



P10 LIFE & TIMES
**STUDY SUGGESTS ATTRACTIVE
FOOD MAY SEEM HEALTHIER TO
CONSUMERS**
Attractive food might seem healthier to
consumers, suggest the findings of ...

P6 PANORAMA
**CHILLAI KALAN, CHILLAI
KHURD, AND CHALLAI BACHE**
Chillai Kalan is the most severe part
of the winter in Kashmir consisting of
three months. It is divided into three
parts called the Chillas: The Chillai
Kalan, the Chillai Khurd ...



P12 OBSERVER OUTPOST
**EXPEDITE PROBE INTO
JOURNALIST MUDASSIR'S
DEATH: KWJA**
Kashmir Working Journalists Association
(KWJA) is dismayed over the criminal ...



**Wisdom
Quote!**
“Where wisdom reigns,
there is no conflict between
thinking and feeling.”
— Carl Gustav Jung

news
DIGEST

Teen Student Goes Missing From Seminary

BANDIPORA: A teenage student
has gone missing from a
seminary in north Kashmir's
Bandipora district, reports said
Monday.

Local sources told KNT that
the in charge of a seminary
namely Madrasa Islamia Arabia
reported that a

16-year-old student Qaiser
Ahmad Gagi, a resident of Wani
Durusa Sogam Kupwara left
school on December 19 and did
not return till date and is miss-
ing since then, news agency
KNT reported. The disappear-
ance of the student has been
reported by in-charge of the
seminary Madrasa Islamia
Arabia located in Ongam village of
the district.

A missing report has been
lodged at concerned police sta-
tion, the report added.

Woman Found Dead Near Wular Park

BANDIPORA: A woman was
found dead on Monday under
'mysterious circumstances'
in north Kashmir's Bandipora
district.

The woman (name withheld)
was found dead under mysteri-
ous circumstances near the
Wular Vintage Park in Saderkoot
Payeen, news agency KNS
reported Monday. The woman,
the report said, had strained
relationship with her in-laws.

Quoting an unnamed official,
the report said that during ini-
tial investigations police didn't
find any clue behind the death.

"The body has been taken for
medico-legal formalities. A case
under relevant sections of law
stands registered and once the
finds of post mortem comes to
fore, everything

➔ More On P8

Power Cuts Trigger Protests In Sumbal

Bandipora: Irked by long power
cuts, residents of Sumbal area
of Bandipora district on Monday
held protests against Power
Development Department (PDD)
and disrupted traffic movement
on Sumbal-Hajin road for hours
together.

The protesters said that for
past several weeks the unsched-
uled and long power cuts in
Sumba and its adjacent areas
have been giving tough time to
the people, news agency KNT
reported Monday. ➔ More On P8

Ladakh Records Nine New Covid-19 Cases

LEH: Nine fresh COVID-19 cases
were reported in Ladakh where
78 patients recovered from the
infection during the past 24
hours, bringing down the num-
ber of active cases in the union
territory to 355, officials said on
Monday.

Ladakh had recorded a total
of 9,279 virus case-load since
the outbreak of the pandemic
in March, out of which 124
patients, including 81 in Leh and
43 in Kargil, have succumbed to
the infection.

All the nine new cases sur-
faced in Leh district, which had
of late witnessed a surge in the
positive cases, the officials said.

With the recovery of 71 pa-
tients in Leh and seven in Kargil
on Sunday, the recovery figure
had gone up to 8,800, which is
95 percent of the total cases,
they said.

DDC Election Results Today

FATE OF 4200 CANDIDATES TO BE DECIDED BY EVENING

SRINAGAR: The fate of nearly 4,200
candidates for the 280 District
Development Council (DDC) seats
in Jammu and Kashmir will be
decided on Tuesday, as counting
of votes will begin for the eight-
phase polls held for the first time
in the union territory.

Officials in the State Election
Commission said a total of 4,181
candidates, including over 450
women, were in the fray for the 280
DDC seats.

The elections to this third tier
of the Panchayati Raj system were
held for the first time in Jammu and
Kashmir and were the first mass
polls after the abrogation of provi-
sions of Article 370 in August 2019.

The polling was held over eight
phases beginning November 28
and ending on December 19 as
51 per cent of the 57 lakh eligible
voters exercised their franchise in
the elections, which were largely
peaceful.

Seven Kashmir-centric main-
stream political parties, including
the National Conference and the
Peoples Democratic ➔ More On P8



Results Will Be Available Online: SEC

JAMMU: The results of re-
cently conducted District
Development Council (DDC)
elections would be
accessed online dynami-
cally, the State Election
Commissioner (SEC), KK
Sharma on Monday.

The SEC stated this while
interacting with the media-
persons here today.

While briefing the media
about the availability of elec-
tion results on a website:
http://ceojk.nic.in, the SEC
stated that the State Election
Authority would facilitate
people and media alike to

access election results and
trends on a dynamic basis.

He said that soon after
the randomization and
time-tested protocols the
ballot boxes would be
opened and ballot papers
would be mixed subse-
quently for counting and
added the updated infor-
mation would be given to
the people on the website.

The SEC added that to-
morrow's counting would
decide the fate of 2178 can-
didates for 280 DDC seats
and counting would begin
at 9 am. ➔ More On P8

Court Orders Framing Of Charges Against Aasiya



File Photo

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court
Monday ordered framing of
charges against Kashmiri sepa-
ratist Aasiya Andrabi and her
two associates for allegedly
"waging war against India, se-
dition and conspiracy to com-
mit acts of militancy in the
country."

The case relates to allegedly
waging war against the country
with support from Pakistan, in-
cluding militant entities there.

Special Judge Parveen Singh
ordered putting Andrabi and
her associates -- Sofi Fehmeeda
and Nahida Nasreen -- on trial
for various offences punish-
able under IPC and stringent
Unlawful Activities (Prevention)
Act (UAPA). They were arrested
in April 2018.

The court order the framing of

charges under IPC Sections 120-B
(criminal conspiracy), 121 (wag-
ing war against the Government
of India), 121-A (conspiracy to
wage war against Government
of India), 124-A (sedition), 153-
A (promoting enmity between
different groups), 153-B (impu-
tations, assertions prejudicial to
national-integration) and 505
(statements conducting to public
mischief).

It further directed framing
charges under UAPA sections 18
(conspires or attempts to com-
mit, or advocates, abets, advises
or incites terror act), 20 (being
member of terrorist gang or
organisation), 38 (offence relat-
ing to membership of a terrorist
organisation) and 39 (offence re-
lating to support given to a ter-
rorist organisation).

The charges are scheduled to
be formally framed on January
18. Andrabi, who was chief of the
banned outfit Dukhtar-e-Milat
(Daughters of Nation), was ac-
cused of being involved in con-
spiracy and acts to "severely des-
tabilize the sovereignty and in-
tegrity of India", along with the two wom-
en associates. ➔ More On P8

Himayat Great Initiative for Youngsters: LG

"It provides
second chance
to youngsters
who have had
to quit studies"



JAMMU: Lieutenant Governor
Manoj Sinha on Monday called
for creating an ecosystem to
promote self-employment &
continuous encouragement for
the skilled youth in Jammu and
Kashmir through programmes
like centrally sponsored Himayat
Programme, saying "we can re-
construct a better & more resilient
workforce in J&K, which will also
be able to bridge social inequality"

Speaking during Industry
Connect Meet-Himayat 2020
organized by Himayat Mission
Management Unit, Department
of Rural Development and

Panchayati Raj here, Sinha said
that Himayat Programme' was a
perfect example of great synergy
between the government, train-
ing partners, job providers and
the people.

"Himayat is an unprecedented
initiative for those youngsters
who have had to quit studies due
to one reason or the other. It pro-
vides them a second chance to
realize their dreams and earn a
livelihood", he said, as per an of-
ficial spokesperson while address-
ing the gathering of representa-
tives from over 60 organizations
from private sector. ➔ More On P8

HC Disposes Of PIL Into Shopian 'Fake Encounter'

Says PIL By Third Party Cannot, Should Not Be Entertained

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir
High Court on Monday disposed of
a petition filed in "Public Interest"
into the "fake encounter killing"
of three Rajouri youth this year,
underlining that the PIL by a third
party cannot and should not be
entertained.

Three youth— Abrar Ahmed
(25), Imtiyaz Ahmed (20) and

Mohammed Ibrar (16) were
claimed to be militants and killed in
a "gunfight" at Amshippora Shopian
on July 18 this year. As they turned
out to be innocents, on October
2, their bodies were exhumed in
Baramulla and handed over to their
families.

A bench of Acting Chief Justice
Rajesh Binal and Justice Puneet
Gupta passed the orders as a peti-
tion filed by family members of
three victims with "same prayer" is
pending before the court Jammu's
wing. "If the prayers made by the
petitioner in the ➔ More On P8

Examine Setting Up Of HRC: HC Tells Govt

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and
Kashmir High Court on Monday
asked the government to examine
matter regarding setting up of a
Human Rights Commission in J&K.

After the promulgation of the
J&K Reorganization Act 2019, the
Jammu and Kashmir State Human
Rights Commission ceased to exist
from 31 October last year.

"The matter especially with refer-
ence to the provisions of Section 21(7)
of the Act of 1993 needs to be exam-
ined by the Government so that prop-
er remedies are available with the
aggrieved persons, who are having
any grievance regarding violation of
their human rights," a bench of Acting
Chief Justice Rajesh Binal and Justice
Puneet Gupta said. ➔ More On P8

Dreaded Deathsmen Of Kashmir's Hanged History

ZAID BIN SHABIR

As morning news on December
12, 2020 flashed the execution
of an Iranian dissident Ruhollah
Zam, Abdul Aziz, 84, instantly traveled
decades back, in the tumultuous era of
forties, when as a seven-year-old boy
he was forced to witness "his life's first
public hanging".

It was early 1940s and his homeland
was reverberating with "Quit Kashmir"
slogans—challenging the mighty Dogra
regime in the erstwhile state of Jammu
and Kashmir.

In his hometown Kokar Bazaar, he
would see his tribe quivering in fear
when frightening ParagWatul would
proclaim: "Aaj Khash-Khash Bagh meai
Phansi Ha" (Today, hanging will take

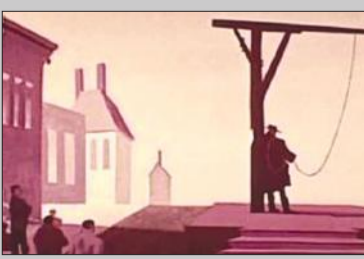


Representation pix.

place in Khash Khash Bagh).

The death-drummer would leave
behind a trail of terror and common-
ers would coop in their houses like
frightened chickens.

But in Dogra-dominated Kashmir,
such ghoulis street specters were a
different Olympus, where participation
of the public was made mandatory by
monarch.



Representation pix.

**After the hanging, these hangmen would flee in such a manner
that no one ever perceived their real identity and maybe no one
will ever know the reality behind the disguise of a Mar'riWatul"**

In that circa of political circus, Aziz
saw ParagWatul vanishing from the
scene after raising his petrifying pitch.
Bogeyman in Town

In the city where defiant as well as
tax-burdened souls would often find
themselves hanging from the fabled
bridges, the terror tribe of ParagWatul
was being patronized on the regime
order to instill fear among masses.
Among those harrowing men was
Boud'i Watul.

The legend of Boud'i Watul remains
a shrouded chapter in Kashmir's
dreadful past. ➔ More On P2



No 1- Dal Lake Boulevard Srinagar, 190001, Kashmir

2

women with private insurance, leading the UMass Amherst team to examine insurance type in their review. "We hypothesized recommended services would be less frequently provided during postpartum visits for women with Medicaid insurance compared to women with other coverage types," the researchers write. However, Attanasio says, "we found that there were not significant differences in the services received between women with Medicaid coverage and private insurance. That could reflect the fact that a lot of these services were not provided to most of the women."

N KO

Executive Engineer,
PHE Division, Kulgam,
(Jal Shakti Deptt)

Dated: 19-12-2020

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LG Lays Foundation Stone Of Rs 160 Cr 100-Bedded Hospital At Budgam

Central Government Keen To Ensure Peace, Prosperity And Development In J&K: Union MOS

SRINAGAR: Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha and Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Labour and Employment, Santosh Kumar Gangwar today laid the foundation stone of 100-bedded ESIC (Employees' State Insurance Corporation) Hospital at SIDCO Industrial Complex, Ompora, Budgam.

The hospital being constructed at a cost of Rs 160 crore would be equipped with modern healthcare facilities and will have OPD, IPD, ICU, Wards, Diagnostic Laboratories, Operation Theater, Disaster management facilities, in addition to an independent sub-station. Surgery and Psychiatric departments would be established in which specialist doctors and well trained staff will be made available round the clock.

Speaking on the occasion, the Lt Governor termed the occasion as yet another step to boost healthcare infrastructure in J&K. "We are working to provide world class health facilities at affordable prices to the people of UT. My aim is to strengthen the preventive, primary and secondary health care ecosystem in J&K", asserted the Lt Governor.

The Lieutenant Governor said that the facilities in the hospital would be on the lines of those available in the hospital in Ahmedabad, and there is no cap placed on the expenses during the treatment, so that needy people are benefitted.

A time limit of two years has been set for completing this hospital in Ompora with 23 Specialties. I want this hospital and the expansion of 'Bari Brahmana' hospital to be completed in the



next One and a half years so that health facilities like Delhi-Mumbai can be provided to the beneficiaries in J&K, he added.

He observed that there has been a new wave of development across Jammu and Kashmir. I am constantly meeting people, communicating, and every person talks about new opportunities, progress, social and economic advancement.

The Lt Governor said that there are more than 6000 Factories and Establishments in Jammu and Kashmir, under ESI Act and about One lakh 33 thousand insured people and their dependents are given benefits in Jammu Branch Office and five Other Dispensary Branches at Kathua, Samba, Udhampur, Katra and Srinagar.

"Agreement has been made with many other Super Speciality Hospitals so that there is no lack of necessary health facilities", he added.

While reiterating Government's commitment for providing better healthcare facilities across J&K, he

said that many progressive initiatives have been undertaken in the field of health sector to ensure best healthcare facilities being provided to the people.

The Prime Minister is going to launch SEHAT - Health Insurance scheme for the entire J&K, in convergence with Ayushman Bharat, to provide free of cost health coverage up to Rs. 5 lakhs per household per year without any discrimination, he maintained.

The Lt Governor said that about One crore residents of J&K who were not eligible under Ayushman Bharat scheme will also be provided insurance cover under the SEHAT Health Insurance Scheme.

Similarly, the World Bank has agreed to provide financial assistance to the extent of Rs. 367 crore to the UT of Jammu and Kashmir for strengthening the health care institutions to provide better health care services to the people and to tackle the global COVID pandemic more effectively. This project includes equip-

ment for hospitals, strengthening of Intensive Care Units, Operation Theatres, Laboratories and Critical Care Ambulances, he observed.

In order to streamline the supply of Oxygen in Health care institutions in J&K and to reduce the dependence on the system of storing and supply of oxygen, we have approved installation of oxygen generation plants in all tertiary care hospitals, district hospitals and other major hospitals, thereby increasing the oxygen availability pool for which Rs. 227 crore have already been earmarked, said the Lt Governor.

Maternal and infant health indicators in Jammu and Kashmir have recorded improvements as per the report of the National Family Health Survey. The report states that in Jammu and Kashmir, there has been a decrease of 22 numbers in neonatal morbidities and a decrease of 16 numbers in infant mortality, he added.

To provide immediate relief to the workers of the unorganized sector during COVID pandemic, more than 90 thousand people have been registered in Mission Mode and cards of more than 25,000 workers were renewed.

As on date, the number of registered workers has reached 2.86 lakh and not only this, 696 Transport workers who were facing hardships due to Corona pandemic are being given Rs. 1000 as relief every month under the Economic Revival Package and under COVID relief and assistance, Rs 63 crore has been provided to about 1.66 lakh beneficiaries. At the same time, under the PM Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan, nearly 1 lakh people from the unorganized sector have

been registered and Jammu and Kashmir has become the first UT in the country to do so, he added.

On the occasion, the Lt Governor observed that a national level job fair in both Jammu and Srinagar would be held so that our Skilled and Educated youth can be provided job opportunities in corporate entities.

The Lt Governor also expressed desire to establish Labour Sarai for the Labourers who often get struck on highways while travelling during landslides and snowfall.

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Labour and Employment, Santosh Kumar Gangwar, while speaking on the occasion, said that the Central Government is very keen to ensure peace, prosperity and development in J&K. He said that the government has taken various milestone steps for the welfare and progress of labour class to uplift their socio-economic conditions. By establishing Labour Courts and Laws, workers have been provided a lot of relief, he added. Regarding completion of construction work of ESIC hospital at Budgam, the Union Minister said that the hospital will come up with the State of Art medical facilities and cater to the medical needs of insured persons and beneficiaries in the catchment area. 50 bedded ESIC Hospital at Bari Brahmana would be upgraded to 100-bedded hospital for which additional land has been identified, he added.

The Union Minister assured all possible support to the UT government for welfare and prosperity of the people of J&K.

BJP Vote Share Will Be Up This Time: Shahnawaz

SRINAGAR: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Shahnawaz Hussain Monday said that the recently concluded District Development Council (DDC) polls will go with the golden words in India's history as there was not "even a single law and order incident anywhere during the entire polling process."

He said that it was for the first time in the history of elections that there was not even a single law and order incident reported during polling. "Let me announce here that democracy has finally won in J&K after a gap of 70-long years," Hussain said while addressing media men at a hotel in Srinagar.

He said that the recently concluded DDC polls will go with the golden words in the election history of India. "There was no complaint from any party. We also didn't complain," he said. Hussain, the former Union Minister said that it was for the first time that such a large number of people came to fight polls. "There were long queues outside polling stations every were barring a few places. This signifies that democracy has won in Kashmir," he said.

He said today's presser was held to announce that this time BJP will make its difference felt. "Let the DDC poll result come.

Whether we would be able to defeat others but one thing I want to make clear is that we will surely defeat Congress in J&K. Congress is a sinking ship across the country," he said.

He said that three parties contested DDC Polls in J&K—PAGD, which according to him is a "Gupkar Gang", Congress and the BJP. "We contested on 80 seats and on the remaining 200 we supported independent candidates," said Hussain, who travelled extensively to almost all the DDC constituencies J&K in the past few weeks as part of campaigning.

He said today late Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's dream of Kashmiriyat, Insaniyat and Jamhoriyat has come true as "DDC polls have shown that democracy is the backbone of Kashmiriyat and Insaniyat," said Hussain.

He said in the DDC poll results, voting share of BJP will be up given the feedback he has received from the ground zero. "Gone are the days where our voting share in polls used to be 19 or 12. You will see a difference, let DDC results come," Hussain asserted.

On when 4-G services will be resorted in J&K, the BJP national spokesman said: "Hopefully, very soon, 4-G will be restored in J&K."

CUK's SoE Holds Student Orientation Prog

GANDERBAL: School of Education (SoE), Central University of Kashmir (CUK) Monday organised an orientation programme for newly admitted students to the integrated B.Ed.-M.Ed, M.PED, M.A Education and PGDGC Programmes through both offline and virtual mode.

Addressing the students, Vice Chancellor, Prof. Mehraj ud Din Mir, highlighted the achievements of the university especially during the Covid-19 lockdown and wished good luck for the growth and progress of the entire family of SoE. Registrar, Prof. M Afzal Zargar, in his address dis-

cussed the potential impact of New National Education Policy-2020 on the overall scenario of education in general and teacher education in particular.

In her address, Controller of Examination Prof. Parveen Pandit, enlightened the students about the importance of student induction programme for students' campus adjustment.

Dean SoE, Dr. Syed Zahoor Ahmad Geelani, Dean, SoE, spoke at length about the structure of various programmes offered by SoE and apprised the audience about various steps and initiatives taken by various departments of SoE.

Royal Springs Golf Course Cheshmashahi Srinagar

E-NIT No.50of 2020-21 Dated21.12.2020

For and on behalf of Secretary Royal Springs Golf Course, Cheshmashahi, Srinagar e-tenders (In two cover system) invited on item rate basis from approved and eligible suppliers/dealer for each of the following item/work.

S. No	Name of work	Est. cost (Rs in lacs).	Earnest money/ Security (In Rs)	Bid Cost of tender document (in Rs)	Time of Class of Major Head of Account
1.	Supply of Turf Machinery Spares parts for the year 2020-21 at RSGC Srinagar	10.70 Lakhs	21400/= In Shape of CDR Or FDR in favour of Executive Engineer RSGC	1050/= Non Refundable in shape of DD in favour of Secretary RSGC or Bank Branch Nishat Srinagar	35 days Eligible suppliers/dealers

Special conditions :-

1. In case the offered bid is below 60% of the advertised cost or more, such bid / bids will be out rightly rejected.
2. In case more than one bidder has quoted equal bid amounts or bids are found to a "Tie" 1st lowest will from draw of lots.
3. The Bidding documents Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given below:-

1.	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	21.12.2020 4:00 PM
	Period of downloading of bidding documents	From 21-12.2020 to 29-12.2020 (4.00PM)
	Bid submission Start Date	21-12.2020 4:00 PM
	Bid Submission End Date	29-12.2020 4:00 PM
	Date & time of opening of Bids(Online)	30-12-2020 11:30 PM in the office of Executive Engineer RSGC Srinagar

General Conditions:

1. The successful bidder shall submit original Demand Drafts/CDR or FDR and copies of GST Registration Certificate and PAN in person within two days from the opening of the bids failing which proceeding as warranted under rules shall be initiated in the matter.
2. The bidders will provide email ID and complete postal address including cell numbers.
3. The date and time of opening of Bids shall be notified on Web Site www.jktenders.gov.in and conveyed to the bidders automatically through an e-mail message on their e-mail address. The bids of Responsive bidders shall be opened online.
4. The bids for the work shall remain valid for a period of 120 days from the date of opening of Bids.
38. Deductions of Taxes shall be made from the bills of contractors on gross amount of the bills as per the rates prevailing at the time of recovery, as admissible under rules.
39. Defect Liability period (DLP) shall be one year calculated from the date of completion of work, if after physical completion of work in all respects, any defect/imperfection in the work done by the contractor becomes apparent on account of bad workmanship or use of sub-standard materials or on any other account within a period of one year, the contractor shall make the same good, at his own expenses. If the Department deems it proper to restore the damages / defects through other agency, the expenses incurred therein shall be recovered from payment amount that may be due to contractor at any time or from the security deposit. The Security deposit of the contractor shall not be refunded before the expiry of (DLP).
40. The CDRs/FDR in respect of unsuccessful & untendered bidders shall be released only after depositing of Demand Draft in original (cost of Tender Document) in the office of Executive Engineer RSGC
41. In case the IRREVOCABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY is executed by the successful contractor in favour of any other person or Bank, the same shall be entertained subject to acceptance by the competent authority.

No:- RSGC/EE /2020-21/382-85
Dated :-21-12-2020.

Executive Engineer
Royal Springs Golf Course
Srinagar.

DIPK-NB-4724/20

Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences & Technology of Kashmir

Estates Wing, Main Campus Shalimar – 190 025

Notice Inviting e-Tender

E-NIT NO. (15) of 2020

For and on behalf of Vice-Chancellor, SKUAST(K), e-tenders (in two-cover system) are invited from approved and eligible Civil contractors whose cards are valid up to 31-03-2021 registered with State PWD, CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Govt. departments for the following work:-

S. No	Name of the work	Estimated Cost (in lacs)	Earnest Money (Rs.)	Class of Contractor	Cost of Tender document	Time of completion
1.	Construction of Trainees Hostel at Faculty of Forestry, Benihama Ganderbal, SKUAST-K (NABARD) Position of AAA: Approved	350.00	7,00,000/-	"AAV"	5000/-	24 months

a) Position of funds: Assured
b) The Bidding document consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, set of terms and conditions and other details can be downloaded from the departmental website www.jktenders.gov.in as per following schedule:-

1.	Date of issue of Tender Notice	19.12.2020
2.	Date of start of downloading	19.12.2020
3.	Pre-bid meeting date	NA
4.	Bid submission start Date	20.12.2020
5.	Bid submission end date	11.01.2021
7.	Date & Time of opening of Technical bid/ Financial Bids of qualifying bidders (online)	12.01.2021

Further information can be had from the Office of the undersigned

Sd/-

Executive Engineer
SKUAST-K

No. Au/Estates/E-NIT (15)/146
Dated: 19.12.2020

DIPK-NB-4713/20

DIAL-EMMA

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

AIRPORTS

SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311

RAILWAYS

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

HIGHWAY STATUS

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

This Day in History

- 1790 - Supposedly impenetrable Turkish fortress of Izmail stormed and captured by Suvorov and his Russian armies during the Russo-Turkish War (1787-1792).
- 1807 - US Congress passes Embargo Act, prohibiting American ships from trading in all foreign ports, as a result of involvement in hostilities between France and Britain.
- 1810 - British frigate HMS Minotaur sinks killing 480
- 1814 - Samuel Marsden of the Church Missionary Society arrives in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand to establish the country's first mission station; Sheep, cattle, horses and poultry are introduced.
- 1849 - The execution of Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky is called off at the last second.
- 1851 - The first freight train is operated in Roorkee, India.
- 1882 - 1st string of Christmas tree lights created by Thomas Edison
- 1890 - Cornwallis Valley Railway begins operation between Kingsport and Kentville, Nova Scotia.
- 1915 - Organized baseball & Federal League sign a peace treaty at Cincinnati.
- 1917 - Flanders declares its independence, under Pieter Tack
- 1930 - Convention of Economic Rapprochement/ Oslo Agreements signed between some European countries in response to the Great Depression.
- 1939 - 99 die in 2nd wreck at Friedrichshafen Germany
- 1940 - World War II: Himarë is captured by the Greek army.
- 1941 - Japans invasion leader lands on Luzon, Philippines
- 1941 - Tito establishes 1st Proletarian Brigade in Yugoslavia
- 1942 - World War II: Adolf Hitler signs the order to develop the V-2 rocket as a weapon.
- get permission to use synthetic rubber for baseball core.
- 1950 - 2 self-propelled trains of Long Island RR collide, killing 77.
- 1956 - Last British & French troops leave Egypt.
- 1963 - Official 30-day mourning period for President John F. Kennedy ends.
- 1963 - Cruise ship Lakonia burns 180 miles north of Madeira with the loss of 128 lives.
- 1964 - First flight of the SR-71 (Blackbird).
- 1971 - UN General Assembly ratifies former Austrian President Kurt Waldheim as Secretary-General.
- 1971 - USSR performs underground nuclear test.
- 1972 6.25 earthquake strikes Managua Nicaragua, 12,000+ killed
- 1974 - 2nd cease-fire between IRA & British; lasts until approx April 1975.
- 1974 - Referenda in Comoros-3 islands for independence, 1 stays French.
- 1974 - Iraq announces plans to increase its oil production capacity.
- 1975 - US President Gerald Ford signs the Energy Policy and Conservation Act (EPCA).
- 1983 - Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak meets with PLO leader Yasser Arafat.
- 1988 - South Africa signs accord granting independence to South West Africa.
- 1990 - Iraq announces it will never give up Kuwait.
- 1990 - Israeli ferry capsizes killing 21 US servicemen.
- 1992 - Libyan MIG-23UB attacks Boeing 727 at Souk al-Sabt, 158 die.
- 2001 - Burhanuddin Rabbani, political leader of the Afghan Northern Alliance, hands over power in Afghanistan to the interim government headed by President Hamid Karzai.
- 2006 - Australian archaeologist Sue O'Connor

From KO Archives

Foreign Militants' Role Limited To Help: Ghani Lone

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI: Foreign militant groups fighting India troops in Kashmir have no place in talks on the future of the region, People's conference chairman and senior Hurriyat leader Abdul Ghani Lone said Thursday.

Lone who returned to New Delhi after a three-week visit to Pakistan, also told an international news agency that he thought Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf was keen to find a solution to Kashmir issue.

"They (foreign militants) came to help us when they found that we were, in trouble ... they should keep it to help alone," Lone said, adding it was not for foreign groups to reject Indian government proposals.

If foreign militants were all Pakistani, we could have told them to quit. But these people are from Saudi, Afghani-stan and Chechnya."

When asked about his meeting with Musharraf in Islamabad Lone said he had found the Pakistani leader "sincere" about seeking a permanent solution of the Kashmir dispute.

However Lone said Musharraf was disappointed as Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had "not responded constructively" to his offer of talks.

The violent struggle in Kashmir has claimed tens of thousands of lives since it erupted in 1989.

India blames Pakistan for providing military backing to the militants. Pakistan denies the charge, but offers open diplomatic support to what it terms the Kashmir freedom fighters.

(KASHMIR OBSERVER, 22 DECEMBER, 2000)

Interpol Expects "Dramatic" Jump In Crime Over Covid Vaccine Shipments

Agencies

Berlin: Interpol chief Juer-gen Stock predicted Monday a sharp rise in crimes with robbers seeking to get their hands on precious vaccines aimed at stopping the coronavirus pandemic.

"With vaccines rolling out, crime will increase dramatically," Stock told business weekly WirtschaftsWoche.

"We will see thefts and warehouse break-ins and attacks on vaccine shipments."

pant in many places to get the valuable vaccine quicker," he said.

A vaccine produced by German company BioNTech and US giant Pfizer has already been approved for use by 16 countries.

The European Union's EMA is posed to make a similar decision on Monday, with the first jabs to begin in the bloc on Sunday (December 27).

In Germany, federal police will be deployed to secure transportation of the vaccines,



The secretary general of the France-based global policing agency said he also expected more cases of graft related to Covid-19 vaccines.

"Corruption will be ram-

which will also be stored in secret places.

Besides the threat of robberies, fears are also running high of possible sabotage by anti-vaxxers.

Al Jazeera journalists hacked using Israeli firm's spyware

Agencies

Abu Dhabi: Dozens of journalists at Al Jazeera Media Network were targeted this year by advanced spyware sold by an Israeli firm in an attack likely linked to the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, a cybersecurity watchdog said.

Citizen Lab's researchers at the University of Toronto pub-

find other ways to reach out on our Tips page.

"They threatened to make me the new Jamal Khashoggi," said Al Jazeera's Almisshal, referring to the death threats received.

"Based on this, we handed the phone to Citizen Lab, who found that the phone was hacked by spyware called Pegasus, which is developed by NSO, an Israeli company," said Almisshal.



lished a report on Sunday detailing how NSO Group's Pegasus spyware infected the mobile phones of 36 journalists, producers, anchors and executives at the media network which has its headquarters in Qatar.

The cybersecurity watchdog attributed the unprecedented attack to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

In confirming the hacking, Tamer Almisshal, an investigative journalist with Al Jazeera Arabic, said a probe was launched after death threats were received on a phone that was used to call ministries in the UAE for a story.

Do you have more info about spyware or want to share another tip? Contact us on +974 5080 0207 (WhatsApp/Signal), or

"This hacking was done by a so-called zero-click technique where they can access cameras and track the device. They also found that operators in the UAE and Saudi Arabia were behind this hacking.

"We tracked the spyware for six months and found that at least 36 Al Jazeera staffers were hacked. They have used some of the content they stole from the phones to blackmail journalists, by posting private photos on the internet," he added.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt imposed a diplomatic, trade and travel boycott on Qatar in June 2017, accusing Doha of supporting "terrorism" and having ties with Iran that were deemed too close.



"Sick Man Of Europe": UK Cut Off Over Fears About New Covid Strain

Agencies

Dover, England: The United Kingdom was on Monday shut off from much of Europe after its closest allies cut transport ties due to fears about a new strain of the coronavirus, sowing chaos for families and companies just days before it exits the European Union's orbit.

France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Ireland, Belgium, Israel and Canada shut off travel ties after Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned that a highly infectious new strain of the virus was a danger to the country.

Johnson will chair an emergency response meeting on Monday to discuss international travel, in particular the flow of freight in and out of Britain.

France shut its border to arrivals of people and trucks from the United Kingdom, closing off one of the most important trade arteries with mainland Europe, a step Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said was surprising.

"I'm in touch with my opposite number in France and we're doing everything we can to get that restarted, in fact they've said to us they want to restart the hauliers as quickly

as possible," Shapps told Sky.

Shapps said getting the bans lifted as swiftly as possible was his priority but that given British preparations for the end of the Brexit transition period, the country was well prepared for disruption.

Talks on a Brexit trade deal were due to continue on Monday.

TRANSPORT CHAOS

Johnson on Saturday cancelled Christmas plans for millions of British people due to what he said was a more infectious strain of the coronavirus, though he said there was no evidence that it was either more lethal or caused a more severe illness.

The new variant contains 23 different changes, many of them associated with alterations in a protein made by the virus. Shapps said Britain had done some of the best global analysis of the mutations of the virus so it was simply seeing what was already at large in other countries.

Chief Scientific Adviser Patrick Vallance said on Saturday he thought the new variant may be in other countries but also might have started in the United Kingdom.

The British government trig-

gered plans it had for stacking up trucks in the southeast county of Kent - part of its plans for potential disruption when the United Kingdom exits the EU's orbit with - or without - a trade deal at 2300 GMT on Dec. 31.

Trucks are being stacked on the M20 motorway through the county, heading towards the ports, which is closed to normal traffic. A nearby airport will also be used to hold freight.

"Sick Man of Europe", the Daily Mirror newspaper said on its front page beside a picture of Johnson while the Sun newspaper said "French show no merci".

The closure of the Channel Tunnel and ports for onward travel to France will affect the export of goods such as fish and shell fish from Scotland to Europe, and the import of food for British supermarkets if, as expected, European drivers refuse to travel.

Trucks have been told to avoid Kent to prevent any further build up of trucks.

"The closure of France to UK traffic, including accompanied freight poses difficulties for UK capacity to import and export key goods during the busy Christmas period," said Andrew Opie, director of food & sustainability at the British Retail Consortium.

What You Need To Know About New UK Coronavirus Mutation

Agencies

London: A flurry of European travel restrictions announced Sunday over worries about a fast-spreading new variant of the coronavirus have spurred curiosity and concern that the mutation could infect Americans.

After officials in the United Kingdom said Saturday that the variant first identified there was spreading 70% faster than others, Google searches about the mutation have spiked. American public health experts and federal officials say that although it appears that the variant may be more contagious, it is not any more dangerous than others already detected in the United States.

"I don't think there should be any reason for alarm right now," Adm. Brett Giroir, who

has been in charge of U.S. testing, told George Stephanopoulos on ABC's "This Week."

Variations to the virus are nothing new, and experts say the novel coronavirus does not mutate as much as influenza, meaning it is less likely that a vaccine would need to be developed every year to keep up with the new strains.

Still, much about this variant remains unknown, such as whether it is a new strain - a functionally different version of the virus.

"The take-home message for right now is that we need to get more information," said Krutika Kuppalli, an infectious-diseases specialist at the Medical University of South Carolina. "In the meantime, we all need to really double down on our public health measures - wearing masks, remaining physically distanced, avoiding

crowds of people."

Where has the variant been detected?

In September, U.K. researchers discovered the variant's prevalence when they collected samples from infected people in southeastern England. It seemed to spread quickly.

"This lineage came up quite rapidly," Nick Loman, one of the researchers and a professor of microbial genomics at the University of Birmingham, told The Washington Post.

Since then, Australia, Denmark and the Netherlands have identified cases of the variant in their countries, the World Health Organization told the BBC. On Sunday, Italian officials announced that a patient returning from Britain "in the last few days" was in isolation after scientists detected the mutation.

Saudi Arabia shuts land, air, sea borders over fears of a new strain of coronavirus

Agencies

RIYADH — Saudi Arabia has suspended all international commercial flights for a week amid reports of the appearance of a new mutated strain of coronavirus in a number of European countries, the Saudi Press Agency reported late Sunday citing an official source at the Interior Ministry.

The Kingdom has also decided to close its land and sea borders.

The suspension of international travel except for emergency cases, which is part of the precautionary measures seeking to ensure the health and safety of citizens, can be extended by one more week, according to the source.

The decisions, which have been taken as precautionary measures, are the following:

1. Temporary suspension of all commercial international flights for travelers, except in emergency cases, for a week, which can be extended for another week. However,

the foreign flights that are currently in the Kingdom are allowed to leave.

2. Suspension of the entry to the Kingdom through land and seaports temporarily for a period of one week and it can be extended for another week.

3. Everyone, who has returned from one of the European countries or any country where the new strain has appeared after Dec. 8, 2020, must adhere to the following:

A. Self-isolate for a period of two weeks from the date of his arrival in the Kingdom.

B. Undergo coronavirus tests during his isolation period after every five days.

C. Anyone, who has returned from or passed through a European country or any country where the new strain of COVID-19 appeared over the past three months, must take a coronavirus test.

The measures will be reviewed in the light of the developments related to the pandemic based on the assessment of the Ministry of Health, according to the source.

Take an objective view on Chinese-Pakistan air force drills, China tells India

Press Trust Of India

Beijing: China on Monday defended the ongoing joint exercises of its air force with that of Pakistan, saying the drills were not directed against any third country and India should view them objectively.

The Air Forces of China and Pakistan are holding their annual exercises "Shaheen (Eagle)-IX" since the second week of December in Pakistan's southern Sindh province.

The exercises followed the recent visit of China's Defence Minister General Wei Fenghe

riety," he said.

"We are committed to jointly upholding regional peace and stability. The relevant cooperation is a routine arrangement between the two militaries," he said.

"It is not targeting any third party. We hope that (the) relevant party can view this in an objective manner," Wang said, without directly naming India.

The joint air force exercises, which will conclude in late December, is a project within the 2020 cooperation plan of the two militaries, the Chinese military said earlier.



to Pakistan during which the all-weather allies signed a new memorandum of understanding, details of which were not disclosed.

Asked whether the exercises between the two air forces were aimed at conveying a message to New Delhi, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here that drills were part of "routine arrangement".

"As all-weather Strategic Cooperation Partners, China and Pakistan have friendly exchanges and cooperation in many areas including politics, economy, military, and secu-

The drills will promote the development of China-Pakistan "mil-to-mil" relationships, deepen practical cooperation between the two air forces, and improve the actual-combat training level of the two sides, it said.

Pakistan Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa on Friday visited an airbase to witness the joint drills and emphasised combat readiness and improved interoperability with China.

All weather friends, China and Pakistan share close military ties with Beijing emerging as a major weapons provider to Pakistan in recent years.

Nawaz, Vajpayee spoke over phone in midst of Kargil war, says book

NEW DELHI: Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, spoke to each other on the phone at least five times during the course of the 1999 Kargil war, with the latter veering to the view that Mr Sharif had been bamboozled by then army chief General Pervez Musharraf into the conflict, The Hindu said on Sunday, quoting from a new book by Mr Vajpayee's private secretary.

The book on Mr Vajpayee's tumultuous tenure, Vajpayee: The Years That Changed India by former bureaucrat Shakti Sinha, who served as Vajpayee's private secretary for many years, goes on to say that the communication was kept up after a telling incident between Mr Sharif and R.K. Mishra, a former head of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), the man selected for back channel talks to end the conflict.



"...Sharif's position was a tenuous one, and in a later meeting, he indicated to Mishra that they should take a walk in the garden, obviously suspecting that his own house was tapped. When Mishra reported this to Vajpayee, the latter took this as an indication that Sharif was more a prisoner of circumstances than anything else," says the book.

One of the calls occurred in June from Srinagar, after Vajpayee had made a visit to Kargil. "On his arrival in Srinagar, Vajpayee asked me to

connect him to Sharif. My small team and I tried, but we just could not get through. Then one of the local officers present informed us that dialling Pakistan (+92) from Jammu and Kashmir was barred. The telecom authorities were told to open the facility for a short while, so that the two prime ministers could talk," says the book.

A major factor in the withdrawal of Pakistani troops from the LoC, the book claims, was two telephonic recordings that Arvind Dave, then chief of Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), India's external intelligence agency, brought to Prime Minister Vajpayee. "Arvind Dave, the R&AW chief, came up with two telephonic recordings between the Pakistan Army chief Pervez Musharraf, and his chief of general staff, Lt Gen Mohammad Aziz. It was clear that the Pakistan Army was involved, with the Mujahideen playing a minor role, if any," says the book.

As end approaches, Trump gets doses of flattery, finality

President Donald Trump's administration is ending how it began, with over-the-top declarations of praise for the chief executive.

But now the flattery is mixed with a sense of finality as key people in the president's orbit are beginning to turn the page and acknowledge his defeat.

Trump himself keeps to the Oval Office, still fighting the Election Day results and offering scant acknowledgement of the death and suffering Americans are bearing in the darkest hours of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a week when the Electoral College made official President-elect Joe Biden's victory, Trump remained out of sight, staying late in the Oval Office and working the phones and television remote

in his private dining area just steps from the Resolute Desk.

While he made not one public appearance, some of those who have been his most influential allies and loyal defenders

gave up the fight, letting the president down as gently as possible.

Attorney General William Barr offered his resignation last Monday after weeks of tension with Trump brought about an early exit from his post.

Long seen as one of Trump's most supportive Cabinet members, Barr in recent weeks and months had drawn Trump's wrath for not supporting the president's baseless claims of election fraud or for not publicly pursuing an investigation into Biden's son Hunter.



NEWS MAKERS

Pak cancels licences of 50 pilots

Islamabad: The Pakistan Government has cancelled the licences of 50 pilots for flying with fake credentials and authorities will probe how they obtained the certificates through unfair means, the country's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has informed a top court here.

The issue of fake licences surfaced in the wake of the tragic crash of a Pakistan International Airlines plane in Karachi on May 22, killing 97 people, when Minister of Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan told the media that 260 of the country's 860 active pilots had either fake licences or had cheated in their exams.

Their names were made public to avoid any negative impression about other pilots, including those working outside Pakistan. Dawn newspaper reported that authorities told the Islamabad high court that under the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organisation, they have reviewed licences of 860 commercial pilots and cancelled 50 of them after a thorough scrutiny. — PTI

Punjab Farmer Attempts Suicide Near Singhu Border



A 65-year-old Punjab farmer protesting against the Centre's agriculture laws attempted suicide by taking some poisonous substance near the Delhi's Singhu border on Monday, a police official said.

Niranjan Singh, who hails from Punjab's Tarn Taran, was admitted to the Rohtak's PGIMS and his condition is stated to be stable, the official said.

Before the suicide bid, the farmer left a note behind, which is being verified by police.

"We are in the process of recording his statement," the official said when asked about the reason behind the suicide attempt.

The incident comes close on the heels of a Sikh preacher, Sant Ram Singh, allegedly committing suicide near the Singhu border last week as he was "unable to bear the

pain of the farmers".

On Saturday, a 22-year-old farmer had allegedly committed suicide in Punjab's Bathinda after returning from a protest site near the Delhi border.

Farmers are protesting against the Centre's three contentious laws enacted in September this year.

The government has projected the laws as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove middlemen and allow farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country.

However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of the minimum support price and do away with the mandis, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

The Centre has repeatedly asserted that these mechanisms will remain.

'Love Jihad': Two Arrested In UP's Kannauj District Under New Anti-Conversion Law



Two people have been arrested in Uttar Pradesh's Kannauj district in separate cases under the state's new anti-conversion law, police said on Monday.

Mohammad Taufeeq was arrested on Sunday for allegedly marrying a 29-year-old woman by hiding his religion and then forcing her to convert, Superintendent of Police (SP) Prashant Verma said.

The FIR in the case was lodged in Kannauj on a complaint from the woman's father, he said.

In his complaint, the father said that Taufeeq "trapped" his daughter by hiding his religion and on Saturday, took her to Lucknow. There he disclosed his religion and married her, and forced her to convert, the SP said.

Besides being charged under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, Taufeeq has also been booked under sections pertaining to cheating and impersonation of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Prashant Verma said.

The complainant has alleged that Taufeeq introduced himself as Rahul Verma to marry

his daughter, the officer said.

In Sarameera village of the district, police claimed to have arrested a man on Friday for allegedly trying to "trap" a woman without disclosing his religion.

Ahtesham was caught by a mob and handed over to police. He was booked under the anti-conversion law, they said.

Under the law which deals with different categories of offences, a marriage will be declared "null and void" if the conversion of a woman is solely for that purpose, and those wishing to change their religion after marriage need to apply to the district magistrate.

The ordinance mainly envisages that no person shall convert, either directly or indirectly from one religion to another by use or practice of misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage nor shall any person abet, convince or conspire such conversion.

The onus to prove that the conversion has not been done forcibly will lie on the person accused of the act and the convert, it said.



Farmers at the Singhu border, Tribune file

"Will Consider CAA As Soon As Covid Vaccination Starts": Amit Shah

BOLPUR, WEST BENGAL: Slamming West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over the recent attack on BJP chief JP Nadda's convoy, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday asserted the centre has the right to summon state IPS officers responsible for providing him security for central deputation, and asked the TMC to go through the rules before pointing fingers at the union government.

He also said that rules for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act are yet to be framed because of the pandemic situation and the matter will be considered once the COVID-19 vaccination starts and the corona chain breaks.

Addressing a press conference, Mr Shah claimed that Ms Banerjee and the Trinamool Congress raked up the "outsider-insider" issue to divert public attention from the failures of the state government and said that a "son of the soil" would lead the state if the BJP is voted to power.

"The rules of the CAA are yet to be framed as such a massive process could not be carried out because of the corona. As soon

as (COVID) vaccination starts and corona cycle breaks, we will consider it," he said.

Asked about the summoning of IPS officers of West Bengal cadre by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Mr Shah said that the Centre has sent the letter to state government as per the Constitution and the law. "It is according to the federal structure (of the country). They (TMC government) should first go through the rules and then talk to the centre and the public."

The centre had on Thursday shot off a fresh letter to the West Bengal government to immediately relieve its three IPS officers for central deputation, following which the Chief Minister branded the move as "unconstitutional and unacceptable".

On the attack on JP Nadda's convoy by alleged TMC activists during his visit to Diamond Harbour on December 10, Mr Shah alleged that political violence and corruption are at peak in the state.

"The BJP condemns it, and I too condemn it. The BJP believes that in a democracy, everyone should have the right

to voice their views. And it is the responsibility of the ruling party to ensure that all parties can have their voice heard.

"The attack on the BJP chief is not only an attack on him. It is an attack on democracy in West Bengal and the Trinamool Congress is completely responsible for this," Mr Shah said.

It was more alarming that after the attack, TMC leaders' statements, in a way, supported it, the senior BJP leader claimed.

They must not be under the impression that the BJP will be cowed down by such attacks, he said adding that the party will continue to work to defeat the TMC.

On the "insider-outsider" debate, Mr Shah said, "I think Mamata di has forgotten a few things. Did she call Indira Gandhi, Pranab Mukherjee, Narsimha Rao outsiders when they used to come to West Bengal, and she was with the Congress? Does she want a country where people from one state will not visit another?"

"Someone from Bengal, a bhumiputra (son of the soil), will defeat her and become the next CM of the state." He said.

Ready For Talks, But Nothing New In Govt's Letter, Need Concrete Solution: Farmer Leaders

Farmer leaders on Monday said they are always ready for dialogue as long as the government is willing to offer a "concrete solution" and added that there is nothing new in the Centre's latest letter addressed to them seeking a date to schedule the next round of talks.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait said that the government, in its letter, mentioned that it wants to discuss its earlier proposal of amending the new agri laws.

"On this issue (government's proposal), we did not talk to them earlier. We are currently discussing how to respond to the government letter," Tikait told PTI.

The sixth round of talks on December 9 was cancelled.

In the letter addressed to 40 union leaders, the Agriculture Ministry Joint Secretary Vivek Aggarwal on Sunday asked them to specify their concerns regarding the Centre's earlier proposal of amendments in the laws and choose a convenient date for the next round of talks so that the ongoing agitation could end at the earliest.

"There is nothing new in their letter. We have already rejected the government's proposal to amend the new farm laws. In its letter, the government has asked us to discuss



its proposal and convey a date to it for another round of talks. Don't they know our demand? We just want a complete repeal of the new agriculture laws," another farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar said.

In the letter, the Union agriculture joint secretary said the Centre is making all efforts with "an open heart" to find an appropriate solution to resolve all concerns raised by farmers.

The officer said that in its draft proposal sent on December 9, the government had proposed to make necessary amendments on at least seven issues, including providing a "written assurance" to the farmers that the existing minimum support price (MSP) system would continue.

Thousands of farmers have been camping at several Delhi border points against the new farm laws for the last 24 days.

"It doesn't make sense that the government is asking us for a date.

We are basically sitting here all day long waiting for the government to hear us. They are the ones who have busy schedules. They should give us a date, or they can simply come to our tents here, see how we are living and talk to us," said farmer leader Kashmir Singh, who is an assistant secretary of the All India Kisan Samiti (Punjab) said.

Amarjeet Singh Rarra, general secretary of Dwaba Kisan Committee, said that farmers are always ready to meet the government but it has to come to them with a concrete solution. "We have studied their proposals clause by clause, and we have repeatedly told them that we want the laws to be repealed," Rarra said.

The farmer leaders are expected to meet on Tuesday to discuss the next plan of action, said Gurmeet Singh of Krantikari Kisan Union.

"We have already sent them our proposals, and pointed out the issues we had with the government's proposal. They need to respond to what we have already told them. Tomorrow, there will be a Sanyukt Morcha meeting to decide how and when to respond to the government. We will evaluate the government's letter and then decide," Gurmeet Singh said.

Pak Allegations Of Indian Troop Attack On UN Vehicle Along Line Of Control False: India



NEW DELHI: India on Sunday said Pakistan's allegations that Indian troops deliberately targeted a vehicle of the United Nations along the Line of Control (LoC) were investigated in detail and found to be factually "incorrect and false".

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said Pakistan should responsibly investigate its "lapses" instead of repeating "baseless and fabricated" allegations against India to cover up its own "failure" in ensuring the safety and security of UN personnel in territory under its control.

Pakistan on Friday alleged that Indian troops targeted a vehicle of United Nations Military Observers (UNMO) in the Chirikt sector along the LoC. Indian government sources rejected the allegations that day itself.

In response to media queries on allegations by Pakistan, Mr Srivastava also said that India has conveyed its findings and views on "these misrepresentations" to the Pakistani side.

"Allegations by Pakistan regarding Indian forces deliberately targeting a UN vehicle on December 18 have been investigated in detail and found to be factually incorrect and false. Our forward troops were aware of the visit of UN Military Observers in the area and did not conduct any firing as alleged," he said.

"Instead of repeating baseless and fabricated allegations against India to cover up its own failure in ensuring the safety and security of UN personnel in territory under its control, Pakistan should responsibly investigate its lapses," the MEA spokesperson said.

Payment To Homemakers, Computer To Households, And More: Kamal Haasan Promises Freebies Galore



Actor-politician Kamal Haasan on Monday assured "payment" to homemakers for their work at home, computer with high-speed internet to all households and transformation of farmers to entrepreneurs if his party MNM was voted to power in the 2021 Tamil Nadu assembly elections.

Unveiling his party's seven-point 'Governance and Economic Agenda', he also said people below the poverty line would be taken to "prosperity line".

"Homemakers will get their due recognition through payment for their work at home which hitherto has been unrecognised and unmonetised, thus raising the dignity of womenfolk," the agenda said. It was released by Haasan in the presence of former IAS officer Santhosh Babu, who recently joined the Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM), in this temple town, close to Chennai.

On his campaign trail in northern Tamil Nadu for the second day on Monday, the 66-year old MNM founder-leader asserted that remittance to women at home was possible.

"It is definitely possible," he said, when reporters asked him about the assurance for "payment" to the womenfolk in the agenda, virtually a mini manifesto of the party. By avoiding corruption, the state could be made prosperous, he added.

To a question, Haasan ruled out joining hands with the Dravidian majors—the ruling AIADMK and the DMK. Though the assembly elections were expected during April-May, the MNM, the AIADMK and DMK have already launched their campaign to woo the electorate.

The MNM said, if voted to power, its government would take steps to realise revolutionary poet Bharati's dream of women empowerment through education, employment and opportunities towards entrepreneurship. "Women will break through established glass ceilings by the equal opportunities provided to them by our

MNM government," he said.

Promising what the party called "online homes," the agenda said its government would provide a computer along with high speed internet (100 mbps and above) through optical fibre cable to each and every home, as a common property resource by implementing the BharatNet and TamilNet projects. The plan could bring far-reaching transformation and the "internet will be declared as a basic human right," the party added.

Outlining "Green plus revolution," the party said farmers would be transformed to agriculture entrepreneurs. It assured world class infrastructural amenities like cold chain from the level of villages, investments for value added farming and giving a fillip to organic farming as part of its agenda.

MNM would take people below the poverty line to the "prosperity line," the document said. Promising a "green channel" government, MNM said all certificates and documents would be issued without the citizen applying for it and these shall be delivered to people on their smartphone.

"All services to citizens, including grievance redressal, shall be delivered in a time bound manner." Paperless government offices, a new department of digital governance, promotion of green industries, technologies and providing urban opportunities in rural areas were among the other aspects of the agenda.

Haasan visited Dravidian icon and late chief minister C.N. Annadurai's memorial and interacted with weavers in this town, known for its unique and popular Kancheepuram silk sarees.

The MNM, launched in February, 2018, contested the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and garnered 3.77 per cent votes is seeking to offer an alternative to the Dravidian majors in the state polls, the first after the demise of DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi and AIADMK supremo Jayalalithaa.

NEWS MAKERS

River Course To Be Diverted To Protect 2,500-Year-Old Bihar Archaeological Site: Nitish Kumar

PATNA: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday said that the course of the Kosi river will be diverted to protect an area in the state's Bhagalpur district, which could be a 2,500-year-old archaeological site.

Mr Kumar visited Guwaridih village in Bihpur block, from where ancient terracotta objects such as utensils and ornaments, various tools, triangular bricks, copper coins, and fossils were recovered from beneath the earth.

Those items could be remains of the Kushan, Maurya and the Gupta era.

Bihar Heritage Development Society's Executive Director Dr Vijay Kumar Choudhary gave details of the items displayed there to the chief minister.

"It is really an ancient and historical place. The remains recovered could be more than 2,500 years old. Everyone should know about the place," an official release quoted the chief minister as saying.

It is important to divert the Kosi river to its old course in order to protect the area and the objects which are still below the earth's surface from flood and erosion, Mr Kumar



said adding that it will be done after proper planning.

The river is currently flowing around 300-400 metres from the site, while its old course is about

two kilometres from the village.

"Legislator Shailendra jee (Kumar Shailendra, the MLA from Bihpur) had informed me about the recovery of ancient items which have historical importance. Even a team of experts, in its preliminary report, have confirmed the place to be a historical one," Mr Kumar told reporters.

If it is confirmed after proper excavation that the site is really of archaeological importance, it will be developed so that people of the country and the world are able to know about it, he said.

Kumar Shailendra and a host of officials and historians accompanied the chief minister during his visit to Guwaridih, around 260 kilometres from Patna.

KASHMIR
OBSERVER

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Over to Bengal

After the BJP's good showing in recent Bihar elections, the party is now busy training guns at West Bengal where it seeks to dislodge the Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress Party. Senior BJP leaders including home minister Amit Shah and the BJP president JP Nadda are making frequent visits to Bengal to mobilize support in favour of the BJP. The BJP is leaving no stone unturned to upstage the Chief Minister Banerjee. The past few weeks have witnessed many a bitter exchange between the parties. Several TMC leaders have also defected to the BJP. The war of words between the parties is likely to get fiercer by the day.

But nothing can as yet be said with certainty about which of the two parties will eventually carry the day in Bengal. It is true that the BJP has never had a strong political base in the state. Its efforts over the past several years to mobilize public support haven't met with success. The TMC has a strong cadre and has been in power since the last ten years. The party would certainly be facing some anti-incumbency issues but it doesn't mean that the party is on a weaker wicket.

However, the significance of the Bengal election is beyond the BJP-TMC rivalry. Its outcome will be a profoundly important development. If the TMC wins, it will arrest the disarray among the secular forces and give them confidence to stand up to Modi in the upcoming state elections. As the result in recent Bihar polls has once again highlighted, only a broad secular front against the BJP could confront the party with a credible challenge. As things stand, there is no dislodging the Prime Minister Narendra Modi yet. That is, if no credible political rival emerges from the shadows in the near future, a prospect which looks bleak.

The likes of Mamta Banerjee and Mayawati who once showed signs of shaping up into credible national rivals have too paled into significance. The caste based parties in Uttar Pradesh who were only hope to stop Modi juggernaut have bitten the dust. And they are unlikely to recover from the beating they took in polls after polls. Modi's appeal has only grown stronger. He is now certain to win many more Assembly polls. The BJP under him has set itself up as a formidable challenger to Mamata Banerjee. While the broader opposition is reeling from the abject defeat, the BJP is busy setting up its base in the states where it lacks the presence like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. Things can still turn around for the opposition and also for India if the opposition too develops a potent narrative that offers a persuasive alternative to the one being plied by the BJP.

OTHER OPINION

The good news on Covid-19

In the past week, India has reported 27,672 new infections of the coronavirus disease a day on average. When the Covid-19 wave was at its peak in the country in mid-September, this number was 93,617 cases a day. This is a 70% drop in cases in three months, and it takes the Covid outbreak in India back to levels that were last seen in mid-July. While the Indian wave has been receding since mid-September, even as recently as October and November, there were regions such as Delhi, Kerala, West Bengal and Rajasthan that were still defying the larger trend and reporting rising cases. This is not true anymore. This is the first time numbers are receding in every major state in the country.

It gets even better in terms of testing. In the past week, 2.9% of all samples tested in India have come back positive for Covid-19 — the lowest this number (known as the positivity rate) has ever touched since the government started releasing testing figures. India's dropping positivity rate tells us two things — first, the testing strategy currently being enforced is adequate; second, the rate of spread of the virus in the community is being brought under control. According to the World Health Organization, if the positivity rate remains 5% or below for two weeks, a region can be said to be keeping its outbreak under control and is testing adequately. India's positivity rate has been below this threshold for 24 days now. India's Covid-19 numbers have clearly taken a turn for the better.

But the government, and the people, can't get carried away. Trends in Europe and the United States must serve as a strong reminder of how the situation can quickly go out of control even if the first peak is contained. And each subsequent wave abroad has been stronger than the one preceding it. So if that holds true for India, and if a second wave hits, it may be devastatingly strong, especially given the fierceness of the first wave. While the Union government has said it has started preparations to start a vaccination programme to cover close to 300 million people by the middle of next year, this is work in progress and others will remain vulnerable. India has done well but must not let down its guard.

Hindustan Times

People's Movements
Symbolise People's Power

Arab Spring and Shaheen Bagh sit-out emerge as two examples of popular and strong people movements in recent history



Asad Mirza

The past week marked the tenth and first anniversary of two different events, both starting off as a protest against the ruling regime and in turn snowballing into massive movements.

The first, the so-called 'Arab Spring' marked its tenth anniversary and the second, the Shaheen Bagh sit-out its first anniversary. Let's have a look how these two movements started and what did they achieve.

Arab Spring

Ten years back when a young street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid set himself on fire on 17 December 2010, he started a revolution, which spread across his own country and later to most of the Middle Eastern countries.

Due to the protests Tunisia has transformed in many ways, it has held numerous elections. Form of government to strengthen the parliament has been affected, a new constitution that enshrines civil liberties and women's rights while limiting the power of the armed forces has been adopted.

The protestors had hoped for change and a dawn of a new era of prosperity and freedom. But 10 years later, that spectacular moment of joy and liberation has faded away to reveal a sober reality. A small country struggles to find its way despite economic stagnancy, persistent corruption, and stark political and cultural polarisation.

Though Tunisia is widely celebrated as the sole success of the Arab Spring for a transition to democracy and the revolution might have achieved its first aim of winning political freedom for the country, yet the economic prosperity still eludes it.

Western view of the Arab Spring

The Western media viewed the Arab Spring and its results through its out-dated and flawed Orientalist prism.

The mise en scene of the event instigating the Arab Spring constructed in the Western media theorised the outbreak of the Arab uprisings not as a logical reaction to despotism and natural drive for freedom and democracy, but as a product of perceived Arab irrationality and impulsiveness.

Second, Western media and scholarship have reduced the Tunisian revolution to a story of success or failure. And has done much to validate the tired trope that Arabs are not ready for democracy.

After affects of the Arab Spring



The two events, though separated by thousands of miles, had quite a few similarities between them. Both were spontaneous actions, with no pre-planning and with no idea about the result of their actions. Yet, both were able to involve a large number of people and were able to influence the future actions of the governed and the government

The 10 years of the "Arab Spring"—the last of which is the year of COVID-19—have brought many Arab countries to the edge of an abyss. The food shortage, the unending wars in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, the Iranian expansion and global apathy have worsened the distress of the Middle East.

However, the Arab Spring and the political movements spawned by it were a rejection of decades of failed governments and aspiration for a democratic styled governance, in most countries. The uprising in Syria, for example, began as small regional protests calling for political reforms, not the downfall of the dictatorship. It was only after the initial calls were met with overwhelming violence that those calls eventually changed.

But other than geographic proximity and a shared history of living under dictatorship, the Middle Eastern uprisings had very little in common, besides the chant that spread collectively across the region: "The people want the downfall of the regime."

Oz Katerji, a British-Lebanese freelance journalist sums it up by saying that the Arab Spring may be over, but the civilian uprisings in the Middle East have barely begun. The Middle East now finds itself in the state of flux that Karl Marx described as a permanent revolution, the aspirations of its people permanently churning but never fulfilled. There is no way for dictatorships to turn the clock back to 2011, and there is no desire for their populations to accept a status quo that permanently disenfranchises them. The powder is drier than it has ever been; all that is missing now is the next spark.

Shaheen Bagh Sit-out

The Shaheen Bagh sit-out started very quietly on the night of 16 December 2019, when late at night four men and six women, with some children in tow, moved from the lanes of Shaheen Bagh, a Muslim ghetto in South Delhi, onto the main road connecting Delhi to the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh. They silently sat on the road, a few hundred metres away from the spot where earlier in the evening the police had dispersed a crowd of youngsters protesting against the Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC), violently. The location of the sit-out made it mightier as it affected the traffic between the capital city and its neighbouring state to a large extent, the resultant chaos lent it more publicity.

From the night of 16 December onwards, these handful women were joined by hundreds of protesters, mostly women, both young and old. Their main grouse was the exclusion of Muslims from the controversial Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) and the plethora of complexities which will be thrust on the shoulders of Muslims to prove their identity, as and when the NRC-NPR are rolled out in the country, besides raising their voice against the barbaric police action on students of Jamia and AMU, and in several other cities of UP, days before.

The Shaheen Bagh demonstrators who took their cue from the bird Shaheen, and were full of determination to get the government listen to them, and had a clear view of the trials and tribulations to unfurl for the Muslims to comply with, once NRC-NPR are rolled out, like a Shaheen-the bird.

Shaheen is a Persian origin

word in Urdu, referring specifically to the Barbary falcon. In Persian, Shaheen literally means 'majestic' or 'like a king', besides symbolising victory in regard to a decision that has already been made. The vibrant bird also signifies strength, as though small in size yet it preys on larger birds.

In Urdu, renowned poet Allama Iqbal, in his youth-focussed poetry, has used the word Shaheen symbolically to motivate and inspire the young and old alike to provide a leadership which leads the nations to the heights of self-determination, and is best exemplified in his concept of the perfect man (Mard-e Mo'min).

Provisionally, the women protesters at Shaheen Bagh proved to take upon the qualities of the bird on which their locality had also been named. They proved that they were visionary, resolved, determined and tenacious like the free bird. And were ready to take on the might of an unresponsive establishment through their silent protest.

Within months, this sit-out, which was removed by authorities in late March earlier this year - when the countrywide lockdown was implemented, became a symbol of unswerving voices against what has been perceived as a discriminatory law, against the minorities, landless, illiterate and the downtrodden.

These women described their fight as a fight to save the Constitution of the country. They became a symbol of resolve and tenacity, just like a mother who can move mountains for the welfare of her children. Similarly, they felt that they were fighting to secure a dignified and proud future for themselves and their children as enshrined and guaranteed in the Indian constitution.

Parallels between Arab Spring and Shaheen Bagh

The two events, though separated by thousands of miles, had quite a few similarities between them. Both were spontaneous actions, with no pre-planning and with no idea about the result of their actions. Yet, both were able to involve a large number of people and were able to influence the future actions of the governed and the government. Both found unparalleled support and adulations besides attracting the attention of the world and this shows the strength of people and the power of their silent protests charting a whole new path for their countries and fellow citizens.

The views expressed in this article are author's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer

Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi. He was also associated with BBC Urdu Service and Khaleej Times of Dubai. He writes on Muslims, educational, international affairs, interfaith and current affairs.

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Unnecessary C-section

Propos the news report titled, "I Feel Like Crying: C-Section Making Life Painful for Kashmiri Mothers" published by this newspaper on 15 December 2020; the report highlighted a very serious issue that needs our urgent attention. A few days ago, National Family Health Survey - 5 (2019-20) fact sheet was released for Jammu and Kashmir which contains some perturbing data on the increasing rate of C-Section deliveries in the UT. A total of 41.7% of deliveries are done through C-Section in both Private and Public Health facilities. Public health facilities carry out 42.7% deliveries through C-section while for private health facilities it is 82.1%, which is almost double that of public health facilities. This is up from NHFS-4 (2015-16) when 33% of total deliveries were done through C-Section- 35.5% for public health facilities while 75.5% for private facilities.

Private clinics seem to put almost every mother under the surgical knife. This is at least true for the ur-

ban areas of J and K where C-Section delivery rate is 91% in private health facilities. Normal deliveries here are an exception. World Health Organization guidelines insist to limit the rate of "C-Section" deliveries between 10-15% in any region but we have normal deliveries being limited to this rate. According to WHO statistics "when caesarean section rates rise towards 10% across a population, the number of maternal and newborn deaths decreases" but "when the rate goes above 10%, there is no evidence that mortality rates improve." The guidelines further advise that C-Section should only be performed if either the baby's or mother's life is in mortal peril because C-Section surgeries have some serious short and long-term consequences that affect both the child and the mother as the news report cited above mentioned some problems that the mothers in Kashmir face after going through the surgery.

The news report published in this newspaper states that women opt voluntarily for C-Section deliveries out

of fear of labour pain. Even the gynaecologist cited in the report is blaming women for Googling the complications associated with natural birth and then opting for the C-Section surgery to avoid those complications. Even if this is true, it is surprising that the women should not have known about the post-partum short and long-term complications that they and their babies will have to go through after the delivery. It also raises serious doubts about the consent that the hospitals take from such patients before the surgery. As far as informed consent is concerned, the patients should have been informed about these complications. If the mothers had been informed about the whole list of side effects that the C-Section surgery brings with it, they might have preferred the labour pain over the habitual backache, the hair fall and weakening of uterus. These mothers would not have been complaining about all this if informed consent had been obtained from them. Even though there is a vast network of ASHA workers that are respon-

sible to provide medical assistance to pregnant women but given the data of C-Section deliveries they do not seem to assist the expecting mothers in picking up a procedure for their delivery based on informed choice. ASHA workers along with doctors should be made responsible to tackle this concern. ASHA workers should especially be mandated to overlook C-Section surgeries in private hospitals where the doctors seem to encourage C-Section deliveries for financial gains as the Doctors Association Kashmir had alleged in April 2017 when it had come all out against the rising number of C-Section deliveries in Kashmir. It is not about trivializing the labour pain or prohibiting the people from choosing their preferred procedure for the delivery, but the concern is that they should be allowed to choose the option only after informing them about the benefits and drawbacks of various procedures that are available.

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Chillai Kalan, Chillai Khurd, and Challai Bache

Umair Shafiq

Every year, when winter sets in, weatherman Sonam Lotus acquires the status of a minor celebrity. Residents of the Valley anxiously wait for updates from the head of the state’s meteorological department before stepping out of their homes

Chillai Kalan is the most severe part of the winter in Kashmir consisting of three months. It is divided into three parts called the Chilas: The Chillai Kalan, the Chillai Khurd, and the Challai Bache. Chillai-Kalan is the 40-day period of harsh winter. Chillai-Kalan begins from December 21 and ends on January 31, next year. Chillai-Kalan is followed by a 20-day long Chillai-Khurd (small cold) that occurs between January 31 and February 19 and a 10-day long Chillai-Bachha (baby cold) which is from February 20 to March 2. Chillai Kalan is a Persian word that in literal sense means "major cold". December 21 marks the beginning of Chillai Kalan every year and thus, begins the period of harsh cold and continues till January 31. In this 40-day period, nights are chilly and day temperatures thrive in single digits. Historically, during this period, Kashmiris stay indoors surviving on dried preserved food and enjoying folklore and traditional music. During Chillai-Kalan, the weather in Kashmir valley continues to remain dry and cold with minimum temperatures hovering below the

freezing point. The snow during this 40-day period freezes and lasts longer. It is this snow that adds to the glaciers of the Valley and replenishes the perennial reservoirs that feed the rivers, streams and lakes in Kashmir during the months of summer. Any snowfall after the chillai kalan does not last long. In the past, many families would prepare 'Shabdeg' on the first day of 'Chillai Kalan'. A fat duck would be cooked with turnips and spices in an earthen vessel during the night intervening December 20-21. Since many years, there has been more snowfall and cold during chillai khurd and chillai bachcha than during chillai kalan.The discomfort of cold is exacerbated by the erratic supply of power. Every year, residents cover their windows with plastic to prevent the cold air from seeping in during the peak winter. While kangerees become indispensable for most residents of Kashmir, the well-to-do huddle together in hamams – rooms with limestone floors that are warmed by burning firewood in a hearth. Others spend long hours in mosques even after prayers, as the hamams there provide

a warm backdrop against which Valley residents socialise. Every year, when winter sets in, weatherman Sonam Lotus acquires the status of a minor celebrity. Residents of the Valley anxiously wait for updates from the head of the state’s meteorological department before stepping out of their homes. Traditionally, Kashmiris used to dry vegetables like tomatoes, turnips, brinjals and gourd during summers to be used during winters when the Valley would remain cut off from the rest of the country. The tradition continues in remote and far flung areas of the Valley.However, with the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway becoming almost an all-weather road, fresh vegetables are available in the market throughout the year and the tradition of drying vegetables is no more seen in cities and towns of the Valley. Dried fish, popularly known as Hokh Gard in Kashmiri, is, however, still used as a delicacy during the winter.

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Siraiki: A Forgotten Mother-Tongue of Faridabad

Soumya duggal

If Delhi, Faridabad, Noida, Lucknow and other major cities in the Hindi heartland of India were siblings living in a great country house in Victorian England, surely Delhi would be the eldest male child- the sole inheritor of the title, estate and all the attention of the county. Faridabad would live a quieter life, no matter how rich in experience and quality. Indeed in the annals of history, Farid’s town has not attracted as many scholars-suitors as Delhi has, nor has its geographical landscape been bedecked by as many fine buildings or its literary cartography been bejewelled by as many lyrical elegies. Yet we must take a moment to hear its stories as they echo from the depths of its dried up lakes and parched tongues. Simply said, Siraiki is the tongue, and not the language, of many of the people who reside in Faridabad. Even though its speakers across neighbouring Pakistan are some twenty million in number, Siraiki never attained the status of a language in its own right in India and has always been considered a corruption, a mere dialect of Punjabi. Before the Partition in 1947, it was known to its speakers by many names- Multani, Reasati, Derewali etc- in the Multan and Bahawalpur regions of Pakistan where they lived. Many of them settled in Haryana and Delhi post arriving in the newly formed Indian nation and brought along their mother-tongue. But hoping to thrive in the post-colonial era, they taught their children Hindi (the language of nationalism) and English (the language of power), and internalised the disdain they received for their “unrefined” regional vernacular in the new nation-state. Having severed ties with their native land on the other side of the border, they were unaware that this ‘dialect’ was gaining greater legitimacy for language-hood in Pakistan and would soon be rechristened Siraiki. Today, even as they suppress the memories of their erstwhile homeland, marred as they are by bitter scenes of Partition violence and contemporary hate campaign against Pakistan in the Indian political discourse, the many residents of Faridabad, Ballabhgarh, Palwal, and so on, carry an inextricable bond with their language everywhere

Today, even as they suppress the memories of their erstwhile homeland, marred as they are by bitter scenes of Partition violence and contemporary hate campaign against Pakistan in the Indian political discourse, the many residents of Faridabad, Ballabhgarh, Palwal, and so on, carry an inextricable bond with their language everywhere. They carry it in their names (the Bhatias, the Narangs, the Chawlas...), in their wedding songs (the off-sung folk songs of Mussarrat Nazir), in their love for Sufis and their poetry- especially that of the founder of their second home, Sheikh Farid. If we could bring them the treasures of scholarship which have accumulated in the Siraiki departments of university campuses in Pakistan as well as the U.K., they too would realise the transnational power of their largely ignored and increasingly forgotten intangible heritage- Siraiki.

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This is how life comes a full circle

The most difficult and scary time in parenting is when children fall ill

Annie Mathew

I was trying to thread a needle to sew a button onto a shirt and try as I might I just couldn’t get the thread into the eye of the needle. I squinted, tried another pair of glasses but to no avail. I finally had to call one of my kids to the aid and as I watched him do it in a jiffy, I was reminded of my mom peering over her glasses, watching me doing the same for her. A very young me, with all faculties intact, was perplexed why my mom couldn’t do such a simple thing. It’s jolted out of my thoughts when my son asked, ‘It’s so easy, you seriously couldn’t do it?’ Life has come a full circle! As I advance into the third quarter of my life there are many such déjà vu moments but with role reversals! I remember one of my sons struggling to write the letter ‘g’ when he was little. I’d guide him, trying my best not to lose patience, ‘First, you write ‘c’ then you go up, then down and then to your left and bingo! You are done!’ He would keep saying that for days while writing that letter with a loud ‘BINGO’ at the end and we would laugh hysterically.

Sending us into peals of laughter The other one would reinvent the rules of chess as he was learning to play. He would move the chessmen as was convenient for him and send us into peals of laughter. There would be words, which they would mispronounce consistently, and it would be difficult for us to keep a straight face. Now they sit with me, patiently (well, most of the time!) as and when I have issues with various gadgets, explaining myriad things to me. It’s particularly difficult when I get a new device. After all the explanations and demos, just when I feel I’ve mastered it, I get confused all over again and see my sons stifling giggles! Small children have a penchant for asking all kinds of questions all the time and even the best of parents get exasperated but as parents get older, the children seem to be at the receiving end. ‘What does TTYL mean?’ ‘How can I



attach a photo/video in messenger?’ ‘Why isn’t the cursor moving?’ ‘How can I get this autocorrect off?’ asks a red-faced parent after sending a hilarious, embarrassing message and make the children ROFL! Same with sending the wrong message to the wrong group through Whatsapp and running to the children, ‘How do I delete?’ A senior colleague once told me ‘Isn’t it amazing how life always comes a full circle in the blink of an eye? Wasn’t it just yesterday that I was dropping off my daughter to her school and today she has dropped me off to my school’ I could feel the pride in her voice laced with a wistfulness, that words cannot describe.

Howling kid in the back seat Somewhere between ‘Mama, Can you take me to the park?’ and ‘Son/daughter, can you take me to the doc’s?’ life comes a full circle. It’s just a matter of time that the par-

ent at the wheel with a howling kid in the back seats of vehicle change places; only the howling gets replaced by back seat driving instructions. ‘Not now, child. I have work to do,’ changes to by ‘Not now, papa/mama, I am busy’. I feel the most difficult and scary time in parenting is when children fall ill. Sleep vanishes as we stay guard beside the child and time drags. We check the temperature a number of times and we sway between relief and panic. I was down with flu a few days ago and took to bed. In the middle of the night, I opened my eyes, weary from high temperature, to the touch of a palm on my forehead. It was my son checking on me and déjà vu stuck again! We never realise how fast the time speeds us by and before we know we have become like our parents and our children like us. Yes, it is a bit annoying and kind of funny but that’s life! As a kid, whenever we visited grandma in our ‘hometown’, I used to pick up things that I thought my grandma would like. I beam with happiness when my kids do the same but now ‘hometown’ is ‘home country’ and there are more miles to be traversed but the sentiments remain the same! As I am penning this late into night, I feel a tap on my shoulder and see my son standing behind me with a cup of black coffee. ‘You might need it to keep awake and complete your work’. I am reminded of the countless times I have done that for him when he was burning the midnight oil. Life has indeed come a full circle!

Gulf News

Mehbooba Fumes After Her Uncle, Party Leader ‘Detained’

SRINAGAR: Ahead of the results to the 280 District Development Council (DDC) seats in Jammu and Kashmir, the authorities on Monday “detained” two senior Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) leaders, including maternal uncle of party President Mehbooba Mufti.

Taking to her Twitter handle, Mehbooba lambasted the government and said that there was no rule of law in the Union Territory anymore.

“Total lawlessness as PDPs Sartaj Madni & Mansoor Hussain have been arbitrarily detained today on the eve of DDC election results. Every senior police officer here is clueless as it is ‘upar say order’. No rule of law in J&K anymore. It is out & out Gunda Raj,” Mehbooba said in a tweet.

Madni is maternal uncle of the former J&K Chief Minister and PDP President. He was released by the J&K administration this year along with Mansoor and former IAS

officer-turned-politician Shah Faesal.

Meanwhile, PDP in a statement has condemned the alleged arrest of its two senior leaders and said that the detention of duo was an “extreme case of political vengeance and vendetta”.

Party’s Srinagar District President and former MLC Mohammad Khurshid Alam said the arrest of Mohammad Sartaj Madani and Peerzada Mansoor have once again proven beyond doubt that peoples’ rights are

being “trampled here with impunity while those who dare to dissent are hounded and horrified by the government agencies in an absolute sadistic and undemocratic manner.”.

CPI (M) Secretary Ghulam Nabi Malik also termed the alleged detention of Madni and Mansoor as ‘unwarranted and uncalled for’ and demanded their immediate release. “Rule of law is being flouted with impunity in Jammu and Kashmir,” Malik said.

Jammu NC Leaders Accuse BJP Of Political Vendetta

Jammu: National Conference (NC) leaders here on Monday assailed the attachment of properties of party president Farooq Abdullah and said the action was political vendetta aimed at weakening the political party of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Enforcement Directorate on Saturday attached residential and commercial properties worth nearly Rs 12 crore of the former chief minister of the erstwhile state in an

ongoing case of alleged money laundering.

The timing of the unfortunate action at the conclusion of the District Development Council (DDC) election makes it all the more murkier and raises questions on the intent of the BJP, which has now mastered in using the agencies for furthering its political agendas, over 60 senior party leaders led by provincial president Devender Singh Rana said in a joint

statement here.

The statement, issued from the party headquarters by former ministers and legislators among others, said the action speaks volumes about the “desperation” in the BJP rank and file as the NC was further consolidating its roots in the union territory.

Such coercive tactics will not deter the party which is a mass movement, the statement said.

FROM FRONT PAGE

Dreaded Deathsmen ...

Some historians, infact, draw parallels between this secret terror-militia raised by Hari Singhwith Hitler’s Dirty Dozens.

“They were mindless bunch of musclemen who would do anything to protect the crown regime,” Yasir Amin, a history scholar researching on ‘Quit Kashmir’ era, comments on Boud’i Watul. “It won’t be wrong to say that they were Kashmir’s band of banditslet loose to terror commoners.”

Boud’i Watulcame from gravedigger community of the Central jail, whowould show up as hangmanin KhashKhshBagh, whenever a condemned prisoner was to be executed.

Locals had a loathsome name for him—Mar’iWatul—the slaughterer.Over the period of time, the name has stayed in Kashmir, making many believe that the hangman’s legacy is still intact.

As a full-time gravedigger anda part-time hangman, Boud’iWatul was the Dogra regime’s hatchet man. Some loose historic documents reveal that he would be paid according to the size of the convict.

“His ilk would stay low-key for a reason,” Yasir, the history scholar, continues. “Despite being dreadful, these dirty men of the regime had families. So they completed their job with complete secrecy without anyone knowing, except the jail authorities who knew about their uncovered reality, due to fear of divulging their real identity in front of the locals.”

After monarchy perished in the bloodcurdling fall of 1947, many hangmen would be rendered jobless in Sheikh’s “Naya Kashmir”. But after his dramatic arrest in 1953, and gradual erosion of the region’s autonomy, some of the regime’s dirty men would find another assignment, this time, in the middle of covert Operation Gibraltar.

THAT SUMMER EXECUTION

Legend has it when Pakistani soldiers in plainclothes reached as far as to Secretariat in a bid to “liberate Kashmir”, Srinagar was getting ready for an uncanny execution.

In that tumultuous year of 1965, someone like Zareef Ahmad Zareef would be overwhelmed by the “word of mouth” bravado of Pakistani air-soldiers about whom it’s being said they even plucked Lotus from Nigeen.

But more than an eager war spectator, Zareef would dread witnessing the same notorious Boud’iWatul on the slaying job.

“That year Boud’iWatul was unleashed on a BSF inmate awarded a capital punishment in a fratricidal case,” Zareef recalls Kashmir’s flaring summer. “During his posting in Ladakh, that condemned paramilitary man had pulled trigger on his colleague and killed him.”

Soon the Boud’iWatul would seal his fate with his “Waqt ha Wou’ti” pitch.

“That high-pitch of Boud’iWatul was a unique way of invoking fear in the hearts and minds of the condemned prisoners,” Zareef, a living witness of Kashmir’s executive past, recounts.

In the times of some notorious band of bullies—like Bakshi’s Gogga—unleashed on the society, Boud’iWatul and his tribe were equally living up to their harrowing reputation.

“The condemned prisoner would dread and die once, but those alive would reel under the fear of hangman again and again,” the poet says. “They were demonic figures raised as the fear symbols.”

INSIDE KASHMIR’S BLANK ARCHIVES

Some dusted articles and moth-eatenbooks in Kashmir’s archives faintly detail some of the horrors unleashed by those hangmen on the strife-battered society when it was trying to set itself free from Dogra regime and getting into the groove of the new order inflicted by the bloody partition.

Exhaustive trips to Srinagar’s shrinking libraries didn’t yield any details about these hangmen. Even the custodians of these so-called treasure troves were oblivious about these characters.

“You’re knocking at a wrong door, son,” says one chief librarian. “We don’t have any such record here.”

Such curt refusals came from many others, suggesting that state archives have no room for Kashmir’s executed past.Why? Well, that’s some other story.

But whatever details one could find made it certain that the jail manual required no pre-or-post psychological counseling for the executioner except an indispensable knowledge of making noose and knots in the hanging rope.

Akin to Kashmir’s blank archives, prisons are equally devoid of details.

Even as it’s believed that Bou’diWatul alone hanged around 30 people over 25 years, no official data in this regard exists in his parent body—the Central Jail of Srinagar—where the current curators made it curt and quick: “We don’t have any such

data.” The last officially-recorded hanging in Kashmir took place in the year 1935 but the testimonies from civilians indicate that hanging was a pertinent part of Kashmir even during the 1960s.

“I have a very bleak memory about the BSF man’s case but certainly he was hanged in Kashmir after 1960,” Ali Mohammed Watali, former DIG J&K, who survived the first militant strike during late eighties, says.

INSIDE HANGING CAPITAL

When the day of BSF man’s hanging approached, Zareef makes mention of that momentous day in 1965, “one could see afar Boud’iWatul’s invoking in that BSF personnel. He looked benumbed with his rope-tied hands.”

One needs to understand the timing of that execution, a retired police officer, now spending his days playing golf with politicians and retired bureaucrats in Srinagar, says. “Kashmir was rallying for plebiscite movement and such occurrences would only cripple the gullible lots of the valley.”

In pre-1947 Kashmir, such public hangings would make Srinagar a hanging capital for many chroniclers.

Convicts on death sentence would be shipped from different parts of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir to Srinagar for execution. This norm of Dogra era would stay as a tag with the Sun City where treacherous turn of events mostly made life uneasy for the natives.

DAY OF HANGING

Along with his playmates,Gul and Ismael, Abdul Aziz rushed towards the KhashKhshBagh to witness the first hanging in his life during “Quit Kashmir” era.

That day heavy traffic was piled towards the hanging ground as people desperately wanted to see the last glimpse of the murderer before execution. After exhausting themselves running, the trio boarded a Tonga that was traveling towards the gallows.

The tonga driver drove through the narrow street leading towards the KhashKhshBagh where men from the nearby areas were “packed like sardines”, pouncing on each other for a sight of ground’s centrum. Opposite to them was a local bread-maker selling his freshly made bread and adjacent to him was a group of wailing women execrating the murderer.

That “condemned prisoner” was a Gujar man from Doda living as tenant in Srinagar. He was accused of murdering his wife and the Civil Court of Srinagar headed by the then Judge Radha Krishan Koul and his jury members Mufti Azam Molvi Kaam Deen and Sanaullah Shawl had decreed him a death penalty.

The Gujar-man after being lodged in dark dungeons of Central Jail was brought out of the condemned cells guarded by five local police warders – who got him ready for the gallows. He was wearing a white kurta-pajama, his hands were tied to a rope and his head hung in shame.

From the dungeons to the gallows, a warden had his hand consistently on the accused’s shoulder in a caressing manner.

On the gallows, Boud’iWatul was entangling the noose and tightening another end of the rope to the top of the Phan’siKou’t. This was his third noose in twenty-four hours. He had already tested his skills on two nooses a day before the hanging to ensure that the coir would hold the convict’s weight.

The accused was brought to the gallows with his hands tightly cinched and his head covered with a black cloth. The man was made to climb on to the wooden bench placed parallel to the noose before Boud’i Watul had put the “hangman’s knot” around the doomed neck.

Concealing his identity with a tightly wrapped cloth on his face, hangman Boud’i came closer to the convict’s bench and solemnly asked the cleric standing near the gallows to recite Kalima.

The venerated Muslim cleric promptly turned his face towards the gigantic mass of people and loudly recited the Kalima. The Islamic phrase came to an end and so did the breath of the convict.

Boud’i had vigorously kicked the wooden bench from the convict’s underneath. The doctor, who was mandatorily supposed to be present whenever a hanging was scheduled, checked the pulse of the convict. After sharing his conclusion with the jail superintendent, the condemned Doda convict was declared dead.

“After the hanging, these hangmen would flee in such a manner that no one ever perceived their real identity and maybe no one will ever know the reality behind the disguise of a Mar’iWatul,” recalls Ghulam Nabi Khayal, Kashmir’s veteranwriter of Progressive Writers Movement’s era.

While the crowd was contemplated with the hanging dead-body, Boud’iWatul had absconded, evading everyone’s gaze.

This secrecy is the reason why history books, among other things, don’t have a chapter calledMar’iWatul of Kashmir.

Zeenish Imroz contributed reporting.

Results Will ...

He also informed that the overall voting percentage in all eight phases across the Union Territory is 51.42 percent and tomorrow over thirty lakh votes would be counted at counting centres.

While giving a demonstration, Secretary SEC, Anil Salgotra briefed the media persons about the functioning of the website. He said that people along with the media would be able to have access to the counting trends, final results and party-wise trends for all 280 DDC constituencies. He added that the website can also be accessed for trends with respect to particular constituency in a given district and particular party, besides the information for top two leading candidates and the overall votes polled for all the candidates can also be accessed.

During the Industry Connect Meet, Four Panel Discussions on technical subjects were held covering various facets of Himayat programme including- Challenges and Opportunities in Himayat, Experience sharing by PIAs; Employment Sectors Post COVID 19 for DDUKY Candidates, Employers Perspective, Innovations and Best Practices in Skilling Ecosystem, Experts Speak and Skilling the Youth of J&K - Roadmap from Prospective PIAs.

Himayat Great ...

The LG, he said, observed that the Youth requires both conventional as well as evolving skills. The industry, demand and skill set requirements are changing at a faster pace. Since skill training can only be commensurate with levels of education, it is important to focus on the sectors, which are known to be employing a large workforce.

“For people under Himayat Programme, which covers youth between the age group of 15-35 years, in both Rural and Urban areas, technical as well as soft skill training which is basically a set of skills as defined by the World Economic Forum is a must,” Sinha said.

As per the official spokesperson, the LG said that in the coming days, we will have huge requirements of skilled workforce in Electricity, Gas, Water, Construction, Electronics, Wholesale and Retail Trade, E-commerce, Hotels, Transport, Information and Communication Technology, Finance and Insurance, Real Estate, IT enabled Services, Health and Social Services, Manufacturing, Horticulture, Education, Automobile and Packaged Food Industry.

He said that the LG observed that according to a global research firm, job opportunities for skilled, but inexperienced, workforce have increased from 43% to 67% between 2015 and 2019.

“Last year, under Himayat programme of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, youth were given skill training in 77 trades. Ubaid Hussain, of Baramulla, is one youngster who was trained under Himayat and is working as a robot operator at present,” Sinha said.

He also gave example of Meenakshi Devi, from a remote area of district Doda, who had to drop out of school due to some domestic circumstances.

“Though she may have given up formal studies, she had not yet given up on her dreams. Himayat provided her with an opportunity to step out and get professionally trained in the hospitality sector. Today she is earning a living in Hyderabad,” he said.

The LG advised the skill training agencies to start providing training in cloud computing, artificial intelligence, machine learning, block chain and cyber security at the earliest after the COVID crisis subsides.

“We have to meticulously craft the skilling programme as per requirement with certain strategic interventions to ensure more and more people completing the training are immediately provided with jobs,” he said.

“It is estimated that 88,354 young boys and girls are to be trained within the next three years. More than 16 thousand candidates have been trained and more than seven thousand are already working in the private sector, all because of the Himayat programme. Big companies like Tech Mahindra, Amazon Pay, Greenply, Yazaki India, Apollo and others have recruited these candidates”, he added.

As per official spokesperson, it was informed that the Himayat Mission is also conducting counseling sessions and mobilization and promotion activities in association with the project implementing agencies in various villages.

He said that the LG also suggested for carrying out skill mismatch challenges in the villages and urban areas, to identify such youth who may be a perfect candidate for different dimensions of skill set and is keen to participate in innovative learning initiatives. This exercise may reshape the upcoming skilling and job market, he added.

“The LG observed that suggestions have already been made to the Agricultural Universities and Krishi Vigyan Kendras to adopt Panchayats for facilitating and setting up food processing units in private

sector. That is another opportunity to provide redefined skill training in this sector,” he said. The official spokesperson further said that Sinha stressed on the urgent need of reallocation of activities and production factors in skill education programmes in face of the challenges posed by the COVID pandemic.

“Since, pandemic is reconfiguring the society, job market and work culture, the industries and business leaders are looking for creative and innovative talents. With additional skill sets, Himayat programme can make the transition little smoother and easier for our youth,” LG said.

He said that Himayat can provide adequate and appropriate support for all future candidates, especially those who have been affected by global pandemic and belong to vulnerable section of the society.

“1500 candidates have been given job offers in two virtual job fairs. Today, more than 60 organizations are participating who have to see the training aspects of 54,000 prospective candidates, said the LG, as per the official spokesperson.

Relevant training is required for re-skilling and up-skilling of the existing skills-set of the youth, besides digital literacy will certainly enhance the job opportunities for the younger generation, he observed.

During the Industry Connect Meet, Four Panel Discussions on technical subjects were held covering various facets of Himayat programme including- Challenges and Opportunities in Himayat, Experience sharing by PIAs; Employment Sectors Post COVID 19 for DDUKY Candidates, Employers Perspective, Innovations and Best Practices in Skilling Ecosystem, Experts Speak and Skilling the Youth of J&K - Roadmap from Prospective PIAs.

For Training, skill development and Industry Tie-ups, Himayat Mission Management Unit JKRLM signed MoUs with Instrumentation Automation Surveillance & Communication Sector Skill Council of India and Electronics Sector Skills Council of India.

Sh. Baseer Ahmad Khan, Advisor to the Lt Governor; Sh. BVR Subrahmanyam, Chief Secretary; Ms. Leena Johri, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, GOI; Sh. Nitishwar Kumar, Principal Secretary to the Lt Governor; Ms. Sheetal Nanda, Secretary to the Government, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj; Sh. Kapil Sharma, COO Himayat; Representatives of Corporate Planning, Research, Skilling, Consulting, Sales and Marketing, Brand Management and Biotech Healthcare were present on the occasion.

Woman Found ...

will be clear”, the official added.

Meanwhile, the family members of deceased woman staged a protest and sought action against the “culprits” outside Police Station Bandipora, news agency KNO reported.

Power Cuts Trigger ...

The locals said that Sumbal, Nesbal, Markundal, Vijpora, Shahgund, and many other villages rarely see the power in their villages. Power has remained one of the worst things in Sonawari villages, with authorities turning a blind eye, the report said while quoting locals.

The protesters sought the intervention of higher-ups, the report added.

DDC Election ...

Party, contested the polls in an alliance under the banner of the Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) formed for restoration of Article 370.

The Congress was initially a part of the PAGD but distanced itself from the alliance as the BJP targeted the opposition party for being in league with the ‘Gupkar Gang’.

Although the Congress went alone in the last seven phases, it is widely believed that its understanding with the PAGD remains intact.

The PAGD is expected to emerge as the single largest grouping at the hustings on Tuesday, followed by the BJP in a close second position while the Congress is expected to fill the third position.

Meanwhile, all necessary arrangements have been made for counting of votes, which will begin at 9 am in all 20 districts of the union territory.

State Election Commissioner K K Sharma on Monday chaired a meeting to review the final arrangements with regard to the counting process to be held on Tuesday.

The meeting was attended by all Deputy Commissioners of Jammu and Kashmir through video conferencing while as Secretary State Election Commission and other senior election officers attended the meeting in person, an official spokesperson said.

The concerned DCs, he said, informed the SEC about all the arrangements of

counting of votes for DDCs regarding halls dedicated for counting at counting centres in their respective districts. Each counting hall will have dedicated tables with each table with counting assistants monitored by one counting supervisor.

According to the official spokesperson, the SEC said that the process in each centre will be supervised by a Returning Officer and Assistant Returning Officer and added that the counting exercise will be recorded by CCTV cameras, and will be overseen by observers also.

Explaining the counting of ballot papers, he said, the SEC stated that the counting will begin with opening of ballot boxes and subsequently the ballot papers will be made into bundles of 25 each, and compared with the actual number of votes polled in each polling station.

“The bundles of each polling station will then be mixed together as per the counting guidelines,”Sharma, as per official spokesperson said.

“The SEC also directed the concerned DCs that COVID-19 protocol must be observed through mandatory masks, and hand sanitisers at each table, besides all the counting staff and other officials should compulsorily wear masks before entering the halls,” he added.

4G Likely ...

Janata Party (BJP) leader, wishing anonymity has confirmed that the 4G internet services would be restored by the end of December month.

“The deliberations regarding the restoration of services were going on since long and it has been decided to restore the services by the end of this month,” sources said, adding that the announcement would probably be made after December 25.

However, there was no official confirmation from the J&K administration.

Pertinently, except two districts—Ganderbal and Udhampur, the administration in Jammu and Kashmir has extended the ban on high speed mobile data services across J&K till December 25.

The high speed mobile data services were suspended in J&K on August 05, 201 when the government scrapped the special status of erstwhile J&K state and bifurcated it into two Union Territories. The ban on 4G mobile internet services has crossed the 500-day mark on December 16, 2020.

Notably, on August 16 this year, the Jammu and Kashmir administration has decided to restore 4G internet services in Ganderbal and Udhampur district of the union territory on trial basis.

3 More Die ...

With these deaths, the total fatality count in J&K reached 1844—1168 in the Valley and 676 in the Jammu region.

Srinagar district with 443 deaths tops the list followed by Jammu (344), Baramulla (170), Budgam (106), Pulwama (88), Kupwara (88), Anantnag (82), Doda (60), Bandipora (58), Udhampur (52), Kulgam (53), Rajouri (54), Kathua (48), Ganderbal (43), Shopian (37), Samba (36), Poonch (22), Ramban (21), Kishtwar (21), and Reasi (13).

Meanwhile, 35 travelers, five soldiers and a cop were among 232 more people, who tested positive for coronavirus in J&K during the last 24 hours, taking the overall count to 118495.

In Jammu, 129 more people tested Covid-19 positive while the remaining 103 were confirmed virus infected by the officials here.

Giving district wise break-up, officials said, Srinagar reported 36, Baramulla 9, Budgam 10, Kupwara 15, Pulwama 18, Anantnag 4, Ganderbal 5, Kulgam 2, Shopian 4, Jammu 97, Udhampur 8,Rajouri 2, Doda 2, Kathua 9, Samba 2, Poonch 3 and Reasi 6 new cases.

Moreover, they said, 458 more patients have recovered and were discharged from various hospitals— 192 from Jammu Division and 266 from Kashmir Valley. (With GNS inputs)

Chillai-Kalan ...

Celsius, up from the previous night’s minus 6.2 degrees Celsius, they said.

The mercury in Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir improved by over three degrees from the previous night’s low of minus 7.7 degrees Celsius to settle at a low of minus 4.6 degrees Celsius, the officials said.

They said Gulmarg recorded a low of minus 6.4 degrees Celsius, up from Sunday’s minus 7.5 degrees Celsius.

Qazigund, the gateway town to the valley, recorded the minimum of minus 4.6 degrees Celsius, while Kupwara, in the north, registered a low of minus 2.5 degrees Celsius and Kokernag, in the south, minus 3.9 degrees Celsius, the officials said.

The Meteorological Office has said while no major snowfall is expected till the end of this month in the union territory, there is a

possibility of light snowfall at a few places in Kashmir on Monday. (PTI)

HC Disposes ...

present petition are considered viz-a-viz the prayers made in the writ petition filed by the parents of the deceased, it would be evident that most of the prayers are common. Hence, a separate petition filed by the petitioner claiming the same to be in public interest cannot be entertained,” the court said.

Merely adding certain judgments of the Supreme Court laying guidelines with reference to the investigation of the persons killed in encounter will not make any difference as the matter raised by the parents of the deceased is already pending consideration in of the Court, the bench said.

“The provisions of law applicable or any judgment with reference to the subject matter can always be cited even if the same is not quoted in the pleadings,” the court said, adding, “The claim made is with reference to a specific incident for which the petitioner has not been authorized by the aggrieved party to raise a dispute.”

The PIL was filed by Jammu & Kashmir Reconciliation Front through its chairman Dr Sandeep Mawa.

Further, the court said, once the parents of the deceased can approach the Court by filing a petition prior in time, they can always raise whatever grievance they have.

“In such a situation, public interest petition filed by a third party cannot and should not be entertained as he has no locus or cause of action to raise that dispute,” the court said, adding, “It cannot be said to be in larger public interest as the guidelines for investigation in such type of cases have already been laid down by the Supreme Court in the cases referred to by the petitioner himself.” (GNS)

Court Orders ...

The NIA had said that the accused persons were found involved in “the conspiracy and acts to severely destabilize the sovereignty and integrity of India.”

By their activities on cyber space they were running a concerted campaign to solicit support of Pakistani establishment which inter-alia included arranging support from militantentities from Pakistan, it said.

The NIA, on directions of the Union Home Ministry, registered a case against them as well as the organisation.

According to the FIR, Andrabi, Fehmeeda and Nasreen were actively running the organization -- named ‘Dukhtaran-E-Millat’ (DEM), which is proscribed under the First Schedule to the UAPA.

“They were using various media platforms to spread insurrectionary imputations and hateful speeches that endanger the integrity, security and sovereignty of India,” the NIA said.

DEM through Aasiya Andrabi openly advocated secession of Jammu and Kashmir from India and called for Jihad and use of violence against the country, it said.

Examine Setting ...

The petitioner—chairman Jammu & Kashmir Reconciliation Front through its chairman Dr Sandeep Mawa— had said that Section 21 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 provides for constitution of Human Rights Commissions in every State and the Union Territory.

In the absence of a forum, Mawa had said that the aggrieved parties are not able to get redressal of their grievances.

“Prior to the enactment of the Reorganization Act, the Jammu & Kashmir Protection of Human Rights Act, 1997 was applicable in J&K. In exercise of powers conferred thereunder, the J&K State Human Rights Commission had also been constituted, which was wound up after the enactment of the Reorganization Act. The residents of J&K, if having any grievance regarding violation of their human rights, may have to approach the National Human Rights Commission,” the court said.

As far as the Constitution of Human Rights Courts in the Union Territory of J&K is concerned, needless to add that vide notification dated 07.02.2019 issued by the Department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of J&K, the Court of the learned Principal Sessions Judge of each district has been designated as Human Rights Courts. Hence, the grievance of the petitioner to that extent does not survive.

As regards the Constitution of Human Rights Courts in the J&K is concerned, the court said: “needless to add that vide notification dated 07.02.2019 issued by the Department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of J&K, the Court of the learned Principal Sessions Judge of each district has been designated as Human Rights Courts.” (GNS)

Solar Power Tariff Dips To All-Time Low Of Rs 1.99 Per Unit



NEW DELHI: Solar power tariff has dropped to an all-time low of Rs 1.99 per unit in an auction of projects of 500 MW capacity by Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd (GUVNL) last week. "Now the solar power tariff has dropped to a new low of Rs 1.99 per unit in an auction for 500MW projects by GUVNL last week," a source told PTI. State-run power giant NTPC (200MW), Torrent Power (100MW), Saudi Arabian firm Al Jomaih Energy and Water Co. and Sembcorp Energy India arm Green Infra Wind Energy Ltd had emerged as the lowest bidders by quoting a tariff of Rs 2 per unit for 200MW and 400MW capacities respectively. Under the SECI auction, the NTPC quoted a price of Rs 2.01 per unit for 600 MW capacity. However, the NTPC got the balance amount of 470 MW even as it had bid for 600 MW because it was the L2 (second lowest) in the auction. In July this year, solar power tariffs had dropped to a low of Rs 2.36 per unit in an auction of 2GW capacities by SECI. PTI

Finance Ministry Slaps Rs 96 Lakh Penalty Against PayPal

American online payment gateway giant PayPal was imposed a Rs 96 lakh penalty by the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) for alleged contravention of the anti-money laundering law and the platform has been accused of "concealing" financial transactions and abetting "disintegration" of India's financial system.



following anti-money laundering procedures in keeping their financial channels clean. As per the order accessed by PTI, the legal tussle between the FIU and PayPal began in March, 2018 when the latter asked the company to register as a reporting entity for keeping "record" of all transactions, reporting suspicious transactions and cross-border wire transfers to the FIU and for identifying beneficiaries of these funds. The FIU analyses and shares these reports with various intelligence and investigative agencies for further action.

PayPal, which began its India operations in November 2017, said it was fully committed to following due processes and is "carefully reviewing the matter". The company has also been charged with "defeating and frustrating" the tenets of public interest and the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), which aims to keep the country's financial system safe from economic crimes, terrorist financing and black money transactions. Calling the contraventions as "deliberate and willful", the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) in a scathing 27-page order issued on December 17 held the company guilty on three broad counts, the fundamental being its failure to register itself as a "reporting entity" with the federal agency as mandated under the PMLA. "...I, in exercise of powers conferred upon me under section 13(2)(d) of the PMLA, 2002 impose a total fine of Rs 96 lakh only on PayPal Payments Private Limited which will be commensurate with the violations committed by it," the order issued by FIU Director Pan-kaj Kumar Mishra said. It said that "there is ample evidence of the willful violation of the law and, therefore, PayPal cannot be let off with a penalty that should normally be imposed for minor violations".

The order directs the company to pay the fine within 45 days and also register itself as a reporting entity with the FIU, appoint a principal officer and director for communication within a fortnight of the receipt of the order. An appeal against the order can also be made before the Appellate Tribunal of the PMLA within 1.5 months.

A PayPal spokesperson told PTI that it "is fully committed to regulatory compliance." "We take our obligations seriously across 200 markets where our payments platform is present. We are carefully reviewing the matter and we cannot comment further at this point," he said.

This is for the first time that the FIU, an agency under the Union finance ministry, has undertaken punitive action against an online payment system operating in the country like it has done against public, private and cooperative banks in the past for not

As per the order issued under section 13 of the PMLA, PayPal refused the FIU's directive and hence a show-cause notice was issued to it in September last year. PayPal defended its action and cited Reserve Bank of India guidelines to state that it only operates as an Online Payment Gateway Service Provider (OP-GSP) or a payment intermediary in India and is "not covered within the definition of a payment system operator or financial institution and in turn, not covered under the definition of a reporting entity under the PMLA".

"Therefore, at this time, payment intermediaries, such as PayPal, are not required to register as such with the FIU-India," it said in its reply to the agency. "PayPal also stated that it has 'submitted' to the RBI its decision to cease domestic payment aggregator business in India before June next year.

The FIU, however, rejected its claims and said PayPal was very much involved in the handling of funds in India, is a "financial institution" and hence qualifies to be a reporting entity under the PMLA. "The business model offered by PayPal clearly indicated that it not only acts as an intermediary but actively undertakes money transfer operations..."

"PayPal undertakes to settle an online transaction by moving money from the customer's account (issuing bank) to the merchant account, which ultimately transmits funds to the merchant's bank account (acquiring bank) when the transaction is finalised," the order said. It added, "By virtue of enabling payment system for its users by way of credit card, debit card, money transfer operations, PayPal is functioning as a payment system operator and is therefore deemed to be a reporting entity..."



Centre Announces New Electricity Rules For 'Historic Reform' In Power Sector

Union Power Minister RK Singh on Monday announced historic power reforms in the sector for consumers, asserting that the new rules will empower them.

The new set of rules, which will ensure the rights of electricity consumers, provides for penalties for power distribution utilities (discoms) for not maintaining mandated standards of services under the Electricity (Rights of consumers) Rules.

Speaking to ANI, Singh said that these rules will empower the consumers of electricity as the entire power system is for them.

"We are the representatives of the people. We will fight for the rights of the people. The rules we have made it clear for the first time that the entire power system is for the consumer and not the consumers for the system. You have to serve the consumer. You have to give rights to the consumer," he said.

"Now there is no need that the consumer will apply for the connection and run to local power office. Consumers will submit an application to complete all the formality. This can be done on-

line also. Power companies have to give the connection within the fixed time," he said.

The Union Minister said that consumers' complaint should be resolved quickly else penalty will be imposed.

"If there is any complaint about the meter, then it has to be tested within the fixed time. If there is any complaint of consumers, then action has to be taken within these days or else penalty will be imposed because consumers are empowered now. The company does not have the rights that is why it was needed. We are also setting the standard," he said.

"If the power supply is below standard, then you will incur a penalty. The penalty will be incurred if you do load setting for a long time also. This is the rule. The government has the right to make the rule. We drafted and consulted all the stakeholders and put it on the internet. Keeping the suggestions in mind, we made rules in consultation with the Law Ministry and that rules were made," Singh said.

"Now we have to put it on the table of the Parliament and it will remain on the table of the Parliament for 60 days and if the Parliament did not make

any amendments to it, then it will be implemented like this," he said.

Singh said that the Central government had approved a plan of 2.2 lakh crore under Deendayal Vidut Yojana and Saubhagya scheme to improve the power system.

"60 per cent of which has been given by the Government of India as a grant and 30 per cent loan. Only 10 per cent state has to bear. This has strengthened the distribution system of the power supply in states," he added.

Rights of consumers and obligations of distribution licensees, release of new connection and modification in existing connection, metering arrangement, billing and payment, disconnection and reconnection, reliability of supply, consumer as prosumer, standards of performance of licensee, compensation mechanism, call centre for consumer services, grievance redressal mechanism are key areas covered in the Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules.

These rules emanate from the conviction that the power systems exist to serve the consumers and the consumers have rights to get the services and reliable, quality electricity, according to a release by the Ministry of Power.

IIP Mumbai Conducts Workshop On Customized Packaging With Craft Entrepreneurs

Better Safety Standards, Specifications, Extended Shelf-Life Identified As Key Packing Areas

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 21, 2020 - In a first, the Indian Institute of Packaging (IIP), Mumbai, in collaboration with Handicrafts and Handloom Department, Kashmir, Monday conducted a workshop with craft entrepreneurs on customized packaging to boost global exports of famed handicrafts and handloom products from the Kashmir valley.

The workshop laid emphasis on standard packaging of various Kashmir-based craft products like Pashmina and Kani Shawls, Papier Mache, Walnut Wood Carving, Carpets, Sozni, Crewel and Chain-Stitch embroidery for value addition and stimulation of customer interest in the national and international markets.

Director, Ministry of Commerce, Mr. Praveen Kumar, Director, IIP Mumbai, Mr. Tanweer Alam, Director, Industries, Kashmir, Mr. Mahmood Ahmad Shah, Director, Handicrafts & Handloom, Kashmir, Mr. Mussarat Islam, Director, IICT, Mr. Zubair Ahmad,

Director, NIFT, Mr. Javed Wani, President, FCIK, Mr. Shahid Kamili, besides representatives from PHD Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Kashmir Carpet Cluster Development Organization, exporters and artisans associated with handicrafts sector were present on the occasion.

Ticking presentation and brand promotion as central to the export of hand-made products, Director IIP made a detailed presentation on various aspects of packaging with special focus on standards, specifications and destinations. He also provided detailed insight into innovation and aesthetic value in packaging which shall go a long way in brand building of exquisite hand-made products from Kashmir and also agriculture and horticulture sector to boost global sales. "For compatibility of products in the international markets, aesthetic aspects to stimulate customer interest and safety of product to avoid wear and tear and cost effectiveness are critical to styl-

ized packaging," he added.

While providing an overview of the packaging industry, Mr Alam said the global packaging market was valued at \$975 billion for 2019-20 with annual growth rate of 4-5% while Asia alone is predicted to represent over 40% of global demand. He added that the export of packing material from India was to the tune of \$843.8 million in 2018-19, witnessing a growth of 14.1%.

Highlighting the importance of packaging in branding of products, Mr. Praveen Kumar, in his address, said the business stakeholders are free to approach IIP Mumbai directly or through UT administration for getting customized packaging for their unique range of products. He said the Union Government will impart training on changing trends in fashionable packaging to resource persons who would act as master trainers to provide packaging knowledge to young and upcoming entrepreneurs.

Sensex Tanks 1,407 Pts As New COVID-19 Strain In UK Triggers Global Selloff



MUMBAI: Equity benchmark Sensex plummeted 1,407 points on Monday as panic over a new strain of coronavirus in the UK led to a massive selloff in global equities.

The 30-share BSE index plunged 1,406.73 points or 3 per cent to close at 45,553.96. The broader NSE Nifty crashed 432.15 points or 3.14 per cent to 13,328.40.

All Sensex components ended in the red, with ONGC leading the pack by tanking around 9 per cent. IndusInd Bank, M&M, SBI, NTPC, ITC, Axis Bank and PowerGrid shed up to 7 per cent.

"Domestic equities witnessed sharp selling pressure today and wiped out more than Rs 7 trillion of investors' wealth in a single day," said Binod Modi, Head- Strategy at Reliance Securities.

Concerns of new COVID-19 strain in the UK and emerging doubts over efficacy of COVID-19 vaccination dented investors' sentiments globally, he said, adding that Indian market was among the worst

performers as profit-booking also took place at higher levels. Notably, volatility index witnessed sharp jump of 25 per cent, indicating more volatility ahead, he asserted.

Several European countries, including France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Italy, have banned flights from the UK with the British government warning that the potent new strain of the virus was "out of control". The UK has imposed a stringent new stay-at-home lockdown from Sunday in London and other regions.

India too has suspended all flights from the UK between December 23-31.

Stock exchanges in Paris, Frankfurt and London were trading up to 2.50 per lower in early deals.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Hong Kong and Tokyo ended in the red, while Shanghai and Seoul settled with mild gains.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures plummeted 5.30 per cent to USD 49.49 per barrel. --- PTI

BMW To Increase Vehicle Prices In India By Up To 2% From January



German luxury carmaker BMW on Monday said it will increase prices of its entire model range in India by up to 2 per cent from next month. The automaker will introduce the revised pricing for all BMW and MINI models effective January 4, 2021, BMW Group India said in a statement.

Prices will increase by up to 2 per cent across the portfolio, it added.

"In an unprecedented year, the company has been focused on providing best-in-class products and unparalleled services to its esteemed clientele. From January 4, 2021, BMW Group India will introduce the new pricing for BMW and MINI portfolio, increasing the prices marginally by up to 2 per cent to offset the increasing input costs," BMW Group India President Vikram Pawah said.

This will ensure that customer satisfaction, dealer profitability and sustainable growth, which are fundamentals of a successful business, remain strong, he added.

The company sells a range of locally produced cars in In-

dia including the 2 Series Gran Coupe, 3 Series, 3 Series Gran Turismo, 5 Series, 6 Series Gran Turismo, 7 Series, X1, X3, X4, X5, X7 and MINI Countryman.

BMW also sells 8 Series Gran Coupe, X6, Z4, M2 Competition, M5 Competition, M8 Coupe, X3 M and X5 M which come as completely built-up units (CBUs).

Besides, the MINI dealerships also showcase the MINI 3-door, MINI 5-door, MINI Convertible, MINI Clubman and MINI John Cooper Works Hatch as CBUs.

Rival Audi has already announced a price increase of up to 2 per cent across its entire model range, effective from January 1 next year.

Besides, mass market players like Maruti Suzuki India, Renault India, Honda Cars, Mahindra & Mahindra and Ford India have also planned to increase prices from next month.

Two-wheeler major Hero MotoCorp has also announced that it will increase the price of its vehicles by up to Rs 1,500 from January 1, 2021, to offset the impact of rising input costs.

NEWS MAKERS

Navin Chairs BoD meeting Of Ang, Bla Central Co-op Banks

JAMMU: Principal Secretary, Animal/Sheep Husbandry, Agriculture Production & Farmers Welfare and Cooperative Departments, Navin Kumar Choudhary today chaired the 5th Board of Directors meeting of Anantnag/Baramulla Central Cooperative Banks here at Civil Secretariat.

The members of the Boards, who attended the meeting, included Director General Budget, Mohammad Yaqoob Itoo; Managing Director of Anantnag/Baramulla Central Cooperative Banks, Muzafar Sultan and Ropan Sobti (Director) and many other officers of the Cooperative de-

partment and the Banks.

Deputy Commissioner, Baramulla, GN Itoo; Director Horticulture, Kashmir, Ajaz Ahmad Bhat and other members of the respective Boards participated in the meeting through a video link from DC offices of Anantnag and Baramulla.

Navin, who is also chairman of the Boards of the twin cooperative banks, directed the management to conduct regular board meetings with a maximum gap of two months.

He also advised them to conduct the audit of the banks regularly and submit the Action taken report on the observations raised thereof before the Board.

The members of the twin Boards also advised the managements of the banks to make it a regular feature to adopt the audited balance sheets and submit the same before them for rectifications, if required. The banks were further asked to hire the services of a professional Company Secretary to oversee the affairs of the banks as is mandatory under the RBI guidelines. The members of the Boards further asked the managements of the banks to designate one woman member each for the respective BoD for having a fair gender representation.

The Boards further called upon the Finance department

to release the much required capital in favour of the banks already accepted for their recapitalization. The Boards also resolved to take the balance amount from NABARD to make the banks run smoothly.

The Boards resolved to make it mandatory for the banks to rationalise the branches for smooth working. The members asked the managements to merge less profitable branches with the nearest ones and bring a detailed proposal for hiring of new staff.

The Boards also directed the banks to adopt all the policies recommended by NABARD including obtaining membership of CIBIL, system generated

NPAs and Payment & Settlement system. The banks were asked to work for meeting the criteria for the same.

Besides, the members of the Boards asked the banks to carry out the statutory inspections regularly with the stakeholders and submit the inspection reports along with the action taken reports to the Boards without any fail.

Moreover the Boards asked the banks to address all the public grievances at their own level without any delay and submit a summary report regarding the same to the Boards in each of its meetings to be held henceforth.

Mental health might get affected by natural disasters

Horney and others looked at disaster declaration data and found overall suicide rates increased by 23 per cent when compared to rates before and after the disaster.

Suicide rates increased for all types of disasters -- including severe storms, floods, hurricanes and ice storms -- with the largest overall increase occurring two years after a disaster, according to an article published in The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention.

"That finding is important, I think because those could be preventable deaths with better disaster preparedness and response," Horney said.

"It's particularly important to consider the risk of suicide since those with more existing social vulnerabilities live in areas with a greater risk of being damaged by a disaster," added Horney.

The researchers looked at counties in the continental United States with a single major disaster declaration between 2003 and 2015, based on data from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

For each county, suicide rates were estimated for three 12-month periods before and after the disaster. Although FEMA gives disaster declarations for nine types of disasters, storms, floods and hurricanes occurred frequently enough to be included in the study.

For all disaster types combined as well as individually for severe storms, flooding and ice storms, researchers found the suicide rate increased in both the first and second year following a disaster, then declined in the third year. Flooding saw suicide rates increase by nearly 18 percent the first year and 61 percent the second year before declining to the baseline rate after that.

By contrast, the suicide rate following hurricanes rose in the first year -- jumping 26 percent -- then returned to the baseline in the second year. "Counties impacted by hurricanes saw the biggest increase in the rate of suicide in the first year, which makes sense because it's the most widespread type of disaster among those we examined," Horney said.

The study only looked at counties with a single disaster declaration

and excluded those with multiple disaster episodes. Therefore, "these data probably underestimate the association between disaster exposure and suicide because we know that there are a lot of additional mental health impacts from repetitive loss," Horney said.

The findings suggest a need for more mental health resources being made available to address challenges that can arise after a natural disaster, Horney said. Policy changes also should address the duration of these funding resources.

"From a policy perspective, we can use this data to say we should really extend funding for mental health services out at least two years after a disaster because people clearly are not yet recovered, even to their old normal, after one year, when this type of funding typically expires," she said.

"The goal cannot be to recover to the pre-disaster status quo. We want those impacted by disasters to recover and be more resilient to the mental health impacts of disasters than they were before," she added. -Agencies



“That finding is important, I think because those could be preventable deaths with better disaster preparedness and response”

Exercise and training can help reduce fatigue in breast cancer survivors, study reveals



In a recent study conducted at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, it was revealed that fatigue can be reduced in breast cancer survivors by combining exercise and mindfulness training.

The study named "Acute effects of aerobic exercise and relaxation training on fatigue in breast cancer survivors: A feasibility trial" was published in Psycho-Oncology. Results from their preliminary trials might be useful in designing interventions for other cancer patients too.

"When it comes to cancer patients, hospitals treat the disease. However, treating the patients is equally important and sometimes that aspect is overlooked," said Jason Cohen, a former graduate student from Sean Mullen's Exercise, Technology, and Cognition Laboratory, which is affiliated with the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology. "We wanted to look at improving the quality of life in breast cancer survivors after chemotherapy."

After enduring rigorous cancer treatments, the survivors often experience mental and physical fatigue, anxiety, and poor sleep.

Although other researchers have found that either exercise or relaxation techniques help relieve fatigue, there are very few studies that have tested them in combination. "We wanted to see if there were any added benefits," Cohen said.

The trial took place over seven days, and it included 40 women. The participants were asked to fill out questionnaires about their perceived fatigue levels. They were then divided into three groups where they were asked to either exercise or undergo mindfulness training or a combination of both.

"We found that initially, all the participants had a moderate level of self-reported mental fatigue," Cohen said. "Over the course of the week, the groups that took part in a combination of exercise and mindfulness training reported a drop in fatigue levels from moderate to mild. The other groups did not show a comparable degree of improvement."

"These findings parallel the ones that my team has collected from other studies involving aerobic exercise paired with brain training," said Sean Mullen, an associate professor of kinesiology and community

health. "Although each of our studies are different in aims, scope and population, our research consistently supports the idea that two health behaviour interventions are better than one. Sometimes it is assumed that in merging them together, we end up watering down their unique effects. In our experience, they tend to work just as well, if not better, together."

The researchers hope to use the information from the trial as preliminary data in future grant applications. In doing so, they hope to increase sample size and trial duration to assess whether the intervention can provide a more robust improvement in the quality of life.

"When expanding behavioural interventions, the key is not to overwhelm participants with too much new information and to offer sufficient education, training and resources to ensure they stick with the program," Mullen said.

The researchers are continuing to explore opportunities to work with other adult populations with and without chronic disease, using a variety of intervention modalities, to determine if combined treatments are helpful. -Agencies

Study suggests attractive food may seem healthier to consumers

Attractive food might seem healthier to consumers, suggest the findings of a new study.

The study forthcoming in the Journal of Marketing is titled "Pretty Healthy Food: How and When Aesthetics Enhance Perceived Healthiness" and is authored by Linda Hagen.

Consumers see almost 7,000 food and restaurant advertisements per year, with the vast majority touting fast food. In marketing materials, food is extensively styled to look especially pretty. Imagine the beautiful pizza you might see on a billboard - a perfect circle of crust with flawlessly allocated pepperoni and melted cheese. Advertisers clearly aim to make the food more appetizing. But do pretty aesthetics have other, potentially problematic, effects on your impressions of food?

On one hand, beautiful aesthetics are closely associated with pleasure and indulgence. Looking at beautiful art and people activates the brain's reward centre and observing beauty is inherently gratifying. This link with pleasure might make pretty food seem unhealthy because people tend to view pleasure and usefulness as mutually exclusive. For instance, many people have the general intuition that food is either tasty or healthy, but not both.

On the other hand, a specific type of aesthetics called "classical" aesthetics is characterized by the ideal patterns found in nature. For instance, a key classical aesthetic feature is symmetry, which is also extremely common in nature. Another prominent classical aesthetic feature involves order and systematic patterns, which, again, are ubiquitous in nature. It seems possible that sporting more of these nature-like visual features might make food depictions feel more natural. Seemingly more natural, in turn, may make the food seem healthier because people tend to consider natural things (e.g., organic food or natural remedies) to be healthier than unnatural things (e.g., highly processed food or synthetic chemicals). So, by virtue of reflecting nature, the same food may seem healthier when it is pretty (compared to when it is ugly).

In a series of experiments, the

researcher tested if the same food is perceived as healthier when it looks pretty by following classical aesthetics principles (i.e., symmetry, order, and systematic patterns) compared to when it does not. For example, in one experiment, participants evaluated avocado toast. Everyone read identical ingredient and price information, but people were randomly assigned to see either a pretty avocado toast or an ugly avocado toast (the pictures had previously been, on average, rated as differentially pretty). Despite identical information about the food, respondents rated the avocado toast as overall healthier (e.g., healthier, more nutritious, fewer calories) and more natural (e.g., purer, less processed) if they saw

an analogous boost in healthiness judgments. In another study, even when people had financial incentives to correctly identify which of two foods contained fewer calories, they were more likely to declare a target food to be the lower calorie option when it was pretty than when it was ugly—even though this choice lost them money.

There are some key qualifications. First, the pretty=healthy effect is limited to classical aesthetics. "Expressive" aesthetics do not involve nature-like patterns, but instead please through imaginative execution of creative ideas, such as food cut into fun shapes or arranged to depict a scene. Second, the pretty=healthy bias can be muted by displaying a disclaimer next to



the pretty version compared to the ugly version.

As suspected, the difference in naturalness judgments drove the difference in healthiness judgments. Judgments of other aspects, like freshness or size, were unaffected. Experiments with different foods and prettiness manipulations returned the same pattern of results, suggesting that the effect is unlikely idiosyncratic to certain pictures.

Importantly, these healthiness judgments affect consumer behaviour. In a field experiment, people were willing to pay significantly more money for a pretty bell pepper than an ugly one, and a substantial portion of this boost in reservation prices was attributable to

the food reminding people that the food was artificially modified.

This effect of classical aesthetic principles has implications for marketers and public health advocates, albeit different ones. Hagen explains that "Classical aesthetics may be a costless and subtle new way to convey naturalness and healthfulness--attributes that consumers increasingly demand in food products. At the same time, pretty food presentation may optimistically distort nutrition estimates and negatively impact dietary decisions. Given these findings, policy-makers may want to consider modification disclaimers as an intervention or strengthen regulations around providing objective nutrition information with food images." -Agencies

New means of neuronal communication discovered in human brain

An international research group has discovered in the human brain a new functional coupling mechanism between neurons, which may serve as a communication channel between brain regions.

The novel study published in Nature Communications was led by research groups of Professor J. Matias Palva and Research Director Satu Palva at the Neuroscience Centre of the University of Helsinki and Aalto University, in collaboration with the University of Glasgow and the University of Genoa.

Neuronal oscillations are an essential part of the functioning of the human brain. They regulate the communication between neural networks and the processing of information carried out by the brain by pacing neuronal groups and synchronising brain regions.

High-frequency oscillations with frequencies over 100 Hertz are known to indicate the activity of small neuronal populations. However, up to now, they have been considered to be exclusively a local phenomenon.

The findings of the European research project demonstrate that also high-frequency oscillations over 100 Hertz synchronize across several brain regions. This important finding reveals that strictly-timed communication between brain regions can be achieved by high-frequency oscillations.

The researchers observed that high-frequency oscillations were synchronised between neuronal groups with a similar architecture of brain structures across subjects, but occurring in individual frequency bands. Carrying out a visual task resulted in the synchronisation of high-frequency oscillations in the specific brain regions responsible for the task execution. These observations suggest that high-frequency oscillations convey within the brain 'information packages' from one small neuronal group to another. The discovery of high-frequency oscillations synchronised between brain regions is the first evidence of the transmission and reception of such information packages in a context broader than individual locations in the brain. The finding also helps to understand how the healthy brain processes information and how this processing is altered in brain diseases. -Agencies

7 Reasons to Include FD in your Investment Plan During the Pandemic

SPONSORED FEATURE

As the pandemic stretches, it has taken a toll on people's economic well-being across the globe. Apart from other significant lessons, this pandemic has certainly taught us to stay prepared for the worst with a fixed income source to sustain such challenging times. Investing in a safe investment vehicle, like a fixed deposit, is an ideal option. Even as the market brawls with the aftermath of the slowdown, FD holders can expect a promised amount of return.

FD is an instrument in which you invest a lump sum amount of money at an agreed rate of interest for a fixed tenure. It helps you in earning interest regularly, which is unaffected by market fluctuations. FD is still a popular and preferred choice, especially for risk-averse investors and for people having

short term financial goals.

FD is highly suitable for people in lower income tax brackets; however, people in higher income tax brackets can also invest in FD for liquidity and diversification purposes. Few reasons for which fixed deposits can prove to be gainful, especially during strenuous times, are:

1. Flexible Instrument

FD is considered a lucrative investment option for investors due to its flexible nature. The amount can be deposited for a tenure of 7 days to 10 years, as per your requirement. You can choose the amount as well as the tenure as per your convenience.

2. Unaffected by Market Uncertainties Another advantage of FD, which attracts the investors, is its non-volatility to the market uncertainties. Your deposited amount will always yield returns for pre-decided tenure and interest rate,



unlike market-linked instruments. Due to this reason, it is a safer option, no matter what the economic situation is.

3. Easy Access to Credits

During uncertain times, liabilities

might arise. You can have easy access to the credit you want to avail on the basis of your FD. Mostly, loans amounting to 80-90% of your FD amount can be availed easily against a fixed deposit, which is not possible against your savings account.

4. Easy Withdrawal

In times of emergency, you can easily withdraw your FD amount whenever required. Just a small amount of fees is levied on the same. You'll also have to compromise on the interest amount, but your urgent needs can be met immediately.

5. Retirement Planning

To plan for your retirement, you need a passive and stable income source, and what could be a better option than a fixed deposit? Depending on your requirement, you can choose the frequency, i.e., whether you require returns

monthly, quarterly, or at the end of the tenure. This can become a regular income source for you.

6. Inculcates a Habit of Dedicated Savings

Right since childhood, we are taught to save money, irrespective of the amount. But human nature is to spend money whenever we can. However, once you start investing in FD, you'll inculcate a habit of saving money as you earn interest on the same along with the saved amount. As we all know, a practice to save money is no more an option, rather a necessity due to rising uncertainties.

7. Magic of Compounding

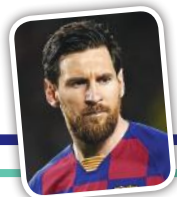
With the FD reinvestment option, you get the benefit of earning interest on your principal amount and your interest amount as well. It is a good option for investors who do not need regular income

currently. If you choose the cumulative returns option, you get a handsome amount of money when your tenure ends.

Save and Create a Passive Source of Income Today

With the growing uncertainties, who would not prefer to save and earn money from a source that is unaffected by market volatilities? You should always invest in a measured way and create a good source of passive income and cope with difficult times. Reputable banks like Axis Bank provide good investment options like fixed deposits and mutual funds schemes through SIP (Systematic Investment Plan). You can keep depositing a small amount at regular intervals, rather than a lump sum amount in one go. You can reap a fair amount of interest and other benefits by investing in SIPs too.

Shield your future with a stable source of income today!



IT'S TRUE THAT I HAD A VERY BAD TIME IN SUMMER. What happened before the summer, because of how the season ended, the burofax and all that.

AUS Vs IND

Don't Think India Can Recover From Adelaide Thrashing, Says Brad Haddin

Former Australia wicket-keeper Brad Haddin reckons the opening day/night Test was India's best shot at winning in the ongoing series as it will be very difficult for the visitors to script a turnaround after demoralizing eight-wicket loss in Adelaide. India were bundled out for their lowest-ever Test score of 36 in their second innings as Australia claimed an eight-wicket win in the pink-ball Test to take a 1-0 lead in the Border-Gavaskar trophy. "I don't think they will (recover from the loss)," Haddin told SEN Radio. The 43-year-old, who featured in 66 Tests for Australia, feels the conditions at the Adelaide Oval were conducive to the Indian bowling attack. "I thought their only opportunity to win a Test match was the first Test at Adelaide. "I thought the conditions suited their bowling and I thought they'd get enough runs. But I don't think they'll be able to turn it around. "You've got one Test up at Brisbane where no one beats Australia. These next two wickets will be suited to Indian cricket, but I don't think they'll be able to turn it around," Haddin added. India created history by registering their maiden series win Down Under in 2018-19 on the back of a lethal pace-bowling attack.



However, the visitor's are without the experienced Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami, who suffered a fracture after being hit on the elbow by a Pat Cummins short ball during India's second innings on Saturday. "They had a great bowling attack the last time they come out here, and now with Shami out with a broken arm they don't have enough depth to cover that," Haddin said. Reflecting on the Indian batting collapse Haddin said "I think it's really concerning. "Yes India were driving the game and we were talking at the start of day three about how Australia would get back into it, but the collapse they had has to leave some marks. "With skipper Virat Kohli returning home for the birth of his child, India are faced with selection dilemmas. "There were a few performances from the Indian batsmen that will come under scrutiny over the next week. "Do they go in with (Wriddhiman) Saha? Who goes to the top order for Prithvi Shaw? Rohit Sharma comes out of quarantine, does he come back into the side? "They have a lot of things they're going to have to tackle over this next week leading into this next Test," Haddin added. India will take on Australia in the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, starting December 26.

YOU'VE GOT ONE TEST UP AT BRISBANE WHERE NO ONE BEATS AUSTRALIA. These next two wickets will be suited to Indian cricket, but I don't think they'll be able to turn it around,"

NZ Vs PAK, 1st Test: Misbah-ul-Haq Backs Pakistan To 'Rise To Occasion' Despite Losing Babar Azam

Misbah-ul-Haq believes Pakistan will rise to the occasion in the first Test against New Zealand despite the absence of captain Babar Azam and opener Imam-ul-Haq. Both players suffered fractured thumbs during training sessions in Queenstown last week and are yet to return to practice. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) confirmed on Monday that the duo could return for the second Test, which begins in Christchurch on January 3. They will, however, sit out the opener in Mount Maunganui, with Imran Butt added to the 17-man squad and Mohammad Rizwan confirmed as the 33rd captain to lead the team in the longest format. The first Test begins on Boxing Day, three days after the final Twenty20 international, with the hosts already 2-0 ahead in that series. "It is disappointing to lose the



T20I series against a well-settled New Zealand side, who utilised their resources and conditions to their advantage," head coach Misbah said. "We need to up-skill and improve our individual and team performances, including in Tuesday's match, and the sooner we get these sorted the better it will be in term of player confidence and team results as 2021 will not be any easier as we have two major events. "Contrary to the T20I side, the Test side appears to be pretty organised and we boast some experienced cricketers, both in the batting and bowling

departments. With some competitive cricket on the tour now under the belt, I am hoping we will be a better outfit in the longer version of the game. "Although it will be nearly two weeks to Babar's injury when the first Test starts, it will be hard on him and the team to play him without any net sessions. I remain confident and optimistic that other players will rise to the occasion in Mount Maunganui and use the opportunity to rise to the occasion and put the disappointment of the T20I series behind them." Pakistan squad for Tests: Mohammad Rizwan (captain for first Test), Abid Ali, Azhar Ali, Faheem Ashraf, Fawad Alam, Haris Sohail, Imran Butt, Mohammad Abbas, Naseem Shah, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Afridi, Shan Masood, Sohail Khan, Yasir Shah (Babar Azam and Imam-ul-Haq not available for first Test).

Chris Gayle, Shahid Afridi, Dwayne Bravo To Feature In Abu Dhabi T10 League

Some of the world's most renowned cricketers like Chris Gayle, Shahid Afridi and Dwayne Bravo will be seen in action in the fourth edition of Abu Dhabi T10 tournament, to be played from January 28 to February 6. The entire tournament will be played at the Zayed Cricket Stadium. Arguably the greatest limited-overs cricketer of all time, Gayle will take centre stage as the icon player for Team Abu Dhabi. With over 1,000 T20 sixes under his belt, the West Indian is raring to produce the fireworks in the fast-paced ten-over format. "The shorter the format, the more exciting the game becomes, I can't wait to play at the Zayed Cricket Stadium again, watch out Abu Dhabi - a Gayle storm is coming!" said Gayle in a statement issued by the organisers. While Gayle is part of Team Abu Dhabi, Afridi will be the icon player for Qalandars, Bravo for Delhi Bulls, Russell for Northern Warriors and Narine for Deccan Gladiators. Other big names to feature in the event are former Pakistan captain Shoaib Malik for defending champions Maratha Arabians and Sri Lankan duo of Thisara Perera (Pune Dev-



ils) and Iisuru Udana (Bangla Tigers). "I look forward to coming back to the Abu Dhabi T10 and playing in one of the most stunning stadiums in the world," said Afridi. His Excellency Aref Al Awani, General Secretary of Abu Dhabi Sports Council, felt proud about the city's growing sporting reputation. "Although we have hosted numerous local and international cricket events in the past, our commitment to host the second season of Abu Dhabi T10 enhances our gold star portfolio of world-class destination sporting events. "It builds upon and expands our profile for bringing together the top athletes in world sport and offering elite competition and unparalleled entertainment value," Al Awani said.

FOOTBALL

Arsenal Vs Manchester City: Aubameyang Out As Mikel Arteta Gives Backing To 'Mature' Young Guns

Arsenal will be without striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang in Tuesday's EFL Cup quarter-final with Manchester City. The Gabon international missed the 2-1 Premier League loss at Everton, a match that extended the Gunners' winless domestic run to seven games. Manager Mikel Arteta confirmed Aubameyang is improving but will not be ready to face Pep Guardiola's side at Emirates Stadium. "Auba is feeling much better and he was more positive yesterday [Sunday] than in the previous two days," Arteta told reporters on Monday. "He will have another scan in the next few days and we will see how quickly we can get him back in the team. "We know how important he is for us and he feels that responsibility and he is trying his best to be back fit as quickly as possible. For the rest, I don't think we're going to have any news today before training. "Auba is not fit for tomorrow, that's for sure. He won't be playing tomorrow so we will see who is available because we have a



few doubts as well in other positions. We want to get together a very competitive team because we know the level of City and we want to win the game tomorrow." Arteta admits the match will serve as a welcome distraction from Arsenal's league campaign, with the defeat to Everton leaving them 15th in the table having taken five points from their past 10 matches. "This is what we want to use it for. It's a competition we want to try to win," he said. "We had two difficult opponents before in Leicester City and Liverpool, we

managed to beat them both and now we are playing at home and we are one step closer to Wembley. So, it is a really nice game to play, as this is the type of game we are looking for through the season." Arteta suggested he could choose to field some youngsters against City and admits he has been surprised by the maturity they have displayed during a difficult few weeks at the club. "It's part of what they have to do and what they have to go through to become really important players for this football club," he said. "You have to see how people react in difficult moments and they have to experience it themselves, to get through these difficult moments and how they're going to handle that pressure. "If they are able to do that, they have to handle good moments and how they handle that to continue performing at the level that is required here. So it's another experience for them and I must say that they have been much more mature, responsible and efficient than I was expecting. So in my opinion, they are doing really well."

Lionel Messi Confirms Commitment To Barcelona After 'Very Bad Time'



Lionel Messi is determined to help Barcelona win trophies after admitting the saga surrounding his future has affected him this season. The Argentine superstar appeared determined to leave Camp Nou in the previous transfer window, believing he was entitled to depart on a free transfer due to a clause in his contract. However, Barca refused to sanction a move without a fee being involved, so Messi confirmed he would stay for the 2020-21 campaign, the final year on his current deal. His long-term future still remains unclear, with more potentially becoming known when an in-depth interview with the 33-year-old is broadcast by LaSexta on December 27. RAC1 released a short excerpt on Monday, in which Messi outlined his continued commitment to the cause for the coming months, ruling out any idea of a January transfer. "The truth is that today I'm fine," Messi said in conversation with journalist and presenter Jordi Evole. "It's true that I had a very bad time in summer. What happened before the summer, because of how the season ended, the burofax and all that. Then I dragged it a bit at the beginning of the season.

"Today I'm fine and I feel like fighting seriously for everything we have ahead of us. "I'm excited. I know the club is going through a difficult time, at club and team level, and it is difficult everything that surrounds Barcelona but I'm looking forward to it." Messi was strongly linked with a reunion with Pep Guardiola at Manchester City earlier in the year, while more recent rumours have suggested Paris Saint-Germain could be his next destination. For now, though, he appears to be staying put. Barca have struggled for consistency so far this term under head coach Ronald Koeman, winning just six of their 13 league outings so far to sit outside the top four in the table. They have qualified for the knockout stages of the Champions League, finishing behind Juventus in their group. The last-16 draw paired them with PSG, meaning a clash with former Barcelona team-mate Neymar. Messi has contributed nine goals in all competitions so far, taking his career tally for Barca to 643. In doing so, he tied Pele's record for most scored by a player for one club, equalling the legendary Brazilian's feat when finding the net for the 450th time in LaLiga against Valencia on Saturday.

Liverpool Are Considering Selling Unhappy Mohamed Salah: Aboutrika

Mohamed Salah is unhappy at Liverpool and the Premier League giants are considering selling the star, according to his former Egypt team-mate Mohamed Aboutrika. Salah, who has starred since arriving at Anfield in 2017, refused to rule out a move to Real Madrid or Barcelona during a recent interview with AS. The forward also said he was disappointed not to be made captain for Liverpool's Champions League clash against

Midtjylland earlier this month. Aboutrika, who played 100 games for Egypt, said Salah was unhappy at Liverpool. "I called Salah about his situation in Liverpool and he is upset, but that would never affect his performance on the field," he told beIN SPORTS. "I know that Salah is not happy in Liverpool, he told me the reasons why he is not happy but they are secrets and I cannot talk about it in public. One of the reasons that made Salah angry that he was not the captain against Midtjylland."

Salah joined Liverpool from Roma for a reported £36.9million (£42m) in mid-2017. Aboutrika believes the Premier League champions are thinking about selling the 28-year-old forward. "In my opinion, Liverpool is considering selling Salah for economic purposes," he said. Salah has scored 110 goals in 173 career appearances for Liverpool, including 16 in 21 this season. He has helped the club win the Premier League, Champions League, UEFA Super Cup and Club World Cup.



I CALLED SALAH ABOUT HIS SITUATION IN Liverpool and he is upset, but that would never affect his performance on the field," he told beIN SPORTS.

'COVID-19 lockdown increased conflicts between parents, kids'



During the nationwide lockdown in India, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased interaction between adults and their teenage wards and has allowed parents more time to monitor them, experts said.

During the nationwide lockdown in India, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased interaction between adults and their teenage wards and has allowed parents more time to monitor them, the experts said on Sunday.

According to Debjani Banerjee Faculty- Sociology and Social & Cultural Anthropology(CBSE and IBDP), Shiv Nadar School, Gurugram, while the lockdown has been challenging for everyone, it hasn't been particularly easy for teenagers.

"Before the pandemic struck the world, teenagers would spend most part of their day with friends in school or outdoors; however, the sudden lockdown and subsequent restrictions to movement brought their social life to a standstill," Banerjee told IANS.

She stressed that teenage is a more vulnerable and sensitive period of life for children and is also challenging for parents as they try and navigate their changing relationship with children. The pandemic has led to increased interaction between adults and their teenage wards and has allowed parents more time to monitor them.

"A lot of time this proximity results in more arguments, misunderstandings, conflicting opinions and emotional stress,

particularly for the teenagers," she explained. However, there are also enough examples of parents making use of this extra time to build on their relationship with children through better communication and helping teenagers find creative outlets to vent their emotions, ultimately leading to decreased stress and tension.

Meanwhile, several global studies have found that parents and children are spending more time on various screens at home which is seriously affecting their health, resulting in eye pain, watery eyes, headaches and less quality sleep time.

A recent study, published in the journal Obesity, also revealed that lockdowns implemented across the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic have negatively impacted diet, sleep and physical activity among children with obesity.

From office work to classes online, from streaming movies to playing online games, the social distancing norms have only resulted in a vast majority of Indians suffering from screen-induced stress and health problems, the health experts said.

According to Dr Samir Parikh, Director and Head of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences Department at Fortis Healthcare in New Delhi, at present kids are cooped up within the house, having to rely on the screen for not just their leisure and play, but for both academic classes as well as connecting with family and peers.

"Therefore, it's important for parents to avoid restricting the children's screen time but instead trying to instil a sense of normalcy within their routine. We can create opportunities to stimulate their mind, for instance by encouraging them to pick up some new hobbies, skills or activities," he explained. Dr Parikh added that involving in household activities in the form of a fun based activity, participating with children and family can be a good option.



KASHMIR UNIVERSITY law students stage a protest in press enclave Demanding online topic based exam. —Photo KO: Abid Bhat

Sputnik V Can Be "Highly Effective" Against New Covid Strain: Co-Developer



Moscow: Sputnik V, the world's first COVID-19 vaccine, will be "highly effective" against the new strain of coronavirus found in Europe, said Kirill Dmitriev, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Russian Direct Investment Fund, the company which co-developed the vaccine.

"According to our information, Sputnik V will be as highly effective against the new strain of the coronavirus found in

Europe as against the existing strains. Sputnik V has been showing its efficacy over a period of time despite the previous mutations of S-protein," he said, according to Sputnik V's Twitter handle.

Mr Dmitriev added that it would jointly work with AstraZeneca, another vaccine manufacturing company, to combat the new mutation strain of the COVID-19.

"Joint work with such a pharmaceutical giant as AstraZeneca is becoming particularly important today, in light of combating the new mutating strains of the coronavirus," he said. The RDIF CEO also said that the Sputnik V has been registered for use in Belarus.

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Sputnik V is over 95 per cent effective.

Taking to Twitter, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) cited Mr Putin saying that some health specialists have claimed that the vaccine's protection level reaches up to 96-97 per cent.

Russia became the first country to register the world's first COVID-19 vaccine on August 11, named after Russia's first satellite.

Pork-Chocolate Burger, Anyone? McDonald's Sells 'Spam Burger' In China

McDonald's Corp. said the sandwich was part of a series of 'members only' promotions which will be sold only on Mondays in China.



Fast-food chain McDonald's is selling a sandwich made of Spam topped with crushed Oreo cookies in China in an attention-grabbing move that has raised eyebrows.

Global brands from restaurants to automakers sometimes roll out off-beat products to appeal to Chinese tastes in the populous and intensely competitive market. McDonald's latest sandwich is undoubtedly one of them. "I thought it was delicious," said a comment signed Feifei Mao Enthusiast on the Sina Weibo microblog service. "Is that because I love McDonald's too deeply? Or is something wrong with my taste?" the user wondered. The sandwich is made of two slices of Spam, a product of Hormell Foods LLC, and Mondelez International's Oreo cookies, topped with mayonnaise.

McDonald's Corp. said the sandwich was part of a series of "members only" promotions to be released on Mondays in China.

However, not everyone became an instant fan of the new sandwich.

Expedite Probe Into Journalist Mudassar's Death: KWJA

Srinagar: Kashmir Working Journalists Association (KWJA) is dismayed over the criminal silence maintained by the Directorate of Health Services Kashmir over the enquiry into the death of senior journalist Mudassar Ali. Mudassar, who was a senior editor at Greater Kashmir, died exactly a month before at Char Sharif Sub-District hospital after the on-duty doctor allegedly failed to provide him basic life support.

"The KWJA wants to convey to the Health department authorities that our month-long silence over the enquiry should not be misconstrued as a fait accompli," said Samaan Lateef, General Secretary KWJA.

"We have been waiting for the outcome of the enquiry for a month now. It seems the Health department wants to hide its failures and hush-up the case. Let it be clear to all that the journalist fraternity of Kashmir will pursue the case until Mudassar, his family and friends get justice."

The alleged negligence on part of the SDH Charri Sharief BMO, the on-duty doctor and paramedic staff was accentuated by the delay in providing Mudassar oxygen supply and lifesaving drugs at the Emergency Room, established at SDH Char Sharif few years ago under 'Save Heart Initiative'.

"KWJA has learnt that Mudassar Ali was the first critical care case presented to the SDH Char-Sharief in past two years but the doctor

on duty not only failed to save his life but forgot to even follow basic treatment protocol in pulmonary embolism or myocardial infarction cases."

Samaan said KWJA is deeply pained to learn that Mudassar Ali had to wait for at least 10 minutes inside the hospital before the on duty doctor could wake himself up and treat him. "Even after declaring Mudassar Ali a heart attack case, the doctor failed to treat him as per the protocol laid down under Basic Life Support (BLS),"

KWJA understands that the doctor on night duty was in deep sleep when Mudassar was brought to the hospital and it is likely that the drowsiness due to sleep may have clouded his judgement after encountering a young healthy male patient needing emergency care, Samaan said.

"The hospital administration has to take responsibility for not keeping the Emergency Room functional and adequate number of doctors available during the night hours," he said, adding, "That even basic equipment such as a stretcher was not available at the hospital on the fateful night and the doctor had to manually lift the patient in his arms with the help of the attendants should be enough to sack the BMO for negligence."

KWJA urged Lieutenant Governor Manoj Joshi to ensure that the enquiry into Mudassar Ali's death is expedited and the report is shared with his family members.

'Godi Medi' Never Shows Reality, Social Media Crucial For Agitation: Farmers On Facebook Page Row

The social media platform on Sunday evening shut down the page of 'Kisan Ekta Morcha' that shares official updates on the agitation

A day after Facebook temporarily shut down a page on the on-going farmers' agitation against the Centre's new farm laws, the protestors on Monday said social media was crucial for their movement as it allowed them to tell the "truth in their own words".

The social media giant had Sunday evening shut down the page of 'Kisan Ekta Morcha' that shares "official updates" on the agitation, only to restore it three hours later following social media outrage.

The Kisan Ekta Morcha's Instagram page was also temporarily suspended.

"Social media plays an important role in our movement. While all kinds of media are writing about us, social media helps us tell our truth in our own words. The 'godi' media will never show the reality, but on social media, we can share what is actually happening," Himmat Singh, a farmer camping at Singhu border, said.

He came to the protest site from Punjab's Kapurthala four days ago. Before arriving here, he said his main source of information about the agitation was social media.

Himmat said he used to take the help of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to stay abreast of the various developments of the protest.

The farmer added that ever since he came to the protest site, he has been posting short videos of the agitation on his Facebook page. He also termed the shutting down of the Facebook page of Kisan Ekta Morcha as an "attempt to silence them".

"I think it was done by the

government. It is not a big deal for them to shut down something they do not like," the protestor rued.

Facebook had on Sunday said the farmers protest community page was blocked because it violated the virtual platform's "community standards". The social media site, however, clarified on Monday that it was an automated action which happened because of "increased activity" on the page.

Three brothers from Punjab's Gurdaspur said social media was their go-to medium for all kinds of updates on the protest, not just at Singhu border, but also other sites like Tikri and Ghazipur.

"We have been completely dependent on social media for information about the protest, whether it is about what the government is saying or what our leaders have been planning." "Likewise, we keep watching Youtube to listen to our leaders' speeches," Jitender Singh, a class 12 student, said.

His brother Maninder Singh said they have been posting at least 50 stories on Snapchat every day along with putting up a post on Instagram every other day.

"It helps us to let the people of the country and the world know what our protest is about. It is because of social media that so much help is coming in for the farmers," he said.

The third brother, Pratap Singh, said he had logged into his Twitter account and posted details of the protest after Facebook shut down the farmers' protest page.

The three brothers have been camping at Singhu border for the past five days. Another protestor, Jagjit Singh, also underlined the

importance of social media in the ongoing agitation by the farmers.

"Everything is on social media only. Who watches television now, and where will we watch TV here?" he asked.

Jagjit, who has been protesting at Singhu border for the last 20 days, said he has subscribed to several pages on both Facebook and YouTube to keep himself updated about the agitation.

"Though I do not post much on these platforms, I regularly surf the social media for new things that may be happening here or at other sites. I know several young men here who keep making short videos about the everyday developments at the protest sites. These are very helpful," he said.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and other states are protesting against the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

Enacted in September, the three farm laws have been projected by the central government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country.

However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of Minimum Support Price and do away with the mandi system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

Marriage Over: BJP MP Tells Wife Who Joined TMC

Sujata Mondal Khan, wife of BJP MP Saumitra Khan, gets notice asking her not to use her husband's surname anymore



Sujata Mondal Khan, wife of BJP MP Saumitra Khan, switched over to the TMC from the saffron camp on Monday, claiming that she did not get her due recognition even after taking several risks to get her husband elected from Bishnupur during 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Shortly after, incensed by his wife's action, Khan said he would be sending a divorce notice to Sujata, and urged her not to use his surname anymore.

Earlier in the day, at a press meet, Mondal Khan said that "misfit and corrupt leaders" are getting more importance in the saffron camp than the loyal ones.

"Despite enduring physical attacks, sacrificing so much to get my husband elected to Parliament, I got nothing in return... I want to work under our beloved leader Mamata Banerjee and our dada Abhishek Banerjee," she said, after joining the party in the presence of TMC MP Saugata Roy and its spokesperson Kunal Ghosh.

Asked if her decision would, in any way, influence her husband, who is also the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) state unit chief, she said it was up to him to decide his future course of action.

"I hope he would realise one day... Who knows he might be back in the

TMC one day," the newly inducted leader of the Bengal's ruling party said. Khan told a hurriedly called press meet a little later that he is sending a divorce notice to Sujata, "severing our 10-year relationship".

"You are being used by some people who did not hesitate to create rift between a husband and wife who stood by each other during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Yes, you were my pillar during the Bishnupur Lok Sabha campaign.

"However, please don't forget I had won by 6,58,000 votes and this margin was made possible because of my party, because of my reputation in the area," Khan said. Claiming that his wife owed her popularity to the saffron camp, he said, "You (Sujata) have come this far as you had chanted Jai Shree Ram, chanted in favour of (Narendra) Modiji, as you were the wife of Saumitra Khan."

"Please refrain from using 'Khan' surname hereafter; please don't refer to yourself as Saumitra Khan's wife. I am giving you all the freedom to chart your own political destiny. But please don't forget you are siding with those who had attacked your parents' residence in 2019 after I joined the BJP," Khan said, urging the TMC leadership to ensure she is not subjected to any assault or physical harm.

Hong Kong Based 'Gree' Opens Outlet in Srinagar

SRINAGAR: Gree, a Hong Kong based air conditioners and home appliances maker is now in Srinagar with the company launching its first brand outlet near the Flour Mills Munawarabad.

Gree a fortune 500 multinational brand is the largest manufacturer of air conditioners having annual manufacturing capacity of 60 million AC's in the residential sector and 5.5 million in the industrial segment worldwide, the company said in a statement.

Gree is so much into air conditioners that 1 in 3 air conditioners sold worldwide is made by Gree.

"All GREE machines are 100% copper. Due to extreme weather conditions of

Kashmir, Gree has specially imported Hong Kong manufacturer air conditioners to fulfill the requirements of Kashmir's harsh weather and these machines are designed to work at -35 to 54 degree Celsius. The company is introducing premium products that will consume lower electricity than any other AC brand."

Mr Amit Hitler, who is the MD and CEO of Gree India inaugurated the showroom along with Nafis Ahmed Siddiqui, General Manager of the company and Mr Aryan Agarwal. The showroom is opened in collaboration with Wafa Enterprises who will be the official supplier in Jammu and Kashmir.



Grenades Dropped by Drones Seized In Punjab

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Police on Monday said it seized 11 hand grenades, suspected to have been dropped by a drone flying in from Pakistan, from a field near the International Border (IB) in Gurdaspur district.

The consignment was found in a field in Salach village, located about 1 km from the border, in Gurdaspur district, Gurdaspur Senior Superintendent of Police Rajinder Singh Sohail told PTI.

The grenades were hidden in a box and it was attached to a wooden frame, he said, adding the recovery was made on Sunday evening.

Sohail said the Border Security Force

(BSF) had noticed the movement of a drone on the intervening night of December 19 and 20.

"We conducted a search operation with the BSF personnel on Sunday and recovered the grenades," he said.

The first incident of dropping arms and weapons through drones from Pakistan came to light in Punjab in August 2019 when police recovered AK-47 rifles, magazines, ammunition, hand grenades, fake currency and other items in Tarn Taran district. Since then, there have been a number of instances when security forces seized arms and ammunition dropped by drones flying in from across the Pakistani border.