



Maximum : 16°
Minnum : -1°
Humidity : 68%

SUNSET
Today 05:21 PM
SUNRISE
Tomorrow 07:19 AM



P6 LIFE & TIMES

Plastic pollution threatening Ganges wildlife, study finds

P4 EDITPAGE

Indian Madrassas – A Need for Reorientation



P7 NEWS

Pandemic to fan surge in humanitarian needs in 2021: UN



NEWS DIGEST

Mughal Road Reopens After 9 Days

POONCH: The Mughal road, connecting Shopian and Poonch districts, reopened after 9 days closure due to snowfall along the thoroughfare, officials said on Tuesday.

“Subject to fair weather and good road condition (only downward traffic) load carriers carrying fresh fruits/vegetables shall be allowed from Herpora (Shopian) from 1100 hrs to 1500 hours towards Poonch,” a police officer told news agency GNS.

“No vehicle shall be allowed after cut off timing. Moreover, no passenger vehicle or pedestrian shall be allowed on Mughal Road,” he added.

CASO Launched In Sopore

SRINAGAR: Government forces on Tuesday launched a cordon and search operation (CASO) in Sopore town of north Kashmir's Baramulla district.

According to reports, special operations group (SOG) of police, army's 22 RR and 179 CRPF on Tuesday evening cordoned off Model Town -B locality of Sopore and conducted house to house searches following inputs about the presence of militants in the area. Searches were going on in the area when last reports came in.

7 Officials Suspended In Budgam

BUDGAM: District Panchayat Election Officer (DPEO) Budgam, Shahbaz Ahmed Mirza on Tuesday placed seven officials under suspension for dereliction of Election duties till further orders.

The officials in question had failed to report on poll duties scheduled for Phase 2nd at Beerwah, Budgam.

Meanwhile, the said officials have been directed to remain attached in the office of Additional Deputy Commissioner Budgam till further orders.

Man Ends Life In Srinagar

SRINAGAR: A man on Tuesday allegedly ended his life by hanging himself to death in Shalimar area of this capital city.

The 50-year-old man identified as Bashir Ahmad son of Ghulam Mohammed of Banigam Shalimar, allegedly hanged himself to death at his home on Tuesday morning, news agency KDC reported. Meanwhile, Police have taken cognizance of the incident and have set investigations into motion.

House, Shops Gutted In Bandipora Blaze

BANDIPORA: A residential house besides at least two shops were completely gutted even as considerable damage dealt to two other shops in a blaze incident in Hajin area of Bandipora district on Tuesday.

According to eyewitnesses, the fire which broke out from a provision store and spread in no time resulting in damage to at least three other shops besides a residential house at Rekhi Hajin area in the district.

The raging fire was brought under control after hectic efforts made by Fire and Emergency department, however by then the fire had already razed a residential house and two shops belonging to Ghulam Mohiuddin Ganaie to ashes, they said.

Two other shops belonging to Bashir Ahmad Ganaie also suffered considerable damage in the incident, they added. When contacted a police official told GNS that the cause of the fire could not be immediately ascertained.

“A case in this regard has been taken up and further investigations are underway to enquire into the cause of mishap”, the official said.

DDC POLLS

49.5 % Voter Turnout In Second Phase

KO Photo: Abid Bhat

SRINAGAR: A 49.5 percent turnout was recorded in the second phase of polling in District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir which passed off peacefully on Tuesday.

Jammu region witnessed 65.54 percent voting, while Kashmir valley recorded an average of 33.34 percent turnout, state election commissioner K K Sharma told reporters here.

Bandipora district recorded the highest turnout in Kashmir at 69.66 percent which was the third-highest in the union territory.

A turnout of 51.76 was recorded in the first phase on November 28--64.2 percent in the Jammu division and 40.65 percent in the Kashmir division.

Tral Boycotts Ballot Box

TRAL: Residents of Tral in south Kashmir's Pulwama district on Tuesday stayed away from ballot box owing to the lack of development in the area from the last seven decades. [More On P2](#)



‘Voting To Keep BJP Away’

Unlike the voters at other places, the electors at one of the polling booths in Amira Kadal constituency here had turned up at the booth to “ensure that their votes will keep the BJP candidate away.” [More On P2](#)

PDP Leader ‘Detained’ Briefly By Police

A People's Democratic Party (PDP) leader on Tuesday was allegedly detained by police when the municipal elections were in progress in this capital city. [More On P2](#)

ECI Will Take Final Call On Assembly Polls: Sharma

SRINAGAR: The Election Commission of India will take a final call on holding the first assembly polls after the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir as a union territory, state election commissioner K K Sharma said on Tuesday.

“It will not be appropriate for me to comment on it. The Election Commission (of India) will take a final decision on assembly elections,” Sharma told reporters here.

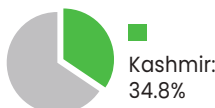
He was replying to a question whether the situation was conducive in Jammu and Kashmir for holding the elections to the legislative assembly of the union territory

Sharma said as state election commissioner, his mandate was

limited to holding polls to urban local bodies and panchayati Raj institutions.

“We held deliberations with the law and order machinery and other agencies involved in holding the elections for District Development Councils before deciding on it.

“I am sure a similar process will be followed for holding assembly elections but the Election Commission will decide on it,” he said. The last assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir were held in November-December, 2014, which led to the formation of the PDP-BJP government in the erstwhile state for the first and the last time. [More On P2](#)



Srinagar	33.8 %
Budgam	43.9 %
Kupwara	58.6 %
Baramulla	30.2 %
Bandipora	70.8 %
Ganderbal	49.1 %
Anantnag	30.9 %
Shopian	17.2 %
Pulwama	8.6 %



Kishtwar	61.6 %
Rajouri	60.2 %
Poonch	75.1 %
Udhampur	62.5 %
Doda	64.8 %
Kathua	60.1 %
Ramban	66.2 %
Reasi	69.2 %
Samba	66.4 %

Youth Shot At By Gunmen In Srinagar

SRINAGAR:A 24-year-old youth on Tuesday was critically injured after unknown gunmen fired upon him in Soura area of this capital city.

Unidentified militants fired upon a man identified as Nadif Khan son of Muhammad Hanief Khan of Bilal colony Soura, leaving him critically injured, a senior police officer told news agency GNS. The injured youth, he said was immediately rushed to SKIMS for treatment.

Medical Superintendent SKIMS Dr. Farooq Jan said that the youth has firearm injury and his condition was serious.

Meanwhile, the area has been cordoned off to nab the attackers.

8 More Corona Deaths In J&K, Toll Crosses 1700 Mark

OBSERVER MONITORING DESK

SRINAGAR: At least eight more people succumbed to coronavirus in Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, taking the death toll due to virus in the Union Territory past 1700-mark.

In Jammu division, five more people died of Covid-19 while three others lost their battle with the deadli infection in Kashmir Valley, officials said Tuesday.

Among the victims from Jammu division an 82-year-old man from Udhampur, an 86-year-old from Trikuta Nagar Jammu, a 52-year-old from man from R S Pura and a 44-year-old man and a 35-year-old from Kathua. [More On P2](#)

454 More Test Positive

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir reported on Tuesday 454 fresh cases of novel coronavirus, including thirteen travelers, taking the total number of people infected by the virus in Union Territory to 110678.

While Kashmir division reported 237 new cases of Covid-19, the remaining 217 were detected in Jammu division, officials said Tuesday. Giving district wise details, they said, Srinagar reported 118, Baramulla 18, Budgam 45, Pulwama 9, Kupwara 10, Anantnag 10, Bandipora 13, Ganderbal 6, Kulgam [More On P2](#)

Govt Forms Committees To Implement Forest Rights Act



SRINAGAR: Lieutenant Governor-led dispensation on Tuesday accorded sanction into constitution of committees on various levels for implementation of Forests Rights Act (2006) in Jammu and Kashmir. An order in this regard reads that “Sanction is hereby accorded

to the constitution of UT Level Monitoring Committee, Sub-Divisional Committee and District Level Committee(s) for implementation of Forest Rights Act, 2006 in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.”

The UT Level Committee, as per the order, will have a total strength of eight persons with Chief Secretary J&K as its Chairperson.

The District Level Committee will have a constitution of four persons with Deputy Commissioner as Chairperson, the order reads.

The Sub-divisional committee(s) will also have a total strength of four persons which, as per the order, will be headed by Sub-Divisional Level Officer of Revenue Department (SDM/ADC).

BSF Officer Killed In Pak Firing

JAMMU: A sub-inspector of the Border Security Force (BSF) was killed on Tuesday in a cross-border firing along the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said.

“The Pakistan army resorted to unprovoked ceasefire violation in Rajouri sector on the LoC again, in which BSF Sub-Inspector Paotinsat Guite, who was deployed at Forward Defence Location, was killed,” a statement issued by the BSF said.

The incident took place at Tarkundi area of Mendhar in Poonch district. It said the BSF has retaliated strongly and effectively on Pakistan army posts.

The mortal remains of the deceased would be sent by air to Maphoukuki village in [More On P2](#)

‘It’s Becoming Harder Day By Day’: Campus Life Outside Kashmir

ROMAAN ARORA

It's another cold morning of the winter season, and a group of young Kashmiris is busy discussing their holiday plans with each other in the IT hub of India.

One of them, Junaid Nazeer, is a third-year student of Bachelor of Engineering (BE) from Visvesvaraya Technological University (VTU).

Junaid plans to go to his homeland, once the official announcement regarding the vacations is made. Speaking

“People here are filled with a huge amount of anger for Kashmiris, as they hold us responsible for the killings of their soldiers.”

about his journey, he says that his family wanted him to pursue B.Tech from Chandigarh, but he never agreed, keeping his family's low income in mind.

Yet, in the second step of the Prime Minister Special Scholarship Scheme, he finally got the opportunity to complete higher studies.

Coming to Bengaluru, the first thing Junaid noticed was the highly developed



Representation picture

Every rally was marked with hate speeches against Kashmiris, and there were incidents of violence against Kashmiri students and workers.”

city space, and huge skyscrapers. Speaking about the people of the city, he claims that the residents there don't interfere in each other's affairs. As a result of which, there is no reason to fight.

“Even after the Pulwama attack of 2019, there was a complete sense of peace and calmness in Bengaluru,” he says. However, he remembers one incident in Haryana, where a shopkeeper denied him entry for being a Kashmiri.

At this point, Abdul Wahid Peer, Junaid's senior and a resident of North Kashmir's Handwara, jumps into the conversation. [More On P2](#)

FROM FRONT PAGE

49.5 % Voter ...

Voting was held in 43 DDC constituencies including 25 in Kashmir and 18 in the Jammu region in the first phase.

"The voting for the second phase of DDC elections passed off peacefully with no incident reported from anywhere in the union territory.

The overall voting percentage for the second phase was 48.62 per cent," Sharma said.

On the dip in poll percentage in the valley, Sharma said it was for the people to vote.

"We have been appealing to people to vote in the DDC polls as these are very important in electing the decision-making body at the district level. We have run awareness campaigns in this regard but in the end, it is the people who have to vote," he said.

Giving details, Sharma said 1.45 lakh people including 62,117 women turned up to cast their votes in the valley. In Jammu, 1.27 lakh male voters and 1.13 lakh female voters exercised their franchise.

Tral Boycotts ...

The residents from Rathsuna, Shairafabad, Nowdal, Midoor, Pinglish said that casting votes in the past has brought them no relief, "thus they have decided to boycott the polls this time."

"We used to vote for our basic amenities but our demands were never met, so we decided to stay away from polls," residents of Nuristan Tral said.

A local resident Muzamil Ahmad said that in the last two decades, several political parties promised to provide better road connectivity, electricity but it all proved a hoax on the ground.

"These political parties just want a vote from us, and after we vote in their favour, they don't keep their promise," he said.

Pertinently, in eight booths of Tral, not a single vote was casted.

However, an official said that 15.2 per cent votes were cast in Tral block.

Of 3977 votes, 2236 votes were cast by men while 1741 votes were cast by women, an official said.

Karmulla village recorded the highest number of votes with 59.80 per cent. Around eight booths witnessed zero per cent voting.

454 More Test ...

3, Shopian 5, Jammu 95, Rajouri 25, Udhampur 25, Doda 13, Kathua 20, Poonch 3, Samba 7, Kishtwar 6, Ramban 9 and Reasi 14.

Moreover, they said, 503 more patients have recovered and were discharged from various hospitals— 230 from Jammu Division and 273 from Kashmir Valley.

Voting To Keep ...

A group of voters at the polling booth established at Government Girls Higher Secondary School Amira Kadal said that they have no expectations from any of the candidates contesting the polls today.

"We are just casting our vote today to keep BJP away, who always took steps against the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir," a woman, donning green traditional Pheran and wearing white mask, said.

She said it is not the first time she is casting the ballots, but this time "I am not expecting anything from any of the candidates as we have seen false and fake promises by the leaders so far. I am here to ensure the BJP candidate will not win."

The other voters, accompanying her, echoed similar views, saying that "we believe it is not good either to cast the vote due to the situation and killings we have witnessed so far, but this time, it was necessary to come out and cast vote to ensure that the party who is taking anti-people decision will be shown doors."

"We don't want anyone to do fake promises this time. We are not casting ballots to ensure anyone's win. But, this vote is only against the anti-people decisions like abrogation of Article 370 taken by the BJP led government. We don't want to realize our mistake in the future for not casting ballots. We have got a chance to protest the anti-people decision of BJP and by casting the vote today against their candidate, we have done our job and fulfilled our responsibility," Shaista (name changed), donning grey traditional Pheran said outside the polling booth.

The other voters, also present there said that every leader and candidate they have chosen so far has deceived them by failing to fulfill their promises. "This election is meant for the development, which has never taken place in Jammu and Kashmir. What is the fun of supporting the candidates now? But as a responsible society member, you have to do your bit to protest and tell those at the helm that the decision you have taken on August 05, 2019 didn't suit the aspirations of people here," a male voter said.

Pertinently, the second phase of ongoing eight-phased elections concluded on Tuesday across Jammu and Kashmir. The counting will be held on December 22.

PDP Leader ...

PDP leader Rouf Bhat was allegedly detained by police at the Shergari police station for over an hour before being let off, news agency KDC reported. However, the reasons behind detaining the PDP leader could not be known.

Meanwhile, PDP President Mehbooba Mufti reacted sharply to the alleged detention of her party leader.

"PDPs @RoufBhat has been detained again on the day municipal election is being held in Srinagar. GOI by subverting democracy reminds me of the cycle of rigged elections in the past, which is one of the reasons J&K is in turmoil. How long will @ECISVEEP ignore such malpractices?" Mehbooba posted on her Twitter page

"In 2002 BJP's Vajpayee ji promised & ensured free & fair elections in J&K. And in 2020 the very same BJP is going all out to ensure every election here from municipal to DDC is manipulated & rigged," she said in her tweet.

8 More Corona ...

Those who succumbed to the virus in Valley include two residents of Srinagar and one from Anantnag.

With these deaths, the total fatality count in the Valley has reached 1107 and 595 in the Jammu region. the J&K has reported 100 deaths in around 13 days, the officials said.

Srinagar district with 418 deaths tops the list followed by Jammu (302), Baramulla (163),

Budgam (101), Pulwama (86), Kupwara (83), Anantnag (79), Doda (56), Bandipora (51), Kulgam (51), Rajouri (49), Udhampur (50), Ganderbal (38), Shopian (37), Kathua (39), Samba (30), Poonch (22), Ramban (18), Kishtwar(18), and Reasi (9). —With GNS inputs

ECI Will Take ...

The coalition government fell in June 2018 after the BJP pulled out and withdrew support, leading to the imposition of the governor's rule.

President's rule was imposed in Jammu and Kashmir in January 2019 and extended in July last year as elections were not conducted in the state.

The Centre nullified Article 370 and reorganised Jammu and Kashmir into union territories -- Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh -- on August 5, 2019.

While the Ladakh union territory does not have a legislature in the new set up, Jammu and Kashmir has been provided with a legislative assembly but the elections have not been held even after a passage of more than a year.

BSF Officer ...

Imphal, where his last rites will be performed with full state honours, the statement said.

On November 13, 11 people, including four Army personnel and a BSF officer, were killed in different ceasefire violations in north Kashmir, while four Army personnel were killed in firing by Pakistani troops in different sectors along the LoC in the twin districts of Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu region on November 21, 26 and 27.

It's Becoming ...

Abdul, who came to V.T.U because of his cousin studying there, claims that in his entire 4 years of study, he hasn't witnessed any sort of discrimination against any Kashmiri, in his varsity.

"See, no one wants to leave his homeland in the first place, but I had to come here for meaningful higher education and a promising career, which is not there in Kashmir. In the initial stages of moving here to Bengaluru, I was concerned. But to my surprise, the atmosphere was quite peaceful; people don't care who you are and what you do."

However, Abdul strongly reiteratesthe pointmade by his junior and further claims that North Indians don't like Kashmiris.

"I have seen and felt it personally. There is a big difference between the treatment we receive in North and South Indian states. I haven't faced any discrimination here in Bengaluru, but unfortunately, it's there in northern states."

Though Abdul and his junior Junaid agree and disagree on some points, still both of them jointlysay that revealing their Kashmiri identity outside of Kashmir, does bring them a huge sort of discomfort and insecurity in the first place.

To understand the experience of other Kashmiri students, and to check the claim ofAbdul and Junaid, we talk to Sukaina Ashraf,a third-year nursing student at Aman Bhalla Nursing Institute, Pathankot (Punjab).

Sukaina, who hails from Nowgam in Srinagar, says that though her family was worried about her security, yet all of them were convinced of her plans to study nursing in Punjab.

The first thing she noticed after coming to Pathankot was the unnecessary stares of people. But she was already prepared for such an experience, so it didn't cause her any serious problem.

However, Sukaina clearly remembers the news of the Pulwama attack in her college, and how it unfolded a huge set of disturbance and insecurity for her.

"I was at the hospital duty when the news of Pulwama attack reached us. I clearly remember how the staff members and the patients shouted at us and said:'Get these Kashmiri terrorists out of here and shoot them indeed!' Most of my female friends started crying at that moment. We all felt isolated and helpless. It was a horrific incident."

Everything changed after the Pulwama attack for her.

"Everyone changed their behavior with us in a negative manner," she recalls."They treated and looked at us in such a way as if we the students were responsible for the attack. We weren't allowed to go outside of the campus for one month. We felt as if we have been aged."

Today, she doesn't feel safe revealing her identity to anyone outside of Kashmir, especially after the kind of things she went through, post the Pulwama attack. Sharing the same story of anguish, Mohammad Zeeshan, a final year arts student from Delhi University, remains watchful about his conduct outside the valley.

Zeeshan hails from Srinagar and has spent most of his academic life in Delhi.

"Day by dayit is becoming harder and harder for a Kashmiri to get accepted here in Delhi," Zeeshan says."People here are filled with a huge amount of anger for Kashmiris, as they hold us responsible for the killings of their soldiers." His family remains quite worried about him, and repeatedly asks him to not reveal his identity to others.

"I remember my first semester in DU when I went to attend a seminar at St. Stephen's College. There was a blind student who was asking for people to assist him to reach the cafeteria, and no one was paying any attention to him. Hence, I went to him and offered him help, to which he agreed and asked for my name. The moment I told him my name, his facial expressions changed from a smile to a state of shock and discomfort. Then he immediately took a step back and asked me to go after claiming that he can reach the cafeteria on his own. I was hurt to my core, yet I moved on."

Another thing happened when he was in the second semester. This time, the Pulwama attack.

"People were angry, and rallies were held where inflammatory slogans were being raised all across Delhi," he recalls."Every rally was marked with hate speeches against Kashmiris, and there were incidents of violence against Kashmiri students and workers."

In his own college group, a hyper-toxic nationalist started calling every Kashmiri a traitor and militant and asked for a heavy assault policy against Kashmiris, Zeeshan says.

"No one came forward to counter him," recalls."These back to back moments made me feel how vulnerable I will become, the moment I reveal my identity. Hence, to this day, I prefer to remain silent on many things and issues."

Shah Faesal Saddened By Shoras Tussle

SRINAGAR: A day after former JNU leader Shehla Rashid's father accused her daughter of taking Rs 3 crore for joining politics, ex-Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Movement (JKPM) President Shah Feasal on Tuesday said that his name was being dragged into family dispute and that he was open for any probe.

Taking to micro-blogging website Twitter, the former IAS topper said "As far as my name has been dragged into the family dispute of a former colleague, I want to make it clear that I have neither met nor consulted any of the terror accused persons, directly or indirectly, not to speak of seeking their support or benefitting from them."

He said, "In the US also, in 2018, I have been very careful with my actions and utterances and never said anything prejudicial to the security and integrity of the country. Having been in the IAS, I am fully aware of the redlines and am very clear about where I stand."

"While I know the perils of public life, I feel extremely sad to see my name being dragged into something

with which I am not even remotely associated. I will be glad to go before @JKP NIA CBI ED and assist in the investigation if required," the former JKPM President said in another Tweet.

Faesal was reacting to serious allegations leveled by Abdul Rashid Shora, the estranged father of student activist Shehla Rashid, demanding that a probe be initiated into her NGOs and also accused her of having taken a huge amount of money for joining politics in Kashmir valley, a charge denied by her.

"She had taken Rs three crore

to join politics in Kashmir from (former MLA) Engineer Rashid and (businessman) Zahoor Watali (both of whom were arrested last year by the National Investigation Agency for their alleged involvement in terror funding case)," Shora had claimed on Monday.

Shehla joined politics and became a founding member of JK Political Movement floated by IAS topper turned politician Shah Faesal. However, she later announced her "dissociation with the electoral mainstream in Kashmir" last year.

BJP Will Not Tolerate Pak's 'Policy Of Bloodshed': Raina

JAMMU: Stern action will be taken against leaders who have "bled" Jammu and Kashmir at the behest of Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir BJP president Ravinder Raina said on Tuesday.

We will not tolerate Pakistan's policy of bloodshed . Anyone whether a terrorist, separatist, politician or Tukde Tukde gang leaders like Shehla Rashid will be dealt with sternly, Raina said in a statement.

The BJP leader's remarks came a day after Abdul Rashid Shora, the estranged father of student activist Shehla Rashid, levelled serious allegations against her, demanding that a probe be initiated into her NGOs and also accused her of having taken a huge amount of money for joining politics in Kashmir, a charge denied by her.

Shehla termed her father's statement absolutely disgusting and baseless and said this was his reaction after a court barred

him entry into their Srinagar house on November 17 in response to a complaint filed by the family against him for alleged domestic violence.

Raina alleged, Hurriyat Conference, Tukde Tukde gang's Shehla Rashid, (former MLA) Engineer Rashid and (businessman) Zahoor Watali and some other political leaders have been running their 'shop of death' in Jammu and Kashmir over the past 30 years.

"They have bled Kashmir at the behest of Pakistan from whom they are taking money and their hand is behind the killing of innocent people.

He said they are not leaders or well-wishers of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

They stand exposed today. All such people who are involved in treason against the country or make an attempt to bleed J&K will be dealt with sternly, Raina said.

BJP Is 'Disruptionist, Deeply Communal' Party: Soz

SRINAGAR: Coming down heavily on senior BJP leader and MoS Jitendra Singh over his remarks that Kashmir has gained peace and development after Article 370 abrogation, senior Congress leader Saifuddin Soz on Tuesday said that the handful of people who have joined BJP in Kashmir, must understand that this party is the most "disruptionist and deeply communal and sectarian group" in India.

In a statement issued to media, the former Union Minister said that Singh was only bragging his ignorance that Kashmir had gained peace and development after the abrogation of Article 370.

"This is a blatant lie and extreme falsehood. The people of Kashmir have already rejected this falsehood with contempt," Soz said.

The reality, he said was that the people of the J&K, especially the people of Kashmir are extremely angry after the abrogation of Article 370 and this anger is not

going to subside in future.

"A vast majority of the state have resolved to fight for their rights in spite of the odds in their way. There is, however, a little danger that a small (negligible) number of Kashmiris will somehow believe the propaganda of small timers in the BJP, who are trying to mislead the people of Kashmir by saying that the Statehood would be restored, early. Statehood or No-Statehood, Kashmiris want restoration of Article 370 of the Constitution of India," Soz said.

The senior Congress leader also said that the real significant thing is restoration of the state's autonomy enshrined in Article 370 of the Constitution.

"It may mean a struggle for Kashmiris, but it is the struggle worth fighting," he said

He said political leaders should keep fighting for a cause and also fight for the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Water Scarcity Sparks Protest In Nowshera

SRINAGAR: The residents of Nowshera area of central Kashmir's Srinagar district on Tuesday held a protest against the water scarcity in their area and blocked the traffic for many hours.

The residents (mostly ladies) of Nowshera area of the city, assembled at the main road and staged a massive protest demonstration against the Jal-Shakti department for not providing the locality adequate water supply, resulting into the halt-age of the traffic for some time.

One of the protesters while

talking to news agency Kashmir Dot Com-(KDC) said that they are facing acute water shortage for almost two years and the concerned department has completely failed to address their issues.

"I called the concerned officials several times, once a team of Jal-Shakti visited the area but since then they don't bother to answer our calls. We have been forced to come on roads," She said.

They appealed to the Administration to look into their genuine problems and redress them as soon as possible. (KDC)

In Times Of 2-G Internet, KU Students Demand Recommencement Of Regular Offline Classes

Srinagar, Dec 01 (KNO): In the backdrop of low speed internet, the Postgraduate students of University of Kashmir (KU) on Tuesday appealed the administration to recommence with regular offline classes saying that they could not learn anything through online lectures in previous semester.

The students informed the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that they feel they have wasted the previous semester wherein they couldn't follow the online lectures in view of low speed internet.

One of the students said, "In my previous semester, I hardly attended 30 percent of the online classes even the lectures I attended online via 2G internet services, I couldn't understand anything as the video lectures were buffering."

He said that the students also suffered huge academic losses in 2019 as well following the abrogation of Article-370.

"Last year also we barely had started to commence with a fresh semester, curfew was imposed and all educational institutes were closed following the abrogation of Article-370. In this academic semester, we had a lot of academic loss that was not even

compensated in any way," another student said.

Officials at KU told KNO that no new guidelines were issued by the authorities to reopen the establishment.

"As of now, we have not received any order or any new guidelines to reopen the university. We are just following the government directions," the official said—(KNO)

LMD recovers 4.25 lacs fine, books 174 erring traders

SRINAGAR The field executives of Legal Metrology Department (LMD) have recovered a penal sum of Rs. 4.25 lacs from the erring traders and booked 174 others during 2699 market inspections conducted in the month of November, 2020.

These erring traders were fined and booked for violating Legal Metrology Laws. In addition to this, over 8000 commercial weights and measures were standardized in the Inspectorate Laboratories for which a stamping fee of Rs. 4.87 lacs was also collected. Besides these, the department also received 133 public complaints related to non-transfer of subsidy amount on cooking-gas, short-weighting, use of non-standard weights and measures etc.

Meanwhile, the department has informed consumers to register their genuine complaints on toll free number: 1800-180-7114 in case any unscrupulous commercial establishment indulges in short-weighting/short-measurement/over-charging on packed products/use of false weight or measure offers for sale any packed product without label/smudging of MRP.

Cabinet Secretary reviews arrangements for COVID-19 vaccine roll-out

- Vaccine to be provided in a time-bound, hassle-free manner through UIP distribution network
- ‘CO-WIN’ portal/app being developed for coordination between all stakeholders

JAMMU : The Cabinet Secretary, Rajiv Gauba, while chairing a high-level meeting, asked all the States and Union Territories to prepare and maintain a database of the prioritized group of people to receive the COVID-19 vaccine during the initial stages.

Chief Secretary, B V R Subrahmanyam, and Director General of Police, Dilbag Singh along with Chief Secretaries of all the States/UTs participated in the meeting.

Financial Commissioner, Health & Medical Education Department, Principal Secretary, Home, and MD, National Health Mission, were also present.

While reviewing the public health response to COVID-19, Cabinet Secretary informed that at present, 3 companies are frontrunners in developing COVID-19 vaccines in India- which are currently in the third phase of clinical trials and will be shortly available for usage. As such, he asked the States/UTs to develop

respective databases to prioritize various groups of people based on their exposure to the disease, starting from healthcare workers both in government and private establishments, frontline workers including armed forces, home guards, police, volunteers, municipal workers, etc, the prioritized age group of persons above the age of 50 years, and persons with co-morbidities.

It was informed that in India, vaccines are being administered against 12 preventable diseases under the prestigious ‘Universal Immunization Programme’ (UIP), which is one of the largest immunization programmes in the world. Therefore, with a strong network of 28,947 chain points for storage and distribution of vaccines, COVID-19 vaccine distribution too will be carried out in a hassle-free and time-bound manner.

To further ease the COVID vaccine-related burden on existing medi-

cal infrastructure, the States/UTs were asked to develop a multi-level coordination mechanism through State/District/Block level Committees which will be mandated to monitor and coordinate the smooth delivery of the COVID vaccine. This includes arrangements for site readiness for installation of the additional cold chain equipment, plans for cold chain, and dry storage space for vaccines and syringes, facilities for transportation of vaccines at all levels of State/UT, and procurement of ancillary items like hub cutters and waste bags for bio-medical waste management.

The Cabinet Secretary said that efforts should also be directed to minimize the impact of COVID-vaccination on routine immunization and advised States/UTs to identify potential vaccinators among MBBS/BDS doctors/interns, staff nurses, auxiliary nursing midwives, pharmacists,

and retired persons for organizing COVID-vaccination drives.

It was also informed that to facilitate coordination between government authorities, vaccinating agencies, and the general public, a digital platform for COVID-19 vaccination delivery named ‘CO-WIN’ is also being developed. The said portal will be supplemented with a mobile application to facilitate beneficiaries in getting registered; receive SMS alerts regarding the vaccination, and an electronic QR based vaccination certificate carrying all the vaccine-related information.

The Cabinet Secretary urged States/UTs to ensure a multi-sectoral response to the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine by involving all the government departments, NGOs, NCC, and other volunteers, besides maintaining an open and transparent communication with the public to curb misinformation and rumors.

Div Com reviews status of work process on major road projects in Kashmir

Stresses on speedy shifting, realignment of public utilities



SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 01: The Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Pandurang K Pole today chaired a meeting of officers to take stock of work process about various ongoing road projects in Kashmir.

The meeting, among others was attended by DC Srinagar, DC Kulgam, ADCs and ACRs from other districts, representatives from RAMKY, BRO, Beacon and other concerned agencies and departments through videoconferencing.

CE PWD, CE Transmission, Conservator Forests Kashmir, AC Central and other concerned officers also attended the meeting.

At the outset, the Div Com took a detailed reviews of the pace and progress made on the development of ongoing road projects including Semi Ring Road, Srinagar- Baramulla- Uri Kamanpost Road, Srinagar- Sonamarg- Gumri Road, Srinagar- Qazigund- Banihal Road, Srinagar- Pulwama- Shopian- Kulgam NH 444 and Uri- Poonch road project.

During the meeting, the Div Com stressed on the speedy completion of estimate work and instructed concerned to submit details on charges to be spent on shifting and realignment of public

utilities including Transmission towers, HT, LT lines, Bus Stops, public conveniences and other coming under Semi Ring Road construction and other road projects.

He directed concerned DCs and HoDs to ensure all required details regarding shifting of all public utilities including water supply schemes , irrigation schemes and others coming under the road construction is completed and submitted at war footing to facilitate smooth and swift work process.

He instructed concerned to submit mutation of acquired and handed over land besides timely disbursement of funds as compensation to the land owners whose land is acquired under semi ring road and other projects.

The Div Com stressed that speedy construction work is carried on all road projects, besides instruction were given for work on land acquisition, demarcation, release of compensation, shifting of public utilities, construction of bridges and culverts, alignments and realignments works, smoothening of sharp turns, removal of illegal structures and roadside encroachments and related works on these projects is ensured on fast track basis in every district.

Advisor Baseer Khan chairs review meeting of Handicrafts, Handloom department, JKI

Pitches for strengthening of base level of deptts

JAMMU, DECEMBER 01: Advisor to Lieutenant Governor, Baseer Ahmad Khan, today chaired a meeting of Handicrafts and Handloom department besides Jammu Kashmir Industries to get first hand feedback about functioning of the departments.

Regarding Handicrafts and Handloom department, Advisor directed the officers to strengthen the base

level of the department and take measures for uplifting the economic conditions of artisans. He said that endeavour of the department should be to initiate adequate steps for helping artisans in increasing their production and showcasing their products.

Advisor directed the officers to explore possibilities for virtual opportunities for the artisans for show-

casing their products in view of the pandemic. He further asked them to explore possibilities for convergence with the National Rural Livelihood Mission for providing an immediate platform to artisans. He asked for working out strategies to give a fillip to economic activities of the artisans and look for avenues which liberates them from economic distress.

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SKIING & MOUNTAINEERING

HOUSE NO. 183 A, KURSOO RAJBAGH, SRINAGAR-190008
Tel./Fax: 0194-2312749

NO: IISM-145(MP)03/SSC/2020-21/203 **DATED: 01/12/2020**

Sub: Notice inviting tenders for supply of Manpower to IISM, Gulmarg during conduct of Snow Skiing Course from December, 2020 to March, 2021.

1. For and on behalf of President of India, sealed tenders, affixed with revenue stamp of Rs. 6/= value, are invited by the Principal, Indian Institute of Skiing & Mountaineering (IISM), Gulmarg from registered/ reputed Manpower Service Providers for supply well Trained/ qualified/ experienced manpower in following categories on outsource basis to IISM, Gulmarg during winter months on the terms & conditions mentioned below:-
(a) Chief Ski Instructor (b) Ski Instructor (c) Medical Assistant (d) Waiters (e) Cooks (f) Asstt. Cooks (h) Helper for Kitchen (i) Helper for Ski lift (j) Ski Shop (k) Porter

2. The tenders must reach in the office of the undersigned on or before 11.12.2020 3.00 pm. The envelope containing the tender would be sealed and superscripted as under:

"TENDER FOR SUPPLY OF MANPOWER AGAINST INQUIRY NO. IISM-145(MP)03/SSC/2020-21/203 DATED:-01.12. 2020" DUE ON 11.12.2020 3 PM. I.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

This Institute has tentative requirement of 36 persons in the categories given above however, the number of staff may increase/ decrease based on Institute's requirements.

The contract is likely to commence from mid of December, 2020 and would continue till March, 2021. The period of the contract may be extended for similar or lesser period after the successful / satisfactory completion of initial contract and based on the manpower requirement at that time. The contract may also be curtailed / terminated before the contract period owing to deficiency in service or substandard quality of the manpower deployed by the selected Firm /Agency. This office, however, reserves right to terminate the contract without assigning any reason thereof at any time.

There should be no case pending with the police against the Proprietor/ Firm/Partner or the Company as a whole (Service Provider) and the Service Provider shall not have been blacklisted by any Government Departments, Public Sector Companies, Banks and Government Autonomous organizations or private companies. An affidavit in this regard shall be submitted.

The Income Tax/TDS and other statutory deductions, as applicable will be deducted from the payment Tax deduction certificate will be issued to the Service Provider by IISM.

In case of any material violation of any of the terms and conditions by the Service Provider, the IISM reserves its right to unilaterally terminate the contract. In case of any dispute, the decision of the Competent Authority in the IISM will be final and binding.

The Service Provider shall be obliged and solely responsible to comply with all statutory requirements in respect of the manpower engaged by him and the Institute shall not be a party to any dispute arising out of such deployment by the contractor.

The persons deployed by the Agency should not have any Police record/criminal cases against them. The agency should make adequate enquiries about the character and antecedents of the persons whom they are recommending. Any person deployed by the service provider should not indulge in act of misconduct or otherwise or later if any. Service will be ceased with immediate effect, if any employee deployed by the service provider found in such activities.

The Institute is located at Gulmarg of District Baramullah in the Jammu & Kashmir UT. The personnel so deployed shall have to report for duty at the above place or any new location. No extra liability on this account will be borne by IISM.

If need arises, the outsource staff shall have to sit late or come early or attend the Office even on Sunday/Gazetted Holidays (as per work requirements).

The responsibility of statutory/compulsory deductions like EPF/Income Tax will be of the service provider. The Institute shall make no extra payment except GST.

The Service Provider shall be responsible for all acts of commission and omission on the part of the manpower engaged for the purpose. The IISM shall not be responsible in any manner, whatsoever, in matters of injury/death/health etc. of the Service Provider's employees performing duties under the contract.

The Service Provider shall be responsible for any damages done to the property of the Institute by the personnel so employed. The IISM will be free to recover it from the Service Provider

The Service Provider's personnel working in the IISM should be polite, cordial, positive and efficient while handling the assigned work and their actions should promote good will and enhance the image of the Institute. The Service Provider shall be responsible for any act of indiscipline on the part of persons deployed by him.

The Service Provider shall ensure proper conduct of his persons in the office premises, and enforce prohibition of consumption of alcoholic drinks, paan, smoking, loitering without work etc.

The Service Provider's personnel shall not have any right to claim any Benefit/ compensation/ absorption/regularization of services with the IISM under the provision of Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 or Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition] Act, 1970. Undertaking from the person to this effect will be required to be submitted by the Service Provider to this office.

The Service Provider shall be responsible for compliance of all statutory provisions relating to Minimum wages, Provident Fund, and Employees State Insurance etc. in respect of the persons deployed by it in IISM.

The successful bidder will have to deposit an EMD of Rs. 55000/-, pledged to the Principal, IISM in shape of CDR.


The Service Provider shall raise the bill, in duplicate in the first week of the succeeding month.

IISM reserves the right to withdraw/ relax any of the terms and conditions mentioned above to overcome the problem encountered by the contracting parties.

The sealed tender completed in all respect shall be submitted to the Principal, IISM, House No. 183 A, Kursoo Rajbagh, Srinagar -190 008 on or before 11.12.2020 up to 3 pm and the same will be opened on 14.12.2020 at 11.15 am in presence of the tenderers or their authorized representatives who may like to be present at that time.


Sd/-
Principal

DIAL-EMMA




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

AIRPORTS


SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311 

RAILWAYS




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

HIGHWAY STATUS



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



HIJRI CALENDAR
16 Rabi-us-Sani
1442

PRAYERS

FAJR	5: 50
ZUHR	12: 17
ASR	3:45
Magrib	5:26
ISHA	6:49

This Day In History

- 1790 - Austrian army occupies Brussels.
- 1804 - Napoleon Bonaparte is crowned Emperor of France in Paris.
- 1805 - Napoleon defeats Russians & Austrians at Austerlitz.
- 1840 - William Henry Harrison elected the 9th President of the United States of America.
- 1899 - US & Germany agree to divide Samoa between them.
- 1914 - Austria army occupies Belgrade Serbia.
- 1927 - Paleontologist Davidson Black announces to the Geological Society of China that the ancient human fossils from Zhoukoudian, China are a new species which he has named 'Sinanthropus pekinensis' (now known as 'Homo erectus').
- 1942 - World's 1st self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction occurs in Chicago Pile-1 (world's 1st nuclear reactor) at the University of Chicago, overseen by Enrico Fermi.
- 1952 - First human birth televised to public (KOA-TV Denver, Colo).
- 1961 - Fidel Castro declares he's a Marxist & will lead Cuba to Communism.
- 1968 - US President Richard Nixon names Henry Kissinger security advisor.
- 1969 - Boeing 747 jumbo jet 1st public preview (Seattle to NYC).
- 1971 - Soviet Mars 3 is first to soft land on Mars.
- 1971 - Naped Arab Emirates (Trucial States) declares independence from UK.
- 1971 - Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujaira, Sharjah & Umm ak Qiwain form United Arab Emirates.
- 1971 - Zayid bin Sultan Al Nuhayyan of Abu Dhabi becomes President of UAE.
- 1974 - Soyuz 16 launched into Earth orbit for 6 days
- 1976 - Fidel Castro becomes President of Cuba, replacing Osvaldo Dorticos Torrado.
- 1981 - Spanish government requests membership of NATO.
- 1982 - 1st permanent artificial heart successfully implanted (U of Utah) in retired dentist Barney Clark; lived 112 days with Jarvic-7 heart.

From KO Archives

Pak go-ahead to Hurriyat for talks with India

AGENCIES

ISLAMABAD: In a significant move of far-reaching import, Islamabad today proposed the Hurriyat Conference hold talks with India and Pakistan separately to pave the way for three way talks and announced that it's armed, forces would observe "maximum restraint" along the Line of Control (LoC) with immediate effect.

"With immediate effect Pakistan armed forces deployed along the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir will observe maximum restraint in order to strengthen and stabilize the cease-fire," foreign secretary Inam ul Haq announced at a press conference here. Haq proposed that APhC should hold talks with India and Pakistan separately to pave the way for three way talks .Haq extended invitation to the Hurriyat executive committee to visit Pakistan during the month of Ramadhan to prepare the ground for three way negotiations and urged India to do the same to settle the Kashmir issue peacefully in accordance with the will of the people of Kashmir.

Haq urged Indian government to allow APhC leaders to visit Pakistan for consultations. Haq reiterated Pakistan's commitment to respect and support the Kashmiri's inherent right of self-determination.

Haq said Pakistan "does not exercise any control" on militant groups fighting against Indian rule in Kashmir, when asked if Islamabad would ask them to curb their activities.

India should also hold consultative talks with the APhC,so that the dispute could be resolved "in accordance with the will of the people of state," he said.

"We are not asking APhC to work as a mediator. Its executive committee should meet both governments to discuss ways to initiate a process of dialogue".

To add credibility to its claim for a peaceful settlement the Indian government should end "repression" in Jammu and Kashmir, release all detainees and respect the fundamental rights of the Kashmiri people, he said.

(Kashmir Observer, 02 December, 2000)

KASHMIR OBSERVER

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K O V I E W

India, Pak deadlock

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) heads of government meeting was held on Monday without the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan attending it. The summit is held every year at the level of prime ministers and deals mainly with the trade and economic agenda of the SCO. However, earlier this month PM Modi, Khan and Chinese President Xi Jinping had joined the virtual SCO summit, chaired by Russia. This meeting was chaired by India and Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu represented the country. On Pakistan side was the meeting was attended by its Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Andleeb Abbas.

In his address, without naming Pakistan, Naidu highlighted India's core concern of cross-border terrorism calling it the biggest challenge for countries. In his response, Pakistani parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including state terrorism inflicted upon people living under foreign occupation in disputed territories.

As happens in the multilateral meetings attended by India and Pakistan, they indirectly take potshots at each other. India always brings up terrorism sponsored from across the border and Pakistan makes counter accusations and also seeks to highlight the situation in Kashmir. This acrimonious exchange is a routine spectacle at United Nations where the mutually antagonistic positions are ritualistically rehearsed at various meetings.

The SCO meeting has witnessed the reiteration of this spectacle. If anything, it also underlines the lingering estrangement between the neighbours that has further deepened since New Delhi's withdrawal of Article 370 in August last year. Situation can be expected to improve if the leaders of the two countries deem it in their core interest to engage.

And if not then we can only hope that the current climate of distrust and antagonism doesn't lead to further escalation of tensions. The intermittent exchange of fire along Line of Control and the lingering turmoil in Kashmir that recently killed five soldiers over two days has created a fraught situation with a potential to further worsen the bilateral ties. More so, when due to suspended talks, the two countries lack the diplomatic tools to manage the fallout. It is therefore important that the two countries get back to the dialogue and work towards resolution of their longstanding issues for a durable peace in the region.

The only hope for a redeeming difference lies in a summit meeting between the prime ministers of the two countries. They owe it to the peoples of their respective countries to resume a long-stalled dialogue to forge a way forward and renew hope for a reconciliation and the resolution of their long-festering issues.

OTHER OPINION

Is the economy turning?

The latest GDP numbers are not surprising. Many high frequency indicators had signalled improvement. But the pandemic-induced challenge is far from over. Some economists have pointed out that the second quarter had the fortunate confluence of pent-up demand (due to the lockdown) and advance production for the festive season. These tailwinds might dissipate going forward. There is also the question of the slowly but steadily building demand squeeze due to a continuing weakness in labour markets and cost cutting by firms. An HT analysis of 2,400 companies shows that their profits went up in the September quarter despite sales going down. This has been achieved via a cut in costs including salaries. The most worrying part of the GDP numbers, however, is the pro-cyclical turn in government spending. There has been a deterioration on this front compared to the first quarter. While the Centre has announced many schemes to cushion the pandemic's impact, a fall in government spending shows that the actual fiscal support has not been commensurate. This needs to change.

There is also a big-picture message in the latest GDP numbers. India's economic challenge in a post-Covid world is not going to be a restoration of positive growth rates. That is more a question of when (December or March quarter) rather than if. The real question is whether the economy can regain a high growth trajectory which gave way to a long deceleration phase even before the pandemic struck. This will require a vision and strategy for growth and ensuring that there is no permanent damage from the disruption. The government has unleashed critical second generation reforms, which could unleash hitherto unexploited growth possibilities. However, these possibilities will only materialise if there is a strong domestic demand. That should be the priority now.

Hindustan Times

Indian Madrassas – A Need for Reorientation

If the Indian madrassas could reorient themselves, it may silence their critics besides influencing the government to support these initiatives.



ASAD MIRZA

The first institute of Islamic Madrassa education was at the estate of Hazrat Zaid bin Arkam near a hill called Safa in Makkah, where Prophet Muhammad was the teacher and the students were some of his followers. After Hijrah (migration) to Madina the Madrassa of 'Suf-fah' was established on the east side of the Al-Masjid an-Nabawi. The curriculum included understanding of The Holy Qur'an, Hadith, fara'iz, tajweed, genealogy, treatises of first aid, etc.

Madrassas in India-current challenges

Ever since their emergence, the Madrassas in India have persisted with a curriculum that has seen few changes. The fact that literally, lakhs of Muslim children acquire their primary, and perhaps their only formal education, in these Madrassas where only literature and Islamic studies with a cursory knowledge of social sciences thrown in, are taught, should be a matter of concern not only to their parents but also to anybody concerned with education in any manner. The format of education imparted to the students of Madrassas ought to be modified keeping in view the shifting demands of the job market – a concern that can no longer be under-played. And this is perfectly possible without an erosion of the cultural and religious identity.

Developing suitable answers for today's dilemmas requires an examination of the essentials of education. Education involves transference to others, of knowledge and values accumulated by mankind. Even though schools and teachers have been part of the process of education for hundreds or even thousands of years, it is the spirit of enquiry that has enriched mankind with knowledge. We learn through reading, experience by watching others and by observing the world in general. Inculcating a spirit of scientific enquiry in students will perhaps be the best manner of propelling them on the path of learning.

Even though this may be the general agreement, it is a fact that in India in particular, whenever an attempt is made to institute any profound change, a resistance begins to act from its very inception. The critics flinch at the vision of a Madrassa system where modern education would jettison religious knowledge and make education "worldly" and "impersonal".

It is a matter of satisfaction to note that of late, some Madrassas, have realised the significance of modern education, and have introduced teaching science, English and Computer skills in their curricula. For example the two largest Madrassas in India, Darul Uloom-Deoband and Nadwa-tul Ulema-Lucknow have braced themselves to be the harbinger of change and have introduced English language teaching and computer skills as part of their curriculum. But both have not been able to bring about any noticeable improvement in the quality of education they impart to their students.

It is often argued that if modern education is so sensational, why hasn't it brought any notable improvement to education in the few Madrassas that have adopted it? In reality, in spite of modern education being imparted, thousands of Madrassas don't have a well-formulated curriculum, and/or couldn't implement it even if they wanted to, as they don't have sufficiently trained and proficient staff in these disciplines.

MILAP Programme

During the last ten years or so, Madrassa Education in India has been a subject of interest, debate and prominence both in the educational and research circles, in media and of course the civil and political discourse. Based on different research studies and the demand for Capacity Building of Madrassa in India, an NGO of Delhi-Minorities Initiative for Learning, Advancement and Partnership (MILAP- www.milapindia.org) started a Capacity Building Programme for Madrassa Teachers and Students, which later became known as MILAP Programme.

The Capacity Building of Madrassas Programme (CBM) was based on inputs from madrassa teachers, administrators, religious scholars and educationists. The two-day consultative workshop

held in 2008, deliberated over the needs, requirements and aspirations of madrassa teachers and students, how modern educationists could supplement their inputs and how a better cohesive programme could be tailor-made for the Madrassa audience.

The MILAP programme for Madrassa teachers focused first on identifying the areas which needed intervention from modern educationists and secondly, how to evolve the correct training for the participants. The same set of principles also applied to Madrassa students programme.

Based on the initial consultations with religious scholars and Madrassa administrators, one of the key strategies to improve the quality of education offered in Madrassas was designed to develop new, and strengthen existing tools and skills to equip Madrassa Teachers to enhance the overall quality of the teaching-learning practices

what modern educational techniques and management are, how lesson plans could help them improve their pedagogy skills, how by learning about the psychological state of their students they could focus more on students individually. The madrassa teachers lack basic skills in subjects like mathematics and science subjects and they are eager to learn these. The introduction of computers was an eye opener for both the students and teachers and they were really anxious to get their hands on the latest technology and for madrassa teachers it was really an eye opener to know how they could use computers in teaching subjects like Hadith and the Holy Qu'ran. Meanwhile, the students groups all across India were eager to improve their personal and communications skills and learn subjects like time management, English speaking and writing skills.

Most of these training programmes were of 15



It is a matter of satisfaction to note that of late, some Madrassas, have realised the significance of modern education, and have introduced teaching science, English and Computer skills in their curricula. For example the two largest Madrassas in India, Darul Uloom-Deoband and Nadwa-tul Ulema-Lucknow have braced themselves to be the harbinger of change and have introduced English language teaching and computer skills as part of their curriculum

within their Madrassas. The CBM programme was designed based on a "professional development/coaching model". This was intended to help address the gaps in teaching-learning practices. The CBM programme was offered to Madrassa Teachers and Students across India, and so far, has been organised in New Delhi, Aligarh, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Pune and Guwahati.

The training topics for teachers ranged from Indian culture and religions, besides an introduction to constitutional & other legal rights of minorities and human rights. Introduction to different teaching methods. Role and responsibilities of an effective teacher, Lesson planning: Principles and Process. Concept, importance and types of teaching aids for language teaching, particularly English, Sciences, and elementary Mathematics. Besides understanding the socio-economic and educational background of the students, child and educational psychology, understanding the student-teacher communication process and formulating responses based on these inputs. Focus on spoken and written English, besides an introduction to the use of computers and Internet, was a key component of the training.

Lessons learnt and way forward

To gauge the efficacy of these training programmes, a feedback survey was conducted by an external consultant after every programme and finally collated on an all-India basis. Based on the survey findings and feedback from the organisers of these Training Courses in 11 Indian cities, it could be surmised that there is a huge demand from both Madrassa teachers and students to learn and be acquainted with other subjects (modern subjects) not taught in madrassas.

The Madrassa teachers lack any idea about

to 21 days duration, and if during such a short duration, using intensive intervention, outlook of the participants could be changed and skills and topics beneficial to them could be taught to better their skills and personality, then this module could be used to supplement their usual Madrassa teaching and such courses should be organised to help shape their future.

In addition, if the madrassas administration is ready to adapt this module along with the essential religious content, they could take the wind out of sails of the madrassa critics, that madrassas are not ready to change with times. Further, we should understand that Islam is not static but a dynamic religion and we can change the various inputs needed for its dissemination, keeping intact the fundamental principles. This strategy would not only be beneficial but also could be a game changer for the community.

Confidence building measures by the government

The MILAP Programme was designed to resemble the key elements from the CBM-sessions and focussed on training the teachers on secular curriculum and pedagogical issues. The objective of the MILAP module was to develop Madrassa/Maktab teachers' understanding of new educational and pedagogical techniques and assimilate them in Madrassa environment. And to a certain extent it attained its objective very well.

Central bodies like the Ministry of Minority Affairs and Maulana Azad National Foundation could be entrusted to carry forward such successful programmes, whose results have been quantified and documented well.

Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi.



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

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email: editpage.ko@gmail.com

Stringent and Effective Laws for Provocative Trollers

Global systems of interconnected network is an entirely unexplored set of human behaviour. Open internet is a platform for trolls to thrive and achieve their goals. It means a deliberate offensive or provocative post with the aim of upsetting someone.

Trollers spend a credible amount of energy on targeting someone about his language, colour, religion, thinking actions and felt reactions. Feminist are frequently trolled by their

unexpected attacks, overwhelmed by volumes of abuse, getting attention by frustrating them and to discredit them wherever possible.

People hide behind the screens with the purpose of abusing others whilst maintaining good behaviour in real life and abusive in digital space. Lack of patience results in inflicting pain and differences in opinions. Correcting other behavioural attitudes by trolling is seen as a part of social justice. Political or religious motivated

trolls are common in daily life where bigoted or elitist people troll others. State sponsored trolling are common to attack a person who dares to criticize a regime or their political policies.

People remain unsafe and undergo trauma in day to day life because of trolling. Some oppose online censorship, taking advantages of the anonymity of the internet. Malevolent people torture and exhort by trolling. It encourages chain of anti-social crimes and aggression.

Stringent and effective laws need to be imposed to discourage and stop trolling. We should make people aware of digital crimes and conduct various programmes in schools, colleges for social welfare and start counselling of people to make safe our digital world. We should ignore the prevalent trolls and also report to the police about their repeated offences.

Muneer Shameer
muneer.udl@gmail.com

Covid-19: Viral Shedding or Re-Infection?

LARA HERRERO
EUGENE MADZOKERE

In the absence of targeted antiviral drugs, shedding can't be stopped. But, by sticking to COVID-safe guidelines such as keeping an adequate distance from others, wearing a face mask, and practising hand hygiene, we can minimise the risks from a person unknowingly shedding infectious virus.

Over recent weeks and months, we've heard of several COVID cases in which people have tested positive after previously clearing the virus. Scientists are hopeful being infected with COVID-19 confers immunity for a length of time. But some of these instances have raised concerns about reinfection. Although rare, it seems to be possible. The other thing which could be at play in many of these cases is "prolonged viral shedding". Both phenomena are probably more common than we realise. But it's important to understand the differences between the two. Become a monthly donor and support independent media today.

What is viral shedding?

When you're sick with a virus, the cells in your body hosting the infection release infectious virus particles, which you then shed into the environment. This process is called viral shedding. For SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, shedding primarily occurs when we talk, cough, sneeze, or even exhale. SARS-CoV-2 can be shed in a person's stool, too. Research shows shedding of infectious SARS-CoV-2 begins before a person starts displaying symptoms, and peaks at or just after symptom onset (usually four to six days after infection). Shedding can continue for several weeks after a person's symptoms have resolved — there's no standard time frame. Research has identified shedding of infectious SARS-CoV-2 virus particles from up to eight days after symptom onset in hospitalised patients, to up to 70 days after diagnosis in an immunocompromised person.

Not all shedding is equal

In the above cases, the viral particles being shed are infectious, which is what we as virologists consider viral shedding to mean. But during COVID-19, the definition of shedding has been broadened to include the shedding of viral genetic material (RNA). Although RNA constitutes fragments of the virus, these aren't necessarily infectious fragments. Studies measuring the shedding of viral genetic material from the respiratory tract have reported shedding typically lasts around 17 days. Shedding of SARS-CoV-2 genetic material can persist for more than 80 days in the upper respiratory tract, and over 120 days in the stool. Where people have recovered and then later test positive again — or return a "weak positive" result — the test has picked up viral genetic material. We don't know whether the virus is infectious at this point. So, how can you tell? Currently there's no simple way to determine whether a person is shedding infectious virus, or how much. The "gold standard" method used to diagnose COVID-19 is the PCR test. PCR tests detect viral genetic material (RNA in the case of SARS-CoV-2) from a patient's swabbed samples. But they can't determine whether the virus is alive or dead, or, in other words, if the virus is infectious. The level of infectious SARS-CoV-2 can only be determined using infectivity methods (called assays). These are common in research laboratories, but are not used as diagnostic tests.



Why do some people shed for longer?

There's no evidence to suggest people who shed SARS-CoV-2 genetic material for a long time in their faeces have been sicker with COVID-19. Though some research has found prolonged shedding in the respiratory tract can be linked to more severe disease. We don't fully understand the factors that make a person a "long shedder", but research into this is ongoing. Certain groups have been associated with prolonged SARS-CoV-2 shedding, including males, children, older adults, and people with compromised immune systems. There's also speculation factors such as the amount of SARS-CoV-2 which caused the infection (the viral dose), and possibly the viral strain, may play a role. In the absence of targeted antiviral drugs, shedding can't be stopped. But, by sticking to COVID-safe guidelines such as keeping an adequate distance from others, wearing a face mask, and practising hand hygiene, we can minimise the risks from a person unknowingly shedding infectious virus.

Long viral shedding versus reinfection

Reports of reinfection — in the sense of a new infection, rather than prolonged or intermittent shedding of the same one — have been limited to date. One source collating confirmed reinfection cases indicates there have been just 26 worldwide. Evidence we have from other coronaviruses

suggests the risk of reinfection may be lower in the first 90 days after initial infection. Some studies on COVID-19, both published and not yet formally published in a peer-reviewed journal, suggest immunity may last for several months. But we need more evidence on this topic, which we will accumulate as time passes. Where a person does test positive several weeks or months after they've recovered, the difficulty is confirming reinfection. That's because this requires genetic testing of both infections to determine whether they are in fact different. Given this is time consuming and the technology isn't widely accessible, it's highly likely there are more than 26 cases of reinfection around the world.

Shedding, reinfection and community spread

While the virus appears to be under good control in Australia, prolonged viral shedding and reinfection are probably two of the most important drivers of SARS-CoV-2 community transmission around the world. Understanding how and for how long people can shed SARS-CoV-2, and which factors increase the risk of viral shedding or reinfection, can help us to improve surveillance and reduce the rate at which the virus spreads.

By Arrangements with
The Conversation

Have I Already Had Coronavirus? How Would I Know And What Should I Do?

Covid-19 symptoms, when they occur, vary widely and undertesting means many people have probably been unwittingly infected

DANIELLE RENWICK

Covid-19 symptoms vary widely, and undertesting in many countries means that many people may have already had the coronavirus without having received a positive diagnosis. Is it possible to find out, and how should you behave if you think you may have been infected?

Is there any way to know whether someone has had Covid-19 in the past?

Dr William Hillmann: Antibody tests are being developed but are not in widespread clinical use yet. The antibody testing would allow us to check blood samples for antibodies against coronavirus to tell whether somebody has had it. I, and I think many others, are anxiously awaiting for those to become available.

Could I have had it and been asymptomatic?

Hillmann: Coronavirus is actually quite a significant spectrum of symptoms, from people who are entirely asymptomatic and would have no idea that they have it to people with very mild, cold-like symptoms — runny nose, congestion, sore throat — to people with more flu-like symptoms — high fevers, muscle aches, shortness of breath and cough. Loss of smell and taste are also symptoms. All the way up to people with severe illness, who we're seeing in the hospital with respiratory failure, requiring ICU care. It's impossible right now to say what the true prevalence of the disease in the US is since we are still prioritizing testing for people who are sick or in

the hospital or who are healthcare workers. We're not doing widespread testing that South Korea and some European countries have done to get a sense of how many people are asymptomatic or have such minimal symptoms that they attribute it to allergies or something else.

Are people who are asymptomatic also contagious?

Hillmann: A significant proportion of people who are totally asymptomatic are contagious for some portion of time. We just don't know [for how long] at

weeks after symptoms are resolved. It's hard to know if that's actual live virus, which is still able to infect somebody, or if that's just dead virus that the body is shedding.

Should someone behave differently if they think, but don't know for certain, that they have already had it?

Dr David Buchholz: We all have to be role models. If we're all in it together, we all should be doing social distancing.

Keep doing all of those things that we all should be doing at this point: social distancing and hand hygiene. Universal mask-wearing in public is a reasonable recommendation based on what we know about the wide spectrum of symptoms, and the fact that people can be asymptomatic and still be shedding the virus.

this point, because we don't have the kind of testing available to screen for asymptomatic infections. When people are symptomatic, they're contagious. A day or two before they become symptomatic, they're likely contagious as well. A virus builds up and starts to shed, and then after symptoms resolve, people can still be contagious for a couple of days. We have some evidence of viral shed even a couple of

Hillmann: Since there's no real way to know at this point who might have had it, unless you're symptomatic, you get a swab and are definitively diagnosed with it, I would just act as if you hadn't had it. Keep doing all of those things that we all should be doing at this point: social distancing and hand hygiene. I think universal mask-wearing in public is a reasonable recommendation based on what we know

about the wide spectrum of symptoms, and the fact that people can be asymptomatic and still be shedding the virus.

If I think I may have had it, do I have an ethical obligation to tell people I came in contact with? Even if it may in fact just have been a cold?

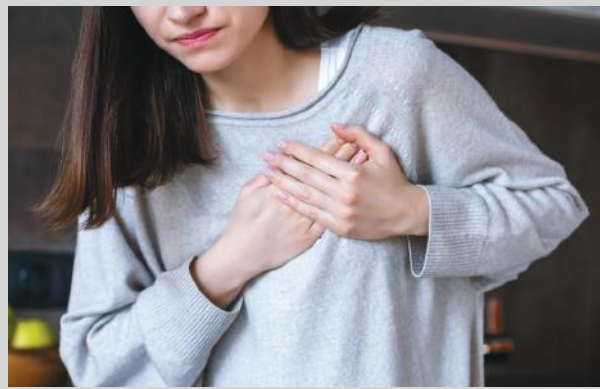
Buchholz: I would, absolutely. I'm in New York, and it was definitely in the community before we knew it. So, yeah, any family members and close friends, maybe somebody you work next to, I think I would just alert them, especially if it was in the last 14 days. If it's been more than 14 days, they would have gotten sick by now if they had significant exposure. Hillmann: It's up to every individual about what they feel is right. That being said, with the surge in infections that we're seeing in places like New York, if you were symptomatic at one point but were not tested, and you were in close contact with somebody, I think you should tell them.

If I've had it, can I get it again?

Buchholz: There's not been any evidence that anyone's gotten it more than once. Someone with a normal immune system that can react to the virus and get better should have immunity for quite some time, at least a year, if not lifelong. There have been reports out of China suggesting people are testing positive for Covid-19 a second time. Most scientists think it is an issue around the inaccuracy of the testing and not that people are having two separate cases of the disease.

The Guardian

Women at higher risk of heart attack death than men: Study



Women face a 20 per cent increased risk of developing heart failure or dying within five years after their first severe heart attack compared to men, according to new research.

The research was published today in the American Heart Association's flagship journal Circulation.

Previous research looking at sex differences in heart health has often focused on a recurrent heart attack or death. However, the differences in vulnerability to heart failure between men and women after heart attack remain unclear.

To study this gap, researchers analyzed data on more than 45,000 patients (30.8 per cent women) hospitalized for a first heart attack between 2002-2016 in Alberta, Canada. They focused on two types of a heart attack: a severe, life-threatening heart attack called ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI), and a less severe type called Non-STEMI or NSTEMI, the latter of which is more common. Patients were followed for an average of 6.2 years.

Women were older and faced a variety of complications and more risk factors that may have put them at a greater risk for heart failure after a heart attack.

In addition to the elevated risk for heart failure among women, researchers found:

- A total of 24,737 patients had a less severe form of heart attack (NSTEMI); among

this group, 34.3 per cent were women and 65.7 per cent were men.

- A total of 20,327 patients experienced STEMI, the more severe heart attack; among this group, 26.5 per cent were women and 73.5 per cent were men.

- The development of heart failure either in the hospital or after discharge remained higher for women than men for both types of heart attack, even after adjusting for certain confounders.

- Women had a higher unadjusted rate of death in the hospital than men in both the STEMI (9.4 per cent vs. 4.5 per cent) and NSTEMI (4.7 per cent vs. 2.9 per cent) groups. However, the gap narrowed considerably for NSTEMI after confounder adjustments.

- Women were more likely to be an average of 10 years older than men at the time of their heart attack, usually an average age of 72 years versus 61 for the men.

- Women also had more complicated medical histories at the time of their heart attacks, including high blood pressure, diabetes, atrial fibrillation, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, risk factors that may contribute to heart failure.

- Women were seen less frequently in

the hospital by a cardiovascular specialist: 72.8 per cent versus 84 per cent for men.

- Regardless of whether their heart attacks were the severe or less severe type, fewer women were prescribed medications such as beta-blockers or cholesterol-lowering drugs. Women also had slightly lower rates of revascularization procedures to restore blood flow, such as surgical angioplasty.

"Identifying when and how women may be at higher risk for heart failure after a heart attack can help providers develop more effective approaches for prevention," said lead study author Justin A. Ezekowitz, M.B.B.Ch., M.Sc., a cardiologist and co-director of the Canadian VIGOUR Centre at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. "Better adherence to reducing cholesterol, controlling high blood pressure, getting more exercise, eating a healthy diet and stopping smoking, combined with recognition of these problems earlier in life would save thousands of lives of women -- and men."

Based on these findings, study co-author Padma Kaul, PhD, co-director of the Canadian VIGOUR Centre, said the next step is to further examine if all patients are

receiving the best care, particularly women, and where interventions can address oversights.

"Close enough is not good enough," said Kaul, who is also the Sex and Gender Science Chair from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. "There are gaps across diagnosis, access, quality of care, and follow-up for all patients, so we need to be vigilant, pay attention to our own biases, and to those most vulnerable to ensure that we have done everything possible in providing the best treatment." -Agencies



Early Intervention Mobile App Brings Hope and Services to Children with Disabilities and their Parents



According to a recent UNESCO report, in India, 72 per cent of 5-year old with disabilities have never attended any educational institution. Parents of children with disabilities face higher physical and financial demands and stress levels, than other parents, because of difficulties in getting qualified therapists, time required for taking the child to the therapy centres, physical burden, social stigma, discrimination in the community and/or within families, and the cost of such services.

Two recent studies conducted in rural India gives hope to millions of preschool children and their caregivers by showing that providing access to early intervention services improves school enrollment and integration for children with disabilities and reduces caregiver burden and increases family empowerment.

Amar Seva Sangam, a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization in South India, developed and implemented a family-centred, community-based early intervention rehabilitation programme called the mobile Village Based Rehabilitation - Early Intervention (mVBR-EI) to improve identification and access to early intervention therapy services for families with children under the age of six with

developmental delays and disabilities. The program was implemented in eight rural locations (blocks) in the Districts of Tirunelveli and Tenkasi (population 3.1 million), State of Tamil Nadu (population 78 million) in South India.

"My child has improvements which means she can go to school and integrate in society," says one of the parent. The program provides access to early intervention services in children's own homes or nearby centres, using the award-winning mobile Village Based Rehabilitation - Early Intervention mobile app (mVBR-EI) developed by Amar Seva Sangam. The app helps connect Community Rehabilitation Workers to rehabilitation specialists and records all assessments, therapy goals and plans, prescribed interventions, caregiver measures, developmental progress, school enrolment and access to government services. Rehabilitation specialists support the Community Rehabilitation Workers and parents through joint visits, phone calls, text messaging, and live video conferencing. This connection and data monitoring allows high quality therapy to be provided in a child's own home or nearby village centres.

The app and program have received global recognition including

MIT-Solve's Early Childhood Development prize in New York, USA, Spindle's Most Inspiring Digital Innovation in Netherlands, World Cerebral Palsy Day's Major award in Medical/Therapeutics in Australia, Zero Project's Inclusive Education Award presented at the United Nations in Vienna, Austria, Nipman Foundation - Microsoft Equal Opportunities Awards 2019 in India and the Vodafone Mobile for Good Award in India.

"It is our vision that no child should be denied of schooling experience because of Disability," says the Secretary of Amar Seva Sangam and the Principal Investigator Sankara Raman Srinivasan. An essential component of the program was education, training and support for the caregivers of the children receiving therapy in the program, developing care plans to prepare children for school enrolment and working with local schools on integrating children with disabilities into the classroom setting. Care plans focused on training caregivers on integrating therapeutic activities into their child's activities of daily living, fostering positive attitudes, increasing knowledge of their child's disability, and increasing confidence in caring for their child, to improve their child's functional abilities. - Agencies

PLASTIC POLLUTION from fishing nets threatening Ganges wildlife, study finds

Plastic pollution from discarded fishing gear in the Ganges River poses a threat to wildlife such as the critically endangered three-striped roofed turtle and the endangered Ganges river dolphin, according to an international team including researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India.

In the study, published in the journal Science of The Total Environment, surveys along the length of the river, from the mouth in Bangladesh to the Himalayas in India, show levels of waste fishing gear are highest near to the sea.

The researchers noted that



fishing nets all made of plastic were the most common type of gear found.

Interviews with local fishers showed high rates of fishing equipment being discarded in the river driven by short gear lifespans and lack of appropriate disposal systems, they said.

"The Ganges River supports some of the world's largest inland fisheries, but no research has been done to assess plastic pollution from this industry, and its impacts on wildlife," said Sarah Nelms from the University of Exeter in the UK.

"Ingesting plastic can harm wildlife, but our threat assessment focussed on entanglement, which is known to injure and kill a wide range of marine

species," Nelms said.

The researchers used a list of 21 river species of "conservation concern" identified by the Wildlife Institute of India in Uttarakhand.



They combined existing information on entanglements of similar species worldwide with the new data on levels of waste fishing gear in the Ganges to estimate which species are most at risk.

"There is no system for fishers to recycle their nets. Most fishers told us they mend and repurpose nets if they can, but if they can't do that the nets are often discarded in the river," said Nelms.

"Many held the view that the river 'cleans it away', so one useful step would be to raise awareness of the real environmental impacts," she said.

The findings offer hope for solutions based on "circular economy" where waste is dramatically reduced by re-using materials, according to Professor Heather Koldewey, from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).

"A high proportion of the fishing gear we found was made of nylon 6, which is valuable and can be used to make products including carpets and clothing," Koldewey said.

"Collection and recycling of nylon 6 has strong potential as a solution because it would cut plastic pollution and provide an income," she added. - PTI

Study finds Divorce impacts physical and mental health negatively

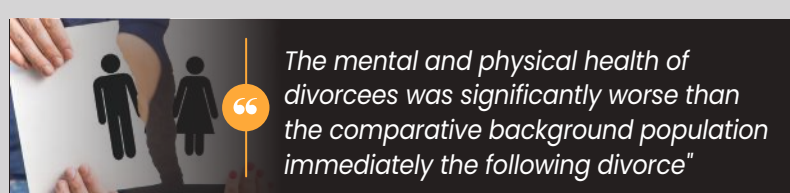
The study published in the open-access journal Frontiers in Psychology, suggests that understanding these mental and physical health effects could assist researchers in designing interventions that help divorcees to get back on their feet and avoid long-term repercussions.



Researchers have been examining the mental and physical effects of divorce but may have missed an opportunity to accurately characterize these effects, until now. Divorce is often a protracted process, with many countries requiring a separation period before couples can apply for divorce. However, a long separation may allow psychological wounds to heal, and assessing divorcees after such a period may underestimate their impact.

"Previous studies have not investigated the effects of divorce without extensive separation periods occurring before the divorce," said Prof Gert Hald, of the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. "We were able to study divorcees who had been granted a so-called 'immediate' divorce in Denmark and on average, these divorcees obtained a divorce within 5 days of filing for it."

This allowed Hald and colleagues, including Dr Soren Sander of the University of Copenhagen, to obtain 'real-time' data



on 1,856 very recent divorcees, who completed questionnaires about their background, health, and their divorce.

Unsurprisingly, the study showed that a recent divorce takes an emotional and physical toll. "The mental and physical health of divorcees was significantly worse than the comparative background population immediately the following divorce," said Sander.

However, some interesting trends emerged from the data. For instance, among men, earning more and being younger predicted better physical health, while having more children, having a new

partner, and even having more previous divorcees was associated with better mental health. Among women, earning more money, having a new partner, and having fewer previous divorces were associated with better physical health, while initiating the divorce and having a new partner predicted better mental health.

However, one factor had a big influence on the divorcees -- conflict. "Across gender, higher levels of divorce conflict were found to predict worse mental health, even when accounting for other socio-demographic variables and divorce characteristics," said Sander.

So, how can the findings help people to navigate divorce with their health intact? Targeted interventions early during the process may be key. "We need evidence-based interventions that can help divorcees immediately the following divorce," said Hald. "These might include face-to-face or digital interventions that are designed to reduce the specific adverse mental and physical health effects of divorce. Not only would this be beneficial for divorcees, but it could also save money by countering the negative impacts of divorce on work-place productivity, sick days, doctor visits and the use of health care facilities."

In another recent study, the researchers developed an online digital solution called 'Cooperation After Divorce' that helps divorcees to significantly reduce such adverse mental and physical health effects. The results of this latest study will help them to refine such approaches in the future. -Agencies

BioNTech/Pfizer Apply For EU Approval Of Covid-19 Vaccine

Agencies

Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Germany's BioNTech and its US partner Pfizer said on Tuesday they had applied for EU regulatory approval for their Covid-19 vaccine, raising hopes that the first jabs could be administered in December.

The two companies said they had submitted an application to the European Medicines Agency (EMA) on Monday



seeking "Conditional Marketing Authorisation (CMA)" for their vaccine.

The move comes after large-scale tests showed their vaccine was 95 percent effective against Covid-19 and triggered no serious side effects.

If approved by the Amsterdam-based EMA, the vaccine could potentially be rolled out "in Europe before the end of 2020", the companies said in a statement.

Pfizer and BioNTech already filed for emergency use authorisation with the US Food and Drug Administration on November 20.

If US regulators give the green light, Americans could start getting vaccinated around mid-December.

UK regulators are also

screening the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine.

"We have known since the beginning of this journey that patients are waiting, and we stand ready to ship Covid-19 vaccine doses as soon as potential authorisations will allow us," Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said.

A fellow frontrunner in the global vaccine race, US biotech company Moderna, said on Monday that it had sought emergency regulatory approval for its Covid-19 shot in both the United States and Europe.

The Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines are both based on a new technology that uses mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) to deliver genetic material to the body that makes human cells create a protein from the virus.

This trains the immune system to be ready to attack if it encounters the novel coronavirus.

But Moderna's vaccine can be kept in long term storage at minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus four degrees Fahrenheit) while Pfizer's requires minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit).

The two vaccines have been developed at breathtaking speed as part of an unprecedented effort to end a pandemic that has infected more than 62 million people worldwide and killed more than 1.4 million.

Pfizer and BioNTech have previously said they expect to manufacture up to 50 million doses of their vaccine globally this year, and up to 1.3 billion doses by the end of 2021.



Pandemic to fan surge in humanitarian needs in 2021: UN

Agencies

Geneva- The UN humanitarian office says needs for assistance have ballooned to unprecedented levels this year because of COVID-19, projecting that a staggering 235 million people will require help in 2021.

This comes as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and global challenges including conflicts, forced migration and the impact of global warming.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA, expects a 40% increase in the number of people in need of such assistance in 2021 compared to this year a sign that pain, suffering and torment brought by the coronavirus outbreak and other problems could get worse even if hopes of a vaccine are rising.

OCHA made the projections in its latest annual Global Humanitarian Overview on Tuesday, saying its hopes to reach 160 million of those people in need will cost 35 billion. That's more than twice the record 17 billion that donors have provided for the international humanitarian response so far this year and a target figure that is almost certain to go unmet.

The picture we're painting this year is the bleakest and darkest perspective on humanitarian needs we've ever set out, and that's because the pandemic has reaped carnage across the most fragile and vulnerable countries on the

planet," said UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock, who heads OCHA.

For the first time since the 1990s, extreme poverty is going to increase, life expectancy will fall, the annual death toll from HIV, tuberculosis and malaria is set to double, he said. We fear a near doubling in the number of people facing starvation.

Lowcock told a UN briefing in New York on the overview that he thinks the UN appeal will probably raise a record 20 billion by the end of the year -- 2 billion more than last year. But he said the gap between needs and funding is growing and the UN is looking to new players coming on the scene in 2021, including US President-elect Joe Biden's new administration.

The UN aims to reach about two-thirds of those in need, with the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations trying to meet the rest, Lowcock explained.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said humanitarian aid budgets are now facing dire shortfalls as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to worsen, and said extreme poverty has risen for the first time in more than a generation.

The lives of people in every nation and corner of the world have been upended by the impact of the pandemic, he said. Those already living on a knife's edge are being hit dis-

proportionately hard by rising food prices, falling incomes, interrupted vaccination programs and school closures.

The overview, which is billed as one of the most comprehensive looks of the world's humanitarian needs, has put together nearly three dozen individual response plans for a total of 56 vulnerable countries.

Lowcock said the biggest problem is in Yemen where there is danger of a large-scale famine now, saying a prime reason is lack of funding from Gulf countries that were major donors in the past which has led to cuts in aid and the closing of clinics.

He said the biggest financial request is for the Syrian crisis and its spillover to neighbouring countries where millions of Syrians have fled to escape the more than nine-year conflict.

OCHA said other countries in need include Afghanistan, Congo, Haiti, Nigeria, South Sudan, Ukraine and Venezuela. Newcomers to this year's list are Mozambique, where extremist activity has increased in the north, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

Lowcock said it's not the pandemic, but its economic impact that's having the greatest effect on humanitarian needs.

These all hit the poorest people in the poorest countries hardest of all, he said. For the poorest, the hangover from the pandemic will be long and hard." (AP)

'China Gave Covid Vaccine Candidate To Kim Jong UN'

Agencies

Seoul: China has provided North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his family with an experimental coronavirus vaccine, a US analyst said on Tuesday, citing two unidentified Japanese intelligence sources.

Harry Kazianis, a North Korea expert at the Center for the National Interest think tank in



Washington, said the Kims and several senior North Korean officials had been vaccinated.

It was unclear which company had supplied its drug candidate to the Kims and whether it had proven to be safe, he added.

"Kim Jong Un and multiple other high-ranking officials within the Kim family and leadership network have been vaccinated for coronavirus within the last two to three weeks thanks to a vaccine candidate supplied by the Chinese government," Kazianis wrote in an article for online outlet 19FortyFive.

Citing US medical scientist Peter J. Hotez, he said at least three Chinese companies were

developing a coronavirus vaccine, including Sinovac Biotech Ltd, CanSinoBio and Sinopharm Group.

Sinopharm says its candidate has been used by nearly one million people in China, although none of the firms was known to have publicly launched Phase 3 clinical trials of their experimental COVID-19 drugs.

Some experts doubted that Kim would use an experimental vaccine

"Even if a Chinese vaccine had already been approved, no drug is perfect and he would not take that risk when he has numerous shelters which can ensure almost complete isolation," said Choi Jung-hun, an infectious disease expert who defected from North Korea to the South in 2012.

Mark Barry, an East Asia analyst and associate editor of the International Journal on World Peace, said Kim would prefer proven European vaccines to one supplied by Beijing. "The risk is too great. But he's happy to get Chinese personal protective equipment," Barry said on Twitter.

North Korea has not confirmed any coronavirus infections, but South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) has said an outbreak there cannot be ruled out as the country had trade and people-to-people exchanges with China - the source of the pandemic - before shutting the border in late January.

Saudi officially allows UAE-bound Israeli flights to cross airspace

Agencies

Riyadh: Saudi Arabia agreed on Monday to let Israeli airliners cross its airspace en route to the United Arab Emirates after talks between Saudi officials and White House senior adviser Jared Kushner, a senior Trump administration official said.

Kushner and Middle East envoys Avi Berkowitz and Brian Hook raised the issue shortly after they arrived in Saudi Arabia for talks. According to the Israeli i24news, the Tel Aviv administration asked Washington to per-

suaide Saudi Arabia to allow use of its airspace and Kushner stepped in.

"We were able to reconcile the issue," the official told Reuters.

The agreement was hammered out just hours before Israel's first commercial flight to the UAE was planned on Tuesday morning. The Israeli flight was at risk of being canceled with no overflight agreement.

An announcement by Saudi Arabia's official news agency said that the kingdom's civil aviation authority had approved a request

by UAE's aviation authority "which includes the desire to allow flights coming to and departing from the United Arab Emirates to all countries to pass through the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's airspace".

This will help the route of Israeli flights to UAE — to start from this month onwards — shorten by half.

The permit was only valid for the UAE and Israeli companies will not be allowed to use the Saudi Arabian airspace for flights to other countries, said Israel's local media report.

Iran's Parliament advances bill to stop nuclear inspections

Agencies

Tehran- Iran's Parliament on Tuesday advanced a bill that would end UN inspections of its nuclear facilities and require the government to boost its uranium enrichment if European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal do not provide relief from oil and banking sanctions.

The vote to debate the bill, which would need to pass through several other stages before becoming law, was a show of defiance after the killing of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist last month.

ian applications. It would also commission new centrifuges at nuclear facilities at Natanz and the underground Fordo site.

The bill would require another parliamentary vote to pass, as well as approval by the Guardian Council, a constitutional watchdog.

The bill was first tabled in parliament in August but gained new momentum after the killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who headed a programme that Israel and the West have alleged was a military operation looking at the feasibility



The official IRNA news agency said 251 lawmakers in the 290-seat chamber voted in favor, after which many began chanting Death to America! and Death to Israel!

The bill would give European countries three months to ease sanctions on Iran's key oil and gas sector, and to restore its access to the international banking system. The US imposed crippling sanctions on Iran after President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear agreement, triggering a series of escalations between the two sides.

The bill would have authorities resume enriching uranium to 20%, which is below the threshold needed for nuclear weapons but higher than that required for civil

of building a nuclear weapon.

The International Atomic Energy Agency says that structured programme ended in 2003. US intelligence agencies concurred with that assessment in a 2007 report.

Israel insists Iran still maintains the ambition of developing nuclear weapons, pointing to Tehran's ballistic missile program and research into other technologies.

Iran long has maintained that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes.

Iran has blamed Fakhrizadeh's killing on Israel, which has long waged a covert war against Tehran and its proxies in the region. Israeli officials have declined to comment on the killing, and no one has claimed responsibility.

Taliban-Afghan Government Agreement Marred By Document's Wording

Agencies

Kabul/Islamabad: A breakthrough on an initial agreement reached between Taliban and government negotiators has been held up at the last minute after the insurgent group balked at the document's preamble because it mentioned the Afghan government by name.

Teams representing the Taliban and the Afghan government have been negotiating in the Qatari capital since September to reach a consensus on the modalities of peace talks, moving forward to help end decades of war in Afghanistan.

"The negotiating teams have so far agreed on all 21 articles that provide guiding principles for the negotiations," Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said in a statement on Monday. "At this time, they continue to debate the preamble, in which some issues need further clarification".

Government and diplomatic sources told Reuters that when it came to signing the document in November, which was to include references to the "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" - the official name of the Afghan government, - the Taliban backed off.

The Taliban refuse to refer to the Afghan negotiating team as representatives of the Afghan government, as they contest the legitimacy of Ghani's election.

"(The government and Taliban) prepared to sign the agreement," a diplomat in Kabul familiar with process told Reuters, adding that the chief Afghan government negotiator was to sign the agreement as "chief negotiator for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan".

NEWS MAKERS

Azerbaijan fully reclaims lands around Nagorno-Karabakh

Baku- Azerbaijan on Tuesday completed reclaiming territory ceded by Armenia under a Russia-brokered peace deal that ended six weeks of fierce fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev hailed the restoration of control over the areas as a historic achievement.

We all lived with one dream and now we fulfilled it," Aliyev said in an address to the nation. We won a victory on the battlefield and on the political arena, and that victory opens a new era for our country. It will be an era of development, security and progress."

-Karabakh lies within Azerbaijan but has been un-



der the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia since a separatist war there ended in 1994. That war left not only Nagorno-Karabakh itself but large chunks of surrounding lands in Armenian hands.

In 44 days of heavy fighting that began on September 27, the Azerbaijani military routed Armenian forces and wedged deep into Nagorno-Karabakh, forcing Armenia to accept a Russia-brokered peace deal that took effect November 10.

Thousands flee as activity in Indonesian volcanoes increases

Jakarta: Indonesian authorities are closely monitoring several volcanoes after sensors picked up increased activity in recent weeks, prompting the evacuation of thousands of people.

Hot ash tumbled as far as 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) down the slopes of Mount Semeru early Tuesday, triggering panic among villagers, said Raditya Jati, the National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman.

Falling ash and sulfur blanketed several villages around its slopes.

The 3,676-meter (12,060-foot) mountain in Lumajang district is the highest volcano on Indonesia's most densely populated island of Java.

Jati said authorities were still trying to evacuate about 550 people living on the mountain's slopes. There were no reports of injuries or serious damage, he said.

Indonesia's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center did

not raise Semeru's alert status, which already was at the third-highest level since it began erupting in May.

Villagers and tourists were advised to stay 4 kilometres (2.4 miles) from the crater, the agency said.

Tuesday's eruption came two days after Mount Ili Lewotolok shot out columns of hot clouds as high as 4,000 meters (13,100 feet) into the sky.

More than 4,600 people were evacuated from the slopes of the mountain, located on Lembata island in East Nusa Tenggara province.

The volcanology agency raised Ili Lewotolok's alert to the second-highest level on Sunday after sensors picked up increased activity.

The 1,423-metre (4,660-foot) mountain has been rumbling since October 2017.

The Transportation Ministry said a flight warning was issued after the eruption and a local airport was closed as ash rained down on many areas of the island.

Lanka's highest court rejects petitions from Muslims against COVID-19 cremations

C Colombo, Dec 1: Sri Lanka's Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed petitions filed by members of the Muslim community against the government's regulation that makes cremations mandatory for COVID-related deaths.

Some 12 petitioners had challenged the official gazette issued in April, claiming it impinged on the fundamental rights of the island nation's 9 per cent Muslim minority.

When the pandemic broke out in the country, the Ministry of Health revised its guidelines on March 31, ordering cremations only for persons who succumbed to or were suspected to have died of COVID-19.

The guidelines were issued after a Muslim, who tested COVID positive, passed away.

On April 11, the government issued a gazette notification making cremations mandatory for COVID-related deaths.

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