

Widom

Quote!

“Do not look for happiness outside yourself. The awakened seek happiness inside.”

—Peter Deunov

NEWS DIGEST

Govt Suspends 13 PDD Officials

SRINAGAR: Two executive engineers were among thirteen officers-cum-officials suspended by government on charges of delinquency here on Wednesday. "Pending enquiry, the delinquent officers/officials of Power Development Department and Finance Department are hereby placed under suspension with immediate effect, in terms of Rule 31 of Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Classification, Control

● More On P8

Guns Roar Along LoC In Karnah Sector

SRINAGAR: The Indian and Pakistani troops on Wednesday exchanged gunfire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Karnah sector of north Kashmir's Kupwara district.

Pakistani troops restored to unprovoked ceasefire violation and targeted forward posts of the Indian army in Karnah sector on Wednesday evening, sources said. ● More On P8

Cardiac Arrest Kills CRPF Man

SRINAGAR: A Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel on Wednesday died of a cardiac arrest in south Kashmir's Pulwama district.

Vinod Kumar of CRPF 183 battalion died of cardiac arrest at the district hospital Pulwama on Wednesday morning where he was shifted after he fell unconscious, news agency KDC reported. He was a resident of Baghat district of Uttar Pradesh.

Arms Recovered From Village Along LoC

JAMMU: State forces recovered arms, ammunition and explosive materials from a militant hideout in Dabbi village along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Wednesday, officials said. The recoveries were made based on the disclosure of militant associates arrested on Sunday.

The Jammu and Kashmir Police and the Army have recovered two pistols, 70 pistol rounds and two grenades kept in bushes along the LoC in Dabbi village of Balakote sector in Mendhar sub-division, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Poonch, Ramesh Kumar Angral said. ● More On P8

Labourer Dies Inside Railway Tunnel

SRINAGAR: A labourer on Wednesday was killed after a rock crushed him inside the under construction railway tunnel in Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir.

34-year-old Safdar Ali of Gandoh area of Doda district was working inside the under construction railway tunnel No. 49B in Hangani area of Ramsoo when a rock hit him, news agency CNS reported Wednesday. He died due to the impact of the rock. Meanwhile, the report said that Police have registered a case in this regard.

Cop's Son Among 3 Militants Killed In Encounter: Police



Soldiers standing near the "encounter" site in Lawaypora area of the city outskirts on Wednesday. —KO photo. Abid Bhat

OBSERVER NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: Three 'non-listed militants', including a policeman's son were killed by the government forces on Wednesday in the city outskirts on Srinagar Baramulla highway.

In a handout issued here Wednesday evening, a police spokesperson said that the soldiers of army's 2 RR around 5:30 pm Tuesday launched a cordon and search operation near Hokersar on the basis of a specific input. The militants, he said, hurled grenades on the soldiers ● More On P8

CRPF Warning Shot Hurts Constable

SRINAGAR: A central reserve police force (CRPF) trooper was injured on Tuesday in Bandipora district when the sentry at a camp fired warning shots after noticing

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Mainstream Camp Demands Time-Bound Probe

SRINAGAR: Several mainstream parties, including National Conference (NC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and CPI (M) on Wednesday demanded a time bound probe

● More On P8

'They Were Innocents', Families Shout Outside PCR



A wailing relative of one of the three killed youths pleads before cops outside PCR Srinagar on Wednesday.

AUQIB JAVEED

SRINAGAR: Barely hours after police claimed to have killed three militants in an "encounter" in Lawaypora area of the Srinagar outskirts, the families of the three slain youth vouched for their innocence and accused the state forces of killing them in a "staged gunfight."

The families of the three alleged militants appeared outside the Police control Room (PCR) here on Wednesday afternoon and claimed that their kin were not even remotely connected with militancy.

The protesting family members said that two of the three killed youth had left their homes on Tuesday for some work.

The families as well as the police have identified the trio as Ajaz Maqbool Ganie and Ather Mushtaq of Pulwama and Zubair Ahmad Lone of Shopian. One among the killed youth is a policeman's son.

"My brother left home on Tuesday to submit his form at the University. Around 3pm, he informed me that he will stay in Srinagar," Ganie's sister told Kashmir Observer. ● More On P8

Cold Wave Returns To Kashmir After Light Snowfall

Gulmarg Shivers At Minus 11 Degrees Celsius

OBSERVER NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: Intense cold wave conditions swept Kashmir on Wednesday as the mercury fell below the freezing point across the valley, officials said.

The cloud cover ahead of Tuesday's snowfall had kept the night temperature around the freezing point for two consecutive nights in most parts of the valley but the respite ended as the mercury plunged to minus 11 degrees in Gulmarg in north Kashmir, the officials said.

They said Gulmarg tourist destination was the coldest recorded place in the valley.

Pahalgam, which serves as the base camp for annual Amarnath yatra in south Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 9 degrees Celsius -- a drop of six notches in 24 hours.

The officials said the minimum temperature in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, was minus 2.2 degrees Celsius on Tuesday night.

Qazigund the gateway town to the valley recorded the minimum of minus 2.5 degrees Celsius, while Kupwara, in the north, registered a low of minus 2.8 degrees Celsius and Kokernag, in the south, minus 6.5 degrees Celsius, the officials said.

Kashmir is currently under the grip of 'Chillai-Kalan' -- the 40-day harshest winter period when a cold wave grips the region and the temperature drops considerably leading to the freezing of water bodies including the famous Dal Lake here as well as the water supply lines in several parts of the valley. The chances of snowfall are most

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Deadlines For Filing IT, GST Return Extended

NEW DELHI: The Centre on Wednesday extended the deadlines for filing 'Income Tax' and 'GST' returns for assessment year 2020-21. According to the Ministry of Finance's Revenue Department, the deadline for filing ITR by those taxpayers whose accounts are to be audited has been extended till February 15, 2021. Besides, the deadline for filing ITR by other taxpayers has been extended till January 10. Accordingly, the timeline for tax audits has also been extended to January 15, 2021. The previous deadline for filing of returns was December 31.

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LG Discusses Kashmir Situation With Amit Shah

AGENCIES

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Singh on Wednesday called upon Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi and discussed among other issues, the prevailing situation in the Union Territory and the recently held District Development Council elections (DDC) elections.

In his first meeting with Home Minister since the conduct of maiden DDC polls in J&K, Sinha also discussed reshuffle in administration and police.

"Sinha briefed him about the security scenario in J&K and measures being taken by the administration to bring peace. They also discussed the Covid-19 situation since the outbreak of the pandemic in March this year," a source privy to the meeting said.

Similarly, according to sources, both discussed the transfer of top officers in administration and police.

"Transfer of top officers is on the cards which were discussed in the meeting," the source said, adding that the Home Minister appreciated the J&K administration for conducting DDC polls peacefully.

"Sinha briefed him about measures being taken to empower Panchayats and DDCs in J&K," the source added.

The first-ever DDC elections were held in eight phases to elect 280 members in 20 districts from November 28 to December 22. The polls marked the resumption of political activity in Jammu and Kashmir after revocation of special status and reorganisation of the erstwhile state last year.

The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), an amalgam of seven mainstream parties, swept the polls by winning 110 seats, while the BJP emerged as the single largest party by getting 75 seats.

J&K Reports 1 Corona Death

OBSERVER MONITORING DESK

SRINAGAR: A sexagenarian man died of coronavirus in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, while 217 more people, including eight security personnel and a minor tested Covid-19 positive in the Union Territory during the last 24 hours.

A 60-year-old man from Jammu succumbed to coronavirus on Wednesday, taking the fatality count across J&K to 1880, officials said Wednesday.

Srinagar district with 449 deaths tops the list followed ● More On P8

CIK Raids Waheed Para's Residence, Other Locations

OBSERVER MONITORING DESK

SRINAGAR: A team of Counter Intelligence Kashmir (CIK), wing of Jammu and Kashmir police Wednesday carried out raids at different locations including the residence of PDP youth president Waheed Para.

An official said that CIK sleuths accompanied by a team of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and police conducted searches in Anantnag, Pulwama and Srinagar districts of Kashmir valley.

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DIPK-NB-4910/20

Udhampur - Baramulla Rail Link

PM Sets Aug 15, 2022 As Deadline To Complete Project

OBSERVER NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: Prime Minister, Narendra Modi on Wednesday set August 15, 2022 as deadline to complete the 272-km long Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail line being built at a cost of Rs 27,949 crores.

Chairing the 34th PRAGATI interaction with Union Secretaries of various Ministries and Chief Secretaries of States/Union Territories through video-conference, PM reviewed 11 projects related to 7 Ministries including the prestigious Udhampur-Baramulla Rail link being constructed in Jammu & Kashmir, an official spokesperson said.

J&K Chief Secretary, B V R Subrahmanyam along with Administrative Secretaries of ● More On P8



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2

'Gut cells sound the alarm when parasites invade'

A chain reaction led by cells lining the intestines tips the immune system off to the presence of the parasite Cryptosporidium, according to a study led by researchers in the School of Veterinary Medicine.

To effectively combat an infection, the body first has to sense it's been invaded, then the affected tissue must send out signals to corral resources to fight the intruder. Knowing more about these early stages of pathogen recognition and response may provide scientists with crucial clues when it comes to preventing infections or treating inflammatory diseases resulting from overactive immunity.

That was the intent behind a new study, led by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, examining infection with the parasite Cryptosporidium. When the team looked for the very first "danger" signals emitted by a host infected with the parasite, they traced them not to an immune cell, as might have been expected, but to epithelial cells lining the intestines, where Cryptosporidium sets up shop during an infection. Known as enterocytes, these cells take up nutrients from the gut, and here they were shown to alert the body to danger via the molecular receptor NLRP6, which is a component of what's known as the inflammasome.

"You can think about the inflammasome as an alarm system in a house," says Boris Striepen, a professor in the Department of Pathobiology at Penn Vet and senior author on the paper, which is publishing in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. "It has various components--like a camera that watches the door, and sensors on the windows--and once triggered it amplifies those first signals to warn of danger and send a call for help. Cells have these different components as well, and now we've provided maybe the clearest example yet of how a particular receptor in the gut is acting as a sensor for an important intestinal infection."

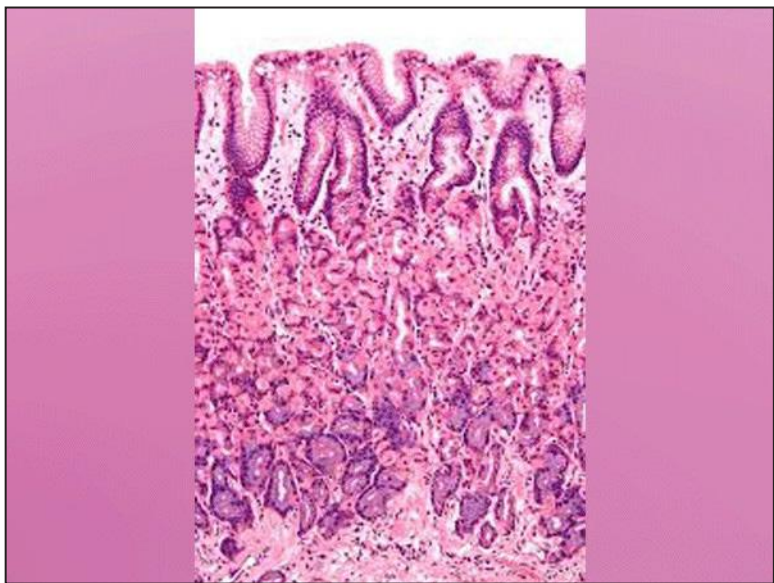
Typically, Striepen says, researchers have focused on immune cells, like macrophages and dendritic cells, as being the first to detect foreign invaders, but this new finding underscores that cells not normally thought of as part of the immune system--in this case intestinal epithelial cells--are playing key roles in how an immune response gets launched.

"There is a growing body of literature that is really appreciating what epithelial cells are doing to help the immune system sense pathogens," says Adam Sateriale, first author on the paper who was a postdoc in Striepen's lab and now leads his own lab at the Francis Crick Institute in London. "They seem to be the first line of defence against infection." Striepen's lab has devoted considerable attention to Cryptosporidium, which is a leading cause of the diarrheal disease that can be deadly in young children in resource-poor areas around the world. Cryptosporidium is also a threat to people in well-resourced environments, causing half of all water-borne disease outbreaks in the United States. In veterinary medicine, it's known for infecting calves,

stunting their growth. These infections have no effective treatment and no vaccine.

In the current work, Striepen, Sateriale, and colleagues took advantage of a naturally occurring species of mouse Cryptosporidium that they recently discovered mimics human infection in many respects. While the researchers knew T cells help control the parasite in later stages of infection, they began looking for clues as to what happens first.

of the NLRP6 receptor leads to failure to control the infection. NLRP6 is a receptor restricted to epithelial barriers previously linked to sensing and maintaining the intestinal microbiome, bacteria that naturally colonize the gut. However, experiments revealed that mice never exposed to bacteria, and thus lacked a microbiome, also activated their inflammasome upon infection with Cryptosporidium--a sign that this aspect of danger signalling



It has various components--like a camera that watches the door, and sensors on the windows--and once triggered it amplifies those first signals to warn of danger and send a call for help. Cells have these different components as well, and now we've provided maybe the clearest example yet of how a particular receptor in the gut is acting as a sensor for an important intestinal infection

One important clue is the unfortunate linkage between malnutrition and Cryptosporidium infection. Early infection with Cryptosporidium and the inflammation of the intestine that goes along with it predisposes children to malnutrition and stunted growth; at the same time, children who are malnourished are more susceptible to infection. This can lead to a downward spiral, putting children at greater risk of deadly infections. The mechanisms behind this phenomenon are not well understood. "That led us to think that maybe some of the danger-sensing mechanisms that can drive inflammation in the gut also play a role in the larger context of this infection," adds Striepen. Together these linkages inspired the research team to look more closely at the inflammasome and its impact on the course of infection in their mouse model. They did so by removing a key component of the inflammasome, an enzyme called caspase-1. "It turns out that animals that are missing this had much higher levels of infection," Sateriale says. Further work demonstrated that mice lacking caspase-1 just in intestinal epithelial cells suffered infections as high as those lacking it completely, demonstrating the crucial role of the epithelial cell. Consistent with this idea, the Penn Vet-led team showed that, out of a variety of candidate receptors, only loss

occurs in direct response to parasite infection and independent of the gut bacterial community.

To trace how triggering the intestinal inflammasome led to an effective response, the researchers looked at some of the signalling molecules, or cytokines, typically associated with inflammasome activation. They found that infection leads to the release of IL-18, with those animals that lack this cytokine or the ability to release it showing more severe infection.

"And when you add back IL-18, you can rescue these mice," Sateriale says, nearly reversing the effects of infection.

Striepen, Sateriale, and colleagues believe there's a lot more work to be done to find a vaccine against Cryptosporidium. But they say their findings help illuminate important aspects of the interplay between the parasite, the immune system, and the inflammatory response, relationships that may inform these translational goals. Moving forward, they are looking to the later stages of Cryptosporidium infection to see how the host successfully tamps it down. "Now that we understand how the infection is detected, we'd like to understand the mechanisms by which it is controlled," Sateriale says. "After the system senses a parasite, what is done to restrict their growth and kill them?"

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Agencies

IN THE FORUM OF AUTHORIZED OFFICER (DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER) PIR PANJAL FOREST DIVISION BUDGAM

PRESENT :- (Mohammad Ashraf Katoo) DFO.

In the case of:-

**Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir through technical:
Range Officer Doodganga**

VERSUS

**Riyaz Ahmad Bhat S/O Ghulam Qadir Bhat R/O Kuthipora B.K Pora Budgam
ORDER**

The proceedings under Section 52 of Indian Forest Act (IFA) came up for hearing before me arising out of seizure of vehicle TATA Mobile (Chassis No. 374435EUZ918295, Engine No.43R-003014) bearing Registration No. JK01N/9626 carrying illicit Timber Kail/Fir Saw to the tune of 16Nos=70.74Cfts at village Kuthipora B.K Pora, District Budgam on 03.12.2019 from the possession of accused namely Riyaz Ahmad Bhat S/O Ghulam Qadir Bhat R/O Kuthipora B.K Pora Budgam which was detected and seized by Range Officer Doodganga. An FIR has been lodged in Police Station Chadoora under No: 190/2019, dated: 03.12.2019, U/S 379 Act IPC against the accused as mentioned above. The seized property has been kept under the safe custody at OB Post Budgam. An intimation was sent to the Hon'ble Chief Judicial Magistrate Budgam as required under section 52(4)a of Indian Forest Act 1927 vide No. DFO/PP/Legal/490, dated: 04.12.2019.

1. The case was submitted to the Authorized Officer by Range Officer Doodganga vide his No. 1099-1102/DG, dated: 03.12.2019 for taking necessary action as per the provisions of Indian Forest Act 1927, as the said property was liable for confiscation under Section 52 of the Act. The perusal of records apparently revealed that the forest offence has been committed with respect to seized property under provisions of IFA. So, the confiscation proceedings were initiated U/s- 52 of sub-section (3) of Indian Forest Act 1927 in this forum.

2. After initiating proceedings, the summon was issued to the person from whom property seized in term of section 52(4)b of IFA by this office vide No. 523/DFO/AO/PP/Legal, dated: 09.12.2019 through Range Officer Doodganga for recording his statement. However, the accused couldn't present himself before the Authorized forum and the same was issued to seizing agency in term of section 52(4)d of IFA vide this office No: 522/DFO/PP/Legal, dt: 09.12.2019 for recording his statement.

3. A notice was sent to Joint Director Information Srinagar for publishing in two local leading News papers vide No: DFO/PP/Legal/84-88, dated: 10.06.2020 but only seizing agency produced himself before this Authority on the scheduled date of hearing i.e. on 23.06.2020 and recorded his evidences/statement. Due to Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, the Undersigned assumed that the communication couldn't have reached to the accused person, subsequently a series of summonses were again sent to the accused person on 04.07.2020, 22.07.2020 & 29.09.2020. In the long run, the accused person namely Riyaz Ahmad Bhat mentioned in the FIR copy, produced himself before this authority on 16.10.2020 and revealed in his statement that neither he is owner nor he was driving the said vehicle when the same was seized. During the proceeding he also stated that he has no claim with respect to seized property if the seized property be confiscated in favour of J & K UT Govt. Therefore, no attempt was made by opposite party to defend the case which resulted into exparte proceedings.

The points that need determination before cases are disposed off under the provisions of Act.

- Whether the seized stocks as per the seizure memos are forest produce?
- Whether the Forest offences with respect to produce have been committed?
- Whether the seized property involved in the cases is liable for confiscation within the meaning of sub-sec-3 of Sec-52 of Indian Forest Act?

AS REGARDS QUESTION NO:-1.

The Sec 2(4)(a) of IFA 1927 defines "forest produce" to be timber, charcoal, caoutchouc, catechu, wood-oil, resin, natural varnish, bark, lath, kuth, myrobalans, dioscarea, firewood, humus, rasant, morels (Morchella spp), Aconitum spp, Podophyllum spp, Picrorhizasp, Trillium spp, Nardostachys spp, Taxus spp, Valerianasp, Rheum spp, wild animals, skins, tusks, horns, bones and all other parts or produce of wild animals whether found in, or brought from, a forest or not.

The Sec-2 sub-section (4)(b)(i)(ii) of IFA defines "Timber" which includes:

- Trees and leaves, flowers and fruits, roots and all other parts or produce of trees not specified in clause (a);
- Plants not being trees (including grass, bamboos, creepers, reeds and moss and lichen), and all parts or produce of such plants;
- Silk, cocoons, honey and wax; and
- Peat, surface soil, rock, and minerals (including limestone, laterite, mineral oils, and all products of mines or quarries).

It is evident from the seizure memo that the seizing authority seized vehicle alongwith illicit timber brought from the forest. So, it can be safely concluded that seized property in the instant case is a forest produce within the meaning of Sec-2(4)(a) & Sec-2(4)(b) of IFA.

AS REGARDS QUESTION NO:-2.

Sec-2 (e) of IFA defines "Forest Offence" which means an offence punishable under this Act or under any rule made under this Act.

Section 2(iv) after clause (6), insert the following clause, namely:-

(6A) "transporter" includes a person, a private agency, a Government Department, Corporation or any other agency engaged in transport of forest produce whether on his own or on behalf of any other person.

Section 20A.- After section 20, insert the following section--

20A. Demarcated forests deemed to be reserved forests.-- (1) Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act or any other law for the time being in force, any forest which has been notified as a demarcated forest under the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir Forest Act, 1987 (1930 A.D.), prior to the appointed day notified under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019, shall be deemed to be a reserved forest under this Act.

(2) All questions decided, orders issued and records prepared in connection with the constitution of such forest as demarcated forests shall be deemed to have been decided, issued and prepared under this Act, and the provisions of this Act relating to reserved forests shall apply to forest to which the provision of sub-section (1) are applicable.

Section 26. -- In sub-section (1)--

- in clause (e), substitute the word dragging with the words dragging or removing;
- in clause (f), substitute the words the same with the words the same or any forest produce.
- for clause (h), substitute the following clause, namely:
 - clears or breaks up any land or erects a fence, enclosure or any structure for cultivation or cultivates or attempts to cultivate any land in any other manner in any reserved forest, or for any other purpose;
 - in the long line, for the words six months, or with fine which may extend to five hundred rupees, substitute the words two years, or with fine which may extend to twenty five thousand rupees.

Section 28.--

- in sub-section (1), for the word reserved forest, substitute the words reserved forest or declared a protected forest or is a land which has been entered in settlement records as Khalsa land.
- in sub-section (3) after the words reserved forests, insert the words or protected forests, as the case may be.

Section 29A.-- After section 29, insert the following section--

29A. Un-demarcated forests deemed to be protected forests. - (1) Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act or any other law for the time being in force, any un-demarcated forest (which means and includes all forest land other than demarcated forest which is the property of the Government of Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir and is not appropriated for any specific purpose and includes all the un-demarcated and berun line forest vested in the Forest Department under the provisions of section 48 of the Jammu and Kashmir Village Panchayat Act, 1958 or any other law for the time being in force), prior to the appointed day notified under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019, shall be deemed to be a protected forest under this Act.

(2) All questions decided, orders issued and records prepared in connection with the constitution of such forest as un-demarcated forests shall be deemed to have been decided, issued and prepared under this Act, and the provisions of this Act relating to protected forests shall apply to forest to which the provision of sub-section (1) are applicable. Moving of any timber or other forest produce through or out of any demarcated forest or from any sale depot except by routes on which check posts have been established, is prohibited.

Sec-52 of IFA provides for the seizure and confiscation of forest produce together with all tools, arms, boats, carts, equipment, ropes, chains, machines, vehicles, or any other article if any forest offence has been committed with respect to such forest produce.

There is overwhelming evidence that the concerned field staff of Doodganga Range have seized one vehicle TATA Mobile (Chassis No. 374435EUZ918295, Engine No.43R-003014) bearing Registration No. JK01N/9626 carrying illicit Timber Kail/Fir Saw to the tune of 16Nos=70.74Cfts (Kail, 02Nos=3.5Cfts and Fir, 14Nos= 67.24Cfts) at village Kuthipora B.K Pora, District Budgam on 03.12.2019 from the possession of accused namely Riyaz Ahmad Bhat S/O Ghulam Qadir Bhat R/O Kuthipora B.K Pora Budgam. No permit Pass/ F-25 or any other document produced in support of the timber as required under law, nor the accused person preferred any claim with respect to seized property during the course of present proceedings. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that the forest offence has been committed in contravention of provisions of the Section 2(ii) Sub-section 4(a)(b) and Sec-2(iv) Sub-section 6(A) of land transport Rules of IFA with respect to seized property.

AS REGARDS QUESTION NO:-3.

Section 52(1) of IFA provides for seizure of forest produce. It says when there is a reason to believe that a forest offence has been committed in respect of any forest produce, such produce together with all tools, arms, boats, carts, equipment, ropes, chains, machines, vehicles, cattle or any other article used in committing any such offence may be seized by a Forest Officer or Police Officer.

(2) Every officer seizing any property under this section shall place on such property a mark indicating that the same has been so seized and shall, as soon as may be, make a report of such seizure before an officer not below the rank of the Divisional Forest Officer (hereinafter referred to as the 'authorized officer').

3) Subject to sub-section (5), where the authorized officer upon receipt of report about seizure, is satisfied that a forest offence has been committed in respect thereof, he may, by order in writing and for reasons to be recorded, confiscate forest produce so seized together with all tools, arms, boats, carts, equipment, ropes, chains, machines, vehicles, cattle or any other article used in committing such offence and a copy of the order of confiscation shall be forwarded without any undue delay to the person from whom the property is seized and to the Conservator of Forest Circle in which the forest produce, tools, arms, boats, carts, equipment, ropes, chains, machines, vehicles, cattle or any other articles used in committing such offence.

As concluded in foregoing sections that the above detailed quantity of timber seized in the instant cases is a forest produce and in respect of which a definite forest offence has been committed in contravention of provisions of sec 2(ii) subsection 4(a)(b) and sec-2(iv) sub-section 6(A) of Land Transport Rules of IFA. Therefore the seized vehicle alongwith illicit timber is liable for confiscation within the meaning of Sub-Sec-3 of Sec-52 of IFA.

AS REGARDS QUESTION NO:-4.

The provision of sub-section-4(b)(c) of section 52 of IFA makes it incumbent to give notice of the proceedings and opportunity of representation and also hearing to the opposite party and to any other person who may appear to the authorised officer to have some interest in such seized property in the matter of confiscation. In context to cases in question, the respondents appeared before this Authority but no claim was made with regard to seized property.

The prosecution proved its case beyond any doubt by adducing evidences and exhibiting all the required documents to satisfy the firm about commission of forest offence. On the contrary, no attempt was made by opposite party to defend the case which resulted in to ex-parte proceedings. In short, the opposite party has adduced nothing to preclude the order of confiscation.

From the above discussion and careful analysis of these cases, I am of the forum view that it is proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the above mentioned persons referred as respondents were in passion of a illicit timber brought from the demarcated forest in violation of provisions of IFA. These were culprits who were transporting or planning to transport the timber covertly and illegally after inflicting the damage to forests which was timely detected and apprehended by forest officials. On consolidation of above facts and circumstances, it can be safely concluded that the respondents committed the offence under section 2(ii) sub-sec 4 (a)(b) and sec 2(iv) sub-section 6(A) of IFA.

Moreover, the principle of natural justice was followed during consecutive trials. Since no claim was made regarding the seized property, it can be thus concluded that the seized property (Kail, 02Nos=3.5Cfts and Fir, 14Nos= 67.24Cfts, Total Kail/Fir 16Nos=70.74Cfts) in the instant case alongwith vehicle is confiscated within the meaning of Sub-Sec-3 of Sec-52 of IFA.

CONCLUSION:-

Keeping in view, the principle enunciated in the Act and on analysis of report and facts on file, the irresistible conclusion is that the property seized alongwith vehicle in the instant case must be confiscated in favour of Jammu & Kashmir Union Territory Govt.

Now, therefore, in view of the facts enumerated above, it is ordered that:

I. The seized vehicle TATA Mobile (Chassis No. 374435EUZ918295, Engine No.43R-003014) bearing Registration No. JK01N/9626 carrying illicit Timber Kail/Fir Saw to the tune of 16Nos=70.74Cfts at village Kuthipora B.K Pora, District Budgam on 03.12.2019 from the possession of accused mentioned above is confiscated in favour of Jammu & Kashmir Union Territory. The confiscated vehicle along with its relevant documents is ordered to be handed over to Range Officer Budgam as custodian of the concerned confiscated assets. The timber be disposed off according to norms at the earliest after making necessary entries in Depot records. The Range Officer concerned will report compliance of order with respect to disposal of timber to this forum latest by 31st of January 2021, subject to expiry of specified period of revision.

II. The copy of this order be communicated to the Conservator of Forests, Srinagar Circle Srinagar. The copy of this order be communicated to the accused. The copy of this order be published in two leading News papers having wide circulation in the state. The file be consigned to records after its due completion.

Pronounced the order

in the open forum on 29.12.2020.

DIPK-11069/20

Memo No: DFO/PP/Legal/ Bud/534-39, Dated: 29-12-2020

-Sd/-

(Mohammad Ashraf Katoo) DFO
Authorized Officer -Cum-Divisional Forest Officer
Pir Panjal Forest Division, Budgam.

J&K SERVICES SELECTION BOARD,

Hema Complex, Adjacent to Gauri Shanker Mandir,

Channi Himmat, Sect 03, Jammu.

(www.jkssb.nic.in)

NOTICE

Subject- Revised/Final Answer Keys of the Computer Based Objective Type Written Examinations (CBT's) held between 15th of December, 2020, after disposal of the representations- regarding

Whereas, the J&K Services Selection Board conducted Computer Based Objective Type Written Examinations (CBT's) on 15th of December, 2020; and

Whereas, a link was activated on the official website of the JKSSB, for sharing the Answer Keys of different sets along with the provision of submitting representations, if any, against the keys, regarding their correctness relating;

Whereas, a total of 12 representations pertains to 7 unique questions were received within the stipulated time in respect of the above mentioned exam. Upon examination of the representations by the experts, it has been found that there is only one question wherein the answer is required to be nullified in comparison to the declared Answer Key. The detail of the question which is nullified is as under:-

Question which is nullified:-

Q)Which among the following is NOT a characteristic of DRAM?

- Short data lifetime.
- High power consumption.
- Needs to be refreshed continuously.
- Slower as compared to SRAM.

Number of Claims: 1

Declared Answer Key: B

Candidate Claim: None of These.

Final Answer: None of these, the question is nullified.

The result/shortlist will be prepared as per the revised key, accordingly.

(Sachin Jamwal) KAS,
Secretary,
J&K Services Selection Board,
Jammu.

No. SSB/Secy/Sel/2020/5179-83

DIPK-11072/20

Dated:- 29.12.2020

DAK Sounds New Covid-19 Strain Alert In Kashmir



SRINAGAR: With India reporting twenty cases of new Covid-19 strain so far, Doctors Association Kashmir (DAK) today sounded alert and has urged health authorities in Kashmir to prepare for the potential spread of the variant in the valley.

"New Covid-19 strain is knocking on our door. We need to be prepared and alert," said DAK President and influenza expert Dr Nisar ul Hassan.

"The new variant is on the move and it can sneak in anytime," he said.

"We have to prepare in advance to deal with the virus. Advance planning and preparedness is critical to help mitigate the impact of

any eventuality."

"We need to intensify surveillance activities and gear up hospitals to prevent an outbreak," Dr Nisar said.

"The best way to prevent the virus is to stop it from coming in as once the virus enters the community it is difficult to control it."

He said twenty people who returned to India from the UK recently have tested positive for the new mutated strain.

The variant - called VUI-202012/01 carries multiple mutations in the spike protein that the virus uses to enter human body cells.

The mutant that was first reported in UK has moved to a number of other countries prompting more

than 50 countries including India to impose travel ban on the UK.

"The new strain is more infectious than the original virus. It is reported to be 70 percent more contagious than the existing strain," Dr Nisar said.

"The new variant has wreaked havoc in UK and is responsible for the surge of new Covid-19 cases in the country."

"At the moment, it seems the symptoms of the new strain are the same as the earlier one," he said.

"Apart from cough and fever, other symptoms that are reported in persons affected by the new virus include fatigue, muscle pain, headache, loss of appetite, diarrhea and mental confusion."

"The new variant spreads through the same old ways. It spreads between people through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks," said Dr Nisar.

"This means that wearing a mask, following hand hygiene and maintaining physical distance remain the principal ways to avoid getting infection from the new variant," he said.

APART FROM COUGH AND FEVER, OTHER SYMPTOMS that are reported in persons affected by the new virus include fatigue, muscle pain, headache, loss of appetite, diarrhea and mental confusion."

Div Com Takes Stock Of Major Dev Projects In Pulwama, Anantnag

Observer News Service

ANANTNAG: The Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir Pandurang K Pole today took on spot assessment of pace and progress of work execution on various major developmental projects during an extensive tour to Pulwama and Anantnag districts.

He visited Industrial Estate Wuyan, Industrial Estate Khrew and Grid Station Khrew in Pulwama district.

The Div Com was accompanied by Deputy Commissioner Pulwama, Raghav Lankar, DC Anantnag KK Sidha, Director Industries, MD JKPC, GM SICOP, CE PHE, GM SIDCO, GM Sports Council, PDD Planning, representatives from various departments and agencies.

Stressing on making all facilities including power and water supply available to the units at Wuyan Industrial Estate, the Div Com directed concerned to identify nearby available structures or land for the relocation of army from the estate land and vacate structures presently occupied by the forces.

Stressing on early widening of approach road length upto 40 feet at Industrial Estate Khrew, the Div Com instructed concerned to start land acquisition and removal of encroachments if any at the earliest for the proposed road construction. He said that work on road widening and other two patches should be complete by January ending. Div Com also stressed on speedy work completion of under construction administrative block.

Instructions for work completion on Grid Station Khrew were also issued to ensure the project is completed by March to facilitate better power supply to the local industrial estate and adjoining areas.

During visit to Anantnag district, the Div Com inspected and assessed ongoing work process on multipurpose Indoor and Outdoor Sports Stadiums, Emergency Landing Facility Bijbehra, Fruit and Vegetable Mandi Jabilpora, Industrial Estate and Transit Accommodation Vessu, GMC Anantnag, Water Supply Schemes Bresty Batapora and Shangus.

Taking stock of the works, the Div Com emphasized on pace of work and is expedited to ensure completion of all projects in time.

Calling upon providing better sports facilities to the youth in Anantnag, he directed concerned to construct a cycle and walking track adjacent to the inner road at Bijbehara stadium.

He said that land of Bijbehara has been always fertile in bringing up various sports personalities and special focus is being given on making all sports facilities available to the local youth.

Inspecting the construction of residential structure at Transit Accommodation at Vessu, the Div Com stressed on speedy work completion on all under construction quarters for their early commissioning to the deserving. He also instructed concerned to ensure early vacation of a building occupied by Panchs and Sarpanchs.

Apni Party Holds Meet With Over 40 DDC candidates

JAMMU: Apni Party today organized a meeting of leaders and candidates who contested District Development Council elections in Jammu region.

The meeting was held under the leadership by Former MLC and Apni Party, General Secretary, Vijay Bakaya in which General Secretary Vikram Malhotra, and Former Minister and Provincial President Manjit Singh, Provincial President, Women Wing, Namrta Sharma, other party leaders and 40 DDC candidates who contested elections participated at Gandhi Nagar.

In his address, Vijay Bakaya appreciated the DDC candidates who contested in Jammu region on party mandate and also thanked the voters who have supported the candidates in recently concluded elections.

The DDC candidates interacted with the party leaders and discussed various issues. Vijay Bakaya said that complimented the candidates for coming forward to contest the DDC elections at short-notice.

'Mental Health And Career Counselling' Amar Singh College Holds Int'l Webinar



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Psychological cum Career Counselling and Placement Cell of the college organized One-Day International webinar at Amar Singh College, Srinagar on 29th December, 2020 at 12.00PM (IST) under Manodarpan, an initiative by MHRD, Govt. of India as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. The theme of the webinar was "Mental Health and career counselling". The webinar acquainted the participants with two important aspects of counselling viz-a-viz Mental Health and Career Counselling: both being indispensable for leading a modern life.

Commissioner/Secretary to Government, Higher Education Department, J&K, Talat Parvez Rohella was the Chief Patron of the programme.

Prof. Bashir Ahmad Rather, Principal of the college, in his address formally welcomed the participants, dignitaries and the Resource Persons and informed that the college is contemplating to conduct more such online workshops and webinars.

The programme consisted of Two Technical sessions and was coordinated by the members of Manodarpan Initiative, Dr. Ulfat Jaan, Dr. Syed Muthar Aaqib and Dr. Parvaize Ahmad Dar.

r. Ulfat Jaan, in her opening remarks, introduced the theme and importance of the webinar. She informed the audience that more than 1000 participants registered for the webinar. The participants included faculty members of the College, re-

search scholars and students. She also introduced the Speakers for the Webinar, Ms. Aflaha Wadera (Senior Manager, Commonwealth Bank of Australia) and Ms. Asiya Niyaz (Consultant clinical psychologist, IMHANS, Srinagar) to the audience.

Ms. Asiya Niyaz in her elaborated presentation explained various mental health issues and their causes. At the same time, she deliberated upon the importance of counselling in day-to-day life. She stressed upon various methods and strategies to alleviate stress.

Ms. Aflaha Wadera, who is also a certified ICF life coach stressed upon developing a mindset for corporate career and asserted the importance of goal setting in order to stay focused. Aflaha also shared her mantra of success with the participants and encouraged them to explore new career options in the job market.

The Webinar was followed by a healthy interactive session which was moderated by Dr. Parvaize Ahmad Dar. The rapporteur for the proceedings of the programme was Dr. Shamas un Nisa. The programme concluded with a formal vote of thanks proposed by Dr. Syed Muthar Aaqib which was followed by the distribution of e-certificates to the participants.

The webinar was conducted over the Google Meet and due to the overwhelming response of participants the webinar was live-streamed on the YouTube channel of the college.

Obtaining Golden Card A Challenging Task : RTIMovement

Cancer Patients 'Denied' Health Insurance In Chadoora

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Jammu & Kashmir RTI Movement has demanded that the Government must take steps to ensure health insurance card is issued to the deserving people. Many people are made to wait for months to get the health insurance also known as Golden Cards.

In a statement Chairman RTI Movement Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat said that people especially those belonging to economically weaker sections of the society are facing challenges in getting the free treatment in Govt and private hospitals as they have not been provided the Golden Cards. "Those who have applied haven't received it for a long time and many are not even being registered on the pretext of some 'tech-

nical issues' especially in Chadoora area of Budgam district. This includes some cancer patients as well who are moving from pillar to post".

People from areas like Wathoora and Gopalpora in Chadoora say they are denied the Golden Cards on the pretext of some technical reasons as these areas according to local Khidmat Center officials are not registered on the online portal. "This is an official apathy and people are made to suffer. Even cancer patients haven't been provided Golden cards which is a matter of concern. On one hand PM Modi launches special health insurance scheme Sahat for J&K, and on the other side people are even denied basic service of Golden Card", said Dr Raja Muzaffar.

He appealed authorities especially Director Health Services Kashmir, DC Budgam and CMO Budgam to intervene.

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
- BUIBHARA: 01932-228243
- PAMPORE: 01933-294132
- PATTAN: 01954-293507
- QAZIGUND: 01951-296153

HIGHWAY STATUS



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

This Day in History

- 535 - Byzantine General Belisarius completes the conquest of Sicily, defeating Ostrogothic garrison of Syracuse, and ending his consulship for the year
- 1600 - British East India Company chartered
- 1669 - France & Brandenburg sign secret treaty
- 1670 - France & England sign Boyne-treaty
- 1744 - English astronomer James Bradley announces discovery of Earth's nutation motion (wobble)
- 1756 - Russia joins the Alliance of Versailles
- 1758 - British expeditionary army occupies Goree (Dakar) Senegal
- 1775 - Battle of Quebec in American Revolutionary War; Americans defeated trying to take British stronghold
- 1783 - Import of African slaves banned by all of the Northern US states
- 1805 - End of French Republican calendar; France returns to Gregorianism
- 1861 - 22,990mm of rain falls in Cherrapunji Assam in India in 1861, a world record
- 1862 - Battle of Stone's River (Battle of Murfreesboro), Tennessee in American Civil War
- 1901 - In the first election under their new constitution, Cuba elects a Congress and their first president, Tomas Estrada Palma
- 1924 - Italian Fascist Mussolini orders the suppression of opposition newspapers
- 1942 - Battle of the Barents Sea between British Navy and German Kriegsmarine off North Cape, Norway
- 1944 - Japanese army evacuates harbor city Akyab
- 1944 - World War II: Hungary declares war on Germany.
- 1946 - US President Harry Truman officially proclaims end of WW II
- 1951 - 1st battery to convert radioactive energy to electricity announced
- 1952 - Danny Nardico stops former world middleweight champion Jake LaMotta in 7 rounds in a light heavyweight non-title bout in Coral Gables, Florida; LaMotta is knocked down for the only time in his career, his corner stopping fight after the round
- 1955 - The General Motors Corporation becomes the first U.S. corporation to make over \$1 billion USD in a year.
- 1961 - Failed coup by Syrian group in Lebanon
- 1961 - Marshall Plan expires after distributing more than \$12 billion
- 1964 - Donald Campbell (UK) sets world water speed record (276.33 mph)
- 1964 - Indonesia proclaims expelled from the UN
- 1974 - Popular Electronics displays Altair 8800 computer
- 1977 - Amir Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah becomes leader of Kuwait
- 1977 - Cambodia drops diplomatic relations with Vietnam
- 1978 - Iran shah names Chapour Bakhtiar premier
- 1978 - Taiwan's final day of diplomatic relations with US
- 1980 - After being struck by an orange thrown from the crowd West Indian fast bowler Sylvester Clarke knocks out a spectator with a brick during 4th Test against Pakistan in Multan
- 1983 - Brunei gains complete independence from Britain
- 1983 - Nigeria's National Assembly dissolves after military coup
- 1983 - President Shagari of Nigeria is overthrown in a military coup and Major General Muhammadu Buhari is installed as Head of State
- 1986 - Russian TU-144 flies for 1st time faster than sound
- 1990 - Iraq begins a military draft of 17 year olds

From KO Archives

Qaum Ka Gam Khatayhain, Dinner Key Saath

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Iftar parties being hosted by every Tom, Dick and Harry in this capital city these days have become a source of avoidable inconvenience to the general public. Amazingly the 'worthy' hosts are least bothered by what their lavish feasting by debit to the empty state exchequer meant to the city dwellers at a time when they hurry back to their homes after a day's work.

Residents of various downtown localities here had a taste of their rulers' indifference on Saturday when they found the -busy Maulana Azad Road blocked to vehicular traffic for most of its stretch. Lo and behold, it was the peak hour for all the commuters to rush back home to join their waiting, generally anxious, families over Iftar.

Location of what is known as the Banquet Hall in the premises of the erstwhile chief minister's official residence on the main Civil Lines artery was the reason why vehicular traffic was diverted towards Regal Chowk for onward journey through the equally crowded SP higher secondary school. Traffic police authorities may know better why its own 'one way' restriction was eased to choke the awfully narrow roads. Obviously, caught in a nasty traffic jam, hundreds of people on fast found them-selves helpless at the Iftar time. Mercifully, some citizens came out to serve some eatables to the stranded hundreds on the road.

"The ministers and bureaucrats hosting the Iftar parties at state expense should hang their heads in shame for subjecting innocent people to inconvenience during the holy month", an agitated downtown resident was heard saying.

(KASHMIR OBSERVER, 31 DECEMBER, 2000)

Power Shutdown In Valley

SRINAGAR: According to the Power Controller, Kashmir Province, in order to stringing work 33kv Baramulla Ist and Baramulla II lines shall remain affected on January 01, 2021 and January 04, 2021 from 11am to 1PM respectively.

The power supply to receiving stations Baramulla ist, Kanibagh, Drangbal, Baramulla II and Sheerl shall remain affected. Similarly, in order to carry out installation of isolators, erection of poles and laying of bus bar, 33/11 receiving stations and lines of Qazigund & Achabal shall remain shutdown on December 31, 2020 from 11am to 5pm while Damjan-Qazigund Tap line shall observe shutdown on January 02, 2021 from 11am to 3pm.

Also, in order to facilitate segregation of 11kv sailors feeder and commissioning thereof, 33kv Alesteng Power House Line shall remain shutdown on December 31, 2020 from 12 noon to 3pm. The power supply to receiving station Power House Doderhama Manigam shall remain affected. Furthermore, in order to carry out works under languishing projects, PMDP 33kv Nihalpora Markundal & Badampora HCC/Army line shall remain shutdown on January 02 & 07, 2021 from 10am to 4 pm. While the power supply to receiving stations Naidkhai, Markundal, Hajin, Ajas, Preng and Army shall remain affected. The power supply to areas fed from these stations and lines shall remain off on their respective periods.

Government of Union Territory Jammu & Kashmir									
OFFICE OF THE EXECUIVE ENGINEER R&B DIVISION PULWAMA									
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS									
E-NIT No.Fresh-238/EEP/RNB/2020-21/9484-94					Dated:30/12/2020				
For and on behalf of the President of India e-tenders (single Cover system) are invited on item rate basis from approved and eligible Contractors registered with UT of J&K Government ,CPWD, Railways and other state/Central Governments for each of the following works'-									
S.No	Name of Work	Est. Cost (Rs. in Lacs)	Cost of T/Doc. (Rs.)	Earnest Money (Rs.)	Time of Completion in Days	Time &Date of Opening of Bid	Class of Contractor	Major Head of Account	
1.	Construction of Lane from Main road to H/o Ghulam Hassan Bhat and others at Washbugh Pulwama.	2.91	200/-	5,900/-	10 days	07/01/2021	DEE	14 th -FC	
2.	Construction of P-Bund from Main road to H/o Nisar Ahmad Bhat on wards at Washbugh Pulwama.	2.93	200/-	5,900/-	10 days	07/01/2021	DEE	14 th -FC	
3.	Construction of C.C Drain at Babhar Dadoora with links and Tiken Sonsamil road and Murrar Deeri road IR Karimabad road by way of P/L of WBM Grade-II in Patchews/Stretches and R/Wall by B/W/O P/L of Construction of R/Wall at Tiken Sonsamil road. (BW.)	2.80	200/-	5600/-	10 Days	07/01/2021	DEE	S/S	
4.	Construction of lane and Drain from H/O Manzoor Ahmad Hajam to H/O Naza Begum Widow of Mohd Abdullah Bhat Ward No 1 (Bahu) MC Awantipora.	2.09	200/-	4,200/-	10 days	07/01/2021	DEE	UDS	
5.	Construction of lane from the H/O Gowhar Ahmad Nengroo to H/O Manzoor Ahmad Nengroo at Nengroo Mohalla Prichoo.	2.00	200/-	4,000/-	10 days	07/01/2021	DEE	UDS	
6.	Construction /Repairs of lane from main road Pampore Shopian road to House of Abdul Rehman Ganie at Washbugh opposite PDD Station.	1.50	200/-	3,000/-	10 days	07/01/2021	DEE	IMDT	
7.	Construction of Drain/Bund from Jamia Masjid to House of Manzoor Ahmad Bhat at Simoo MC Pulwama.	1.50	200/-	3,000/-	10 days	07/01/2021	DEE	IMDT	
8.	Repair/Renovation to SE's Residential Quarter at Pulwama.	3.47	200/-	7000/-	10 days	07/01/2021	DEE	2216-AR Housing	

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 the departmental website www.jktenders.gov.in as per Schedule of dates given below:-

1.	Date of Issue of tender Notice	30/12/2020
2.	Period of downloading of bidding documents	30/12/2020 4:00 PM to 06/01/2021 04:00 PM
3.	Bid submission Start date	30/12/2020 10:00 AM
4.	Bid submission End date	06/01/2021 04:00 PM
5.	Date and time of opening of Bids (online)	07/01/2021 11:00 AM

1. Bids must be accompanied with cost of Tender document in shape of Valid Treasury Receipt/e-Challan under Major Head 0059 Revenue in favour of Executive Engineer R&B Division Pulwama (tender inviting authority) and Earnest money /Bid security in shape of CDR/FDR pledged to Executive Engineer R&B Division Pulwama (tender receiving authority)

2. The date and time of opening of Bids shall be notified on website 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 on same web site in the office of the Executive Engineer R&B Division Pulwama (tender receiving authority).

All other terms and conditions shall be available in website www.jktenders.gov.in

Head Draftsman DIPK-11126/20	Technical Officer	Executive Engineer, R&B Division Pulwama
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AstraZeneca-Oxford Covid Vaccine Cleared By UK As It Fights Mutant Virus

AGENCIES

UK AstraZeneca Vaccine: AstraZeneca said the authorisation was for a two dose regime, and that the vaccine had been approved for use for emergency supply. Britain has ordered 100 million doses of the vaccine.

London: Britain on Wednesday became the first country in the world to approve a coronavirus vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca as it battles a major winter surge driven by a new, highly contagious variant of the virus.

AstraZeneca said the authorisation was for a two dose regime, and that the vaccine had been approved for use for emergency supply. Britain has ordered 100 million doses of the vaccine.

"The government has today accepted the recommendation from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to authorise Oxford University/AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine for use," the health ministry said.

The pandemic has already killed 1.7 million people around the world, sown chaos through the global economy and upended normal life for billions since it began in Wuhan, China, a year ago.

Britain and South Africa in particular are grappling with new variants of the coronavirus, which the government and scientists say are more contagious; many countries have responded by banning passenger flights and blocking trade.

AstraZeneca and other developers have said they are studying the impact of the new variant but expect that their shots will be effective against it.

Regulatory endorsement is a welcome boost for AstraZeneca and the Oxford team, which have been accused of a lack of clarity about the results from late-stage trials.

Pooled results from those trials show it had overall efficacy was 70.4%. Efficacy was 62% for trial participants given two full doses, but 90% for a smaller sub-group given a half, then a full dose. Researchers said that the finding of 90% efficacy for the low-dose/high-dose regime needed more investigation. AstraZeneca did not specify which dose regime had been approved.

"Today is an important day for millions of people in the UK who will get access to this new vaccine," AstraZeneca Chief Executive Pascal Soriot said.

"It has been shown to be effective, well-tolerated, simple to administer and is supplied by AstraZeneca at no profit."

Nasrallah: Israel, US & Saudi's Want Me Dead



AGENCIES

BEIRUT: Hezbollah leader Seyed Hassan Nasrallah has said Saudi Arabia is hand in gloves with the US and Israel in the assassination of Iran's top commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and his companions.

"The criminal assassination of General Soleimani was not only an American crime, but I believe that Israel and Saudi Arabia were culprits in this crime as well, even if their role was just to provoke Washington to commit it," Nasrallah said in a recent interview with the al-Mayadeen television network.

Paying homage to Iran's top commander on the eve of his assassination anniversary, Nasrallah said as a humble commander Soleimani was always present on the battleground and commanding fellow fighters as opposed to military leaders worldwide who are absent from conflict zones.

"Hajj Qassem Soleimani's school of thought means taking risks. Death threatened him all the time. But he was always at the forefront, and I always disagreed with him on the matter. I always tried to keep him behind the frontline, but none of us could force him to do so," Nasrallah said.

The Hezbollah chief recalled how

Soleimani had come to visit him in Beirut's southern Dahieh neighborhood during the 33-day Israeli military onslaught on Lebanon in the summer of 2006, despite repeated warnings that it could seriously put his life at risk.

"During the 33-day war, Hajj Qassem helped us a lot. Iraqi commanders said he was always at the forefront of the fight against Daesh and was with Iraqi and Syrian forces. This is another personality trait of his," Nasrallah highlighted. He also noted that in addition to Soleimani he is also on the joint hit list drawn up by the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia.

According to Nasrallah, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had tried to goad President Donald Trump during his first visit to Washington into authorizing the assassination of top Hezbollah commanders through Israeli operations.

Nasrallah added that he has always been a target for the common axis of the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia both before and after the assassination of Soleimani, adding that efforts made in this regard become more intense before the recent US presidential election because Trump needed its impact on US polls.

Soleimani was assassinated by a US drone near Baghdad International Airport on January 3.

Pakistan's Former Foreign Minister Arrested In Assets Beyond Means Case

Khawaja Asif was taken into the custody of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) when he was coming out of a party meeting here, said Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PM-N) spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb.

AGENCIES

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's former foreign minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif was arrested in Islamabad on Tuesday by anti-corruption officials for allegedly having assets beyond means of income. Asif was taken into the custody of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) when he was coming out of a party meeting here, said Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PM-N) spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb.

The NAB, in a statement, said its officials from the Lahore office executed the arrest in "assets beyond known sources of income case." The bureau said that Asif held a Dubai iqama (work permit) from 2004 to 2008, and earned a total of Rs 136 million for his services as a consultant legal adviser.

He was directed to submit details of the salary he received and other information. "Khawaja Asif continuously failed to cooperate during the inquiry," according to the NAB.

PM-L-N chief former premier Nawaz Sharif condemned the arrest. He said it showed the government was rattled and that "the days of blind vengeance (by the government) are numbered". His daughter Maryam Nawaz alleged that Asif was being pressured to oppose Nawaz Sharif and



was arrested on refusing to do so.

With his arrest, Asif now joins a long list of PM-L-N leaders facing cases of corruption, including party president Shehbaz Sharif, senior members Hamza Shehbaz, Rana Sanaullah, Javed Latif, Ahsan Iqbal, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Saad Rafique, among others.



Trump's Pardon Of Blackwater Iraq Contractors Violates International Law: UN

AGENCIES

United States President Donald Trump's pardon of four American men convicted of killing Iraqi civilians while working as contractors in 2007 violated US obligations under international law, United Nations human rights experts said on Wednesday.

Nicholas Slatten was convicted of first-degree murder, while Paul Slough, Evan Liberty and Dustin Heard were convicted of voluntary and attempted manslaughter, over the incident in which US contractors opened fire in busy traffic in a Baghdad square and killed 14 unarmed Iraqi civilians.

The four contractors, who worked for the private security

firm Blackwater owned by the brother of Trump's education secretary, were included in a wave of pre-Christmas pardons announced by the White House.

"Pardoning the Blackwater contractors is an affront to justice and to the victims of the Nisour Square massacre and their families," Jelena Aparac, chair of the UN working group on the use of mercenaries, said in a statement.

The Geneva Conventions oblige states to hold war criminals accountable for their crimes, even when they act as private security contractors, the UN experts said.

"These pardons violate US obligations under international law and more broadly undermine humanitarian law and human rights at a global level."

By allowing private security contractors to "operate with impunity in armed conflicts", states will be emboldened to circumvent their obligations under humanitarian law, they said.

The pardons were strongly criticised by many in the United States. General David Petraeus and Ryan Crocker, respectively commander of US forces and US ambassador in Iraq at the time of the incident, called Trump's pardons "hugely damaging, an action that tells the world that Americans abroad can commit the most heinous crimes with impunity".

In a statement announcing the pardons, the White House said the move was "broadly supported by the public" and backed by a number of Republican lawmakers.



Pardoning the Blackwater contractors is an affront to justice and to the victims of the Nisour Square massacre and their families"

Us Approves Potential Sale Of 3,000 Smart Bombs To Saudi Arabia

AGENCIES

The US State Department has approved the potential sale of 3,000 precision guided munitions to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in a deal valued at up to \$290 billion, the Pentagon said on Tuesday.

The sale comes in the final days of US President Donald Trump's term. President-elect Joe Biden has pledged to halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the Middle East's biggest buyer of American weapons, in

a bid to pressure Riyadh to end a war in Yemen that has caused the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The package would include 3,000 GBU-39 Small Diameter Bomb I (SDB I) munitions, containers, support equipment, spares and technical support, the Pentagon said. "The proposed sale will improve Saudi Arabia's capability to meet current and future threats by increasing its stocks of long-range, precision air-to-ground munitions," the Pentagon said in a statement. It added that "the size and accuracy of the SDB I allows for an effective munition with

less collateral damage." The Pentagon's Defence Security Cooperation Agency notified Congress of the possible sale on Tuesday. Members of Congress have been angered by steep civilian casualties in Yemen and earlier this year tried and failed to block the sale of F-35 warplanes to Riyadh.

Despite approval by the State Department, the notification does not indicate that a contract has been signed or that negotiations have concluded.

The Pentagon said Boeing Co was the prime contractor for the weapons.

Swan song: A bird Mourning Its Partner Holds-up 23 Trains In Germany

At least 20 trains cancelled after swan stopped at site of another's death near Fuldatal



AGENCIES

Police and firefighters in Germany were forced to intervene to move an apparently "mourning" swan that was blocking a high-speed railway line, according to a statement released by the rescuers on Monday.

The swan was pictured blocking the line near Fuldatal, causing at least 20 trains to be cancelled, after a second swan was killed when it flew into the overhead line above the tracks.

After the accident the second swan settled on the railway tracks below, preventing trains from passing on the route from Kassel to Göttingen. According to reports in local media, firefighters brought in specialist equipment to remove the dead swan from the overhead lines and the second swan from the tracks, taking it to the Fulda river where it was released.

According to police, 23 trains were delayed by around 50 minutes in the incident, which happened on 23 December but was only revealed five days later.

It has been observed before that swans apparently mourn their mates, with the birds remaining near the site of another's death.

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Kamala Harris Receives Coronavirus Vaccine Live On Television



A mask-wearing Kamala Harris received the first of her two shots at United Medical Center, located in an area of Washington, DC with a large African-American population

WASHINGTON: US Vice President-elect Kamala Harris received her Covid vaccine live on television Tuesday and urged public trust in the process, while her choice of hospital highlighted the plight of the hard-hit African-American community.

A mask-wearing Harris received the first of her two shots at United Medical Center, located in an area of Washington, DC with a large African-American population.

African-American communities nationwide have seen disproportionately high levels of death and illness related to the Covid-19 pandemic, while polls have also indicated they are among the most reluctant to get vaccinated.

"So I want to remind people that right in your community is where you can take the vaccine, where you will receive the vaccine by folks you may know," she said after receiving the vaccine manufactured by US firm Moderna.

"So I want to remind people that they have trusted sources of help and that's where they will be able to go to get the vaccine."

Harris will become the first Black and Indian-American vice president when she takes office on January 20, as well as the first woman in the role.

Her husband Doug Emhoff was also to be vaccinated.

A string of public officials have been vaccinated before cameras as part of efforts to overcome public skepticism and convince those in doubt that the immunizations are vital to returning to a semblance of normality in the months ahead. President-elect Joe Biden was vaccinated live on television on December 21.

Outgoing President Donald Trump, who was hospitalized with the virus in October, has not committed to being vaccinated. Trump has repeatedly downplayed the dangerousness of the virus and urged business and school reopenings despite its surge nationwide.

The United States has registered some 19.3 million cases and more than 335,000 deaths related to the virus, both the world's highest, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University.

Suspension Of Scheduled International Passenger Flights Extended Till January 31



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI: The coronavirus-induced suspension of scheduled international passenger flights has been extended till January 31, aviation regulator DGCA said today.

"However, international scheduled flights may be allowed on selected routes by the competent authority on a case-to-case basis," the Directorate General of Civil Aviation added.

Scheduled international passenger services have been suspended in India since March 23 due to the coronavirus pandemic. But special international

flights have been operating under the Vande Bharat Mission since May and under bilateral "air bubble" arrangements with selected countries since July.

India has formed air bubble pacts with 24 countries including the US, the UK, the UAE, Kenya, Bhutan and France. Under an air bubble pact between two countries, special international flights can be operated by their airlines between their territories.

The DGCA circular also said that the suspension does not affect the operation of international all-cargo operations and flights specifically approved by it.

Indian Students In UK Seek Emergency Travel After Flight Ban Extended



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LONDON: Indian student groups in the UK on Wednesday urged the Indian government to consider emergency travel options in extremely exceptional cases during the current suspension of air travel imposed contain a fast-spreading mutant strain of coronavirus detected in Britain.

As the Union Civil Aviation ministry announced that the suspension will be extended by another week until January 7, the groups sought some emergency intervention after being contacted by individuals desperate to get to India due to a family crisis or bereavement.

"I hope this time emergency travel arrangements can be made for Indian travellers with a family member critically ill or just passed away. I've seen first-hand the plight of those unable to travel due to bans -- another just last week," said Sanam Arora, Chair of the National Indian Students and Alumni Union UK (NISAU-UK), a representative group for Indian students in the UK.

"I'm in desperate need of help for flying to India from the UK. My mom is very critical and it is imperative for me to (be)

able to fly to Bangalore," said Netal, one of those affected, in a Twitter plea to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and other senior Indian ministers.

"Urging MEA India to please help!!! There have to (be) exceptions to the rule," she said.

NISAU-UK has also issued an advisory for Indian students hoping to start an academic term in the New Year and confirmed that under UK Home Office rules, their applicability for the new Graduate or post-study work visa will not be impacted adversely.

"If students are required to either continue their current studies or commence a new course by distance or blended learning due to COVID-19, they will still be eligible to switch into the Graduate route on a concessionary basis if they spent some time studying outside the UK," the advisory notes.

"Students who are completing their course in summer 2021, including those who commenced a one-year Masters programme in September 2020, will benefit from this concession if they enter the UK on or before April 6, 2021 and complete the final semester of their studies in the UK," it adds.



Prices Down 50%, Forced To Sell Crops Below MSP: Farm Union Leaders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI: As farmers' protest against three new farm laws continues, union leaders on Wednesday said farmers in some parts of the country are being forced to sell crops, including paddy below the Minimum Support Price (MSP) as market rates have fallen, and asserted that the agitation will continue till the government agrees to their demands.

"After new farm laws were implemented in Uttar Pradesh, prices of crops have fallen by 50 per cent. Crops are being bought at below MSP. Paddy is being sold at 800 per quintal. We will raise these issues in the meeting," Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait said.

Before entering the venue of the sixth round of talks between farmer groups and the government, Mr Tikait told reporters that farmers will continue their stir if the government does not agree to our demands.

"We will not leave Delhi till our demands are met. We will celebrate New Year at borders" he said.

Punjab farmer leader Baldev Singh Sirsa came for the meeting carrying placards of media reports of fraudulent cases reported in Guna and Hosangabad after implementation of the new laws.

"We don't have any new agenda. The government is maligning us by saying farmers are not coming for talks. So, we gave December 29 as the date for talks. We have given them our clear agenda, but the government is insisting that laws are beneficial for farmers," Mr Sirsa said.

Showing media reports, he said more fraudulent cases are being reported after the implementation of the new laws and these issues will be raised in the meeting.

The meeting between three union ministers and representatives of 41 farmer groups began at around 2.30 pm at Vigyan Bhawan.

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar is heading the government side, which also included Railways, Commerce and Food Minister Piyush Goyal and Minister of State for Commerce Som Parkash, who is a Member of Parliament from Punjab.

The sixth round of talks between the two sides is being held after a huge gap. The fifth round of talks was held on December 5.

The protesting farmer unions are sticking to their position that the discussions will only

be on the modalities of repealing the three new farm laws and giving a legal guarantee on the MSP among other issues.

On Monday, the Centre invited the unions for the next round of talks on December 30 on all relevant issues to find a "logical solution" with an "open mind" to the prolonged impasse over the three new farm laws that were enacted in September.

But in its letter on Tuesday, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, the umbrella organisation which represents the farmer unions, said the modalities for repealing the three contentious laws and a legal guarantee on MSP must be part of the agenda.

The sixth round of talks was originally scheduled for December 9 but it was called off after an informal meeting of Home Minister Amit Shah with some union leaders, failed to reach any breakthrough.

The government had, however, followed up Mr Shah's meeting with a draft proposal sent to these farmer unions in which it had suggested 7 to 8 amendments to the new laws and written assurance on the MSP procurement system. The government has ruled out a repeal of the three laws.

Ministers Join Farmer Union Leaders To Share 'Langar' Food

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Three union ministers joined farm leaders on Wednesday to share 'langar' food arranged by protesting farmers during their sixth round of talks to resolve the deadlock over new farm laws.

The 'langar' (community kitchen) food arrived in a van at the meeting venue, Vigyan Bhawan, after around two hours of discussions had taken place and the two sides took a break for tea and snacks.

Sources present at the venue said that Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, Food and Railway Minister Piyush Goyal and Minister of State for Commerce Som Parkash joined the farmer leaders to share their langar food during the break.

Farmer leaders said that the talks were continuing and they were going 'agenda wise'.

Before start of the meeting, some



union leaders had said farmers in some parts of the country are being forced to sell crops including paddy below the Minimum Support Price as market rates have fallen and asserted that the agitation will continue till the government agrees to their demands.

"After new farm laws were implemented in Uttar Pradesh, prices of crops have fallen by 50 per cent. Crops are being bought at below MSP. Paddy is being sold at Rs 800 per quintal. We

will raise these issues in the meeting," Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait told reporters.

"We will not leave Delhi till our demands are met. We will celebrate New Year at borders" he said.

Punjab farmer leader Baldev Singh Sirsa came for the meeting carrying placards of media reports of fraudulent cases reported in Guna and Hosangabad after implementation of the new laws.

Case Against Interfaith Couple In Uttarakhand For Violating Anti-Conversion Law



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DEHRADUN: An interfaith couple who had approached the Uttarakhand High Court seeking protection has been charged along with two others for allegedly not following the provisions of the state's anti-conversion law, police said on Wednesday.

According to police, this is the first case of violation of the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act in the state since it came into force in 2018.

An FIR was lodged at the Patel Nagar police station on Tuesday against the couple who got married in September, the husband's uncle in whose presence the "nikah" took place and the qazi who solemnised the alliance, Patel Nagar SHO Pradeep Rana said.

The High Court, after the couple approached it seeking protection, had directed the District Magistrate to inquire into the matter, police said.

The police found that the woman had converted to Islam without informing her parents or the district authorities prior to her marriage as is required by the law, Mr Rana said.

Circle Officer Anuj Kumar said it was in violation of sections 3, 8 and 12 of the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018.

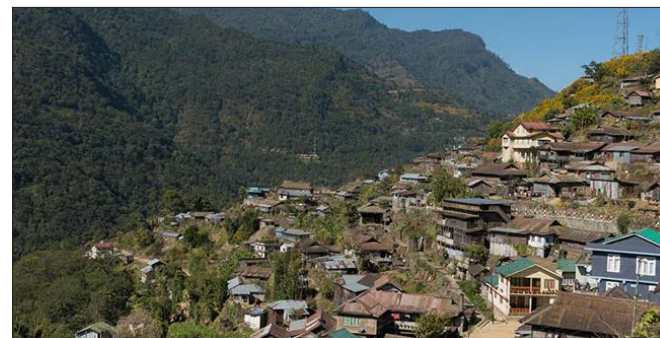
Section 3 of the Act prohibits conversion either directly or otherwise, by use of misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage.

Section 8 of the Act says, "One who desires to convert his religion, shall give a declaration at least one month in advance to the District Magistrate or any official authorised by him for the purpose saying that he wishes to convert his religion on his own and at his free consent and without any force, coercion, undue influence or allurement."

"The religious priest, who performs purification Sanskar or conversion ceremony for converting any person of one religion to another religion, shall give one month's advance notice of such conversion to the DM or someone authorised by him."

It further says any contravention of the provisions shall have the effect of rendering the said conversion, illegal and void.

Dangerous Condition: Centre Declares Nagaland "Disturbed Area" For Another Six Months



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI: The entire Nagaland has today been declared a "disturbed area" for six more months by the central government, enabling the continuation of the controversial AFSPA which empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior warrant.

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) has been in force in Nagaland for several decades.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said in a notification that the central government is of the opinion that the area comprising the whole of Nagaland is in such a "disturbed and dangerous condition" that the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary.

"Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Sec-

tion 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (No. 28 of 1958), the central government hereby declares that whole of the State of Nagaland to be "disturbed area" for a period of six months with effect from 30th December, 2020 for the purpose of the said Act," the notification said.

A home ministry official said the decision to continue the declaration of Nagaland as a "disturbed area" has been taken as killings, loot and extortion have been going on in various parts of the state which necessitated the action for the convenience of the security forces operating there.

There have been demands from various organisations in the north east as well as in Jammu and Kashmir that the AFSPA, which, they allege, gives "sweeping powers" to security forces, be repealed.

NEWS MAKERS

Green Jalebis, Wedding Procession: Farmers' Unique Ways To Grab Eyeballs

NEW DELHI: Serving "green jalebis" to taking out a "baraat" (wedding procession), farmers protesting at Singhu border are using innovative ways to communicate their grievances and demands to the central government.

A group of farmers from Mohali in Punjab have been serving special green jalebis (sweet), saying it symbolised the colour of their crops and the prosperity associated with it.

"We have been distributing green jalebis from the last few days. Nearly five quintals of the sweet are distributed everyday," Jasvir Chand, a protesting farmer, said.

"The green colour of the sweet symbolises Green Revolution as well as peace and tranquillity," Mr Chand's companion Baldev Singh (65) said at the protest site.

"We have been peacefully pro-



testing against the three new farm laws of the central government for over a month. Although the government has not accepted our demand, we are determined to continue the protest peacefully," he said.

Notably, many curious people queued up to taste the "green jalebi" which is usually available in golden colour.

Meanwhile, some youths from Karnal in Haryana took out a marriage procession at the protest venue to draw attention towards

their agitation.

"We thought a marriage procession will be an interesting way to communicate to the people and the government our demands and issues with the farm laws," said 22-year-old Jagdip Singh from Dabri village in Karnal.

The procession with a protester wearing the full attire of a groom and sitting on a tractor passed through the crowded highway attracting lot of merriment from the protesting farmers camping there for over a month.

Farmers mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have been camping at different border points of Delhi for over a month to demand repeal of the three agriculture laws, which were voted through in Parliament in September amid strong protests by opposition parties.

My Accent Was Made Fun Of, Says Deepika Padukone On Her Debut Into Bollywood

One of the highest paid female actors in India and undeniably one of the most glamorous superstars of Bollywood today, Deepika Padukone sure has had a thriving career.

However, in a recent interview with India

Today, the Bajirao Mastani actor opened up about how this was not always the case, and despite having a "dream debut" alongside Shahrukh Khan, she had to face her fair share of trolling and criticism as a new entry to the world of entertainment.

"After hustling and grinding through the modelling world for some years, I finally got my big break in movies. I landed Om Shanti Om at the age of 19 and was immediately thrown into the deep end. My very first movie was a big-ticket, marquee project with the biggest names in the business," she remembered.

"In 2007, when the film finally released,



there was love and appreciation in abundance, but there was also a section of people who scathingly criticised my work. 'Oh she is a model, she cannot act.' My accent was made fun of. A lot was said and written about me and my craft, and, the truth is, all of it was extremely hurtful. When you are all of 21, these kind of brickbats most certainly affect you," she added, speaking about the toll it took on her at the time.

However, Deepika concluded that it was her years as an athlete which taught her how to handle success and failure.

"My parents have led by example. They laid out principles for us to live by, dignity, humility, honesty and authenticity. They taught us to live within our means, encouraged us to focus not only on our professional achievements, but on being remembered as good human beings.

Navjot Sidhu Tenders Apology For Hurting Sikh Sentiments

Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu on Wednesday tendered an apology after the Akal Takht Jathedar asked him to do so for allegedly hurting the sentiments of the Sikh community by wearing a shawl bearing some religious symbols.

Sidhu said he is apologising for unknowingly hurting the sentiments of Sikhs.

"Shri Akal Takht Sahib is Supreme, if I have unknowingly hurt the sentiments of even One Sikh, I apologise !! ... Millions wear the revered Symbols of Sikhism on their Turbans, Clothes and even car Tattoos with Pride, I too as a humble Sikh wore the Shawl unintentionally," Sidhu said in a tweet.

On Tuesday, Giani Harpreet Singh, the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, the supreme temporal seat of the Sikhs, had described Sidhu's act as highly unfortunate and against the traditions of Sikh tenets.

He had said the sentiments of Sikh community were hurt by this act of Sidhu.

He should immediately apologise, the Jathedar had said.

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K O V I E W

Political outreach
needed

Security forces in Jammu and Kashmir have killed 203 militants, 166 of them local youth in 2020. Forty three civilians have also lost their lives and 92 others have been injured in the union territory. The security forces have also arrested 49 militants and claimed the surrender of nine militants during the year.

South Kashmir expectedly has witnessed the maximum number of encounters where the highest number of militants were killed. Areas like Shopian, Kulgam and Pulwama which have seen instances of more local youths joining militant ranks have recorded maximum encounters. But if we go by the new estimate of the number of the active militants in Kashmir, it is over 200, the same number it was in the beginning of this year.

Every year, over the past five years, security forces have killed an average of over 200 militants a year. But the militancy has still continued, earlier replenished mostly by the foreigners, now largely by locals. The pattern of the replenishment has only strengthened since the killing of the popular Hizbul Mujahideen militant commander Burhan Wani. Most of the local recruitment as the figures testify have taken place in South Kashmir and the trend hasn't abated despite the increase in militants killings - albeit, it may have reduced somewhat in past several months.

One reason for this is the overwhelming public support that the militancy enjoys in the area. Ever since Burhan Wani rose on the scene around 2014-15, thousands have continued to attend funerals of militants - that is, until the administration stopped giving bodies of fallen militants to their families citing Covid-19 pandemic.

But if the past is any guide, the militancy has often returned from the dead. Many a Kashmir observer feel that the militancy can be brought down if engagement and dialogue gets going, not just with dissident forces in Kashmir but also with Pakistan. They cite the 2003-07 peace process between India and Pakistan which not only came close to resolving Kashmir but also for the first time since its beginning in 1989, militancy went through a progressive decline. Incidentally, the current period has witnessed a suspension of the engagement by New Delhi, both with Pakistan and Kashmiri separatist groups.

What does the near future have in store for Kashmir? A lingering uncertainty. Security experts had hoped that by the onset of winter they would have substantially reigned the militancy in. But this has not happened. Despite killings, the number of militants remains unchanged. In past, killings have hardly been a deterrent to militancy in the Valley. And considering public support remains at an all time high, more local youth will continue to be inspired to pick up the gun. This calls for the government to change its tack from a security centric to a political approach. An outreach is urgently called for not only with the political opinion in J&K but also with Pakistan.

O T H E R O P I N O N

Towards Justice

The police chargesheet in a civilian court against an army captain of 62 Rashtriya Rifles and two civilians in the fake encounter case in Shopian in July this year has given a disturbing account of the killing of three innocent men allegedly by the officer and his accomplices and the elaborate conspiracy hatched to show the victims as terrorists. The three men, who belonged to the same family in a village in Rajouri district of Jammu division, the youngest just 16 years old, had trekked to Kashmir over the mountains to look for work. They were picked up from their room in Chowgam, Shopian, and taken to Amshipora village, where they were allegedly shot in cold blood. The motive appears to have been greed — to claim a Rs 20 lakh reward given by the security forces for information leading to the capture or killing of terrorists. As part of the plan, weapons were planted on the victims, police and CRPF reinforcements were called in, which threw a real cordon around the encounter site. The incident, and its distressing details, call for sober introspection about the reasons for the sense of impunity of an officer allegedly gone rogue. In a place like Kashmir, the soldier's job poses a difficult challenge every day, but that impunity comes, in large part, from the protection granted under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which the army has invoked repeatedly to protect its own in cases such as this one.

In this case, commendably, the army has acted promptly after prima facie evidence of wrongdoing emerged. The army followed up the preliminary probe with a formal court of inquiry, followed by summary of evidence proceedings, all of which are understood to pave the way to a court martial. The military's findings so far have been reported to be the same as those contained in the police chargesheet. In the past, the army has been at this point, but mostly, it has been unable to take the tough call required to go further — the 2018 court martial in which three officers, including a major and two colonels, and four soldiers, were sentenced to life imprisonment for a fake encounter of Assam student leaders in February 1994, was a rare instance. The army has refused consent for prosecution in cases of fake encounters, custodial killing and rape — Patribal 2000, Ganderbal 2007, and Machil 2010. Where it has conducted its own court martial, sentenced soldiers have been able to get the verdict overturned by civilian courts.

The Amshipora fake encounter case is the first time that the army has acknowledged at the preliminary stage that "powers vested under the AFSPA 1990 were exceeded" and that the "dos and don'ts of the Chief of the Army Staff [COAS] as approved by the Supreme Court have been contravened". This is a welcome sign. The army must now go further and ensure that justice is done, and seen to be done.

Indian Express



Communalising
Languages

HARIS RASHID

The Prime Minister in his speech to AMU reiterated the point that the students in BHU had tried to make: languages are associated with religions and people belonging to one religion do not have the right over the language of other religions

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently in his address to Aligarh Muslim University on its centenary celebrations heaped praises on the university and called AMU "mini-India" for its diversity. To endorse his point on diversity, the Prime Minister mentioned some of the languages that are taught in AMU which he then immediately related to religious books. He pointed out that at AMU, if some students receive education in Urdu, others have the option to study in Hindi and if there are students studying and pursuing research in Arabic, there also are students studying and pursuing research in Sanskrit. Modi further added that if the library of the university contains manuscript of Quran, the translations of Gita and Puran have also been preserved with equal care in the library. The Prime Minister created a clear Hindu-Muslim dichotomy the way he mentioned these languages along with the religious books. Through these examples his focus was more on religious diversity and not on the linguistic or social diversity per se.

The implicit association of certain languages with their supposed religions is often taken for granted. Language is a basic human capability for communication that is above religion. Languages do not come from religions that they are commonly associated with. When a religion is born in some place it expresses itself through the language of that very specific place for the convenience of its propagation. Since Islam was born in Arabia where people speak Arabic, the Quran was revealed in Arabic so that it can be expressed and propagated conveniently among the immediate population. Same can be said for Hindu religion which has most holy texts written in Sanskrit.

The association of some languages with their supposed religions, communalizes those languages. The communalization then dictates as to which members of the society are allowed to speak, learn and teach a particular language. It is by the virtue of religion that one identifies with by which a person gets prerogative over a language

lar language. It is by the virtue of religion that one identifies with by which a person gets prerogative over a language. It is a coincidence that Modi's speech in AMU came exactly one year after a controversy engulfed Banaras Hindu University over the appointment of Feroze Khan- a Muslim, as Assistant Professor in the Literature Department of the Sanskrit Vidya Dharma Vijnan (SVDV). A group of students and some members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)-the students wing of the RSS, had led a month-long protest against his appointment in November last year, arguing that he was ineligible to teach in the department because he was a Muslim. The Prime Minister in his speech to AMU reiterated the

by politicians to further their ends but earlier it used to be about regional, not religious matters. Linguistic identity has always been exploited by politicians because it is one of the most common social cleavages from where political parties emerge. Many states in India were created on the basis of linguistic differences and a nation like Bangladesh came into existence solely on the basis of its linguistic identity. Bangladesh also serves a good example as to how language and religion give two separate identities to their people. Although Pakistan had come into existence based on the religious unity of Muslims, people in East Pakistan launched the Language Movement in the 1950's demanding official status for Bengali language.

The association of some languages with their supposed religions, communalizes those languages. The communalization then dictates as to which members of the society are allowed to speak, learn and teach a particular language. It is by the virtue of religion that one identifies with by which a person gets prerogative over a language

point that the students in BHU had tried to make: languages are associated with religions and people belonging to one religion do not have the right over the language of other religions.

Languages do not belong to any religious community or a group or even a country. A religion cannot claim to own some language through which it expressed itself. It is just that religions take the help of languages to express themselves. It often happens that when a narrow community claims to own a language, it declines and subsequently vanishes because of the stagnation that follows. In case of religions, when a language gets labelled as "sacred", it becomes untouchable, resisting the external influence and becomes exclusive. All this keeps a language from keeping up with the progress of the society.

While it is also not entirely true that language was never used

guage. The movement went on to become the movement for independence of Bangladesh.

Since BJP came into power in 2014, almost everything in India has been communalized and it has come to a point where people's religious identity is being associated with the food that they eat, the language that they speak and the clothes they wear. The Prime Minister should have been careful with his choice of words. He was there applauding the diversity of AMU but ended up explaining the difference between different languages through the prism of religion. This same method of communalizing each and everything is now often deployed to marginalize and exclude Muslims in India.

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The views expressed in this article
are the author's own and do not
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Buyers require more and more

Recent Supreme Court verdict in favour of apartment buyers is a welcome move. Apart from buyers being expected to pay interest on cost of the flat for the period of delay in its delivery, in addition to the meagre monthly per square foot penalty mentioned in the apartment buyers agreement, still there are many more factors to be settled in favour of the buyers .

The factors needed to be addressed

imperatively are that the pricing should be on the basis of carpet area and not built-up or super built-up area even though RERA had done this still there is no transparency. Carpet area strictly to be 25% lower than super built up area. Builders has to disclose the carpet area and loading factors of all the units on their websites as well as brochures mandatorily. There should be no permission to be granted for any changes in layout or alterations to the structural plans once the initial plan to the buyers is exhibited.

The soil quality and topography of the land on which the house is constructed has to be disclosed to the buyers. Nationalised banks should list the bad reputation builders and exhibit the same to buyers in their websites saying that they do not offer loans for purchasing from such builders.

Additional expenses such as GST, stamp duty, home loan processing fee, registration charges and all other charges should be disclosed by builders. Buyers should get commencement certificate and Occupancy certificate

(Occupancy certificate should be usually before expiry of RERA certificate) without any hassle. Certificate to be issued to buyer from builders ensuring that they are following National Green tribunal regulations. Builders should ensure to its buyers that the building is minimum 100m away from water bodies and high tension wires Builders financial strength has to be disclosed to its buyer before commencement of construction

Mr. Vijay kumar
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Song and music has been an inalienable part of Kashmiri culture, and has invariably reflected the ethos of the times in which it has been produced. As the winds of modernity blow over Kashmir, the song has seen a paradigm shift as it is now produced in accompaniment to non-traditional instruments like the guitar, and moreover is invariably accompanied by a video with a detailed storyline. The audience of the song too has changed as the radio is now replaced by streaming sites like Spotify or video streaming sites like YouTube, which cater more to the taste of the younger generation. With the advent of social media, alongside the flourishing of poetry and literature, music too has seen a renaissance of sorts as youth increasingly explore different avenues of expression to vent collective trauma and anguish of Kashmir. With the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, this anguish has grown manifold as a new era of gloom and doom has inaugurated. Naturally, the art produced after the abrogation bears witness to this overwhelming complicated and collective grief, as old wounds are raked by the new ones. In this testimonial spirit, this article seeks to examine a few videos that emerged post August 2019, and analyse them for motifs, symbolism and their overall approach to this testimonial function.

The first video I have chosen is “Jhelum” by Mad in Kashmir released recently on November 18, 2020; Written & Directed by Faheem Abdullah & Imbesat Ahmad with Faheem Abdullah as the Singer/ Songwriter and Rauhan Malik & Ashish Joseph as Music Producers.

The video features a young boy in an unresolved quest that causes him unmistakable anguish and grief. Starting with an aerial view of old Srinagar with the durood, or invocation of peace upon the Prophet (PBUH) playing in the background; the gaze soon shifts to a young boy fiddling with the radio which promptly announces that floods are in the offing due to incessant rain. The flood and rain are thinly veiled symbols of the flood of emotions tugging at the boy’s heart that is filled to the brim just like the Jhelum. The flooding of Jhelum is also an important milestone in the Kashmiri collective memory since it evokes memories of the great destructive flood of 2014, which were a precursor to the terrible years of disenfranchisement and disappointment that have followed ever since. The line ‘Jhelum roya/Kashmir kay liye Jhelum roya’ – Jhelum weeps (Wept)/ Jhelum weeps (Wept) for Kashmir is therefore particularly apt, as the Jhelum’s waters testify to the private and public grief of Kashmir. Soon the boy begins a frantic run, but soon gives up panting and clearly in anguish and deep emotive agony. Calling out to a friend, he jolts him out of sleep, and sets out with him to visit a graveyard and later the roaring Jhelum. Diving into the Jhelum, he seeks the object of his yearning, goaded by the news announcer’s proclamation that Jhelum is now ferrying unidentified objects, only for his hope to be frustrated. Whether the boy is searching for a relic of a dead father, or the body itself is unclear, but that his quest is frustrated is clear. He comes home dripping and wet to a mother who gives him an understanding and sorrowful look, almost on the verge of tears and the video ends there.

The interesting thing to note in the video is the dialectic between the lyrics and the video. While the video clearly depicts a private grief, the lyrics specifically address the collective Kashmir, and mourn the pervasiveness of death, literal and metaphorical, in the valley – “Everyone has died, Everyone has died, but the ones who live cry for they die (everyday)” What significations can be drawn from this dialectic apart from the obvious derivation that the private self in the video is a microcosm of the larger public self? It appears to me that this dialectic raises a question on the question of testimony and the question of performing this testimony. One, it reiterates that the Kashmiri self is forever implicated in the collective trauma of Kashmir, and grief no matter how private draws from the tropes and articulations of the public grief that is the true inheritance of a subjugated people. Second, in its shift between the public and private mourning, it points out that the act of mourning, which is typically a private performance

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Kashmir Rewind

Top Music Videos of 2020

HUZAIFA PANDIT

restricted to closeted spaces, has spilled into the open fluid space indicated by the motif of Jhelum and the cityscape for everyone to claim and reclaim.

The question between the public and private testimony is at the heart of the next video – “Hosh ha” also released in November 2020. The video Written & Composed by Alif, sung by Mohammad Muneem Nazir and directed by Mohammad Muneem, Ruman Hamdani and Xulkarnain Dev, presents a complex interplay of image and words to create a disconcerting interrogation of the act of testifying, and the nature of testimony. The title ‘Hosh ha’ itself resists translation and can either be interpreted as beware/observe/Look out/be mindful. This multiplicity aptly foreshadows the disjointedness of the video, which relies on incoherence to fully illustrate the fractures and contradictions that determine the Kashmiri subject’s perceptions of self. The video starts with a conversation between a group of four men gathered around a table, sipping tea in a bare shack with a few sacks lined against the walls. The bareness of the room indicates the exhausted mind and heart of the Kashmiri self which is left with the burden of overwhelming grief indicated by the sacks. The men converse about the need for witnesses, the challenge of finding the witness and cultivation of ‘a tear drop’. While the rest take turns to speak and listen, a boy seated at the table keeps noting details in his notebook. Since the conversation revolves around witnesses, and the boy acts as a witness of sorts, scribbling the proceedings presumably in his notebook, it can be assumed that the conversation is an oblique reference to kiraman-katibeen- the two angels supposed to keep an account of a human being’s deeds during mortal life. What, however, is the significance of re-enacting the role of these testifying angels? The video provides no easy answers.

One possible answer, apart from a mystic reading of the conversation, is that the enacting is meant to point out that testifying is the inevitable fate of every interaction in Kashmir, since all conversations, interactions are determined and shaped by collective trauma, since every Kashmiri is implicit and complicit in the collective trauma of subjugation. Trauma, which manifests itself through flashbacks, is an attempt to seek closure and meaning of an experience which eludes closure and complete perception. Rather, the repetitiveness of the flashback is meant to seek a right and complete answer to the actual facticity of the traumatic event/phenomenon. The conversation too seeks witnesses to keep the right records of “When to descend the grave/How many breaths are borrowed/how much and who is to be mourned?”. The need to find witnesses who will supply the right answers parallels the flashback which continually interrogates the experience to scale the ‘impossibility’ of truth and seek answers as to the correct ‘event’ and correct ‘experience’. That the conversation talks about existential despair and the challenges of tending to the crop of agony produced by the sowing of the ‘teardrop’ strengthens this reading. It appears to suggest that the Kash-

miri self only makes difficult ‘meaning’ through perpetual mourning, and this mourning itself is the ultimate witness to the banality and facileness of life under subjugation. The remark particularly about there being no measure for shame reinforces this reading, since shame is an integral aspect of trauma, the emotion of emasculation and helplessness quite often a corollary of trauma. The excess that the conversation refers to – there being no measure of shame, therefore, is a reference to the excess of trauma, the shame that defies closure, the shame that defies an origin, but rather occurs as an inheritance passed from one generation to another tended with tears and the crop of agony. Interesting to note, that in response to the question of measure of shame, the protagonist replies – “What I discern here is that everyone is a breath thief.” This expression further validates

‘Janaan’ is a corroboration of Irfan Bukhari and the popular folk singer – Noor Mohamad and features the Indian stylist Sapna Moti Bhavani. The storyline of the video directed by Danish Renzu is simple- Sapna is an Indian tourist facing a writer’s block as her life is uninspired and monotonous. One day while struggling to write, a voice comes floating from the window – that of Noor Mohamad who sings a song of pining, separation and love

the reading of trauma since it implies that existence has been reduced to a frantic, desperate race against death, stealing moments of life from the all-pervasive death of hope and death of the will to live, struggle and survive.

The video proper itself provides a reminder of these themes revolving around the images of death, burial and decay. The opening scene, for example, starts with the protagonist lugging a heavy sack to a ditch, presumably to bury it. In the background a voice sings “Got the sun draped in blood, say when to die?” Katri puur kar Chu wavun Kar Chu marun (When is the droplet to be sown say when to die?). The sun – the ultimate source of light could be taken as a metaphor for truth, clarity and meaning. To drape the sun in blood implies, to view meaning through the prism of bloodshed and death, which eclipses every meaning and emotion and only leaves a lingering shame of emasculation and grief behind. Similarly, images of confinement and imprisonment recur throughout the video.

One striking image is that of a young boy, walking into the sunset with a bird cage in his hand. Sunset is traditionally an image associated with death, and combined with the image of confinement evokes the death of liberty, autonomy and life in general. In another scene, the camera pans to confined bodies about to be buried, while a voice interrogates the meaning of death: “Some borrowed breaths; breaking into the grave- is that - to die?”. This interrogation reinforces the earlier lament about confinement and imprisonment, pointing out that in a place as devoid of hope as Kashmir, death is not just living on borrowed breath, rather it is to be acutely aware of this borrowing and the agony of being a mute witness to this subjugated and inferior existence, to be aware that this existence is a shared inheritance, and that this inheritance is never likely to be replaced by emancipation, and freedom. It is no coincidence then that the next question again harks to the question of death, and asks whether ingesting the agony of life is life. The whole video is built around this complex interplay of death and life, and music and image to interrogate the question of trauma due to subjugation.

‘Janaan’ is a corroboration of Irfan Bukhari and the popular folk singer – Noor Mohamad and features the Indian stylist Sapna Moti Bhavani. The storyline of the video directed by Danish Renzu is simple- Sapna is an Indian tourist facing a writer’s block as her life is uninspired and monotonous. One day while struggling to write, a voice comes floating from the window – that of Noor Mohamad who sings a song of pining, separation and love. The song proves to be the muse that Sapna needs, and she embarks on a journey of self-discovery and inspiration. The song by itself is beautiful and is in keeping with the themes of trauma, yearning and loss that are quintessential to Kashmir. However, the video, even as it is breathtaking in its craft, has a storyline that disappoints.

In its politics, the video is just one of the latest in instruments that draw from a historical tradition of erasing the Kashmiri subject from the landscape in its attempt to fetishize the landscape. The gaze of the camera is firmly on the Indian tourist as her gaze imparts meaning and structure to the surrounding. Noor Mohamad is first introduced as a voice, and then gradually the camera pans to him from the top showing him a distant figure on the stairs. After brief glimpses of him, the camera immediately shifts to Sapna who comes down searching for the singer, only to find him vanished from the sight. Ultimately in the next few scenes, Noor Mohamad is shown passing through an empty lane, or staring out straight at the camera, thus creating an exotic object of display from him. To make this transformation complete, Sapna is shown following him and so we can impute it is her gaze that the camera was following. This positing of Kashmiri as an object of display is a typical re-oriental move where the civilized Indian transforms the Kashmiri body into an object of gaze and exhibition as a fantastic object capable of providing pleasure to the viewer. This is a pattern that is repeated throughout the video where the Kashmi-

ri voice is relegated to the background, while the tourist gaze takes center stage. Repeatedly, the landscape is projected as beautiful and serene erasing all signs and signposts of violence from it, as the old motif of Kashmir as an idyllic bower is repeated. The scenic mountains, the gushing brooks, the scenic panoramic views and shrines with pigeons (to complete the effect of old world charm) are all there to leave the viewer in no doubt as to whose gaze is necessary for constructing the landscape. When the background further plays entreaties on “arousing the desires of my heart, don’t go”, even the song becomes an extension of the Indian tourist, since she now feels a longing for the land. Interestingly, the original differs from the translation since a more accurate translation would be “arousing the desires of this heart, where are you going?” The original, therefore, accords some agency to the lover, and emphasizes her charms, and therefore throws a playful challenge – where can you go after arousing the passions, for surely you can’t be left unscathed by the fire of passion too. The translation on the other hand reduces this playful interaction to an entreaty, while all the power accrues to the beloved in this case the tourist for whom the Kashmiri sings and creates a hospitable welcome. In effect then it points out that the Indian tourist is indispensable to the valley, since it is only the tourist who can be the right audience of our songs, and make the beauty of the land visible. This has been a recurring feature of oriental depictions of Kashmir, and the video points out that the fantasy remains intact for the Indian viewership, and in turn it lends legitimacy to the desirability of Kashmir, turning it into a territory of competing desire.

The concluding video for this essay comes from the stable of Gaekhrir Republik and is titled Khoftan Baangay (By the call to Night’s prayer). Performed live by Sarfaraz Javadi, Suhail Ahmad, Zee-shaan Nabi and Ubaid Parvaiz, the video, directed by Tahoor Qadri, features a group of men who sing a foreboding song of loss, mourning and catastrophe in a wooded area. It puts one in the mind

‘This positing of Kashmiri as an object of display is a typical re-oriental move where the civilized Indian transforms the Kashmiri body into an object of gaze and exhibition as a fantastic object capable of providing pleasure to the viewer

of Macbeth where the three witches prophesied about the impending doom and tragedy of Macbeth’s ambition that causes his demise. The song could very well be read then as a mournful dirge on the doom and gloom at the inevitable loss of identity and fears of being erased from one’s own land. Since the video is restricted to the singing of the three, the focus of our investigation must lie on the lyrics. Accordingly, the first stanza speaks of a soot shrouding the sky, darkness consuming the world, and foxes howling at bridal palanquins. All three images are omens of evil, and portend destruction and doom. ‘Foxes howling at bridal palanquins’ is a particularly distressing image. Bridal palanquin suggests joy and merriment as well as the start of a new life of marital bliss, but the howl of foxes, which are considered an omen of evil and destruction, portends that the event will occasion distress and death. This could be taken to imply that the union of Kashmir and India occasioned by abrogation, which removed all symbolic totems of the erstwhile state’s autonomy, is bound to be a destructive one, and will only result in tragedy. The second stanza speaks of lamps being put out and darkness engulfing the world of the speaker besides employing the image of hail striking at a desolation. These images are a very common trope in the Kashmiri poetic tradition to the point of being a cliché. Nonetheless, the shift from the outside world of palanquins to the world of desolation inside suggests that the private has spilled out into the public, while an overwhelming grief has become the center point of all existence. The rest of the song also speaks about the monotony of grief where everything exists in a perpetual state of wait, and neglect – the hills of despair await the snow of relief as home has been trusted to a stranger. The parched hearts of Kashmir await balms of hope and calm as the specters of death, both literal and metaphorical that haunt the land.

....
Huzaifa Pandit is the author of the recently published *Green is the Colour of Memory*, which won the first edition of Rhythim Divine Poets Chapbook Contest 2017. He holds a PhD on poetry of resistance from University of Kashmir

Cop's Son ...

and fired indiscriminately while the cordon was being laid.

The police and CRPF, he said, rushed to the spot on receiving the information about the gunfight. He said that soldiers retaliated after being fired heavily by the militants hiding in the building.

"Repeated announcements were made to the hiding militants to lay down their illegal weapons and surrender, instead they fired continuously upon the searching party," the police spokesperson said.

He said due to the darkness, the operation was suspended but the cordon remained intact throughout night. On Wednesday morning, he said, the militants again fired towards the government forces when repeated announcements were again made asking them to surrender.

"The fire was retaliated again resulting in the elimination of militants. The operation ended over at 11:30hrs in which all the 3 hiding militants were killed," he said.

During searches, the police spokesperson said that an AK 47 rifle and two pistols & ammunition and other incriminating material along with some documents were recovered.

He said from the recoveries, the militants have been identified as Ajaz Maqbool Ganie, Ather Mushtaq of Pulwama and Zubair Lone of Shopian.

The police spokesperson claimed that the three militants had reportedly come from south Kashmir to target a convoy of security forces, as the area has witnessed several militancy incidents.

He also said that none of the three were listed militants but two among them were hardcore associates of militants.

"People are requested to cooperate with police till the area is completely sanitized and cleared of all the explosive materials, if any," he added.

General Officer Commanding (GoC) Kilo Force H S Sahi claimed that the three alleged militants were planning a big strike on the highway to gain publicity.

Addressing a joint press conference at 2 RR headquarters at Zainakote, HMT, Srinagar, GoC Kilo Force said that in the past one week, five militants including a Pakistani national were killed in two separate gunfights in north Kashmir.

"Since past many days, intelligence inputs were pouring in continuously about the movement of militants on the Srinagar-Baramulla highway. Yesterday, we developed leads and came to know that militants are hiding in a house right opposite to Noora hospital at Lawaypora in HMT area," Sahi said according to the news agency KNO.

To a query why militants are choosing Srinagar outskirts, he said: "Militants choose Srinagar outskirts or highways to carry out attacks on security forces to get maximum publicity. The nature of ammunition used by the militants in today's gunfight, suggests they were planning a big strike on the highway."

Meanwhile, violent protests broke out when the news of the killing of the three alleged militants spread in the Lawaypora area this morning.

Groups of people, mainly youth, took to streets and pelted rocks and stones on the government forces, witnesses said. The forces, they said, chased away the protesters, who regrouped and continued stone pelting attacks. The pitched battles, witnesses said, continued for some time.

They Were ...

She said her father—a policeman posted in Ganderbal district informed the family that their son had been killed in an encounter.

"We were shocked to know, how could this happen. He was living with us till yesterday. How can he become a militant overnight," she said.

"He was at home for two months as he was not keeping well, I don't know why the police were linking him with militants," she added.

Ganie's inconsolable grandfather Bashir Ahmad also expressed surprise over police claims and said that his grandson was a student, not a militant.

"He must have been brought down from Sumo and later killed in a stage managed encounter," Ahmad said.

"Why you killed him. He was a student," he said, while bursting into tears.

The family members of Athar Mushtaq also claimed that their son has been killed in a "fake encounter".

"Why did you kill our kin, he was innocent, what was his fault," said a family member protesting along with scores of relatives outside PCR.

Meanwhile, police have maintained that all the three youth were militants and killed in an encounter after turning down repeated offers for surrender.

In a statement issued here, a police spokesperson said that some families from South Kashmir came to the PCR and claimed them to be their wards.

"They have been sent to Ganderbal for further identification and participation in last rites in the presence of the Magistrate," he added.

He also said that none among the three were not 'listed' militants but two among them were hardcore associates of militants.

"Pertinently, one of the two is a relative of top HM commander Rayees Kachroo who was killed in 2017. Reportedly, a third might have joined very recently. Generally parents don't have an idea about the activities of their wards," the police spokesperson said.

Giving an instance, he said, one

student from Pulwama, who was taking coaching in Srinagar was caught for lobbying a grenade with the help of CCTV's footage.

"His parents were totally unaware about his activities. Several OGWs after committing crimes like grenade throwing & pistol shooting etc stay normally with their family," he said. "Police are investigating the case and after thorough investigation will come to the conclusion soon on merits," he added.

The police spokesperson further said that the IGP Kashmir has requested the parents to keep close watch of their wards and keep strict vigil about their day to day activities to ensure that they may not indulge in any subversive or militant activities.

Cold Wave ...

frequent and maximum during this period and most areas, especially in the higher reaches, receive heavy snowfall, the officials said.

While 'Chillai-Kalan' which began on December 21 -- will end on January 31, the cold wave continues even after that in Kashmir with a 20-day-long 'Chillai-Khurd' (small cold) and a 10-day-long 'Chillai-Bachha' (baby cold). (PTI)

CIK Raids ...

He said that the house of one Umar Wani resident of Anantnag, Ghulam Nabi of Seer Anantnag and residence of jailed PDP youth leader Waheed ur Rehman Para were searched in south Kashmir.

He said in Srinagar district the searches were carried at the residence of Dr Mir Samiullah, owner of Star hospital, in Hyderpora area besides the residence of Ghulam Nabi Dar, a resident of Malangpora Pulwama at present in Batwara area of Srinagar.

"Many important documents were seized in these raids and the case is related to militancy funding and further details about this case will be shared later," he added. (With KDC inputs)

J&K Reports ...

by Jammu (355), Baramulla (171), Budgam (108), Kupwara (91), Pulwama (88), Anantnag (83), Doda (63), Bandipora (60), Udhampur (57), Kulgam (53), Rajouri (54), Kathua (48), Ganderbal (43), Shopian (38), Samba (38), Poonch (23), Ramban (21), Kishthwar (21), and Reasi.

Meanwhile, 217 fresh cases of Covid-19, including eight security personnel and one minor were detected in J&K during the last 24 hours, taking the total number of people infected by virus in the Union Territory to 120744, officials said.

Among them, officials said, 116 cases were from Jammu Division and 101 from Kashmir.

Giving a district wise break-up, officials said Srinagar reported 48, Baramulla 19, Budgam 11, Kupwara 2, Pulwama 4, Anantnag 8, Bandipora 3, Ganderbal 3, Kulgam 1, Shopian 2, Jammu 77, Udhampur 3, Rajouri 3, Doda 5, Kathua 4, Samba 19, Poonch 2, Ramban 2 and Reasi 1 new case of Covid-19.

Moreover, they said, 270 more patients have recovered and were discharged from various hospitals, 128 from Jammu Division and 142 from Kashmir. (With GNS inputs)

PM Sets ...

departments of Health & Medical Education, and Jal Shakti participated in the video conference.

While reviewing the progress of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project, the official spokesperson said that the PM was informed that all the issues have been resolved and works are progressing smoothly.

"Underscoring the potential of the project to exponentially boost Kashmir's tourism and economy, the Prime Minister fixed the deadline for completion of the project as 15.08.2022," he said.

Reviewing the progress of Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) across the country, PM, as per the official spokesperson said, that the scheme not only provides financial relief but also acts as a safety net to the underprivileged families which would earlier be pushed into poverty when befallen by serious illnesses.

"Prime Minister said that through the Jal Jeevan Mission- Har Ghar Nal Se Jal, every rural household in the country will be provided with a clean drinking water supply in adequate quantity by 2024," he said.

"These efforts will lead to an improvement in living standards of rural communities and thereby must be taken up on mission-mode by all the States and UTs," he added.

The meeting, he said, was also informed that in Jammu and Kashmir, the mission has been completed in 2 districts and the rest will be completed by 2022.

Deadlines For ...

Furthermore, GST annual returns for 2019-20 can now be filed till February 28, 2021.

A tweet by the IT Department said: "In view of the continued challenges faced by taxpayers in meeting statutory compliances due to outbreak of Covid-19, the Govt further extends the dates for various compliances."

The deadline for filing tax returns have been extended a number of time this year amid the pandemic and demands have off late been raised for a further extension in a bid to provide relief to the common taxpayers and other

businesses. (Agencies)

"A constable of CRPF 3rd battalion identified as Vikas Kumar was injured in this incident," a police officer said.

"He was shifted to hospital where doctors have described his condition as stable. We are ascertaining the exact details as to how the constable got injured if the sentry fired warning shots in the air," the police officer added.

CRPF Warning ...

suspicious movement. Police said the sentry at a camp in Papchan area of Bandipora district noticed some suspicious movement during the night after which he fired warning shots in the air.

"A constable of CRPF 3rd battalion identified as Vikas Kumar was injured in this incident," a police officer said.

"He was shifted to hospital where doctors have described his condition as stable. We are ascertaining the exact details as to how the constable got injured if the sentry fired warning shots in the air," the police officer added.

Mainstream Camp ...

into killing of three alleged militants in Lawaypora encounter

In a statement issued here, an NC spokesperson said that the versions of people and family pertaining to the killing of three people at an encounter site are contradictory, therefore the situation necessitates the constitution of a fact finding team that could reveal the circumstances that will probe the matter on a fast track basis.

"The police version is that the trio was militants who refused to surrender during the gunfight were killed, but the version of families of the slain is contradictory to that of the police version. It is for the government now to clear the ambiguity leading to the death of the three persons," the NC spokesperson said.

"We have been hearing from government quarters that there would be zero tolerance for human rights violations but on ground such high-pitched claims emanating from government stand debunked in wake of such killings. Therefore we demand a thorough inquiry into the incident on behalf of my party. I also take this opportunity to express my union with the bereaved families in their hour of grief and pain," she added.

Taking to Twitter, PDP President Mehbooba Mufti echoed similar views and asked authorities to come clean on the claims made by the families.

"Worrying that in the past few months after the Shopian fake encounter other families too in J&K have alleged that their sons were innocent & killed in a staged encounter. Authorities need to come clean on this," she tweeted.

CPI (M) leader M Y Tarigami also called for a probe leading to the killing of the three alleged militants.

"The incident of killing of three persons in Hokersar area needs a judicial probe as the families of the slain persons have refuted the allegations of the security forces that they were militants," he said.

"There are unverified reports that they were killed in a fake encounter. If true, this is shocking and must be probed by a sitting High Court judge. The circumstances in which the killings happened need to be thoroughly probed," he added.

Govt Suspends ...

and Appeal) Rules, 1956 (sic.)," the order said. The officers-cum-officials include, Mohammad Yousef Baba, the then Executive Engineer, PDD Sumbal; Aftab Ahmad Khan, the then Executive Engineer, PDD Sumbal; Mushtaq Ahmad Malik, the then Senior Assistant, PDD Sumbal; Riyaz Ahmad Wani, the then Junior Assistant, PDD Sumbal; Ab. Khaliq Dar, the then Helper, PDD Sumbal; Shazia Ahad, the then Junior Assistant, PDD Sumbal; Ab.Rashid Bhat, the then Head Assistant, PDD, Submal; Farooq Ahmad Banday, the then Head Assistant, PDD, Sumbal; Hilal Ahmad Naik, the then Head Assistant, PDD Sambal; Gh.Hassan Malik, the then Junior Assistant, PDD, Sumbal; Farooq Ahmad Khan, the then AAO, PDD, Sumbal; Fayaz Ahmad Bhat, the then AAO, PDD, Sumbal; Gh.Mohi-Ud-Din Sofi, the then AAO, PDD, Sumbal. A case under FIR Number 25/2018 stands registered at Police Station, Crime Branch Kashmir, the order reads. (GNS)

Guns Roar Along ...

They said that forward areas include Hajitara, Sadhpura, Tadd, and Dhani where army heavily retaliated to the ceasefire violation.

"People have been asked to move to safer places to ensure no human loss," they said. According to the local news agency KNO, there were no immediate reports about any loss to the property or life in the cross-LoC firing.

Arms Recovered ...

The arms and ammunition have been recovered on the disclosure of three Pakistan-linked militant associates arrested on Sunday, the SSP said.

He said during questioning of arrested militant associate Yaseen Khan, some vital clues on his confession were developed after which a team of police headed by Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Mendhar, Zaheer Jafri, along with the Army launched an operation in Dabbi and recovered a consignment of arms and ammunition kept in a polythene bag in the bushes.

"Two pistols, 70 bullets and two grenades have been recovered so far and more searches are going on," Angral added.

PAGD's DDC Poll Win Against Article 370 Revocation, Delhi Knows It: Farooq

Terms Talks With Pakistan 'Imperative', Says Ban On 4G Internet Aimed To 'Ruin Students, Businessmen'

OBSERVER NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: President of People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) Farooq Abdullah on Wednesday rejected as fallacious the claims that the alliance has accepted 5 August 2019 announcements by India by participating in the recently concluded DDC polls.

"Had we accepted revocation of Article 370, we would not have fought (DDC) elections. We fought elections against the 5 August 2019 unconstitutional announcements. We have not won in favour of these announcements and New Delhi knows it well," Farooq, who is also president of National Conference and incumbent Parliamentarian from Srinagar constituency, told BBC Hindi in an interview.

"World is ready now to accept that whatever they (GoI) did was wrong. They have brought Bill on farms and see how people are against it. No discussion happened."

PAGD is an alliance of several parties—J&K National Conference, People's Democratic Party, CPI(M), J&K People's Conference and J&K People's Movement and Awami National Conference (ANC)—and were rivals in the past.

Asked if PAGD expected more seats in the DDC polls against around 110 won by the alliance, Farooq said, "See neither we were expecting anything nor we can say anything. See we were caged. Our people could not venture out. It is courage of people that despite such pressures that they voted and supported us with such a huge mandate," he said in the interview shared by the PAGD on official twitter handle and translated by GNS. "They (BJP) should be ashamed. They are still saying our Chief Minister is coming. Come on who stops you. Where is your democracy? Impose whoseover you want to impose. There will be his funeral also. Until you talk about and think about the hearts of people, who will occupy the land through army, police and officer but never by heart."

To a question whether "detestation

and hatred" towards BJP leadership has increased in Kashmir after revocation of the Article 370, Farooq replied: "When was love for them in Kashmir? They tried to change the Indian constitution, divide Hindu and Muslim and tried divide and rule akin to what English did. Don't think people will ever endorse them here. Yes you will always find unscrupulous ones. People like Jaffer who paved way for English to settle in India will always be there."

To a question that BJP for the first time won three DDC seats in Kashmir and if it will consolidate its position, the octogenarian said: "I don't know. Allah knows better."

On BJP calling PAGD "Gupkar Gang", Farooq said: "They don't have sense of respect. Had there been values and intellect, they would never use such words. This is unparliamentary behavior. It is highly deplorable language and I condemn the use of such words. They are showing the nation low."

On talks with Pakistan

Farooq termed as "imperative" the need for talks with Pakistan over Kashmir issue.

"It is imperative. It is indispensable. Our one part is still with them and (New Delhi) knows it better that it cannot be taken back militarily. We have to develop friendship with them. The world has become smaller and the more we live in peace and harmony together we will excel," he said, adding, "The more there is hatred, the lesser there would be development and any progress would be very small."

On India, China Standoff

To a question as to where do he sees Kashmir amid India and China standoff lingering for an year now, Farooq said: "Kashmir has got trapped. On one side there is Pakistan and on the other hand there is China. Issues will be resolved only through talks. If they think they can fight, they cannot. Why are they negotiating with China if they have power to fight against China?"

Asked about his views on the role of

"separatists" in Kashmir issue, Farooq said: "See they are part of this state. It is a democratic set up. They want their space in the democratic set up. When friendly relations are developed between India and Pakistan, everything will be normal. Hatred will fall apart and ways and means of progress will open."

On Restoration 4G Internet

To a question that after Article 370 revocation, the high-speed internet continues to be barred with government dishing one or the other reasons such as national security etc, he said: "Please tell aren't there national security issues in India. It's only aimed at destroying the future of our children.

Today our children need fast internet for studies. Our businessmen need fast internet. They think they will bring our downfall but they are ignorant that those believing Allah will never fall."

'Peace of Graveyard'

Asked about his take on Union Home minister Amit Shah's recent statement that Jammu and Kashmir has been most peaceful in last six years of Modi's rule, the three-time chief minister leader said, "You can see for yourself how peaceful J&K is. There is army everywhere, police is spread everywhere. Paramilitary forces are in every nook and corner. There is peace of graveyard here."

To a question if militancy has been really won over as claimed by the top Indian leadership, Farooq said: "Where? Every day you see news about encounters happening at one or the other place. Army generals keep on saying that a number of militants are waiting on launching pads. If there is everything normal, why is 4G still snapped? Prime Minister is talking about 5G."

On Mehbooba's Apprehensions

Asked if he has same apprehensions as articulated by the former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti that she might be arrested using agencies, Farooq said: "I don't fear. Even if they take me to gallows, I am not going to change my stance. I am not ready to sell people." (GNS)

Mindset of non-compliance of court orders needs to be changed: HC

Imposes Rs 5000 Personal Costs on Officer; Also Seeks Status On Construction of Slaughter House In Srinagar

OBSERVER NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir High Court has sought a status report regarding the construction of a slaughter house at Srinagar even as it imposed Rs 5000 personal costs on Commissioner Secretary, Animal Husbandry Department, underlining that the "mindset of non-compliance of the orders passed by the Court need to be changed."

Hearing a Public Interest Litigation, a Division Bench of Chief Justice (Acting) Rajesh Bindal and Justice Sanjay Dhar observed that that November 19, the Court had directed the Commissioner/Secretary, Animal and Sheep Husbandry Department to appear in person through video conference but he did not comply with the orders.

Senior AAG S. S. Nanda submitted that a status report has been filed mentioning that Animal Husbandry Department has nothing to do with the construction of slaughter house.

"There is no status report on record in the soft copy of the paper book. No application seeking exemption from

personal appearance has been filed," the court said, adding, "Though the status report is not on record in the soft copy of the paper book, however, the same was produced in the Court separately from the Registry of this Court. There is no separate application filed by the Commissioner/Secretary, Animal Husbandry, Department seeking exemption from his personal appearance."

This, the court said, only shows "arrogance" on the part of the officer concerned.

"Neither he has filed any affidavit with the status report under signatures, when he had been called to appear in person nor any exemption application for personal appearance has been filed by him," the court said underlining that when he was directed to appear in person, either he should have appeared or filed his own affidavit mentioning details along with prayer for exemption from appearance.

"The mind set of non-compliance of the orders passed by the Court need to be changed. For his non-appearance, the Commissioner/Secretary, Animal

Husbandry Department, Jammu is burdened with personal cost of Rs 5,000," the court said and asked him to deposit the same with the court's Registry within four weeks.

Meanwhile Ashish Gupta, Joint Commissioner Jammu Municipal Corporation informed the court that the work on slaughter house construction shall be allotted to the successful bidder within two weeks.

As per the conditions in the DPR, Gupta said the project is to be completed within 12 months. In so far as the construction of the slaughter house at Srinagar was concerned, the court observed that as per statement made before it on 26 February this year, the construction was in progress and was likely to be completed within next 7-8 months. S. Nanda, the Sr. AAG, submitted that the work was in progress, however, because of COVID-19, the same was delayed. "Let the present status of the construction of the slaughter house at Srinagar be apprised to the Court on the next date of hearing and the time required for completion thereof," the court added. (GNS)

Police recovers kidnapped girl, accused arrested

KULGAM: Police Station D.H.Pora while receiving a complaint from a person that his daughter was kidnapped by Rayees Ahmad Khanday son of Ghulam Mohiudin Khanday resident of Nagnard DK Marag.

Police on the basis of the complaint filed a case under FIR No. 181/2020 under relevant sections of law and investigation was initiated.

During the course of investigation a team headed by SHO D.H.Pora was constituted. Acting on specific leads, the team was able to recover the kidnapped girl and arrested the accused person involved in the commission of crime.

"He has been shifted to PS D.H.Pora where he remains in custody", read the statement.

The statement further read, "After fulfilling all medico-legal formalities, the girl has been handed over to her legal heirs, Investigation into the matter is in progress."

"Swift action by police against anti-social elements has been appreciated by the locals. Community members are requested to cooperate with police in curbing social crimes in their neighborhood. They can share information pertaining to social crimes with police. We reassure the community members that our efforts in curbing social crimes shall continue", read the statement.

Reliance Jio Writes To Punjab CM, DGP Seeking Intervention Against Vandalism Of Jio Sites



NEW DELHI: Reliance Jio Infocomm has written to Punjab Chief Minister and Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) seeking their intervention into "incidents of sabotage and vandalism at Jio Network sites" in the state by unknown persons.

The letter alleges that police personnel at local level are not taking action or filing FIRs against vandalism and that is why such incidents are not stopping. Jio has requested the DGP to take action.

"With due respect we would like to bring to your kind notice that in your esteemed State of Punjab, the telecom intra structure and digital services of Reliance Jio are being sabotaged and vandalized for the past few weeks by inciting violence and our employees are not being allowed to work to provide the uninterrupted telecom services, which is an essential service for the people of Punjab," Reliance Jio In-

focomm stated in its letter to the chief minister.

A malicious campaign was going on since last week of September against Reliance Jio, which has got escalated to the acts of sabotage and vandalism in the last few weeks, the letter further read.

"We have brought it to the notice of Chief Secretary, DGP Punjab and CEO-PBIP on 28.10.2020 itself by submitting representation but unfortunately the situation on the ground has only got worsened. Copies of the representation are enclosed for your ready reference," said Reliance Jio Infocomm.

"Even during the Curfew and Lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic, under your able leadership, Team Jio Punjab ensured near 100 per cent network availability to the people of Punjab," the company added.

Almost 1500 plus sites have already been damaged and vandalised till yesterday and more incidents are being reported across Punjab. Estimated cost of damage is already to the tune of hundreds of crores, according to Reliance Jio Infocomm.

Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Monday directed police to take action against those who were vandalising mobile towers in the state. — ANI

Ahmedabad Most Affordable Housing Market, Mumbai Most Expensive: Report

NEW DELHI: Ahmedabad has become the most affordable housing market in the country while Mumbai remains the costliest, according to property consultant Knight Frank India.

The consultant released its Affordability Index 2020, which showed that Ahmedabad was the most affordable housing market in India with an affordability ratio of 24 per cent, followed by Pune and Chennai at 26 per cent each in 2020.

A ratio over 50 per cent makes it difficult to secure home loans from banks and housing finance companies, making it unaffordable to purchase a house, Knight Frank India said.

The affordability index, which tracks the EMI (Equated Monthly Installment) to income ratio for an average household, has shown meaningful improvement in affordability over the last decade.

The consultant said that decline in housing prices and multi-decade low home loan interest rates have helped improve housing affordability in 2020.

"While Mumbai is the most expensive market, with affordability ratio of (61 per cent), other cities like Ahmedabad, Chennai and Pune are relatively more affordable," Knight Frank said.

Even for Mumbai, the affordability ratio has improved from a high of 93 per cent in 2010 to 61 per cent in 2020.

The index captures movement in key constituents like property prices, home loan interest rate and household income that determine the buyer's ability to purchase a house.



City-wide average affordability statistics cannot highlight disparities in housing costs within sub-markets or across the income spectrum, it added.

In NCR, the affordability ratio has improved to 38 per cent from 53 per cent in 2010, while in Bengaluru, the ratio has become better at 28 per cent from 48 per cent a decade ago.

As per the report, the ratio improved to 26 per cent in Pune and Chennai both from 39 per cent and 51 per cent in 2010.

In Hyderabad, the ratio has become better at 31 per cent from 47 per cent, while in Kolkata it improved to 30 per cent from 45 per cent.

The consultant said that affordability ratio improved in Ahmedabad to 24 per cent from 46 per cent.

Shishir Bajjal, chairman and managing director, Knight Frank India said, "The affordability ratio across top eight cities has improved tremendously over this decade due to an increase in income level, lower interest rate and subsequently lower property prices." — PTI



Huge Relief To Taxpayers: Deadline Extended For Filing Income Tax Returns For FY 2019-20

NEW DELHI: Extending the deadline for the third time, the government on Wednesday allowed individuals to file income tax returns for 2019-20 fiscal till January 10.

The deadline for companies and individuals who need to get their accounts audited too have been extended by 15 days till February 15, the finance ministry said in a statement.

The due date for filing income tax return (ITR) by individuals and companies was December

31, 2020, and January 31, 2021, respectively.

Over 4.54 crore ITRs for 2019-20 fiscal (assessment year 2020-21) were filed till December 28. In the comparable period last year, 4.77 crore income tax returns were filed.

At the close of deadline for filing ITRs without payment of late fees for fiscal 2018-19 (assessment year 2019-20), over 5.65 crore returns were filed by taxpayers.

The income tax department

tweeted that the extension in various deadline was given in view of the continued challenges faced by taxpayers in meeting statutory compliances due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

Also, the due date for filing declaration under the direct tax dispute resolution scheme Vivad Se Vishwas has been extended by a month till January 31.

The deadline for filing GST annual return for 2019-20 fiscal has been extended by 2 months till February 28, 2021. PTI

THE INCOME TAX DEPARTMENT TWEETED THAT THE extension in various deadline was given in view of the continued challenges faced by taxpayers in meeting statutory compliances due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

Sensex, Nifty Extend Record Run On Vaccine Booster

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty raced to fresh record highs on Wednesday as gains in financials, auto and IT shares helped markets extend their winning run for the sixth straight session.

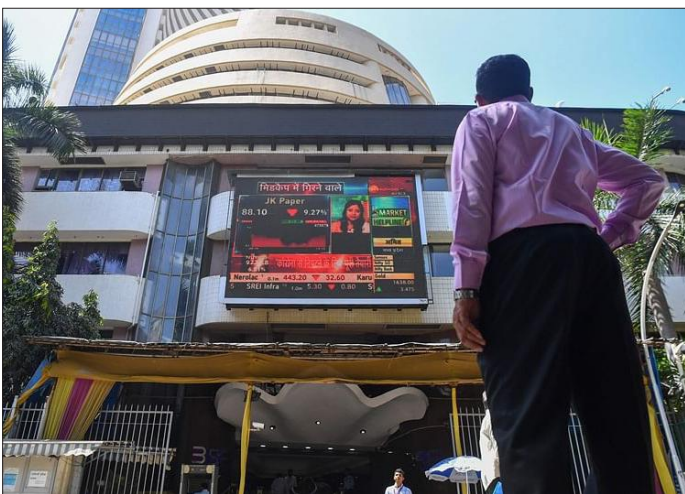
After a volatile session, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed up by 133.14 points or 0.28 per cent at a record high of 47,746.22. The barometer scaled its all-time intra-day high of 47,807.85.

The broad-based NSE Nifty rose by 49.35 points or 0.35 per cent to finish at its lifetime high of 13,981.95. It touched all-time peak of 13,997 in intra-day trade.

Among major Sensex movers, Ultratech Cement rose over 4 per cent, Bajaj Finance by 2.63 per cent and Maruti by 2 per cent.

Mahindra and Mahindra, Tech Mahindra, HUL, Kotak Bank, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and Asian Paints also finished in the green.

After opening strong, the stock indices gave up gains due to profit booking by investors. However, positive trends in the European stocks helped the indices re-



bound and end at record levels.

European stocks advanced on Wednesday as the UK approved the COVID-19 vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

Britain has authorized use of a second COVID-19 vaccine, becoming the first country to green-light an easy-to-handle shot that its developers hope will become the "vaccine for the world".

Asian shares were mixed after a lackluster day on Wall Street.

Benchmarks fell in Tokyo and Sydney but rallied in Hong Kong, Seoul and Shanghai.

Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 0.5 per cent, a day after it surged more than 2 per cent to its highest level in more than 30 years. In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.3 per cent.

On the other hand, Hong Kong's Hang Seng surged 1.6 per cent, the Shanghai Composite index advanced 1 per cent while South Korea's Kospi jumped 1.9 per cent

Advisor Khan Visits Kathua Industrial Estates, Interacts With Entrepreneurs



KATHUA:- Advisor to Lieutenant Governor, Baseer Ahmed Khan, today said that the present dispensation led by Lieutenant Governor is focusing on strengthening industrial infrastructure with better service delivery to make the environment more congenial for industries to grow across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Advisor said this during an interaction meeting with members of Kathua Industries Association.

Responding to issues highlighted by the industrialists of the district, Advisor directed Director Industries to send a team to assess the infrastructure gaps at SICOP areas of Hatli Morh and Govindsar so that needful can be done at the earliest.

Referring to role of industrial sector as important in the economy of an area, Advisor said efforts are being made to have first hand appraisal from all the stakeholders so that Ease of Doing business can be achieved in real terms. He said the objective of meeting all stakeholders was to take necessary feedback so that the concept of Single Window System shall be made practical and workable.

Advisor said the government is revisiting the industrial policy with the objective of making it workable for both existing and new industries.

Responding to the problem of power supply shortage highlighted by industrial units of Chadwal Industrial area, Advisor assured that the needful will be done to address the problem on priority.

Regarding the demand of easing out of Covid-19 SOPs at Lakhampur for visiting labourers, staff members and industrial owners from Punjab, Advisor assured the matter will be taken up with the higher authorities.

Advisor also inspected different production sections of Chenab Textile Mills Kathua.

Later, Advisor visited SICOP Ghati where he inspected the infrastructure of the industrial area.

Advisor was briefed by the Director Industries, Anu Malhotra, that the SICOP Ghati is being developed on modern lines housing first ever biotechnology park, work on which is in full swing. He was also informed this industrial area is among the largest areas having provision of business conference hall, common facility centers, parks, High Capacity Power Grid Station, housing colony, Solid Waste Management Plan, restaurants, Police Station, Fire station, Over Head tanks etc.

Deputy Commissioner Kathua, Om Parkash, GM DIC Babu Ram, Functional Manager Sandeep Dubey and other concerned officers and officials were present on the occasion.

Handicrafts Department Kupwara Holds Awareness Cum Registration Camp At Trehgam

KUPWARA: Handicraft Department, Kupwara today conducted a one day Awareness cum Registration Camp at Trehgam in which Artisans from 04 blocks including Trehgam, Kralpora, Keran and Tangdar participated.

Assistant Director Handicrafts, Muzamil Hussain Chowdry was Chief Guest, on the occasion.

On the occasion, Assistant Director Handicrafts said that the government is committed for upliftment of artisans by introducing various welfare schemes and programmes.

He impressed upon the unemployed educated youth to enroll themselves with the department to take advantage of different government schemes.

It was informed that 111 girls of four blocks have already completed their training in different trade including Wood Carving, Carpet, Aari Sepal,

Crawl and Sozni. It was also informed that 40 girls including 20 each from Kralpora and Karnah blocks have been recently trained under Aspirational District Programme. The trainees were undergoing skill training with a monthly honorarium of Rs.1000. Besides, 36 Self Help Groups (SHG) of artisans have also been registered by the department for special financial assistance.

On the occasion, experts highlighted the role of the department in providing skill training to the youth in far flung areas to make them self-reliant.

Principal GHSS Meelyal, Shariq Mohiddin, Handicrafts Training officer Trehgam, Md Abzal Mir, BDC Chairperson Meelyal and Bank Representatives, besides, a large number of artisans participated in the camp.

NEWS MAKERS

Chakraborty Likely To Head HDFC Bank

NEW DELHI: Former Economic Affairs Secretary Atanu Chakraborty is likely to be the next chairperson of the country's largest private sector lender HDFC Bank, sources said. He would replace Shyamala Gopinath, who is set to complete her term in January.

According to the sources, the bank has recommended the name of Chakraborty for appointment as the part-time chairperson, subject to the RBI's approval.

Chakraborty, a 1985-batch IAS officer of Gujarat cadre, retired as Secretary of Department of Economic Af-



fairs in April 2020. Prior to that, he was Secretary of Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM). — PTI

TATA Sons To Acquire 32.67% Additional Stake In AirAsia India

MUMBAI: Tata Sons will increase its stake in budget carrier AirAsia India (AAIL) to 83.67% by acquiring an additional 32.67% for \$37.66 million from AirAsia Investment Ltd (AAIL), according to a regulatory filing.

Currently, AAIL, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Malaysia-based AirAsia, holds 49% stake in the Bengaluru-based AirAsia India.

In a regulatory filing to stock exchange Bursa Malaysia, AirAsia said, "The Board of directors of AirAsia wishes to announce that its wholly-owned subsidiary AAIL and Tata Sons Pvt Ltd, India, on December 29, entered into a share-purchase agreement." It added that the pact is for dis-



posing of AAIL's equity interest of 32.67% in AirAsia India to Tata Sons "for a total consideration sum of \$37,660,000

(or MYR 152.58 million)".

AirAsia India started operations on domestic routes in June 2014 following the then UPA

government allowing foreign airlines to invest up to 49% in the Indian carriers. "The share of losses over the years has re-

sulted in the carrying value of the investment at the date of transaction to be Nil," AAIL said in the filing.

It added the proposed disposal will, therefore, result in a gain on disposal of \$37,660,000 (equivalent to about 152.58 million Malaysian ringgit) in the fourth quarter of 2020 at both AAIL and consolidated group level.

The directors of AirAsia also wishes to announce that AAIL has further agreed to waive unpaid brand licence fees payable by AAIL to AirAsia Berhad, a company's wholly-owned subsidiary, under an agreement reached in December last year, due to the Covid pandemic, it said. — PTI

Fitness Apps, Wearable Activity Trackers Boost Physical Activity Levels

A review and a pooled data analysis has found that smartphone fitness apps and wearable activity trackers do help boost physical activity levels.

The review published online in the British Journal of Sports Medicine.

The size of the effect is small to moderate, but it may be worth offering them on prescription to motivated patients, given the importance for the health of increasing daily physical activity by any amount, say the researchers.

Globally, more than a quarter of adults don't meet recommended physical activity levels. Physical inactivity represents a leading cause of death worldwide and is thought to cost billions of dollars every year.

Some of the most effective strategies to increase physical activity include behaviour change techniques, such as self-monitoring and feedback, which smartphone apps and wearable activity trackers can provide.

Smartphone ownership is widespread, with activity trackers and fitness apps used by around a third of US and UK adults. But the reviews to date of these apps and trackers haven't produced consistent findings. Nor have they focused on healthy adults and on state-of-the-art



technology.

To plug these knowledge gaps, the researchers trawled research databases looking for relevant studies published between January 2007 and January 2020, involving healthy 18-to-65-year-olds with no long term conditions.

They found 35 suitable comparative studies, involving a total of 7454 people, 2107 (28 percent) of whom were women. The intervention period lasted between 2 and 40 weeks, averaging 13 weeks.

Pooling the data from 28 of these studies showed that compared with other approaches, smartphone apps or activity trackers increased physical activity by an average of 1850

steps a day. Seven further additional analyses of the data also showed that smartphone apps and activity trackers significantly increased physical activity levels.

The apps and tracker programmes that also included text-messaging involving prompts and cues, and tailored features, were more effective. And certain components, such as goal setting, planning, and tasks graded by degree of difficulty, were significantly associated with greater levels of effectiveness.

The researchers acknowledge that the included studies varied in design and methods, while the quality ranged from low to moderate. And given the relatively small number of

women involved, the results may not be widely applicable to both sexes.

Nevertheless, "Interventions using smartphone apps or activity trackers seem promising from a clinical and public health perspective, promoting a significant step count increase of 1850 steps/day," they write.

"These results are of public health importance according to recent evidence showing that any physical activity, regardless of intensity, is associated with lower mortality risk in a dose-response manner and that an increase of 1700 steps/day is significantly associated with lower mortality rates."

Enabling users to move beyond the initial 'novelty phase' will depend on the quality of the experience, overall utility, and the ability to integrate with other devices and services, they add.

But they emphasise: "Given the wide and increasing reach of smartphones, even modest improvements in physical activity can produce large effects at the population level."

And they conclude that their findings are likely to be helpful to clinicians, "who may prescribe apps and trackers as part of a shared decision-making process to individuals who seem ready to make behavioural changes." -

Agencies

Brain imaging predicts PTSD after injury, finds study

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a complex psychiatric disorder brought on by physical and/or psychological trauma. How its symptoms, including anxiety, depression and cognitive disturbances arise remains incompletely understood and unpredictable. Now, researchers using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) have found potential brain biomarkers of PTSD in people with traumatic brain injury (TBI).

The study appears in Biological Psychiatry Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuroimaging, published by Elsevier.

"The relationship between TBI and PTSD has garnered increased attention in recent years as studies have shown a considerable overlap in risk factors and symptoms," said lead author Murray Stein, MD, MPH, FRCPC, a Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Family Medicine and Public Health at the University of California San Diego, San Diego, La Jolla, CA, USA. "In this study, we were able to use data from TRACK-TBI, a large longitudinal study of patients who present in the Emergency Department with TBIs serious enough to warrant CT (computed tomography) scans."

The researchers followed over 400 such TBI patients, assessing them for PTSD at 3 and 6 months after their brain injury. At 3 months, 77 participants, or 18 per cent, had likely PTSD; at 6 months, 70 participants or 16 per cent did. All subjects underwent brain imaging after injury.

"MRI studies conducted within two weeks of injury were used to measure volumes of key structures in the brain thought to be involved in PTSD," said Dr. Stein. "We found that the volume of several of these structures were predictive of PTSD 3-months post-injury."

Specifically, smaller volume in brain regions called the cingulate cortex, the superior frontal cortex, and the insula predicted PTSD at 3 months. The regions are associated with arousal, attention and emotional regulation. The structural imaging did not predict PTSD at 6 months.

The findings are in line with previous studies showing smaller volume in several of these brain regions in people with PTSD and studies suggesting that the reduced cortical volume may be a risk factor for developing PTSD. Together, the findings suggest that a "brain reserve," or higher cortical volumes, may provide some resilience against PTSD.

Although the biomarker of brain volume differences is not yet robust enough to provide clinical guidance, Dr. Stein said, "it does pave the way for future studies to look even more closely at how these brain regions may contribute to (or protect against) mental health problems such as PTSD."

Cameron Carter, MD, Editor of Biological Psychiatry Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuroimaging, said of the work, "This very important study uses magnetic resonance imaging to take the field a step closer to understanding why some people develop PTSD after trauma and others do not. It also lays the groundwork for future research aimed at using brain imaging to help predict that a person is at increased risk and may benefit from targeted interventions to reduce the clinical impact of a traumatic event."

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Agencies

Scientists develop new method for visualising breath to evaluate face masks

A new method for visualising the air exhaled while someone is speaking or singing could shed light on how diseases such as COVID-19 spread, and help evaluate the effectiveness of face masks, according to a study.

The novel system, described in the journal Applied Optics, images temperature differences between exhaled breath and the surrounding air to estimate how far the breath travels before being dispersed into the surrounding air.

According to study author Thomas Moore from Rollins College in the US, the new technique can also be used to study the details of how breath flows from the mouth while speaking or singing, which could be useful for music instruction and

speech therapy.

Originally developed to study the flow of air through musical instruments such as organ pipes, Moore said he began imaging the breath of people speaking and singing.

"I realised that by scaling up my existing system, I could likely determine how far the breath extends and how effective masks may be in limiting the extent of the breath," he added.

While most existing approaches used to image exhaled breath require expensive equipment and can image only a relatively small area, Moore said the new design used common commercially available optical components to overcome these limitations.

The new technique, Moore explained, was based on the fact that the speed of light changed depending

on the temperature of air it passed through.

"As breath is warmer than the surrounding air, the light transmitted through the exhaled air arrives at the camera slightly sooner than light that did not pass through it," which he said "can be used to create images of the air".

According to Moore, the technique can reveal new information that may affect how we approach distancing and masking requirements, especially when outdoors.

"The pandemic has caused an economic catastrophe for many musicians, and any information we can give them that will help them get back to work is important," he added.

Press Trust Of India

Government of Jammu and Kashmir
Office of the Medical Superintendent
ASYM District Hospital Budgam

TENDER NOTICE

For and on behalf of lieutenant Governor of UT of Jammu and Kashmir fresh tenders are invited from the approved/registered firms for sanitation of District Hospital Budgam against CDR Of Rs 10000 /-. The tenders should reach the office of undersigned by or before 12/01/2020 up to 4: 00 PM and shall be opened on next date viz 13/01/2020 at 12:00 Noon. The tender documents will be available on cash payments of Rs 500/- against proper receipt/G.R. From 05/01/2021 to 07/01/2021 during office hours. No tender shall be accepted after the expiry of the scheduled time period. Any tenderer who wishes to be present on the date of opening of tenders can do so.

Sd/- Medical Superintendent
ASYM District Hospital Budgam

No; DHB/
Datd DIPK-11096/20

PRESS RELEASE

Nehru Yuva Kendra Anantnag Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports Govt. of India has Organized Youth Club Development Programme in Block of District Anantnag and Kulgam. The Programme was started from 06/11/2020 to 31/11/2020 under notification No.NYK/DYC/ANG/159-160/20-21.

District Youth Coordinator
Nehru Yuva Dendra Anantnag

MJA

از دفتر نائب تحصیلدار انت نامک با اجلاس زیر احمد چیٹ صاحب

درخواست منجانب:۔ جان اسٹیل و مہرا سائیل پیران محمد اسٹیل بنجار تحصیل ضلع ناگ بغرض حصول شیل کاسٹ سرفٹیک

اشتمار ہمارا آگاہی ہر خاص و عام

معاملہ مندرجہ عنوان الصد میں سالکان صدر نے ایک درخواست بغرض حصول شیل کاسٹ سرفٹیک دفتر بازہ میں پیش کیا ہے حسب رپورٹ پیواری حلقہ تفصیل افراؤنڈہ بذیل درج ہے۔

نام صاحب کنڈہ مولدیت	عمر	پیشہ	آمدنی
محمد اسٹیل بنجار ولد غلام محمد	57 سال	خمر سیریدہ	
علیہ باؤز محمد اسٹیل	49 سال	کھریلو کام	
محمد اسٹیل پیر۔۔۔	29 سال	ایم آر	4000
جان اسٹیل پیر۔۔۔	27 سال	زیر تعلیم	

اسکے علاوہ اوکوئی فرد کنڈہ میں موجود ہیں سے سال کا کنڈہ چھپلہ پندرہ سالوں سے دھ بازہ میں رہائش پزیر ہے اور سال کی کنڈہ کی سالانہ آمدنی حد مشرہ سے کم تک ہے اس حوالے سے اگر کسی شخص یا شخص کو مزوہ سرفٹیک اجرا کرنے میں کوئی عذر یا اعتراض ہو تو وہ سات دن کے اندر اندر اپنا اعتراض دفتر بازہ میں پیش کریں۔ معیار گذرنے کے بعد کوئی بھی اعتراض قابل قبول نہیں ہوگا۔

تحریر الصد نائب تحصیلدار انت نامک

MJA

از دفتر نائب تحصیلدار خرمش رینہ با اجلاس ارشاد احمد کھٹڑے صاحب

درخواست منجانب:۔ یادو یائین و تارک یائین پیران محمد یائین ڈار سالکان ترکہ تانچلو تحصیل و ضلع انت نامک بغرض حصول بیک وارڈ ایئر سرفٹیک

اشتمار ہمارا آگاہی ہر خاص و عام

معاملہ مندرجہ عنوان الصد میں سالکان صدر نے ایک درخواست بغرض حصول بیک وارڈ ایئر سرفٹیک دفتر بازہ میں پیش کیا ہے حسب رپورٹ پیواری حلقہ تفصیل افراؤنڈہ بذیل درج ہے۔

نام صاحب کنڈہ مولدیت	عمر	پیشہ	آمدنی
محمد یائین ڈار ولد غلام رسول	45 سال	زیر تندراری	6000
علیہ باؤز محمد محمد یائین ڈار	45 سال	کھریلو کام	
یادو یائین پیر۔۔۔	20 سال	زیر تعلیم	
تارک یائین پیر۔۔۔	18 سال	---	
ٹانڈہ یائین پیر۔۔۔	12 سال	---	

اسکے علاوہ اوکوئی فرد کنڈہ میں موجود ہیں سے سال کا کنڈہ چھپلہ پندرہ سالوں سے دھ بازہ میں رہائش پزیر ہے اور سال کی کنڈہ کی سالانہ آمدنی حد مشرہ سے کم تک ہے اس حوالے سے اگر کسی شخص یا شخص کو مزوہ سرفٹیک اجرا کرنے میں کوئی عذر یا اعتراض ہو تو وہ سات دن کے اندر اندر اپنا اعتراض دفتر بازہ میں پیش کریں۔ معیار گذرنے کے بعد کوئی بھی اعتراض قابل قبول نہیں ہوگا۔

تحریر الصد نائب تحصیلدار خرمش رینہ

MJA

از عدالت ایگزیکٹو جج سر ڈیوڈ (نائب تحصیلدار انت نامک) با اجلاس زیر احمد چیٹ صاحب۔

درخواست منجانب:۔ عاصف احمد کے والد پرویز احمد کے ساکنہ پندہ بغرض اجرائی تارن پیدائش سرفٹیک بنام زینب زگس۔

اشتمار ہمارا آگاہی ہر خاص و عام۔

معاملہ مندرجہ عنوان الصد میں سالکان صدر نے ایک درخواست طلق بیان پیش کیا ہے سال کے دفتر کا تارن پیدائش 04/11/2018 ہے اس ضمن میں سرفٹیک پیدائش نکالنے کا خواہ ہے لہذا سرفٹیک مذکورہ کا اجرا کرنے میں اگر کسی شخص کو کوئی بھی عذر یا اعتراض ہو تو وہ ایک ہفتہ کے اندر اندر دوران دفتر کی اوقات میں پیش کرے بصورت دیگر کوئی بھی اعتراض قابل قبول نہیں ہوگا۔

ایگزیکٹو جج سر ڈیوڈ

MJA

آسی کی کمشدی

میری گاؤں 800 ALTO 5538 JK03F کی آسی کہیں پرگم ہو گئی ہے اب اسکی ڈیلی کیٹ نکالنی مطلوب ہے اس ضمن میں اگر کسی شخص کو کوئی بھی عذر یا اعتراض ہو تو وہ سات دن کے اندر اندر اسے آئی او آفس انت نامک کے دفتر میں پیش کریں۔ بصورت دیگر کوئی بھی اعتراض قابل قبول نہیں ہوگا۔

اشتمار:۔ بشیر احمد ملک ولد مصیب اللہ ملک ساکنہ بیوہ سر یگنورہ انت نامک

MJA

از نیابت نائب تحصیلدار انت نامک با اجلاس زیر احمد چیٹ صاحب

درخواست منجانب:۔ شہزادہ بانو زید محمد ریم ریاض احمد ڈار ساکن شہر پورہ انت نامک تحصیل انت نامک ضلع انت نامک بغرض حصول لیگل ہیئر سرفٹیک

اشتمار ہمارا

معاملہ مندرجہ عنوان الصد میں سالکان صدر نے ایک درخواست بغرض حصول لیگل ہیئر سرفٹیک پیش کیا ہے حسب رپورٹ پیواری حلقہ سے سالکان کا شوہر مہر ریاض احمد ڈار مورخہ 23/11/2017 کو فوت ہو چکا ہے اور متوفی کے وارثان ذیل درج ہے۔

نام صاحب کنڈہ مولدیت	عمر	پیشہ	رشتہ ہمارا
شہزادہ بیوہ ریاض احمد ڈار	55 سال	کھریلو کام	بیوہ متوفی
محمد احمد ڈار پیر۔۔۔	17 سال	زیر تعلیم	پسر متوفی
علیہ بیوہ محمد صدیق ڈار	76 سال	کھریلو کام	ماس متوفی

اس کے علاوہ اوکوئی فرد کنڈہ میں موجود ہیں سے لہذا اگر کسی شخص یا شخص کو مزوہ سرفٹیک اجرا کرنے میں کوئی عذر یا اعتراض ہو تو ایک ہفتہ کے اندر اندر دفتر بازہ میں پیش کر کے بصورت دیگر کوئی بھی اعتراض قابل قبول نہیں ہوگا۔

تحریر الصد نائب تحصیلدار انت نامک

MJA

Government Of Jammu And Kashmir
Directorate of Information and Public Relations

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tenders affixed with Rupees 10 Revenue Stamp are invited from the reputed firms / parties for providing services on contract basis for day to day House-keeping and cleaning of the following premises of the Directorate of Information at Srinagar and Jammu for the period often months w.e.f 01.01.2021 to 31.10.2021.

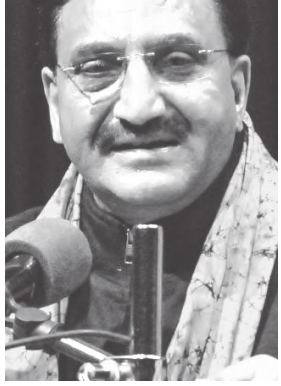
- 2nd & 3rd floor along with the auditorium, lawns and ground at Jammu. •
- Full Building of Information Department at Srinagar.
- References research section at Partap Park Srinagar.

The tenders should be accompanied with earnest money deposited in shape of CDR for Rs 5000/= (Rupees Five Thousand only) drawn on any scheduled bank pledged to Accounts Officer, Directorate of Information J&K. The detailed Tender document containing terms & conditions etc. can be had from the office of the undersigned on cash payment of Rs.500/= (Rupees Five Hundred only) and can be downloaded from this office website www.dirinf.in completed in all respects and should reach both places at Directorate of Information & Public Relations, Polo Ground Opposite Shere-i-Kashmir Park Srinagar and Directorate of Information & Public Relation, Media Complex Rail Head, Jammu by or before 10.01.2021 upto 4.P.M which shall be opened on the same day or any other subsequent day convenient to the Directorate of Information & PR in prcsenfile of the tenderer who may wish to be present.

Administrative Officer
Directorate of Information

No:INF/Stores-II/2016/2156-62
Dated:29/12/2020
DIPK-11079/20

CBSE Board Exams Will Be Held Physically, Dates To Be Announced On Dec 31: Union Education Minister



Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' said that CBSE board examination will not be held online and the examination will be held in adherence to Covid-19 protocols

ASIAN NEWS INTERNATIONAL

NEW DELHI: Union Education Minister, Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' on Wednesday said that he will announce the exam dates for the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) Class 10 and Class 12 on December 31 at 6 PM.

The Union Education Minister said that CBSE board examination will not be held online and the examination will be held in adherence to Covid-19 protocols.

Speaking to ANI, Union Education Minister said that the students were looking forward to the CBSE board exams and during the current pandemic time of difficulty, the dates have been decided on after consulting several parents, teachers and students.

"After keeping their suggestions in mind and the circumstances in the future, on the eve of the new year tomorrow, we will announce dates of CBSE board Exam and their confusion will be over," he said.

The Union Education Minister

said that CBSE board examination will not be held online and examination will be held keeping in mind Covid-19 protocols.

"Our communication with other ministries is going on continuously. Covid-19 has spread all over the world. During these difficulties, we have done a lot of work online, but our goal is to reach the last students. The idea is to conduct examinations in the same manner as examinations are conducted earlier, we are not considering to conduct exams online."

The Education Minister also said that the examination will be held as per guidelines of Ministry of Home Affairs and Health Ministry.

Union Minister said that on the basis of the consultations, the guidelines will be prepared which will further be decided by the Ministry of Home Affairs along with the Ministry of Health. "Ensuring safety of students is our first priority," he said.

Pokhriyal said that government is alert and is taking all measures regarding the new Covid-19



Soldiers carrying ammunition towards the Lawaypora "encounter" site as smoke emanates from the building (R) where three alleged militants were holed up — KO Pics Abid Bhat

5 Things To Know About Landmark UK Vaccine, Being Made By Serum Institute

AGENCIES

LONDON: Cheap and easy to store, the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine approved by the British regulator on Wednesday has given a shot in the arm to the global fight against coronavirus.

Here are five facts about the much-anticipated vaccine.

PRACTICALITY

The AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine has the major advantages of being inexpensive, costing about GBP 2.50 (\$3.40, 2.75 euros) per dose, and easy to store. It can be kept at normal refrigerator temperatures of between two and eight degrees Celsius, making it ideal for large-scale vaccination programs.

By contrast, the Moderna vaccine needs to be stored at -20C, while the Pfizer/BioNTech product must be kept at -70C.

MUTANT STRAIN

The vaccine should be capable of fighting the new variant of the coronavirus responsible for a surge of cases in the United Kingdom, according to AstraZeneca chief executive Pascal Soriot.

"So far, we think the vaccine should remain effective. But we can't be sure, so we're going to test that," he told the Sunday Times. New versions are being developed just in case, he revealed, adding: "You have to get prepared."



BRITISH PRODUCT

The vaccine developed by British firm AstraZeneca, working alongside Oxford University, is the second to be approved by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has been deployed in Britain since December 8, with

almost 800,000 receiving their first dose, according to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. His government is battling one of the world's worst outbreaks, with more than 71,000 deaths so far of those testing positive for the disease.

Britain has ordered 100 million doses of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine, 40 million of which will be available by the end of March, with vaccinations scheduled to begin on January 4. AstraZeneca said it expects to be able to manufacture about three billion doses of its vaccine worldwide in 2021.

CHIMPANZEES

The vaccine is "virus-vectored", meaning it is a version of a virus that normally infects chimpanzees and has been modified with a portion of the Covid-19 coronavirus called the "spike protein" to fire the immune system.

Once in human cells, the vaccine should help stimulate the production of antibodies that recognize the virus. The vaccine is "safe and effective", according to data published by The Lancet medical journal on December 8, with only one of the of the 23,754 volunteers who participated in the

trials experiencing "possibly-related severe side effects".

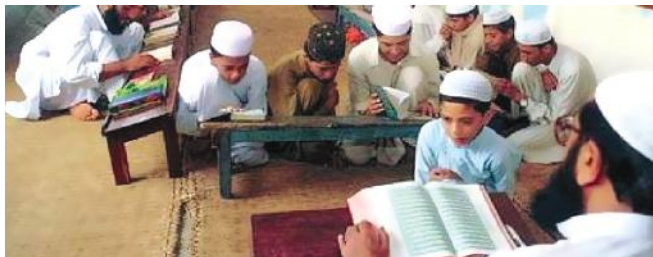
This was a case of rare neurological condition transverse myelitis that forced the temporary suspension of trials.

RESULT CONFUSION

The British laboratory announced in interim findings in November that its vaccine was on average 70 per cent effective, compared with more than 90 per cent for Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna. The efficacy of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine was 90 per cent for volunteers who first received only a half-dose and then a full dose one month later, but only 62 per cent for another group that was vaccinated with two full doses one month apart. The injection of a half-dose was conducted by accident, raising criticism over the robustness of the results and prompting the company to announce on November 26 that an "additional study" would be held into the efficacy of the reduced dosage.

"We think we have figured out the winning formula and how to get efficacy that, after two doses, is up there with everybody else," Soriot told the Sunday Times.

Assam Assembly passes bill to abolish state-run Madrassas, convert them into schools



AGENCIES

DISPUR: A bill, seeking to abolish all state-run Madrassas and transform them into regular schools, has been passed by Assam Legislative Assembly on Wednesday.

Taking to Twitter, Assam Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed his happiness over the passage of the bill and said that all Madrassas being run under the government stand converted into regular educational institutes with effect on April 1, 2021.

"Glad that the Bill pertaining to repeal of Provincialisation of Madrassas has been passed, even as Assam Congress and AIUDF expectedly staged a walkout in Assembly. All Madrassas, being run under government, stand converted into regular educational institutes wef April 1, 2021," Sarma tweeted.

Sarma on Monday, the first

day of the Assam Legislative Assembly session, tabled a Bill to repeal the provincialisation of Madrassas in the state.

"We have introduced a Bill whereby all Madrassas will be converted into institutes of general education and no Madrassa will be established by the government in the future. We are happy to introduce this Bill to bring truly secular curriculum in the education system," Sarma had told reporters after the bill was tabled in the assembly.

On December 14, Sarma had said that in order to facilitate a secular education system in Assam, the state government has decided to make 'education secular' and 198 high madrassas and 542 other madrassas in the state will operate as any other general educational institute and will not give admission to students for theological studies.

Republic Day parade likely to be shorter, to have smaller marching contingents and fewer spectators

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI: The Republic Day celebrations at Rajpath next month are likely to witness a number of changes including smaller marching contingents, shorter distance for the parade and fewer spectators compared to the previous years in view of the coronavirus pandemic, people familiar with the development said on Wednesday.

Every year, India displays its military might, rich cultural diversity and socioeconomic progress during the Republic Day

celebrations at the Rajpath—the city's centrepiece boulevard. The people cited above said though the overall hue of the Republic Day parade will be maintained, its scale and size will be restricted to an extent in view of the coronavirus pandemic.

India has invited British Prime Minister Boris Johnson as the Chief Guest for the Republic Day parade.

The preparations for the celebrations are being made keeping in mind all COVID-19 protocols, said an official.

The people said around 25,000 spectators will be allowed to witness the celebrations

as against a normal crowd of around 100,000 people and that children below 15 years of age will not be allowed entry.

Similarly, the size of the marching contingents is likely to be brought down from around 144 in each contingent to around 96.

The parade is likely to be of shorter distance. It will start from Vijay Chowk and end at the National Stadium instead of the Red Fort, the people said.

Sources said over 2,000 Army personnel have arrived in Delhi since late November for Republic Day and Army Day parades, and

they are being kept in a "safe bubble". The "safe bubble", created in the Cantonment area, comprises a large number of camps and those selected to stay in them will have almost "zero connectivity" with the outside world till the Republic Day celebrations on January 26 are over, sources said.

The Army Day is celebrated on January 15. Similar arrangements have been made by the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force.

Two contingents of the IAF have been selected for the parade and one of them will participate in it.

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