisation dues. "This issue is very tedious and does need careful examination," Hussain told Kashmir Observer. "It would not be right to comment right now since I am not completely aware of the problems of the contractors. But I would like to say that every process needs to be transparent." Noting that e-tendering was not a new feature in the business of contractors, Kakroo admitted that "in 2014 and 2018, when an emergency was declared, e-tendering was not done." He has been chairing the functions of the IFC department since the past two months only but has claimed to have taken the contractors' issue with the seniors of his department. "We are committed to solving this and undoing the confusion," he stated.

What Do Officials Want?

Even after several attempts made by groups representing Jammu and Kashmir's contractors to bring the miscommunication and discrepancies in the system to the attention of the authorities, Rehman believes that all the efforts have so far been in vain. "We did not go to then-government with begging bowls asking for work. They came to us for our services. Also, if we have done anything wrong then all the chief and superintendent engineers should also be penalized with us. We are told 'you did more work than you were allotted' but it was the officials who asked us to do it and because of their carelessness we have been having liabilities since the past 4-5 years," he further mentioned. Basheer Khan argued that the process of budget allocation has been tampered with, leading to all these problems.

"Previously," he said, "lawmakers had a mechanism that allowed the budget to be slightly more than the estimate for the community and state. For example, if the budget needed to be Rs 100 crores, it would be made Rs 120-130 crores. Our dues were being cleared as per our agreements until 2014." As per his interaction with the authorities, the accrued amounts of 2014 and onwards will be cleared only after the physical examination of the embankments. The examination is reportedly being conducted by the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the ACB which has now started digging the earth around the river to check the work that was completed four years ago. But in a region like Kashmir, where all construction projects would be time-bound for weather-related reasons, the players of this seasonal business say that are being "pushed to the edges of despondency."

"The government has been ignoring us after 2014. We are a community on the operations of which a government functions. Without us, there would be no one to build and establish all the schools, hospitals, infrastructure that the politicians promise the public. But we have been grossly ignored by the political setup since 2015," Basheer said exasperatedly.

Altaf Bukhari confirmed that the contractors have been troubled by these developments in their case.

"The present Finance Secretary has been delaying this case, but I know that he is an honest bureaucrat," the Apni part chief said.

"Nevertheless, honesty is not only about being non-corrupt but it is about doing your duties properly. One cannot hide behind the smokescreen of 'anti-corruption' and delay processes. Issues must be solved on priority. I vouch for the contractors as I know their problems are real." The politician also stated that the contractors' dues must be paid to them with interest so that they can pay their lenders and justify their wait of many years.

Heavy Rains Give Respite...

rainfall, Pahalgam 8.2 mm, Kokernag 28 mm, Kupwara 23 mm and Gulmarg

32.8 mm. A weather advisory by the MeT Office predicted flash floods and landslides in vulnerable parts of Jammu and Kashmir. "IMDs experimental model shows that the soil at various places of J-K, especially the Jammu region is fully saturated and has low water absorbing capacity. Continuous rain may lead to flash flood and landslide at vulnerable places," the advisory read. It said the weather system may lead to disruption of traffic on Srinagar- Jammu National highway, Srinagar-Leh highway and the Mughal Road. The MeT office has said the heavy rainfall will continue across the valley till the evening of Thursday, after which there will be a gradual decrease.

The weather will improve and will be sunny from Friday afternoon, the MeT office said, adding that the weather is likely to stay dry over the next few days.

Relief to farmers

The continuous rainfall across Kashmir since the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday also brought relief to the farmers as the valley had reeled under dry weather conditions over the past three months. Srinagar city recorded a maximum temperature of 35.7 degrees Celsius on August 17 which was the hottest August day in the last 39 years. The mercury in the city and elsewhere in the valley had stayed above the normal by several degrees this month. However, the rains have brought down the temperature with the city recording the maximum of 22.6 degrees Celsius on Wednesday which is 13 degrees lower than what it recorded on August 17, the officials said. The maximum temperature in Srinagar is 6.6 degrees below the normal for this part of the season, they added.

The other places in the valley also experienced huge relief from the hotter days due to the rains as the mercury went down by several degrees.

Rains Batter Jammu, No Threat ...

all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country, also remained closed for the third day, while landslides triggered by overnight rains led to the closure of several other hilly roads in different parts of the Jammu division this morning, they said. "The situation so far is under control though the water level in major rivers and streams across Jammu region is increasing due to heavy rains in the catchment areas. However, there is no immediate threat of floods," Superintending Engineer (hydraulic Circle), Irrigation and Flood Control department Jammu, Sumit Puri told PTI. He said the water level in river Tawi in the city at noon was 10.30 ft which is seven feet below danger mark while the gauge in river Chenab near Akhnour in the outskirts of Jammu read 29 feet which is also almost six feet below the danger mark. "Our teams are monitoring the water level regularly and have already sounded an alert, asking people not to come closer to the swollen water bodies as a precautionary measure," he said, adding that people need to exercise caution as the weatherman has predicted more rains during the day. He said the water level in Tawi and other water bodies was expected to increase by two to three feet in the next couple of hours.

Five persons, including a couple, were killed and a number of cattle perished in separate incidents of landslides and house collapse in different parts of the Jammu region, while a bridge and dozens of thatched hutments belonging to Gujar and Bakarwals were washed away over the past two days. The residents in many areas also faced a lot of hardships after water from overflowing streams entered their homes and pedestrians had to walk through water-logged roads to reach their destination. A number of roads in various localities were also damaged by the rains, the officials said, adding that a clear picture about the extent of damage would emerge after a detailed assessment. The officials said thousands of vehicles, mostly trucks, remained stranded on Jammu-Srinagar national highway which remained closed for the third day on Thursday. The highway was closed for vehicular traffic on Tuesday after a massive landslide struck the arterial road at Dalwas in Ramban district but the road clearance work was hit by inclement weather which triggered fresh landslides and shooting of stones from the hillocks overlooking the highway at nearly a dozen places between Banihal-Nashri sector.

"The highway is still closed as overnight rains triggered fresh landslides and shooting of stones at various places including Panthiyal, Digidole, Samroli, Dalwas, Kunfer, Monkey Morh and Moum Passi," a traffic department official said, adding that despite inclement weather, the restoration work is going on to ensure early reopening of the road. He said landslides also forced closure of different hilly roads, including Basohli-Kathua, Kotranka-Rajouri, Paddar-Kishtwar, Basant-Dudu and Doda-Bhaderwah, this morning and the men and machines are on the job to restore these roads.

J&K's Positivity Rate 3.8%...

spread of infection through travellers, primary and secondary contacts, especially after resumption of religious pilgrimage.

"J&K is still conducting universal testing of all visitors travelling by air, road and railways", Subrahmanyam added. Earlier, the Cabinet Secretary asked all the States and Union Territories to dedicatedly work on the testing and early hospitalization of COVID patients, besides, undertaking a robust containment/red zone surveillance strategy to ensure that the case fatality in each State/UT remains below 1%. According to the official spokesperson, while reviewing the public health response to COVID-19, Cabinet Secretary informed that currently 10 States/ UTs are having approximately 70% active cases with subsequent 83% COVID related deaths. "He laid emphasis on the need to proactively identify the critical cases and provide prompt medical intervention to check this trend," the official spokesperson said.

The Cabinet Secretary, he said also reiterated the need for an effective containment strategy and adequate testing facilities for early detection of COVID cases so as to minimise its spread in the community. "This can be further reinforced by perimeter control, active house to house surveillance, contact tracing and timely testing", Gauba, as per the official spokesperson said. "Speaking on the measures to be undertaken to lower 'Case Fatality Rate' below 1%, Cabinet Secretary emphasised on tracing and testing all close contacts of new positive cases with 72 hours of detection, in addition to regularly monitoring the patients under home isolation through tele-calling and home visits. He maintained that testing capacities can be augmented by using Rapid Antigen Tests in containment zones and healthcare institutions," the official spokesperson added.

Ex-MLC, 10 More Die Of...

case of bilateral pneumonia with HTN and diabetes. "The patient was intubated on August 16 and had cardiac arrest," a senior doctor at the hospital said. A 45-year-old woman from Pandach Srinagar, who was admitted to SKIMS Soura on August 25 died at the tertiary care hospital. A 58-year-old woman from Hajan Pulwama who was admitted on August 18 also died at the hospital. A 60-year-old man from Fateh Kadal Srinagar who was admitted on August 17 as a case of "CKD, CAD bilateral CAP" died at SMHS hospital. A 56-year-old woman from Waterwani Budgam also died at SKIMS, a week after she was admitted to the hospital, the sources said. Among others, the fatalities include an 80-year-old person from Koker-nag area and a 60-year-old woman from Pulwama. With these deaths, 675 people have fallen victims to the covid-19 and include 57 from Jammu division and remaining 618 from Kashmir Valley. (With GNS inputs)

4 Doctors Among 655 More...

pregnant woman, four doctors, the remaining 158 were confirmed by officials in the Jammu division.

Giving district-wise breakup of the cases, officials said, Srinagar reported 182 cases, Baramulla 33, Pulwama 42, Budgam 60, Anantnag 27, Kulgam 8, Shopian 23, Kupwara 46, Bandipora 51, Ganderbal 25, Jammu 87, Rajouri 7, Kathua 25, Udhampur 8, Samba 11, Doda 10, Poonch 5, Reasi 2 and Kishtwar 3.

Meanwhile, the officials said, 528 more COVID-19 patients have recovered and were discharged from various hospitals—89 from Jammu Division and 439 from Kashmir Valley.

Kashmiri Pandit Group...

and split it into two union territories.

"That modification, abrogation of Articles 35A and 370, unconstitutional delimitation or trifurcation of the state would be an aggression against the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh," the Gupkar Declaration read. Political parties in Kashmir last week issued a joint statement saying they adhere to the last year's declaration and would be united in their resolve to protect and defend the identity, autonomy and the special status of Jammu and Kashmir against all attacks and onslaughts.

The parties unanimously resolved to fight for restoration of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir as it existed pre-August 5, 2019, saying the measures taken were "spitefully shortsighted" and "grossly unconstitutional".

"We all reiterate that we are bound, wholly, by the contents of the Gupkar Declaration and will unwaveringly adhere to it. We are committed to strive for the restoration of Articles 370 and 35A, the Constitution of J&K and the restoration of the state and any division of the state is unacceptable to us. We unanimously reiterate that there can be 'nothing about us without us,'" the statement said.

PDP Leaders Detained During...

and supporters assembled at the party office near the Sher-e-Kashmir Park here and tried to take out the march, the officials said.

They added that the protesters raised slogans demanding the release of Kashmiris jailed in and outside the Union Territory and political prisoners, including PDP chief and former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti.

The protesters tried to march towards the city centre, however, police stopped them, the officials said.

Some of the protesters were taken into custody, they added.

The party said the police stopped a peaceful protest against the detention of political prisoners, the "harassment" of youngsters, the "gag" on media and "gross human rights violations".

"Police stops peaceful protest of @jkdpd leaders against the detention of political prisoners, the harassment of youth, the gag on media & rights violations. Police has now detained PDP leaders Rouf Bhat, Hamid Qousheen, Shanti Singh, Arif Laigroo & Mohd Amin," the party said on its official Twitter handle.

Meanwhile, Mufti's daughter Ilitja took to Twitter over the police action and said "enforced normalcy through institutionalised repression" stood exposed.

"PDP's Hamid Kohsheen, Rauf Bhat, Arif, @HarbakshDr, Mushtaq & Omar protesting against illegal detention of Kashmiris in & outside J&K have been arrested in Srinagar. Enforced normalcy through institutionalised repression stands exposed. Peaceful protest is also sedition," she wrote on her mother's Twitter handle, which she has been using since last year, after Mufti was taken into custody.

Govt Warns Against Azadi...

strictly under the law," he said. Pertinently, the Divisional Commissioner's warning comes a day after police arrested two youth for their alleged involvement in chanting pro-freedom slogans during a Muharram procession in Hokersar area of the city outskirts.

On Wednesday also, Muharram processions turned into pro-freedom rallies, after police used tear smoke shells and fired in the air to disperse them in Budgam and Srinagar. Officials had claimed that the force was used as the people had violated SOPs and taken out the Muharram processions.

According to an official spokesperson, the meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioners Srinagar and Budgam, Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, Shahbaz Mirza, SSP Srinagar, Haseeb Mughal, Joint Commissioner SMC. Some Shia community leaders, including Secretary Abid Hussain Ansari of Shia Association, Aga Syed Muntazir, of Anjumane Sharie Shaiyan and representatives from other parties.

During the meeting, the official spokesperson said Shia organisations extended their full support to the administration with assurance that no procession or any other outside gathering shall be conducted during these days. He said that the Div Com sought support from these religious bodies and urged them to sensitize people about avoiding all religious processions/ gatherings in wake of Covid-19.

"He urged the heads of these bodies to use their influence and aware people about the importance of following Covid-19 related SOPs including social distancing protocol and use of face masks while commemorating martyrdom of Imam Hussain A.S and other martyrs of Karbala," the official spokesperson said. "He appealed to people to show their cooperation at this juncture as Covid-19 cases were on rise in Kashmir and any carelessness can prove disastrous for the entire society," he added. The official spokesperson further said that during the meeting, the representatives raised various issues with the Div Com and demanded prompt resolution. "The Div Com instructed all DCs and SSPs to cooperate and extend their support to people for hassle-free holding of majalis," he said, adding "He also directed to developmental departments to carry out necessary works and ensure uninterrupted power and potable water supply besides speedy completion of lane and drain works in all Shia dominated areas

Police Foils 7th Muharram...

Botraj Mohalla, to Kathi Darwaza, the route of traditional Muharram procession on the seventh day of the Islamic month of Muharram, witnesses told Kashmir Observer.

When the mourners reached near Dharamshala crossing, eyewitnesses said that the cops, who were deployed in strength, resorted to tear smoke shelling.

"This led to complete chaos. After lobbing tear smoke shells, the cops chased the mourners and pushed them back to Hassanabad Chowk," Shabir Hussain, an eyewitness said.

He said that the police action was unwarranted and uncalled for, as the mourners were moving peacefully towards the Kathi Darwaza.

"The mourners were only raising pro-Islam and other religious slogans. They all were wearing masks and keeping social distance as well. There was no provocation by mourners at all," Hussain said.

7th Muharram is the last major procession in the city as two major processions of 8th and 10th Muharram have not been taken out since a ban was imposed on them by successive governments 23 years back.

On Wednesday also, Muharram processions turned into pro-freedom rallies, after police used tear smoke shells and fired in the air to disperse them in Budgam and Srinagar. Officials had claimed that the force was used as the people had violated SOPs and taken out the Muharram processions.

So far, police has arrested two youth for their alleged involvement in chanting pro-freedom slogans during a Muharram procession in Hokersar area of the city outskirts.

On Thursday, the Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Pandurang K Pole said that restrictions shall continue on all religious processions and gatherings in all districts in wake of Covid-19 pandemic.

Madhav In Srinagar To Assess...

house in the city where he met several party leaders," they said.

They said Madhav is expected to chair a meeting of state BJP leaders to assess to political situation in J&K, where National Conference (NC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Peoples Conference, Congress, Awami National Conference (ANC) and the CPI (M) earlier this week reiterated their commitment to 'Gupkar Declaration' and announced a joint political battle for the restoration of Article 370 and Article 35A and its statehood. BJP has termed the Gupkar Declaration 'anti-national, pro-secessionist, misleading and deceptive'.

The Gupkar Declaration was signed by leaders of six political parties on August 4 last year, a day before Article 370 and Article 35 A were revoked by Parliament and the erstwhile state was divided into two Union Territories.

"Kashmir BJP unit will also raise the issue of security of BJP leaders and workers, who are being targeted by militants," they added.

In the last about two months, five BJP leaders were killed by militants in different parts of Kashmir.

CPI, RSF Urge GOI To...

service, not a criminal act," the signatories write.

The letter also mentions that Sultan's trial has been moving slowly since June 2019 and he has repeatedly been denied bail. It also says that police have reportedly interrogated him about his writing and asked him to reveal his sources.

"Journalists should not face retaliation for their reporting. Press freedom is a vital tenet of democracy and a proud part of India's history. We are asking you to recognize and uphold India's commitment to press freedom under Article 19 of its constitution," the letter reads.

It further adds that given the recent deaths of journalists who contracted COVID-19 in government custody around the world, and the spread of COVID-19 among inmates in jails in Jammu and Kashmir, the threat to Sultan's well-being is significant.

"We call on you to follow the Supreme Court's guidance issued on March 23 to release prisoners on parole due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and grant Aasif Sultan immediate and unconditional release," the letter adds.

Meanwhile Reporters Without Borders (RSF) also reiterated on Thursday its call for the release of Kashmiri journalist who completes his second year in detention "without any serious evidence ever being produced to support the charges of 'harbouring terrorists'".

RSF in a recent report, alleged that it has been almost impossible for journalists to operate in the Kashmir Valley for the past year because of draconian information controls, obstacles to the dissemination of articles and videos, intimidation by the security forces in the field, and every kind of judicial harassment.

"The way the Indian authorities repeatedly obstruct the freedom to inform in Kashmir is unworthy of a democracy," said Daniel Bastard, the head of RSF's Asia-Pacific desk.

India is ranked 142nd out of 180 countries and territories in RSF's 2020

World Press Freedom Index.

Troops Disengagement...

to the recent interview of External Affairs Minister (EAM) wherein referring to various past border incidents he had noted that what was common was that all border situations were resolved through diplomacy," Srivastava said.

He further said: "EAM had further noted that 'when it comes to finding a solution, this must be predicated on honouring all agreements and understandings. And not attempting to alter the status quo unilaterally'". China, meanwhile, said India should look at the big picture of bilateral ties and work with it and take concrete steps to bring the relationship back on the right track of normal development." Beijing also said New Delhi should put the border issue in an appropriate position in this "big picture" and avoid misjudgement . Asked for his comments on the current situation at the India-China border at the monthly online media briefing, Chinese defence ministry Spokesman Senior Colonel Wu Qian said progress has been made in the disengagement of the frontline troops of India and China in eastern Ladakh due to efforts from both sides. "China and India are important neighbours to each other. Maintaining peace and stability in the border areas is not only conducive to their respective development, but also to regional and world peace and stability," he said, adding that "remaining issues" at the border needed to be handled properly.

"India could work with China towards the same goal, bearing in mind the big picture of bilateral ties and putting the border issue in an appropriate position in this big picture, avoid misjudgement, keep divergences from escalating into disputes, and take concrete steps to bring the bilateral relations back to the right track of normal development," Wu was quoted as saying in a statement put out by the Ministry of Defence. At his online briefing, Srivastava also referred to last week's talks between the two sides under the framework of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on border affairs. "As I had conveyed earlier, complete disengagement requires re-deployment of troops by each side towards their regular posts on their respective sides of the LAC. It is natural that this can be done only through mutually agreed reciprocal actions. Thus it is important to bear in mind that achieving this requires agreed actions by both sides," he said.

Srivastava said the two sides at the last meeting of the WMCC agreed to resolve the outstanding issues in an expeditious manner and in accordance with the existing agreements and protocols. "Both sides also agree that full restoration of peace and tranquility in the border areas would be essential for the overall development of bilateral relations. The two sides had also agreed to continue their engagements both through diplomatic and military channels," he said. At the WMCC talks, Srivastava said the two sides had a candid and in-depth exchange of views on the existing situation in the India-China border areas. "Both sides have reaffirmed that the two sides will continue to sincerely work towards complete disengagement of the troops along the Line of Actual Control in the Western Sector in accordance with the agreements reached between the two Foreign Ministers and the two Special Representatives," he said. On July 5, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a nearly two-hour-long telephonic conversation on ways to resolve the row. The formal process of disengagement of troops began a day after Doval-Wang talks. Both Doval and Wang are special representatives for boundary talks.

In Beijing, Wu was further quoted as saying that China and India have agreed to follow the "important consensus reached by the leaders of both countries and other relevant agreements, continue to maintain dialogue and communication through military and diplomatic channels, further ease and cool down the China-India border situation, properly handle the remaining issues, and jointly safeguard peace and tranquility in the border area." The Chinese military has pulled back from Galwan Valley and certain other friction points but the withdrawal of troops has not moved forward in Pangong Tso, Depsang and a couple of other areas since mid-July, sources said. In the five rounds of Corps commander-level talks, the Indian side has been insisting on complete disengagement of Chinese troops at the earliest, and immediate restoration of status quo ante in all areas of eastern Ladakh prior to April. The tension between the two sides escalated manifold after the violent clashes in Galwan Valley on June 15 in which 20 Indian Army personnel were killed. The Chinese side also suffered casualties but it is yet to give out the details. According to an American intelligence report, the number of casualties on the Chinese side was 35.

Following the Galwan Valley incident, the government gave the armed forces "full freedom" to give a "befitting" response to any Chinese misadventure along the LAC. The Army sent thousands of additional troops to forward locations along the border following the deadly clashes. The IAF has also moved air defence systems as well as a sizeable number of its frontline combat jets and attack helicopters to several key air bases.

1500 Structures In Prohibited...

(a) that no further construction shall be allowed in these areas.

The CEO said that there was no Scheme for relocation or rehabilitation of built-up areas and hamlets existing within wildlife and forest zones.

In order to ensure that there is no illegal construction activity in Pahal-gam, the court observed that a digital blueprint of the existing structures and their surroundings requires to be prepared, which would include cadestial mapping, photography and videography. "In the report financial incapacity is reported for undertaking the relocation or rehabilitation of the built-up areas / hamlets existing within wildlife / forest zones. But keeping in view the preservation and conservation of the fragile ecology and environment including forests and wildlife, this aspect cannot be compromised under any circumstances," the court said, adding, "It is the sole responsibility of the Government whose imperative duty lies in such conservation, to have the existing structures video-graphed / photographed on the same lines as has been undertaken in Dal Lake area in Srinagar."

The court has also directed that each building owner located in the forest, wild life areas shall submit the complete site plan of the existing construction with photographs to the Chief Executive Officer, Pahal-gam Development Authority and the Deputy Commissioner, Anantnag. "The Deputy Commissioner, Anantnag, and the Chief Executive Officer, Pahalgam Development Authority shall cause verification of the submissions by the owners; prepare a list of owners as well the locations, sizes of the plots and extent of construction on which the construction exists," the court said.

The CEO Pahalgam Development Authority and the Deputy Commissioner, Anantnag, the court said shall initiate and submit a report to the Court for undertaking digital documentation including videography, the cadestial mapping photographs of all the existing structures via drones in Pahalgam on the same lines as had been done in and around the Dal Lake.

"The respondents shall complete all proper digital documentation, of the forest and wildlife areas clearly demarcating places where the construction exists," the court said, adding, "We also direct that the videography of the forest and wildlife area shall also be undertaken by the aforesaid officers."

The court also ordered that the record shall be put in the public domain and safely preserved both by the Deputy Commissioner, Anantnag, as well as the Chief Executive Officer, Pahalgam Development Authority. "A status report in this regard shall be filed before this Court within six weeks from today," the court said. Regarding Solid Waste Management Bye-Laws, Deputy Commissioner, Anantnag, filed a status report stating that all the Municipal Committees in District Anantnag including Municipal Council Anantnag have notified the Bye Laws. "With regard to the Solid Waste Management Bye-laws, the Deputy Commissioner, Anantnag, shall file a status report with regard to the action taken for implementation of the Solid Waste Management Bye-laws and the details of fines which have been recovered in the process thereto," the court said and ordered that such report shall be filed within eight weeks. (GNS)

Cross-LoC Shelling Continues...

with small arms and intense shelling with mortars in Degwar and Malti sectors," the spokesperson said.

He said the cross-border shelling was going on when last reports were received. There has been no report of any casualty on the Indian side so far.

Govt Jobs Given To Kin Of...

necessary formalities were processed," an official of the district administration said.

He said the deputy commissioner handed over the appointment orders to Mohammad Sarfaraz and Mohammad Naheem, both residents of Mankote, and Sajjad Ahmed of Shahpur.

KASHMIR OBSERVER

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

Go beyond lockdown

With fifteen more people succumbing to coronavirus infection in J&K on Wednesday, eleven of them from Kashmir, the number of fatalities caused by Covid-19 across the Union Territory has risen to 664. J&K has also recorded a fresh 704 cases, taking the total number of people infected by the virus to 34,480. Srinagar has once again recorded the highest number of 198 cases.

If anything, it shows a steady rise in the number of cases over the past five months, with no signs of the government getting a grip on the runaway contagion. That too despite the government imposing first a 70 day long lockdown and following it up intermittently with small duration lockdowns. And these measures seem to have achieved little other than hitting the economy hard.

In hindsight, it should be clear to the government that the lockdowns have not helped. Either the lockdown was not inherently helpful a measure in addressing the outbreak of the contagion or the tool was badly handled. But as for their handling, the lockdowns were strictly enforced, creating a curfew like situation on the streets. This also helped prevent the gatherings including the religious assemblies. But considering the exponential rise in the number of Covid-19 cases since then, it can be safely concluded that the lockdown has only made a minor redeeming difference to the spread of contagion. And by now the government should have learnt its lesson and explored other measures against the deadly contagion. And the most overriding of such measures should have been the strict enforcement of the safety precautions in public.

But this is something that seems to have only been followed in breach. For example, it is now obvious to one and all that despite the standing government instructions a predominant majority of people do not wear masks in public. More alarmingly, the masks are conspicuously absent from the faces of most of the passengers using public transport. And none of these violators is taken to task.

This is strange. The government is ready to lock everything down at the drop of a hat, and doesn't care two hoots about wrecking the economy that, in turn, deprives thousands of people of their livelihood. But it shirks from implementing the law when it comes to forcing people to observe precautions during the unlock period. It is time it does so now. The government needs to urgently work on two fronts: one, run an aggressive advertising campaign alerting people to the deadliness of coronavirus and the urgency of observing safety precautions. Second, a strict action needs to be taken against the people who go out without masks or participate in large gatherings. These are the only pragmatic and hopefully helpful tools to tackle the contagion. That too, with least damage to the economy.

OTHER OPINION

More pain for economy

Three weeks after its monetary policy committee decided to hold fire on interest rates amid accelerating retail inflation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has forecast more pain for the economy. Its assessment of the economic landscape and its prognosis for near-term prospects posit a stark picture: of demand hollowed out by the severe shock to private consumption, public finances strained by the imperative of funding mitigation measures, anaemic appetite for investment among corporates and credit-flow-impeding risk aversion among bankers, to name but a few. The COVID-19-induced economic contraction that manifested itself in the fiscal first quarter, is now almost certain to extend through the July-September period, the RBI said in its Annual Report. Observing that the "reimposition or stricter imposition of lockdowns" in different parts of the country in July and August had mainly contributed to damping the tentative revival in momentum seen in the preceding two months, it said several recent high-frequency indicators pointed to an unprecedented retrenchment in activity. Noting that the services sector has been a prime mover of the Indian economy, the central bank flagged the fact that whatever consumption had survived the shock was now manifesting as essential spending with services including transport and hospitality almost completely eviscerated.

The Central government, which has gamely attempted 'pandemic proofing' demand by increasing its net revenue expenditure by a third in the first quarter, is, however, likely to find itself strapped for resources in the coming months. As a result, it would have little leeway to continue to undergird momentum. States too are expected to find their finances so tightly squeezed as to have to cut capital spending. In its prescription to overcome the funds crunch, however, the central bank appears to run into a contradiction. The RBI suggests that the government should help "crowd in" private investment through targeted public investment that could be funded by monetising assets in steel, coal, power, land and railways. But given that private companies have been either too highly in debt and therefore keen to use gains from the government's corporate tax rate cut to repay loans, or loath to raise capital spending when saddled with excess capacity, it is hard to see the government raising much out of its privatisation efforts. Ultimately, as Expenditure Secretary T.V. Somanathan has acknowledged, the Centre may opt to marshal its meagre resources more prudently and wait for the curve of infections to start flattening before committing to any further stimulus spending. A revival will ensue only once consumers regain confidence to go out and spend. And that, as of now, seems a fair distance away.

The Hindu



Ejaz Ayoub

With draining household savings and eroding business capital, Government's loan bonanza is falling woefully short. The economic catastrophe is already wreaking havoc with lakhs of bread earners losing their jobs, businesses closing down amid rampant bank defaults and average households finding it excruciatingly hard to make the ends meet

Entangled Economy

Quantifying Kashmir's Economic Winter

One year of surviving the double whammy of security and Covid-19 lockdown

CONTRARY to the age old wisdom that "Lightning never strikes the same place twice", the Kashmir economy, already marred with political uncertainties & economic backwardness, witnessed two black swan events of systemically gigantic scale within a short span of only eight months. First, it was the cataclysmic event of August 5, 2019 which froze everything living and paused anything moving and then came this lethal pandemic that uprooted the very foundations of even the most advanced economies across the globe. Due to this double whammy of nested lockdowns and triple tragedy of the communication gag, logistical restrictions and demand shock, havoc of unprecedented proportion has been unleashed on all sectors of the Kashmir economy. So what is the size of this colossal impact?

Given the financial and operational unfeasibility of aggregating individual losses from millions of households and businesses, economic contraction at a macro level is often calculated using proxy indicators. In order to arrive at an indicative quantum of loss that Kashmir's economy has incurred in the last 12 months, we shall rely on proxies like historical trends in the economic output as per official Government records and market published consumption related data points. Besides data, the accuracy and relevance of any loss calculation model depend on a thoroughly researched set of assumptions that form the building blocks of the methodology. Therefore it is essential to briefly embark on the assumptions before discussing the results.

First, given the highly skewed geographical distribution of the first systemic shock, the loss assessment is done only for the 10 districts of Kashmir division. Since Kashmir comprises around 55 percent of the region's population, the economic output figures assumed for calculating loss for Kashmir valley have accordingly been downsized at 55 percent of J&K's GSDP.

Second, some sub sectors like Public Administration & Defense, Electricity, Gas, Water and other utility services, Mining and Quarrying, Forestry and Logging, Fishing and Aquaculture have not been factored while calculating the losses. It is assumed that these sub sectors were operating at normal capacity because they either fall under the domain of Government spending, survival consumption or are considered insignificant for the purpose of calculations. These sectors comprise around 35 percent of the total economic output, implying that only 65 percent of the economy has been taken for assessment of economic contraction.

Third, the entire period from 5th Aug 2019 to 4th Aug 2020 has been classified into 4 phases. First phase comprises of 120 days of complete shutdown from 5th August 2019 to 3rd Dec 2019. Second phase comprises of 109 days of partial opening of economy from 4th Dec 2019 to 21st Mar 2020. The third phase comprises of 70 days of complete lockdown on account of Co-

vid-19 from 22nd March 2020 to 31st May 2020. And the last and fourth phase comprises of 65 days of intermittent lockdowns, restrictions and choked economic activity from 1st June 2020 to 4th August 2020.

Based on the economic output of all the constituent sectors from primary, secondary and tertiary categories and the assumed drop in economic sectors by around 85 percent the estimated loss for the first phase of the year comprising 120 days of shutdown and communication blockade arrives at a whopping Rs 17,878.18 Crore or a per day loss of Rs. 148.98 Crore.

Interestingly, our per day loss calculation of approximately Rs. 149 crore is in line with two authentic studies. First one was a part of J&K Economic Survey 2016 which had estimated a loss of Rs. 16000 crore for 116 days of lost business during 5 months long political turmoil in the valley. The daily loss therefore from GoJK accounts arrives at Rs 138 Crore. Pertinently the nature of shutdown and communication blockade in 2016 was far less severe in terms of geographical distribution within the valley and therefore comparatively less than what is relevant for the previous 12 months. Another research by SEBI registered and RBI accredited rating agency Acuite Ratings and Research Limited (ARRL), has pegged per day loss on account of lockdown across India at Rs 35,000 crore. Since J&K contributes 0.77 percent to the national GDP, the daily loss to J&K comes to Rs 269.50 crore of which Kashmir's share is estimated at Rs 148.22 crore approx. (55percent of JK GSDP).

Phase-2 comprising 109 days of partial opening of economy from early 4th Dec '19 till 21st Mar 2020, belongs to the most economically inactive portion of the calendar year. With hostile weather, all educational institutions shut, sarkari darbar in Jammu, regular CASOs in every nook and corner of the valley and a perceived threat of demographic change, the economic output is assumed to have dropped by a drastic 45 percent. The resulting loss amounts to Rs 7308.45 Crore.

March 22nd witnessed the mother of all lockdowns encompassing entire India, which, on paper, lasted for 70 days till 31st May 2020. With a per day loss of around Rs. 149 crore, phase 3 has cost the 10 districts of Kashmir economy with a back breaking amount of Rs. 10,430 Crore.

Similarly, 65 days of unlock 1.0 and 2.0 from June 1st till 4th Aug 2020 too were marred with frequent covid-19 infection outbursts, ineffective unlock, total closure of transport sector, tourism sector and e-commerce. Export sector which contributes over Rs 1,700 crore to the export economy annually, was already gasping for breath from sustained high speed internet blockade and was now getting overwhelmed under the debris of a severe global recession. Our, otherwise steady, annual stream of Rs. 1300 Crore foreign remittances from Kashmiris working across the globe too started facing the heat of global lockdown. Domestic businesses suffered huge income losses resulting in wide-

spread bank defaults, rampant job cuts and foreclosures. Consumption too was severely devastated due to accelerating job cuts which in turn shook the demand mercilessly. The economic output is assumed to have nosedived by approximately 55percent, resulting in an unavoidable loss of Rs. 5326.75 Crore.

The assumed percentage drop in economic output in various phases of last 12 months have been carefully mapped with various consumption data points like sale of cars, tractors, two-wheelers, commercial vehicles, mobile phones and occupancy in hotels and resorts etc.

For example, compared to an annual sales figure of Rs.650 Crore and Rs. 750 Crore for FY 2017-18 and FY 2018-19, the mobile phones market in Kashmir valley, with an aggregate sales figure dropping to Rs 250 crore, registered a contraction of over 66percent in FY 2019-20.

Likewise, compared to automobile sales of 64,445 units for J&K for last four months of 2018 calendar year, the sales data for the same period from September '19 to December '19 nosedived to only 34,271 units registering a contraction of over -53 percent. The months of April 2020, May 2020, June 2020 and July 2020 were even worse with a respective YoY (Year on Year) contraction of -100 percent, -98.57 percent, -87.60 percent and -53.50 percent. Pertinently, these figures are for entire J&K and given the geographical distribution of the economic slump, the figures of Kashmir valley alone are expected to be even worse.

Based on the above discussed assumptions and methodology, the cumulative loss therefore for the 4 phases arrives at a whopping Rs. 40,943.38 Crore. With a nominal GSDP of Rs 1.587 Lakh Crore for entire J&K and Rs. 87,285 Crore for Kashmir valley, a loss of Rs. 40,943.38 crore means a respective contraction of 25.80 percent and 46.90 percent for the previous 12 months. These are not just simple numbers. A contraction of this scale which has wiped almost half of the Kashmir valley's GDP in just 12 months period will have serious and long lasting ramifications on the ground. With draining household savings and eroding business capital, Government's loan bonanza is falling woefully short. This economic catastrophe is already wreaking havoc with lakhs of bread earners losing their jobs, businesses closing down amid rampant bank defaults and average households finding it excruciatingly hard to make the ends meet. Policy responses on the other hand are not only short in size but late in delivery. It is time that both, the UT government as well as the union government put their heads together and respond with a sustainable fiscal stimulus so that Kashmir survives this brutal economic quagmire with dignity.

Ejaz Ayoub has been working in the BFSI industry in the field of Financial Risk Management, Strategy and Foreign Exchange. He can be reached at: ejaz.ayoub@gmail.com.



OBSERVER
MAIL

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

MAIL YOUR LETTERS

P.O. Box # 337, GPO, Srinagar-190 001
email: editpage.ko@gmail.com

Need an education system that values curiosity

If we develop clones of children and grow them in different countries of the world, there are more chances that they will grow as different individuals, and with different capabilities. This suggests that the level of knowledge that one gets in life is greatly influenced by the surrounding environment that includes social, political, family, and cultural backgrounds, to name a few. And ironically, children of such varied backgrounds are treated as equal in the classroom environment in schools. This is a fact, and we all go through this process of cognitive disorientation.

Ideally, this should not be the case because it is illogical to think that all these children can be measured using just one scale, which usually consists

of various components of assessments in a course such as tests, examination and assignments. When the teachers use the same grading scale for all such children, they're simply implanting seedlings to hinder their intellectual capability and growth. This is because every student absorbs course content differently which will in turn lead to different grades.

The grading system may work only when students are from the same socio-economic backgrounds and have the same kind of support systems. Even this homogeneity will prove inconsequential because one cannot ignore the quality of schooling, teachers, mentors, and infrastructure in shaping a child's cognitive development. Therefore, grades cannot

quantity talent and intellect, which undoubtedly form the backbone of a child's knowledge-bank.

However, with the prevalent state of affairs we're stifling the possibility of an education that craves for creativity, wisdom, and equality. How many media portals interview less achievers, and why does everyone run towards high achievers? By doing so, we've created a harsh celebrity culture that breeds inequality and the real purpose of education is defeated because it should actually build a system that values justice, equality, and togetherness.

Humans sought knowledge to understand the world, universe and to create conditions that prioritize safety, security, love, and comfort for all.

While our forefathers started to build blocks of knowledge that are aimed to make our lives comfortable, happy, and peaceful; why are we destined to do the opposite?

The best remedy to educate our children in a manner that they value creativity, curiosity, and togetherness, is to foster an environment where they are loved, cared, and educated, regardless of their achievements. In the present world, we are in dire need of people who can prioritize peace, sharing of resources (intellectual/material) and teach our kids the same.

*Dr Afroz Ahmad Shah
afroz.shah@gmail.com*

Ashura: An Open Letter To The Silent Majority

Salina Khan

So, respected scholars, when you remind us on the 10th of al-Muharram that on this day, that Adam (a) was forgiven after his exile, remember to talk about Imam Husayn as he is chief of the youth of those eternal gardens of Paradise.

The sacred month of Muharram follows the sacred month of Zil Hijjah. Author argues that the true significance of Ashura and the martyrdom of Imam Hussain must be addressed honestly to create awareness among Muslims about issues of legitimacy, justice, dignity and freedom in Islam.

IT will break my heart if I have to sit through another typical Ashura gathering. That is why I have decided to write this letter appealing for full disclosure and impartiality from scholars lecturing at most masjids around the world.

At many of these commemorations, much time is spent relating how Allah (swt) blessed a string of noble prophets on Ashura, the 10th day of the sacred month of al-Muharram, as they spread the divine message on earth. But little to no time is given to discuss the Ashura event that safeguarded this same message from corruption after the era of the prophets came to an end.

This event was the sacrifice of Imam Husayn, the grandson of the final prophet, Muhammad (pbuh), and son of Fatimah (one of the four perfect women), a courageous soul who stood up against an illegitimate regime to save Allah s (swt) rule from the clutches of tyranny, corruption and oppression. As poet Allama Iqbal wrote, The story of the Kabah is unfortunate, simple and colorful. It began with Isma il and ended with Husayn.

So, respected scholars, when you remind us on the 10th of al-Muharram that on this day, that Adam (a) was forgiven after his exile, remember to talk about Imam Husayn as he is chief of the youth of those eternal gardens of Paradise.

that Noah (a) was rescued on the ark, remember to talk about Imam Husayn as his family was likened to that ship of salvation. The Prophet (pbuh) said, Whoever embarked on it was saved, and whoever turned away from it perished.



that Moses (a) defeated Pharaoh, remember to talk about Imam Husayn as he resisted the pharaoh of his time with faith, nobility and valor. Imam Husayn said, I have not come out with the intention of violence and rebellion or in obedience to my passions, and it is not my object to create mischief on the earth or to oppress anyone. My only object is to reform the affairs of the Muslim Ummah and to act according to the conduct of my father and grandfather.

that Jacob was reunited with his son Joseph (a), remember to talk about Imam Husayn as he lost on this day his young sons, including a thirsty baby pierced by an arrow in the neck while being cradled in his arms.

that Abraham (a) was protected from the fire, remember to talk about Imam Husayn as he was left the last man standing under the blazing sun, on the parched land and against the stifling heat of Arabia, in the words of historian Washington Irving.

Now, don t stop short. Continue the narrative by reminding us what our own Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did on this fateful day. With dust on his head and dust in his beard, he was the first to propagate the plight of Husayn, the grandchild he once cuddled in his lap and rode on his back. I have just been at the slaying of al-Husayn, he told his wife Umm Salamah in a dream of hers, according to her tearful narration (recorded by al-Tirmidhi).

Respected scholars, I ask you to disseminate the story of Imam Husayn far and wide not for the sake of historical truth or inclusiveness but because it is the Sunnah (social convention) of the Prophet (pbuh) and exactly what the world needs right now!

People in all corners of the globe are finally wising up to the injustices being committed against them. It is from Imam Husayn they can learn how a small cadre of people dedicated to truth, peace and justice can undertake a successful struggle against tyrannical regimes with wide-reaching control. Let humanity awaken and every tribe will claim Imam Husayn for their own, predicts poet Josh Malihabadi.

Sexism in Kashmiri Language

Kashmiri language is filled with everyday words and phrases which demean and objectify women and it is time we purge our language from the plague of misogyny

Ahymon Ayoub

ABC of commonly used phrases about women in Kashmir:

Veariv gai qabar, tset aasi ya zeeth, yi cha bardaash Karin - In-laws' home is a grave, uncomfortable or comfortable — bear with it

shoob - Grace, a Son

koor cha luk hund maal - Daughters are others' assets/property

Khodah soozynas rut Khareedaar - May she get a nice customer as her husband

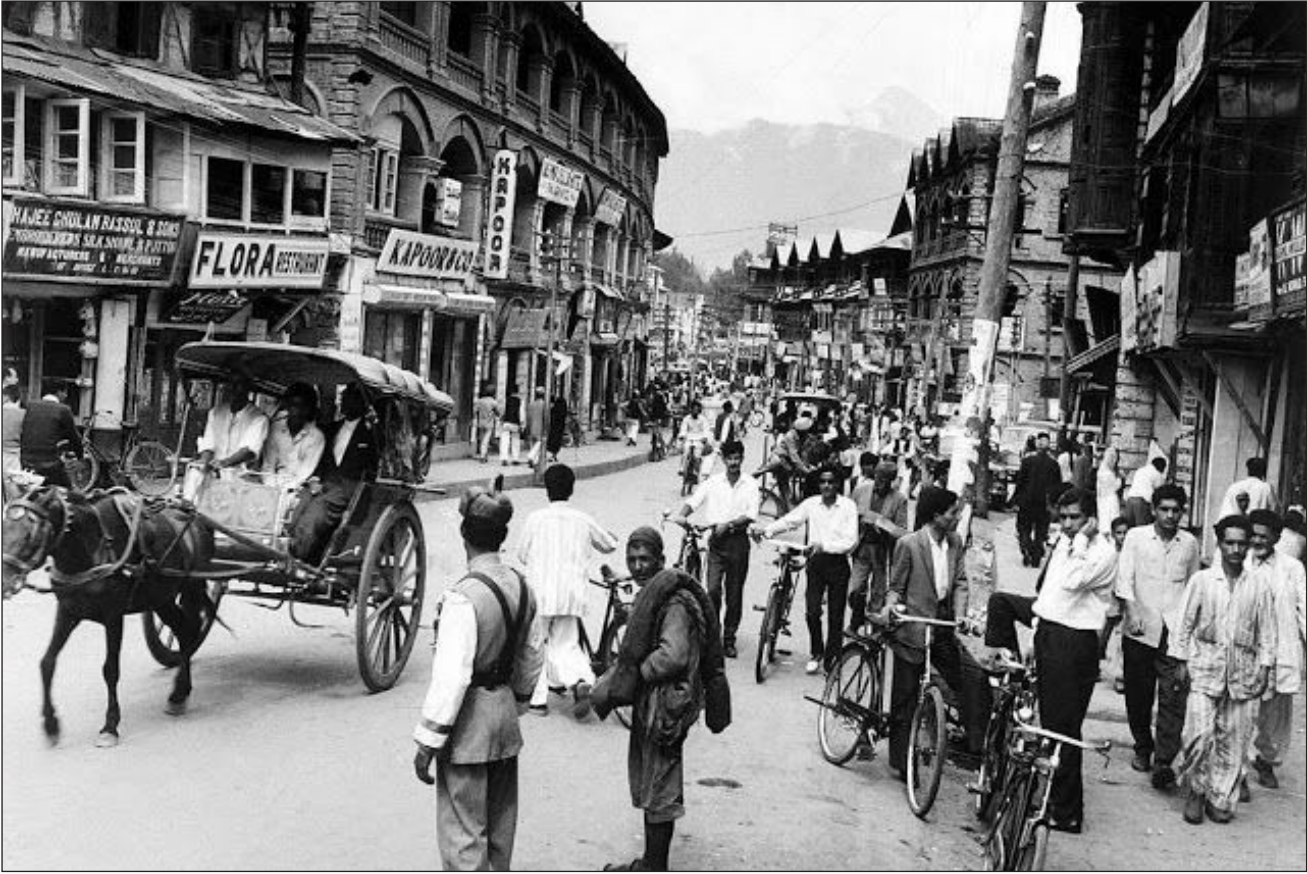
kouri mohnyui - A gendered handicap

Khodah pholneavnai dyekas te potras - May your fate — your husband and your son flourish

In Kashmir, the debate over language usually circumambulates the concerns of social heritage and the need to preserve it. Largely seen as a mode of transmission of values, culture and collective history; language is hardly scanned for its power of creating our world-views, organising our social lives and shaping our sense of wrong and right. Consequently, we become the peddlers of prejudicial and exclusionary behaviours, almost as a part of our genetic and social duty.

Being a part of a society, one tends to internalise and exhibit normalised yet abnormal proclivities. Consequently, we busy ourselves with internalising every piece of learning that falls on our ears from diverse media and are content with modelling ourselves on the template that social mechanisms turn all of us into.

However, women hardly have the privilege of remaining oblivious to the struggles they face. Each attitude that oppresses women finds itself translated into a verbal-bias harboured against them. The pervasiveness of these sexist attitudes in our colloquial conversations only goes onto show that subordination or exclusion of women isn't some violent spectacle that erupts on some unfortunate Sunday. It is a normalised attitude which is deeply enmeshed in our everyday routines, off-the-cuff conversations, stereotyped images and the social expectations directed at women.



Preserving our heritage doesn't merely entail wholesale and lazy emulation of symbols of the past. It must involve screening them to criticism before handing them down to progeny.

Every time a boy's birth in the neighbourhood is exalted toshoob, one can't help but mourn the existential rejection women are subjected to in Kashmir. From extreme marginalisation of bint-e-Hawwain the briefest pleasures like, Khodah pholneavnai dyekas te potras, to objectifying statements like Khodah soozynas rut Khareedaar and

koor cha luk hund maal; devaluation of women seems like an invasive yet unchallenged norm.

These samples of conventional wisdom imagine her as some tradable and perishable commodity to be sold off, lest it diminishes in value. Such idiomatic expressions put a woman's existence subservient to that of a man. Her worth

and value is considered contingent upon the health of relations she shares with men as a daughter, mother or a wife — not as an individual.

The normalisation of such discriminatory language is so internalised that women participate and in some cases encourage such views. In fact, even with the awareness of these misgivings in

our language, expressions like kouri mohnyui seem harmless in the face of the monstrous and fulminating phrases like, Veariv gai qabar, tset aasi ya zeeth, yi cha bardaash Karin.

Very often, these leitmotifs of subjugation use the garb of religion and morality to bludgeon women into submissiveness. They champion misogyny in the name of religion and turn the word of God to the task of Satan. Ironically, the ideals of docile and submissive women glorified in public discourses clash with the strong and principled figures of Islamic history who fought for Haq/ Rights. The values of fierceness and bravery of Prophet's (peace be upon him) female companions like Hz Nusaiba binti Kaab (r.a), the political merit exhibited by the likes of Queen of Sheeba and countless other figures have rarely ever shaped the ideals upheld and celebrated in our society.

Reading carefully into the workings of language, the fault of sexism is hardly a fault of Kashmiri language per se. Misogyny is itself a language with a deep-seated, multi-pronged attitude that manifests itself in a myriad of ways; language only betokening one of them.

Awareness and sensitisation on the issue, although gradual are contributing toward the much-needed erasure of devaluing language. We as a society are required to revisit how language continues to be used as a tool of inhibition rather than liberation. Preserving our heritage doesn't merely entail wholesale and lazy emulation of symbols of the past. It must involve screening them to criticism before handing them down to progeny.

Rhetorically the significance of language in imagining our worlds couldn't be put more eloquently than Hafez in this verse:

"The words we speak become the house we live in"

Ahymon Ayoub has completed her Masters in Sociology from Kashmir University and is a freelance researcher interested in topics related to Islam and Women

Parental Instruction Instrumental For Children To Learn How To Safely Cross Busy Roads

Agencies

Learning to cross a busy street is anything but easy for a child, especially in places where the traffic doesn't stop. Children must first identify a safe gap in traffic, use refined motor skills to precisely step off a curb the moment a car passes, and safely reach the other side of the street before the next vehicle arrives.

Research says parents can help their children in the same.

A new study from the University of Iowa reports that parents who use road crossings as teachable moments help their youngsters learn road-crossing skills faster and become better at crossing streets. The researchers learned this by watching sets of parent-child duos—with the children varying in age from 6 to 12 years old—cross a virtual road with continuous traffic.

A finding says that children who received constructive advice from their parents—especially the pointing out of safe gaps in traffic ahead of time—learned best-practices in crossing more readily and crossed more safely.

“This is something children need to learn how to do. It's an important, common, real-world skill,” said Elizabeth O’Neal, a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Iowa and the first author on the study.

“Children learning ahead of time how to choose a sizable gap between vehicles leads to safer crossing outcomes. We found there's a lot that parents can do to help their children learn those skills and to keep their kids safe,” added O’Neal.

By far, the safest way for a child to cross a road is at an intersection with a walk sign, a stoplight, or with marked crosswalks. But vehicles may not stop, even at crosswalks, and there are many roads where no crossing markings exist.

This puts children at risk. In 2018 alone, 175,000 youngsters between the ages of 1 and 14 were injured as pedestrians, according to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, a branch



of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Iowa researchers wanted to understand whether parents could help their children cross roads more safely, as well as study how the parents offered help. In multiple rounds, 64 parents with a child aged 6, 8, 10, or 12 crossed a virtual, single-lane road with a line of oncoming vehicles traveling at 25 miles per hour. The participating pairs were instructed to watch the traffic and then decide together when to cross.

The main results show that across all ages, parents proactively pointed out safe traffic gaps in just 30% of the crossing exercises. In other instances, parents simply instructed their children to cross or began crossing without saying anything.

When parents gave helpful instruction, their children showed a 10 percent improvement in how quickly they entered the road after the first car passed and a 7 percent gain in the margin of time between when they reached the other side of the road before the next car arrived. The researchers say those seemingly small gains in motor timing substantively increase the chances of a successful crossing.

“When you're crossing roads with your child, don't just say, 'Let's go!' when you want to go. Help the child look at the oncoming traffic and pick out ahead of time which gap you're going to choose. It helps the child learn how to pick the gap ahead of time and to correctly time when to cross,” said Jodie Plumert, a professor in the UI Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences and a co-author of the study.

The findings add to previous results by researchers in the UI's Hank Virtual Environments Lab (led by Plumert and Joseph Kearney, a professor in the Department of Computer Science at Iowa) showing that most children don't fully grasp how to identify gaps in traffic and correctly time their road crossings until age 14.

That study appeared in April 2017 in the Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance, published by the American Psychological Association.

A few previous studies have looked at how children crossroads and then interviewed their parents afterward. According to the Iowa researchers, it was clear from those studies that on the whole, parents weren't actively helping their children learn how to safely negotiate road crossings.

Plumert says the most recent study is the first to examine how parents can help children learn to prospectively control their movements and to understand what is needed mentally and physically to cross safely.

“If this was something that parents were doing most of the time, then that would be great,” Plumert said.

“But our study shows that parents aren't using effective strategies to help their child learn about safe road crossings all that often. But the times the parents do have useful instructions, it's really helpful to the child. They just show much better performance crossing roads,” added Plumert.

Covid-19: Does A Face Mask Protect Me, Or Just The People Around Me?

Agencies

WASHINGTON— Does a face mask protect me, or just the people around me? It likely provides protection for both.

Studies on the new coronavirus and other germs show wearing a mask helps stop infected people from spreading disease to others. Evidence also suggests that masks may offer some protection for the people wearing them.

The virus spreads from droplets people spray when they cough, sneeze or talk. Surgical or cloth face masks can block most of those particles from spreading.

While some droplets may still spread out, wearing a mask could reduce the amount, providing a benefit to others. Research shows people don't get as sick when exposed to smaller amounts of virus, said Dr Monica Gandhi, a virus expert at University of California, San Francisco.

And masks may protect the people wearing them by reducing the amount of droplets from others that might make contact with them. In two US food processing plants where masks were required and infection clusters occurred, Gandhi noted that most workers who developed COVID-19 had mild illness or no symptoms.

Research on a different coronavirus has also found low infection rates among people who frequently wore masks in public. Experts say masks are particularly important with the new coronavirus because infected people can be contagious even if they don't have symptoms.



Scientists Calculate Earth's Ice Age Temperatures, And How Low Did It Go

Agencies

Guided by ocean plankton fossils and climate models, scientists have calculated just how cold it got on Earth during the depths of the last Ice Age, when immense ice sheets covered large parts of North America, South America, Europe and Asia.

The average global temperature during the period known as the Last Glacial Maximum from roughly 23,000 to 19,000 years ago was about 46 degrees Fahrenheit (7.8 degrees Celsius), some 13 degrees Fahrenheit (7 Celsius) colder than 2019, the researchers said on Wednesday.

Certain regions were much cooler than the global average, they found. The polar regions cooled far more than the tropics, with the Arctic region 25 degrees Fahrenheit (14 degree Celsius) colder than the global average.

The researchers made their calculations with the aid of chemical measurements on tiny fossils of zooplankton and the preserved structures of fats from other types of plankton that change in response to water temperature - what they called a “temperature proxy.”

This information was then plugged into climate model simulations to calculate average global temperatures.

“Past climates are the only information we have about what really happens when the Earth cools or warms to a large degree. So by studying them, we can better constrain what to expect in the future,” said University of Arizona paleoclimatologist Jessica Tierney, lead author of the research published in the journal Nature.

During the Ice Age, which lasted from about 115,000 to 11,000 years ago, large mammals well adapted to a cold climate such as the mammoths, mastodons, woolly rhinos and saber-toothed cats roamed the landscape.

Humans entered North America for the first time during the Ice Age, crossing a land bridge that once connected Siberia to Alaska with sea levels much lower than they are today.

Human hunting is believed to have contributed to mass extinctions globally of many species at the end of the Ice Age.

“What is interesting is that Alaska was not entirely covered with ice,” Tierney said. “There was an ice-free corridor that allowed humans to travel across the Bering Strait, into Alaska.



GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR
OFFICE OF THE ADD. INSPECTOR GENERAL
REGISTRATION, KASHMIR
Public Notice

No:- AIGR/KMR/24/2020

Dated:- 27-08-2020

The J&K Department of Registration is very soon starting online registration of documents under National Generic Document Registration System (NGDRS) in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. The general public is as such informed that while applying for online registration of the Sale deeds, Lease deeds, Rent deeds, Mortgage deeds, etc. the documents should only be submitted in Portable Document Format (pdf) on ngdrs.jk.gov.in. Documents submitted by the applicants in any other format shall not be entertained by the Department of Registration for the purpose of online registration.

Sd/-
Gulzar Ahmad Dar(KAS)
Addl. Inspector General Registration, Kashmir

DIPK-4655/20

Government of Jammu & Kashmir
MECHANICAL HOSPITAL & CENTRAL HEATING DIVISION SRINAGAR

No: MHCHD/TS/

SHORT TERM NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Date of sale of tender documents.	
Last date of receipt of Tenders.	

Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, sealed
invited from the registered firms/Govt. Contractors for the below mentioned work:


The tender must be accompanied with the requisite earnest money deposit in the shape of CDR/FDR drawn from any scheduled/national bank and pledged in favour of Executive Engineer, MH&CH Division, Srinagar. The tenders found without earnest money shall be rejected out rightly at the time of opening of tender.

The tender document can be had from the office of the undersigned during working hours against cost mentioned above, in the form of IPO/Demand Draft or Cash Payment. be issued subject to production of certificates to the following effect:

Latest Sales tax clearance certificate/or as applicable as per new GST rules
J&K State Sales Tax Registration Certificate/ GST registration certificate
Documentary proof of similarnature of work in any Govt./Semi

The tenders should reach the office of undersigned on _____
or any subsequent date convenient to the undersigned in presence of the tenderers who may be present on the spot.
The envelope containing tender should properly be superscripted with Tender Notice no, Name of work and Name

DIPK-4636/20



THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR
U.T.OF J&K, BOARD OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION
JAMMU: (NOV. TO APR.)
GOVT. POLYTECHNIC PREMISES
BIKRAM CHOWK, JAMMU-180004
Ph:Fax: 2430099

SRINAGAR: (MAY TO OCT.)
A-BLOCK, OLD SECRETARIAT
SRINAGAR-190001
Ph:Fax: 2430097

email: jk_sbote@rediffmail.com

NOTICE

It is hereby notified for the information of general public that the below mentioned student has approached this office for **correction of name/father's name** in marks certificates issued in his favour by the State Board of Technical Education. The details of the candidate are as under

S. No.	Examination Roll No.	Name of the Institution	Name already written in the records of SBOTE	Corrected name parentage , cast sub caste
1	1104-18D1-76015 1104-18J2-30441 1104-19D3-80028 1104-18J4-65865 1104-16N5-40543 1104-17D6-13611	KGP	FIZU RASHID ZAROO D/O ABDUL RASHID ZAROO	FIZU RASHID ZARGAR D/O ABDUL RASHID ZARGAR

Any Person having objection, should submit his objection in writing to the office of the undersigned within seven (07) days from the date of publishing of this notice , after which no objection will be entertained /accepted.

No: SBOTE/EXAM/NC/2020/1129-32
Dated: 25/08/2020

DIPK-4652/20

SECRETARY,
J&K, Board of Technical Education.

Agencies

A team of researchers has now shed light on the influence of vitamin D supplementation on a baby's developing gut microbiome.

The study, published in the journal Gut Microbes, found that vitamin D supplementation is associated with compositional changes in a baby's microbiome—notably a lower abundance of the bacteria Megamonas—at three months of age.

“Vitamin D plays an important role in early life, supporting bone metabolism and the healthy development of a baby's immune system,” said senior author Anita Kozyskyj, a professor in the Department

Vitamin D Supplements Are Vital For Baby's Gut Microbiome: Study

of Pediatrics at the University of Alberta and a CHILD Cohort Study investigator. “Most infants in North America receive vitamin D, either as a supplement to breastfeeding or as an ingredient in commercial infant formulas, so we wanted to understand the association between vitamin D and the presence or abundance of key bacteria within a baby's intestinal tract.”

The researchers examined faecal samples taken during home visits from 1,157 infants who are part of the CHILD Cohort Study—a national study that is following nearly 3,500 Canadian



children from before birth to adolescence with the primary goal of discovering the root causes of allergies, asthma, obesity, and other chronic diseases.

They found that direct vitamin D supplementation of infants with vitamin D drops was associated with a lower abundance of Megamonas, regardless of how a baby was fed (breastfed or formula-fed). “While little is known about Megamonas in infancy, our previous research suggests there may be a link between this bacterium and asthma or respiratory viral infections, so vitamin D may offer additional ben-

Health Research Institute.

The researchers also assessed the association between infant and maternal vitamin D supplementation and the presence of Clostridioides difficile (C. difficile) in a baby's gut. “Some infants carry the diarrhoea-causing bacterium C. difficile in their guts without any symptoms.

However, when the levels of gut bacteria become imbalanced, this particular bacterium can multiply, causing illness and increasing the susceptibility to chronic disease later in childhood,” commented first author Kelsea Drall, an MSc graduate from the U of A and an

AllerGen trainee.

The study found that nearly 30 per cent of the infants carried C. difficile, but there was a lower incidence of the bacterium among exclusively breastfed infants. However, neither infant supplementation with vitamin D drops nor maternal vitamin D supplementation during pregnancy or after delivery was associated with C. difficile colonization. “Interestingly, maternal consumption of vitamin D-fortified milk was the only factor that reduced the likelihood of C. difficile colonization in infants,” added Drall.

According to Kozyskyj, an

infant's gut microbiota undergoes a rapid change in early life. Therefore, it is critical to understand the factors associated with microbial communities populating the infant gut during this key developmental period.

“Low vitamin D levels have been associated with a respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)—a common lung infection among infants—and more recently, susceptibility to COVID-19 disease,” she pointed out. “In the CHILD Cohort Study, we have a unique opportunity to follow our study children as they get older to understand how microbial changes observed as a result of dietary interventions may be associated with later health outcomes such as asthma and viral infections.”

China fires 'aircraft carrier killer' missile in warning to US

Agencies

Beijing: China has fired two missiles, including one dubbed an "aircraft-carrier killer", into the South China Sea, according to a news report, in a pointed warning to the United States as tensions in the disputed sea lane rise to new levels.

The South China Morning Post reported on Thursday that Beijing fired one intermediate-range ballistic missile, DF-26B, from Qinghai province and another medium-range ballistic missile, DF-21D, from Zhejiang province on Wednesday in response to US aerial activities in a "no-fly zone".

In response, Mark Esper, the US defence chief, said China has repeatedly fallen short of promises to abide by international laws, noting China seems to be flexing its muscles the most in Southeast Asia.

The two missiles were reportedly fired in the direction of the area between Hainan province and the disputed

hai Sea off its north coast.

In a social media post, Liu Xiaoming, China's ambassador to the United Kingdom, said the US move "severely disrupted" China's normal exercises and "training activities".

Zhao Lijian, China's foreign ministry spokesman, described the spy plane overflight as "provocative actions" and urged the US to stop.

China's military will neither "dance to the tune of the US" nor allow the United States to "cause trouble", defence ministry spokesman Wu Qian said on Thursday.

Amid rising tensions between both militaries, he said China hopes the United States can take practical measures to create a "positive atmosphere" for high-level exchanges between their two militaries.

The DF-26B missile, which was formally launched earlier this month, is capable of hitting moving targets at sea, making it an "aircraft-carrier



Paracel Islands, the Hong Kong-based publication added, quoting an unnamed source.

According to the newspaper, a US U-2 spy plane had reportedly entered a Chinese-designated "no-fly zone" on Tuesday without permission during a live-fire naval drill conducted by China in the Bo-

Saudi Arabia's Most Famous Prisoners Go Silent During Pandemic

Agencies

Riyadh: Saudi authorities have severed contact between some of the kingdom's most prominent detainees and their families, escalating a crackdown on dissent that threatens to strain relations with Western allies.

Loujain Al-Hathloul, a women's rights activist whose 2018 arrest made global headlines, hasn't called her family since June 9, her sister said. Princess Basmah bint Saud - a royal family member imprisoned with her adult daughter - hasn't contacted relatives since April, when her detention was made public on Twitter, according to people familiar with the matter. And Salman Al-Odah, a prominent religious cleric detained in 2017, made his last call on May 12, according to his son.

Most were previously allowed to make regular, even weekly, phone calls home. Now, they've fallen silent.

"I'm worried to the degree that I really am numb at this point," said the cleric's son, Abdullah Alaudh, explaining that he's heard from many others

in the same situation. "They're worried sick about their families, and whether there have been any coronavirus cases, and why the government is just keeping them in the dark."

Meanwhile, Saudi officials are moving forward with another set of cases that have caused upset in the United States. A group of intellectuals and writers detained last year that includes two Saudi-American dual nationals - Salah Al-Haidar and Bader Al-Ibrahim - recently received their list of charges, according to three people familiar with the matter. They're expected to face trial in a court reserved for terrorism and other security-related cases, the people said.

The Saudi government's Center for International Communication, which fields inquiries from foreign media, did not respond to requests for comment. Calls to the General Directorate of Prisons' public relations department were not answered, while a request for comment sent to its official media email bounced back with an automated message that the inbox was full.



New Zealand Mosque Shooter Sentenced To Life Without Parole

Agencies

Christchurch: A court in New Zealand has sentenced a self-confessed white supremacist who killed 51 Muslims as they prayed at two mosques in Christchurch to life imprisonment without parole, the first time such a sentence has been handed down in the country.

Brenton Tarrant, a 29-year-old Australian, pleaded guilty earlier this year to 51 charges of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder and one charge of committing a terrorist act during the March 2019 rampage in the southern city, which he livestreamed on Facebook.

In delivering the sentence, High Court Judge Cameron Mander said on Thursday that a finite term was insufficient for such a crime and that Tarrant had shown no remorse.

"Your crimes are so wicked that even if you are detained until you die it will not exhaust the requirements of punishment and denunciation," Mander said.

"As far as I can discern, you are empty of any empathy for your victims."

Prosecutors told the court at the opening of the sentencing hearing on Monday that Tarrant had been planning the attacks for a long time and wanted to create fear among immigrants.

The killer had been representing himself and said through a lawyer in court on Thursday that he did not oppose the sentence. Dressed in

grey prison clothes and surrounded by guards, Tarrant did not react to the sentence.

"The hatred that lies at the heart of your hostility to particular members of the community that you came to



Brenton Tarrant, a 29-year-old Australian, pleaded guilty earlier this year to 51 charges of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder and one charge of committing a terrorist act during the March 2019 rampage in the southern city, which he livestreamed on Facebook.

this country to murder has no place here - it has no place anywhere," Mander said.

'Complete and utter silence'

Temel Atacocugu, who survived being shot nine times during the attack at the Al Noor mosque, said he felt re-

lieved at the sentence.

"Finally we can breathe freely, and we feel secure, and my kids feel secure," Atacocugu told The Associated Press news agency. "The justice system has locked up this ideology forever."

Gamal Fouda, the imam of Al Noor Mosque, said that "no punishment would bring our loved ones back", but was proud of New Zealand's response to extremism.

"We respect our justice system and in New Zealand Muslim community, and the non-Muslim as well - we stood together against hate. And with it, our own model for the world. Extremists are all the same. Whether they use religions, nationalism or any other ideology," he said.

"All extremists, they represent hate. but we are here today. We represent love, compassion, Muslim and non-Muslim people of faith and of no faith. That is us, New Zealanders, and we are very proud that we are Muslims in New Zealand and we'll continue to serve this country, and no punishment again is going to bring our loved ones back."

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said she was relieved "that person will never see the light of day".

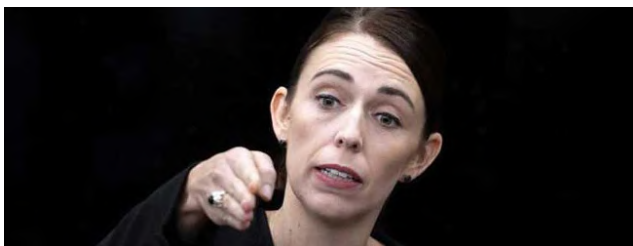
"The trauma of March 15 is not easily healed, but today I hope is the last where we have any cause to hear or utter the name of the terrorist behind it. His deserves to be a lifetime of complete and utter silence," she said.

"Lifetime Of Utter Silence": New Zealand PM On Christchurch Mosque Shooter

Agencies

Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern welcomed the life sentence for the Christchurch mosque gunman on Thursday, saying he deserved a lifetime of "complete and utter silence".

"The trauma of March 15 is not easily healed but today I hope is the last where we have any cause to hear or ut-



ter the name of the terrorist behind it," said Ardern, who was widely praised for her re-

sponse to the attacks last year that killed 51 Muslim worshippers.

Now Asymptomatic People Don't Need Covid Test After Exposure, Says US

Agencies

Washington, United States: After previously encouraging people without Covid-19 symptoms to get tested if they have been exposed to someone diagnosed with the virus, US health authorities have abruptly reversed their position without a clear explanation.

The changes in guidance were quietly made to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website on Monday amid US media reports of political interference

for all close contacts of persons with SARS-CoV-2 infection.

"Because of the potential for asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission, it is important that contacts of individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection be quickly identified and tested."

The site now says: "If you have been in close contact (within 6 feet) of a person with a COVID-19 infection for at least 15 minutes but do not have symptoms, you do not necessarily need a test unless you are a vulnerable individual or your



from the White House.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly said that the US should do less testing, and blamed testing for making it appear as though the country is doing poorly against the pandemic.

This is not true: though the US is testing at a high level, that is because its outbreak is worse than any other country in the world, with more than 5.8 million confirmed cases and almost 180,000 deaths.

The CDC's site previously said: "Testing is recommended

health care provider or State or local public health officials recommend you take one."

Fauci critical

In a call with reporters, senior health department official Brett Giroir said, "The new guidelines are a CDC action. As always, guidelines received appropriate attention, consultation and input from (coronavirus) Task Force experts."

Giroir did not elaborate on what new evidence had led to the guidance.

Skirmish in Syria: Vehicle collision with Russians injures 4 US troops



Agencies

Moscow: In the most violent skirmish in months between US and Russian forces in Syria, a vehicle collision in the eastern part of the war-torn country left American troops with concussions, two US officials said Wednesday.

One official said Russian vehicles sideswiped a light-armored U.S. military vehicle, injuring four Americans. The official said two Russian helicopters flew above the Americans, and one of the aircraft was within about 70 feet of the vehicle.

While there have been several other recent incidents between the American and Russian troops who all patrol in eastern Syria, officials de-

scribed this one as the most serious. US troops are usually accompanied by members of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details of the incident that were not yet made public. One official said the incident happened deep inside the eastern Syria deconfliction zone, where Russian troops generally should not be present.

The officials said the incident is being discussed by senior officials from both countries who routinely work to prevent conflicts between troops in that area. US and Russian commanders have frequent conversations to try and avoid contact between their troops there.

"Butcher Of Bosnia" Personally Oversaw 1995 Srebrenica Massacre: Prosecutor

The Hague: Prosecutors urged UN judges on Wednesday to uphold former Bosnian Serb military chief Ratko Mladic's genocide conviction, saying he personally oversaw the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of some 8,000 Muslim men and boys.

Mladic, 78, is appealing against his 2017 conviction and life sentence by a tribunal in The Hague for genocide over the massacre and for crimes against humanity and war crimes throughout the 1992-95 Bosnian war.

The former general dubbed the "Butcher of Bosnia" resorted to "genocide, extermination and murder" as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing to drive out Croats and Muslims from the UN-protected area, prosecutor Laurel Baig said.

"Mladic was in charge of the Srebrenica operation, Srebrenica was



Mladic's operation. And the chamber was right to conclude that he was responsible for these crimes," Baig told the court.

"He used the forces under his command to execute thousands of men and boys," she added, describing the slaughter as being on "a scale not seen on European soil since the Second World War."

Mladic will be allowed to speak for 10 minutes later on Wednesday at the

International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals - which handles cases left over from the now-closed UN tribunal that convicted him.

Lawyers for Mladic say that he was away from Srebrenica by the time the killings began.

"Mr Mladic is not a villain," defence lawyer Dragan Ivetic said, blaming the murders on "rogue revenge-seekers" among Bosnian Serb troops.

The Srebrenica massacre was the bloodiest single episode from the Bosnian war, which erupted as communal rivalries tore apart Yugoslavia after the fall of communism.

In all about 100,000 people were killed and 2.2 million displaced during the conflict.

Killings "by the truckload"

Prosecutors said the Bosnian Serb general was "personally overseeing" the operation to take Srebrenica.

Jeff Bezos And Elon Musk Just Became "Obscenely Rich"



Three of the world's richest people have achieved staggering new levels of personal wealth.

The net worth of Amazon.com Inc. founder Jeff Bezos eclipsed \$200 billion on Wednesday as shares of the e-commerce giant climbed to a record. The move simultaneously pushed his ex-wife MacKenzie Scott, 50, to the brink of becoming the world's richest woman, just behind L'Oreal SA heiress Françoise Bettencourt Meyers.

Elon Musk, meanwhile, extended an extraordinary stretch of wealth

gains to become a centibillionaire. Tesla Inc. shares rallied Wednesday, pushing his net worth to \$101 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, a listing of the world's 500 richest people.

Tech companies boosted the S&P 500 and Nasdaq Composite indexes to new highs for a fourth straight day, buoyed by news that the Federal Reserve is likely to keep short-term interest rates near zero for at least five years.

The gains by Bezos, 56, and Musk represent just the latest high water mark for wealth accumulation in a top-sy-turvy year defined by both surging markets and catastrophic human and economic loss. The world's 500 richest people have gained \$809 billion so far this year, a 14% increase since January, even as a global pandemic caused a record drop in gross domestic product and millions of lost jobs.

Scientists revise the age of earth's solid inner core



Researchers have improved the estimate of the age of our planet's solid inner core, putting it at 1 billion to 1.3 billion years old. Earth's inner core is the innermost geologic layer of the Earth.

The results place the core at the younger end of an age spectrum that usually runs from about 1.3 billion to 4.5 billion years, but they also make it a good bit older than a recent estimate of only 565 million years.

N E W S M A K E R S

Phase 6 Of Vande Bharat Mission To Begin From September 1: Centre

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of External Affairs on Thursday said the phase 6 of the Vande Bharat Mission to repatriate Indians stranded abroad due to COVID-19 pandemic will begin on September 1.

Speaking on the Vande Bharat Mission's Phase 5, Anurag Srivastava, MEA Spokesperson, said the phase will culminate on August 31.

"Phase 6 of Vande Bharat Mission scheduled to begin on September 1, based on an assessment of demand by our missions abroad, flights are being rescheduled by Air India group and private carriers," Mr Srivastava said at the weekly virtual briefing.

He further said, "During the Phase 5 of Vande Bharat Mission, which will end on August 31, 900 international flights have been operated from around 22 countries reaching 23 airports across India. More than 12 lakh stranded Indians have been repatriated by different modes under mission till August 26."

"The bubble arrangements will continue as per schedule in the next phase," he added.

India has so far established air bubbles arrangements with the US, UK, France, Germany, UAE, Qatar, and the Maldives.

The negotiations are underway with Australia, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Nigeria, Bahrain, Israel, Kenya, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand.



India Slams Pak For Evading "Responsibility" For Pulwama Terror Attack

NEW DELHI: India on Thursday slammed Pakistan for evading responsibility for the Pulwama terror attack and pointed out that Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar, a key accused in the case, continues to find shelter in that country.

External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said the charge sheet into the Pulwama attack case has been filed after an investigation spanning one-and-a-half years.

"Jaish-e-Mohammad had claimed the responsibility of Pulwama attack. The organisation and its leadership are in Pakistan. It is regrettable that Masood Azhar, the first accused in the charge sheet continues to find shelter in Pakistan," Mr Srivastava said at an online media briefing.

"Enough evidence has been shared with Pakistan but it continues to evade responsibility," he added.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a charge sheet in the Pulwama case detailing how Pakistan-based JeM terror outfit planned and carried out the attack.

"It (charge sheet) has been filed to address the act of terrorism and to bring perpetrators of such a heinous crime to justice. Our aim is not to simply issue statements or notifications," Mr Srivastava said.

India had carried out a strike on a JeM terrorist training camp in Pakistan's Balakot area on February 26 last year, in response to the Pulwama attack in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed.

Mr Srivastava also added that Pakistan has not yet taken any credible action against the perpetrators of the Mumbai terror attack of 2008 which resulted in the loss of 165 innocent lives.

On Pakistan's U-turn on presence of Dawood Ibrahim in the country, Mr Srivastava said Islamabad has never taken "any credible and verifiable action" against terror entities or listed individuals, including the most wanted ones.

"This subsequent denial by their Foreign Office calls into question their intentions and it would not mislead the world community in believing its propaganda," he said.



"Pakistan must take credible action and ensure that the listed individuals are prosecuted," the MEA spokesperson added.

Ibrahim's name figured in a list of 88 people which was published as a Statutory Regulatory Order (SRO) by Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

However, later Pakistan rejected media reports saying the SRO list is an acknowledgement of Ibrahim's presence in the country.

JAISH-E-MOHAMMAD HAD claimed the responsibility of Pulwama attack. The organisation and its leadership are in Pakistan. It is regrettable that Masood Azhar, the first accused in the charge sheet continues to find shelter in Pakistan,"



SHIKARA'S remain steady in Srinagar's Dal Lake as rains lashed Kashmir Valley for the second straight day on Thursday. KO Photo Abid Bhat

Supreme Court Declines Permission For Muharram Processions Across India

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court Thursday declined permission for carrying out Muharram procession across the country and asked Lucknow-based petitioner to move before the Allahabad High Court with his plea.

The apex court said how can it pass a general order for the whole country.

A bench comprising Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian said it would lead to chaos and targeting of a particular community.

You are asking for a general order and then if we allow this there will be chaos. Particular community will be targeted for spreading Covid. We don't want that. We as a court cannot risk the health of all the people, the bench, which heard the matter through video conferencing, said.

The bench allowed the petitioner to withdraw the petition with the liberty to approach the high court with limited prayer of holding procession in Lucknow.

The apex court was hearing a PIL was filed by Shia leader Syed Kalbe Jawad.



Farmers Driven To Debt As Banks Turn Risk-Averse During Pandemic

MUMBAI: Last month, Dnyaneshwar Siddhanth, a farmer from Maharashtra, was in desperate need of money to buy seed and fertilizer as the monsoon sowing season approached.

But after being rejected by his bank for a loan despite several attempts, Siddhanth finally borrowed 150,000 Indian rupees (\$2,021) from a moneylender at a rate of 60% annually.

Amid the country's worst economic slowdown in decades due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, millions of farmers like Siddhanth are being shunned by banks as lenders turn cautious due to rising bad loans.

That is forcing them to turn to illegal moneylenders who are charging increasingly exorbitant rates, according to over a dozen farmers and bankers that Reuters spoke to.

Agriculture accounts for near 15% of India's \$2.8 trillion economy and is a source of livelihood for more than half of its 1.3 billion people.

Higher interest rates will reduce farm earnings, impacting overall rural incomes which are key to reviving the economy.

"Most of the profit goes to paying interest to a private moneylender," Siddhanth said.

"Everything now depends on monsoon rains. If the crops fail, then I will have to sell land to repay the loan."

LENDERS HAMSTRUNG

Till last year private moneylenders were charging 24-36% interest, but are now asking for 48-60% as more farmers seek loans, said Prashant Kathe, Siddhanth, who already owed a bank 178,000 rupees from a previous loan, was covered under the scheme. However, the state government is yet to provide funds to repay it, and nearly one-third of the loan remains outstanding.

As of October 2019, 10 states that had announced farm loan waivers since 2014-15 had yet to complete the promised loan write-offs, according to local media reports.

"Only about 30-35% of the promised amount by the various state governments has been sanctioned to the bank," said a senior banker who didn't wish to be identified.

The high level of bad loans in the agriculture sector is another deterrent to more lending.

The share of soured loans in the segment has risen from 8.4% as of September 2018 to 10.1% as of March 2020, at a time when the overall share of bad loans in the banking sector has been going down.

"There is reluctance to lend in the agri segment due to poor asset quality, as a result banks are more keen to lend if there is gold as collateral, but otherwise fresh lending in the segment has been tepid," said Anil Gupta, analyst at credit rating agency ICRA.

Between March and June this year, lending to the agriculture sector contracted 1.8%, according to the Reserve Bank of India. During June 2019-2020, lending to the sector grew by 6.7% compared to 11% in the same period the previous year.

Last year, Maharashtra government, had announced that banks will write off loans of up to 200,000 rupees to distressed farmers.



another farmer who has borrowed 300,000 rupees at a 60% interest rate. Typically, banks charge anywhere between 4-10% for crop related loans.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has been instructing banks to increase lending, but bankers say they are choosing to be cautious.

Economists forecast India's economy to shrink by 5.1% in the current fiscal year, the weakest performance since 1979.

Lenders also complain that they are caught up by farm loan waiver schemes announced by several governments to win over farmers ahead of elections.

"Even though some of the states announced the scheme years ago, the money has still not reached the bank so technically the farmer's account is a non-performing asset for us and we can't give more loans till the outstanding is cleared," said the head of agriculture lending at a large state-owned bank.

India Witnesses Record-Breaking 75K COVID-19 Cases In A Single Day

NEW DELHI: With 75,760 fresh cases and 1,023 deaths, India recorded the highest single day jump in COVID-19 cases on Thursday as overall cases crossed 33.10 lakhs, while total deaths in the country so far reached 60,472.

However, the number of recoveries too zoomed to 25.23 lakhs, out of which 56,013 persons were discharged from medical supervision in the last 24 hours. India's Recovery Rate now is 76.24 per cent. The Recovery Rate is best in Delhi (90%), followed by Tamil Nadu (85%), Bihar (83.80%). The country as of Thursday now has 7.26 lakh cases under active medical care.

"The sustained high recoveries have ensured that the actual caseload of the country, ie, active cases, comprise 21.93% of the total positive cases," said health ministry officials.

"A focus on standard of care protocol as described in the clinical management protocol of Ministry of Health Ministry, better skilled doctors in the ICUs and hospitals, improved ambulance services, use of non-invasive oxygen and use of investigational therapies have led to the national Case Fatality Rate (CFR) maintaining its downward slide. It has further slumped to stand at 1.83% today," officials added.

As per data, ten States/UTs are faring better in terms of Recovery Rate than the national average. The CFR is lowest in Assam (0.27%), followed by Kerala (0.39%), Bihar (0.42%), Odisha (0.51%), Telangana (0.70%), Tripura (0.87%), Andhra Pradesh (0.93%), Chhattisgarh (0.95%), Goa (1.08%) and Jharkhand (1.09%).



No Loan Interest Waiver For Middle Class, Rahul Gandhi Slams "Suit Boot Ki Sarkar"

NEW DELHI: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi today attacked the government over interest on deferred loan payments and asked why it gave tax benefits of 1.45 lakh crore to businesses but did not waive interest on loans for the middle class.

In a tweet, he said, "1450000000000 tax cut benefit given to big businesses. But no interest waiver on loans for middle class" and dubbed the government of being a "suit boot ki Sarkar".

He also tagged a news report stating that the Supreme Court slammed the Centre and asked it to clarify its stand on charging of interest on deferred loan payments.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the Centre is "hiding behind the RBI" and asked it to reply within a week on the issue of interest being charged on installments which have been deferred under the central bank's scheme during the moratorium period amid COVID-19 lockdown.

The court had earlier asked the Centre and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to review the move to charge interest on EMIs during the moratorium period introduced under the scheme due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Coronavirus Hits 10 Of Dying Andaman Tribe Of Just Over 50 People

PORT BLAIR: Ten members of India's dwindling Great Andamanese tribe have tested positive for the coronavirus, officials said Thursday, fuelling concerns about the safety of the group and other indigenous people in the remote archipelago.

Out of the 10, six have recovered and have been put in home quarantine, while the rest are undergoing treatment in a local hospital, officials told AFP.

Just over 50 Great Andamanese people survive today and live on the tiny Strait Islands where the government looks after their food and shelter.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, with a population of some 4,00,000, has reported 2,268 coronavirus cases so far with 37 deaths.

Authorities sent a team of health officials to Strait Island on Sunday after six members of the tribe tested positive in the archipelago's capital Port Blair recently.

Some of the tribe's members travel to Port Blair where they have government jobs.

"The team tested 37 samples and four members of the Great Andamanese tribe were found to be positive. They are admitted in hospital," Avijit Ray, a senior health officer in charge of the disease management in the Andamans, told AFP.

Sanjiv Mittal, a senior government officer for tribal welfare, told AFP authorities were doing their best to keep all the members safe and healthy.



NEWS MAKERS

What Mother Teresa Told Priyanka Gandhi Vadra After Her Father's Death

Mother Teresa's birth anniversary: Priyanka Gandhi Vadra recalled what Mother Teresa told her when she visited the family after former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in May 1991. The Congress leader, in a tweet, shared pictures of her working with the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity.

"Shortly after my father was killed, Mother Teresa came to see us. I had fever. She sat by my bedside, held my hand and said 'Come and work with me,'" Priyanka Gandhi Vadra posted on the microblogging site.

"I did so for many years, and owe her a great debt of gratitude for the abiding friendship of all the MC (Missionaries of Charity) sisters who continue



to show me the path of selfless service and love," she tweeted.

Special prayers were held at the Mother House in Kolkata, the global headquarters of the Missionaries of Charity, on the 110th birth anniversary of St Teresa of Calcutta. Entry of visitors was restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mother Teresa was born on August 26, 1910 in Skopje, presently the capital of North Macedonia, to a family of Albanians. She left home at a young age and came to India in 1929 with the Loreto nuns. She left the congregation in the late 1940s and started the Missionaries of Charity to work among the poor.

Aamir Khan Under Fire For Forging Friendship With 'Enemies Of India'

New Delhi: Bollywood star Aamir Khan has long been a hate figure for India's Hindu far-right, but now they have a new line of attack — his massive popularity in China.

Khan, 55, is a brand ambassador for Chinese smartphone maker Vivo, and is also major draw on the mainland with films such as "Dangal" (2016). He even has 1.16 million followers on China's Twitter-like platform Weibo.

But this week the hard-line Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Hindu group put the actor on the cover of its magazine, calling him "The Dragon's favourite Khan", a reference to China.

Also criticising Khan's ties with Turkey — which has slammed India over Kashmir — the article said he was

"forging friendships with those that are considered enemies of India".

"Aamir seems to be the favourite of the Chinese Communist Party system and the fact his movies are doing so well is an indication that he is being promoted by Chinese state," the editor of the weekly Hitesh Shankar told a news website.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has fanned growing hostility to China following a deadly clash on their disputed Himalayan border in June.

The militaristic RSS is the ideological parent of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the prime minister — a devout Hindu — is a lifelong member.

Since Modi came to power in 2014, the BJP government has



enacted a number of policies that have raised fears of marginalisation among India 200-million-strong Muslim minority.

Bollywood has a long tradition of Muslim movie stars and the so-called three Khans — Aamir, Salman and Shah Rukh — have dominated box offices for the last three decades.

But Aamir Khan stands out

vicious online campaign in 2015 and forced out of several advertisement campaigns after he said his wife feared for the safety of their children in India.

At the time India was reeling under a climate of insecurity following the lynching of a Muslim man for allegedly eating beef, which many Hindus believe is sacrilegious.

Khan attracted further ire when he met Emine Erdogan, the wife of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during a recent film shoot in Turkey.

Erdogan has backed Pakistan over Kashmir, a territory that both India and Pakistan claim as its own but rule in parts. China is in control of some parts of the mountainous Ladakh region.