



**P3 CITY**  
**SMC CONDUCTS ANTI-ENCROACHMENT DRIVE IN CITY PARTS**

No business and establishment at Sangarmal shopping complex in Srinagar has a lease agreement—contrary to it the space holders owe a whopping amount of more....

**P7 THINK**  
**A CASE FOR REASONED DEBATES AND CIVIL DISCOURSE**

These days there are few things that we can probably agree on across the political spectrum. One is that open debate is vital for a healthy democracy. The other is that inflammatory, divisive, and vicious....



**P5 STATE**  
**TRANSPORTERS ON STRIKE AS FRESH COVID-19 GUIDELINES COME INTO EFFECT IN J&K**

Private transporters in Jammu went on an indefinite strike on Wednesday to protest a government order capping the seating capacity to 50 per cent in public transport vehicles in view of the COVID-19 pandemic....



**Widom Quote!**  
He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.  
—Friedrich Nietzsche

## Covid-19: J&K Sees Record Single Day Spike Of 2204 Cases, 13 Deaths



A police officer inspecting a passenger vehicle for Covid-19 SOPs adherence in Srinagar's Lal Chowk on Wednesday. KO Photo, Abid Bhat

### Situation Challenging, But No Need To Panic: Govt

Press Trust Of India

**JAMMU:** The Jammu and Kashmir administration Wednesday said the COVID-19 situation in the Union Territory is "challenging" with cases rising steadily, but there is no need to panic as there is no dearth of facilities including oxygen beds and required medicines. It also advised eligible people to go for vaccination and adopt COVID-appropriate behaviour to help the government defeat the virus.

"We have a steady increase in COVID cases that reached a peak in September last year touching 22,000 later went down to 600 active cases. We are again seeing a sharp

increase and the peaks of September last year have been breached, Government spokesperson Rohit Kansal told reporters here.

He said the government is trying its best to control the situation without going into a complete lockdown.

He said the government is monitoring the situation and has taken various steps like placing certain restrictions while ensuring that economic activity is not impacted.

Kansal was joined by Financial Commissioner, health and medical education, Atal Dulloo and Disaster Management Secretary, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

**WE ARE FOLLOWING THE FIVE pillar strategy to deal with the situation -- testing, containment and surveillance, isolation and treatment, covid-appropriate behavior and vaccination."**

**8<sup>TH</sup> RAMAZAN**

	Iftar TODAY	Sehri TOMMOROW
FIQAH HANAFIYA	07:10	04:23
FIQAH JAFARIYA	07:16	04:21

**NEWS DIGEST**

**2 TRF Workers Held In Bandipora**

**SRINAGAR:** Police on Wednesday claimed to have arrested two over-ground workers of The Resistance Front (TRF) militant outfit in north Kashmir's Bandipora district. Mushtaq Ahmad Parry of Gundpora Rampora and Sajad Ahmad Sofi of Sofigund Tral were

**Missing Man Found Dead**

**SRINAGAR:** A man, missing for nearly a week, was found dead on Wednesday in Kokernag area of south Kashmir's Anantnag district. 36-year-old Gulzar Ahmad Naik's body was found inside a sewerage trench in his native

**Six People Injured In Canine Attack**

**SRINAGAR:** A stray dog attacked and injured at least six persons in a village in north Kashmir's Bandipora district on Wednesday. A stray dog appeared in Malangam village of the district and ran amok biting at least half a dozen people before chased away by

**Budgam Teen Commits 'Suicide'**

**SRINAGAR:** A teenager allegedly committed suicide by consuming some poisonous substance at his home in Shogpora village of central Kashmir's Budgam district, reports said Wednesday. 18-year-old Danish Ahmad Kumar of Shogpora village consumed

**Mentally Unsound Woman Found Dead**

**SRINAGAR:** A mentally unsound woman on Wednesday was found dead along the banks of Mendhar River in Poonch district of Jammu division. According to the officials, a man identified as Mir Ahmed of Sagra Chowki reported at the Police Post Mankote that

**Observer Monitoring Desk**

**SRINAGAR:** In an alarming trend, coronavirus cases in J&K on Wednesday witnessed the biggest ever jump this year as 2204 more people, including 410 travellers, ten minors and equal number of security forces personnel tested positive for the virus. The deadly infection also claimed 13 more lives, taking

the fatality count to 2084 across Jammu and Kashmir. While 1299 fresh cases of coronavirus were reported from Kashmir valley, the remaining 905 were detected across the Jammu division, taking the total number of people infected by the virus since the outbreak of pandemic in J&K last year to 152442, officials said. Among the fresh cases included ten

minors, a ten-month old baby and ten security personnel besides 410 travellers.

Also, officials said, 13 people have succumbed to the virus— 10 from Jammu division and three from Kashmir, taking the death toll to 2084.

Giving district wise details of new cases, officials said, Srinagar reported 612, Baramulla 232, Budgam 102, Pulwama

**NIT Orders Closure Of Hostel**

The National Institute of Technology (NIT) Srinagar on Wednesday ordered starting online classes and closure of hostels within one week in wake of the spike in coronavirus cases across Jammu and Kashmir. "All the UG/PG/Research Scholars are hereby informed that all the academic activities will be held online henceforth till

**SKIMS Shuts Non-Emergency Services**

Valley's premier healthcare institution, SK institute of medical sciences (SKIMS) on Wednesday announced closure of non-emergency services, barring exceptional cases and said that 260 beds have been reserved for coronavirus patients at the tertiary care hospital.

**J&K Bank Director Sampheal Resigns**

Press Trust Of India

**New Delhi:** State-owned Jammu & Kashmir Bank on Wednesday said non-executive non-independent director Rigzian Sampheal has resigned from its board.

"We wish to intimate that Rigzian Sampheal, IAS, non-executive non-independent director has resigned from the board of directors of the bank with effect from today ie April 21, 2021," it said in a regulatory filing.

PNB Housing Finance in a separate filing informed that it has reappointed independent director Nilesh S Vikamsey for a second term.

The board of directors of the company, on recommendation of the nomination and remuneration committee, approved on April 20, 2021 reappointment of Nilesh S Vikamsey as an additional director in the category of independent director, PNB Housing

**RE-REGISTRATION OF NON-J&K VEHICLES**

## What 'Necessitated' Mar 27 Circular? HC's Poser To RTO Kashmir

Agencies

**SRINAGAR:** Jammu and Kashmir High Court on Wednesday asked Regional Transport Officer Kashmir to file affidavit before it by tomorrow, indicating therein as to what necessitated the issuance of March 27 circular, mandating the vehicle owners who have purchased their vehicles bearing outside registration number to apply for a new registration within fortnight.

A division bench of Justices Ali Mohammad Magrey and



Vinod Chatterji Koul also made it clear that pendency of the petitions would not be an impediment for traffic for the Transport Authorities to screen the vehicles

**Seeks Law Secretary's Affidavit On New Jobs In HC**

The Jammu and Kashmir High Court has sought an affidavit by the Law Secretary with regard to creation of promotional posts in the court's computer section. A bench of Justices Sanjeev Kumar and Justice Javed Iqbal Wani passed the order after law secretary informed that for want of certain formalities,

## Govt To Fire Employees Involved In 'Anti-National Activities'

### Special Task Force Constituted To Identify, Scrutinize Such Employees

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** The Jammu and Kashmir administration has constituted a Special Task Force (STF) for identifying and scrutinizing the government employees who are involved in anti-national activities and pose a threat to the country's security, and will be terminated from services, if found guilty.

According to an order issued by the General Administration Department (GAD), sanction has been accorded to the constitution of a Special Task Force,

for identifying and scrutinizing cases of government employees, to initiate the process under Government Order No. 738-JK(GAD) of 2020 dated 30.07.2020, for action in terms of provisions of Article 311(2)(c) of the Constitution of India.

The order further says that Additional Director General of Police (CID) has been nominated as Chairman of the committee and Inspector General of Police, Jammu/Kashmir, Representative of Home Department not Member below the rank of Additional Secretary, Representative of Department of Law, Justice Member & Parliamentary Affairs not below the rank of Additional Secretary and Representative



An elderly man reciting the holy Quran inside the 14th century shrine of Mir Syed Ali Hamadani in Khanqah-e-Moula locality of Old City on Wednesday. KO Photo, Abid Bhat

## Defence Ministry Wants Delinking Of Army Project From PMDP

Agencies

**SRINAGAR:** The Defence Ministry is understood to be in favour of delinking the project of relocation of its transit camp in Kashmir Valley from the Prime Minister's Development Project (PMDP) for Jammu & Kashmir.

According to official documents, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is of the view that relocation of the transit camp in Srinagar should be delinked from the PMDP. "The project is funded exclusively out of the Army Budget, the MoD is of the view to delink it from the PMDP," reads the status report of the projects funded under the PMDP.

The relocation of the 216 transit camp is part of the development package unveiled by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi for Jammu & Kashmir in 2015. The proposal for shifting of the transit camp located opposite to the Army's 15 Corps headquarters at Badami Bagh, Srinagar was mooted after 2014 floods.

Under the package, Rs 150 crore was kept for shifting of the transit camp of Army to old Airport. According to the status report, there has been no progress on the project so far as a revised detailed project report awaits approval of the Defence Ministry.

"Transit Camp to be relocated to Old

## 'Very Small Number' Test +ve After Vaccine: Govt

Press Trust Of India

**NEW DELHI:** More than 21,000 people tested positive for COVID-19 after taking the first dose of either Covishield or Covaxin, while over 5,500 contracted the infection after taking the second dose, the Centre said on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference, ICMR Director General Balram Bhargava said 0.04 per cent of 17,37,178 individuals, who received the second dose of Covaxin, were positive for COVID-19, while 0.03 per cent of 1,57,32,754 people, who took

the second dose of Covishield, contracted the infection.

Bhargava who presented the data said vaccines reduce the risk of infection and prevent death and severe infection.

"After vaccination if one gets infection then it is known as breakthrough infection," he said.

So far, 1.1 crore doses of Covaxin have been administered. Out of which 93 lakh received the first dose and out of that 4,208 (0.04 per cent) people got the infection which is four per 10,000 individuals. About 17,37,178



# New anti-bacterial material to help reuse of face masks, PPE



**Agencies**

**R**esearchers at the Indian Institute of Technology Mandi have developed a novel virus-filtering, self-cleaning and antibacterial material that can be used to make and reuse face masks and other PPE equipment.

The new masks can kill microbes, and are solar light-cleanable. It can also filter more than 96 per cent of particles that are in the size range of the Covid Virus (120 nanometres), without compromising on the breathability of the fabric, and could thus be a powerful tool to prevent the spread of coronavirus and other microbial infections, according to the study, published in the journal Applied Materials and Interfaces.

The researchers have developed prototypes of a 4-layered face mask using the molybdenum sulphide (MoS2) modified fabric. The team used a material that is hundred thousand times smaller than the width of the human hair to confer antimicrobial properties to polycotton fabric.

They incorporated nanometre sized sheets of MoS2 at the sharp edges and corners, which act as tiny knives that pierce bacterial and

viral membranes, thus killing them. "Keeping the urgency of the pandemic situation and cost-effectiveness in mind, we have developed a strategy to repurpose existing PPEs, especially face masks, by providing an antimicrobial coating to these protective clothing/textiles," said lead researcher Amit

**Keeping the urgency of the pandemic situation and cost-effectiveness in mind, we have developed a strategy to repurpose existing PPEs, especially face masks, by providing an antimicrobial coating to these protective clothing/textiles**

Jaiswal, Assistant Professor, at the varsity's School of Basic Sciences.

"The ananoknife'-modified fabrics demonstrated excellent antibacterial activity even after 60 cycles of washing," Jaiswal said.

It also makes this an excellent way to reuse masks and reduce biological waste generation. The reusability of the fabric will also enable it to be integrated with homemade masks, Jaiswal said.

In addition, when exposed to light MoS2 exhibits photothermal properties, that is, it absorbs solar light and converts it into heat, which kills the microbes.

"Within 5 minutes of solar irradiation, all the MoS2-modified fabrics showed 100 per cent killing of both Escherichia coli and Staphylococcus aureus," said the researchers in the study. Thus, merely hanging out the masks in bright sunlight can clean the mask and make it ready to wear again.

The proposed materials can also be used to fabricate screens/sheets for creation of makeshift isolation wards, containment cells and quarantines for holding individuals who come in contact with pathogens.

# New modus operandi by fraudsters to withdraw money from ATMs

Press Trust Of India

**I**n view of increasing incidents of Man in the Middle (MiTM) attacks on ATMs, all banks have been asked to enhance their safety norms for ATMs through end-to-end encryption in the network, officials said.

In a recent communication to all banks, the central government has said the MiTM attacks have been increasing under which messages sent by 'ATM Switch' to 'ATM Host' are altered by attackers to withdraw cash fraudulently.

Investigations by security agencies have found that cyber fraud gangs have started adopting a new modus operandi to withdraw money from ATMs, a security official aware of such incidents said.

According to the investigators, the fraudsters first tamper with the network (LAN) cable of the ATM. Declined messages from 'ATM Switch' are altered to successful cash withdrawal transaction responses, and subsequently cash is withdrawn from the ATM.

The attacker first inserts a device between the ATM machine and the router or switch in the ATM premises.

This device has the capability to modify the responses back from authorisation host (ATM Switch) which is connected to ATM through network. The attacker then uses restricted cards (or blocked cards) to submit a withdrawal request.

When the 'ATM Switch' sends a declined message, the attacker in the middle alters the response to approve the transaction and subsequently withdraws cash, the official said.

In view of this modus operandi, the banks have been directed to ensure end-to-end encryption in the communication between the 'ATM Terminal' or PC and the 'ATM Switch', another official said.

Network cables, input/output port within the ATM premises should be concealed and physically secured or protected, the banks have been told.

A similar advisory has also been issued by the Reserve Bank of India. As per the information reported to and tracked by the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), altogether 1,59,761 cyber security incidents pertaining to digital banking were reported in 2018, a total of 2,46,514 incidents in 2019 and 2,90,445 incidents were reported in 2020.

These incidents include phishing attacks, network scanning and probing, viruses and website hacking.

There has been a 46 per cent rise in digital transactions in 2019-20 in comparison to 2018-19.

The Ministry of Home Affairs holds regular interactions with state governments and Union Territory administrations and advises them to expedite the disposal of cyber crime incidents, with a special emphasis on those relating to women and children, the official said.

The CERT-In is the national technology arm to combat cyber attacks and guard the Indian cyber space.



**FREE 24X7**



**CRITICAL CARE AMBULANCE SERVICE IN SRINAGAR**

FOR ASSISTANCE CALL

**9484-100-200; 0194-240-4000**



**Kashmiri American Society of Healthcare, Medical Education and Research (KASHMER)**

**Zaza Family Bereaved**

With deepest sorrow, we regret to inform the sad demise of our beloved Ali Mohammad Zaza S/o Late Ghulam Ahmed Zaza passed away at his residence Vicharnag Nowshehra near Mandir of Srinagar on Tuesday 20th April 2021. He left for heavenly abode from his residence in Vicharnag Nowshehra near Mandir of Srinagar on Tuesday," the family said.



Keeping in view the COVID pandemic, the family said that there will be no congregational Fateha for the deceased at home and only Fateha Khawani will be held at the graveyard Near Hakeem Shah Sahab Gojwara on Friday 02:30 pm.

ajko

**Public Notice**

My name has been wrongly written in my Passport bearing No: H141205 as Aamir Basharat Father's Name Basharat Qureshi Mother's Name Nasreena While as my correct name is Aamir Basharat Qureshi Father's name Basharat Ahmed Qureshi Mother's Name Nasreen Basharat which need immediate correction. If anybody having any objection in this regard dhe/she may file his/her objection in the office of the Passport Office Srinagar within a period of seven days from the date of publication of this notice. After that no objection shall be entertained.

**Aamir Basharat Qureshi  
Father's name Basharat Ahmed  
Qureshi Mother's Name Nasreen Basharat**

lb.o

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR UT  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (R&B) PROJECT**  
CIRCLE DIVISION 1ST, SRINAGAR  
OPPOSITE MASJID IBRAHIM, HYDERPORA SRINAGAR PIN NO.190014  
E-MAIL:- PCD.BYPASS@GMAIL.COM, PCD.BYPASS@JK.GOV.IN PHONE-FAX:-0194-2435218

**CORRIGENDUM-IV**

Subject: Construct flyover at Bemina Junction including its Approaches, Km 299+145 to Km 300+027 (Length 0.882 Kms) of four lane with paved shoulders of NH-44 at Srinagar in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir on Engineering, Procurement & Construction (EPC) mode

- Reference: 1) This office Fresh NIT No. NIT No PCD-RnB-75 of 2020-21 Dated:25/02/2021 issued Vide endorsement No PCD-Ist/ NIT/9690-99Dated: 25-02-2021.  
2) This office Corrigendum-I No. NIT/Corr/10372-77 dated:- 20/3/2021.  
3) This office Corrigendum-II No. NIT/Corr/178-84 dated:- 08/04/2021  
4) This office Corrigendum-III No. NIT/Corr/289-95 dated:- 12/04/2021

**Critical Dates**

Due to some unavoidable circumstances the critical Dates are hereby modified as under:-

Sl. No.	Event Description	Date
5.	Last date of Request for BID Document	28-04-2021 up to 04.00 PM
6.	BID Due Date	28-04-2021 at 04.00 PM
7.	Online Submission of Bid Securing Declaration /POA etc	28-04-2021 at 04.00 PM
8.	Opening of Technical BIDs at venue 2.11.4 (i)	30-04-2021 at 11.30 AM in the Office of the Chief Engineer PW(R&B) Department Kashmir
9.	Declaration of eligible / qualified Bidders	Later On
10.	Opening of Financial BID	Later On
11.	Letter of Acceptance (LOA)	Later On
12.	Return of signed duplicate copy of LOA	Later On
13.	Validity of BID	120 days from BID Due Date
14.	Submission of Performance Security (PS) and Additional Performance Security (APS), if any	The provision of Performance Security (PS) and Additional Performance Security (APS), will be as per Latest office Memorandum of Ministry of Finance Department of Expenditure procurement Policy Division vide their No.F.9/4/2020-PPD dated:- 12/Nov/2020 (The bidder has to provide 3% of PS within 30 days of receipt of LOA)
15.	Signing of Agreement	Within 10 days from the receipt of Performance Security

No:-NIT/Corr/381-89  
Dated:-19-04-2021

**DIPK-653/21**

Sd/-  
Executive Engineer  
R&B Project Circle Division 1st.  
Srinagar.

# Srinagar Admin Notifies Schedule For Opening Of Markets

## 'Violators To Be Booked Under Disaster Management Act'

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** The District Administration Srinagar on Wednesday notified the schedule for the opening of shops in the city markets.

The notification issued by Deputy Commissioner Srinagar for the opening of shops reads, "In markets having shops on both sides of the road, shops on one side of the road shall open on a particular day/date, the shops on the other side of road shall remain closed completely. The sequence of opening shall be on a rotation basis."

In markets with shops on one side of the road only odd-numbered shops to open on odd dates, even-numbered shops to open on even dates.

"Joint Commissioner Administration, SMC will ensure proper numbering of shops wherever required in Shopping

Complexes, Malls and other such business establishments."

Public transport (Matadors/Mini Buses/Buses etc) shall be permitted to ply only at 50% of authorised seating capacity.

"The Superintendent of Police shall ensure compliance to this effect. This shall be subject to the mandatory provisions."

In the notified Containment Zones only Essential Services / Establishments shall operate as per norms.

The SOPs issued by the Govt of J&K for Hotels and Restaurants, Shopping Malls and Salons/Barbershops etc shall be strictly followed.

"Further concerned market associations shall be responsible for observance of all SOPs in the market area."

Wearing a mask and physical distancing shall be mandatory, equidistant circle in paint indicating mandatory distance



nate days as prescribed in SEC notification quoted above."

While all trade organisations have assured adherence to laid down norms and SOPs in the interest of public health, the Executive Magistrates and SHO's shall ensure strict enforcement and initiate action in case of violations.

Deputy Commissioner has further ordered that any violation of these orders/SOPs/Instructions notified by SEC or DDMA shall attract action under Section 51 of the Disaster Management Act 2008 Section 188 IPC and/or Section 03 of Epidemic Diseases Act 1897 apart from other laws applicable. The trade and business organisations, according to the notification, have been asked to make all efforts for adherence of SOPs in markets as has been undertaken by them during the consultation process.

(1 metre) shall be marked outside every shop/establishment. No business shall be transacted in absence of guidelines related to mandatory wearing of Masks and Physical distancing. "Every shop, establishment shall be properly sanitised before

Hand sanitiser/hand wash/ Soap etc shall also be compulsorily made available at every establishment.

"Shopping Malls shall prominently display a roster for 50% of shops to be opened on alter-

further add to less footfall, "as visitors and travellers are avoiding the travel".

"After the tourism activities had gained pace and addition of night flights at Srinagar Airport, there used to be a footfall of around 12000 people, which has gone down now up to 8000," an official said.

"The way the cases are emerging across the country and fresh lockdowns imposed in different parts of the country, the footfall may further

go down, as most of the people in this prevailing Covid-19 situation are avoiding the travel," an official said.

He said airport authorities are ensuring all the Covid-19 SOPs and guidelines are followed and all the inbound passengers are tested first before leaving the Srinagar Airport.

While talking about the total flight operation at Srinagar Airport, an official said that all the flights are operating as per the schedule—(KNO)

# Srinagar Airport Witnesses 30 Percent Decline In Passenger Flow

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** With the spike in Covid-19 cases in the valley, footfall at the Srinagar Airport has gone down by 30 percent.

A top official from the Srinagar Airport said that after the recent spurt in Covid-19 positive cases in the valley, the footfall at the Airport has gone down to 30 per cent and the current prevailing Covid-19 situation may

# Covid-19: SKIMS Bemina To Start Online OPD Services From April 24

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Authorities at Sheri Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Wednesday said that OPD services at Medical College Hospital Bemina shall be operational in online mode from 24th April.

In an order Medical Superintendent SKIMS MC Hospital Bemina reads, "It is hereby circulated for information of all that the OPD services for all specialties of SKIMS Medical College Hospital Bemina shall be operational in online mode from 24th April through official website www.skimsmc.edu.in."

Medical Superintendent SKIMS Dr Shafa Deva told News Agency KDC that due to surge in coronavirus positive cases, patients were waiting in large queues at the counters for tickets and other related matters, so to avoid that gatherings, we have decided to make online service for registration of patients for all specialties from Saturday, she said adding that registration will be available all the time.

# SMC Conducts Anti-Encroachment Drive in City Parts



Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Srinagar Municipal Corporation's Anti-Encroachment Squad Wednesday conducted anti-encroachment drives in several areas of the City including Regal Chowk, Jehangir Chowk, Maharaja Bazaar, Dalgate, and other adjoining areas.

The drive was conducted under the supervision of Commissioner SMC Athar Amir Khan, who was also accompanied by Joint Commissioner Admin, Joint Commissioner Works, Chief Sanitation Officer, Chief Anti Encroachment Officer and other officials, an SMC statement said.

Action against encroachments along main roads and markets was taken during the drive.

The goods that led to encroachment, displayed by street vendors and shopkeepers outside their shops were removed and seized on spot. SMC took cognisance of the violations and the violators were also fined.

"The Anti Encroachment Squad has been reorganised to ensure effective strategised and sustainable enforcement on ground to remove encroachments for smooth flow of traffic and pedestrian movement in the city."

The drive will strictly continue and anyone found violating fundamental rules will be dealt with accordingly, said the Commissioner SMC.

Athar advised street vendors, shopkeepers to keep their belonging within their shop's premises, otherwise face the consequences, seizure and imposition of fine.

Meanwhile, Athar also inspected various business establishments and markets to review the adherence to the Covid 19 guidelines and made an appeal to people to follow religiously the protocol by wearing masks and maintaining social distance.

## NATIONAL HIGHWAYS & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED (A Govt. of India Undertaking)

Corporate Office: 3rd Floor, PTI Building, 4-Parliament Street, New Delhi - 110001

F.No. NHIDCL/2(8)/Rect Fin & HR/2021/HR

National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited has been set up by the Government of India as a Corporation under the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways to fast pace construction/ up-gradation/ widening of National Highways in the North - Eastern Region and areas that share international boundaries with neighbouring countries.

Applications are invited from dynamic, effective and experienced eligible retired Officers from Central Government Ministries/ Departments, Army, Navy, Airforce, BRO (GREF), Autonomous Bodies, Public Sector Undertakings, State Government Departments and State Government Public Undertakings on Engagement on Contract basis on the Terms & Conditions indicated below:-

Sl. No.	Name of the Posts	No. of Vacancy*	Pay Matrix Level in CDA pattern
1.	General Manager (T/P) [Regional Offices of NHIDCL located in North Eastern States, A&N Islands etc.]	**	Pay Matrix Level-13 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised PB - 4 of Rs. 37,400 - 67,000/- plus Grade Pay Rs.8,700/-]
2.	Deputy General Manager (T/P) [Regional Offices of NHIDCL located in North Eastern States, A&N Islands etc.]	20	Pay Matrix Level-12 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised PB-3 of Rs.15,600 - 39,100/- plus Grade Pay of Rs. 7,600/-]
3.	Deputy General Manager (Fin) [Regional Offices of NHIDCL located in Leh (Ladakh), J&K, North Eastern States, A&N Islands etc.]	05	Pay Matrix Level-12 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised PB-3 of Rs.15,600 - 39,100/-plus Grade Pay of Rs. 7,600/-]
4.	Manager (T/P) [Regional Offices of NHIDCL located in North Eastern States, A&N Islands etc.]	20	Pay Matrix Level-11 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised Pay Band-3 of Rs.15,600 - 39,100/- plus Grade Pay of Rs. 6,600/- in CDA Pattern]
5.	Manager (Fin) [Regional Offices of NHIDCL located in Leh (Ladakh), J&K, North Eastern States, A&N Islands etc.]	05	Pay Matrix Level-11 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised Pay Band-3 of Rs.15,600 - 39,100/- plus Grade Pay of Rs. 6,600/- in CDA Pattern]
6.	Manager (Legal) [NHIDCL HQrs/ Regional Offices of NHIDCL located in Leh (Ladakh), J&K, North Eastern States, A&N Islands etc.]	01	Pay Matrix Level-11 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised Pay Band-3 of Rs.15,600 - 39,100/- plus Grade Pay of Rs. 6,600/- in CDA Pattern]
7.	Assistant Manager (HR) [NHIDCL HQrs/ Regional Offices of NHIDCL located in Leh (Ladakh), J&K, North Eastern States, A&N Islands etc.]	02	Pay Matrix Level-8 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised Pay Band-2 of Rs.9,300-34,800/- plus Grade Pay of Rs. 4,800/- in CDA Pattern]
8.	Junior Manager (HR) [NHIDCL HQrs/ Regional Offices of NHIDCL located in Leh (Ladakh), J&K, North Eastern States, A&N Islands etc.]	06	Pay Matrix Level-6 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised Pay Band-2 of Rs.9,300- 34,800/- plus Grade Pay of Rs. 4,200/- in CDA Pattern]
9.	Junior Manager (Legal) [NHIDCL HQrs/ Regional Offices of NHIDCL located in Leh (Ladakh), J&K, North Eastern States, A&N Islands etc.]	01	Pay Matrix Level-6 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised Pay Band-2 of Rs.9,300-34,800/- plus Grade Pay of Rs. 4,200/- in CDA Pattern]
10.	Junior Manager (Rajbhasha) [HQrs, NHIDCL]	01	Pay Matrix Level-6 of 7th CPC [Pre-revised Pay Band-2 of Rs.9,300-34,800/- plus Grade Pay of Rs. 4,200/- in CDA Pattern]

\* Further, NHIDCL reserves the right to prepare a Panel of selected Candidates for filling up the indicated and future vacancies that may arise in NHIDCL. The number of vacancies in the Posts may vary, depending upon the requirement.

Last date for submission of Application: 31.05.2021 (Monday) up to-18:00 hrs.

For detailed Terms and Conditions please visit- www.nhiddcl.com

**NOTE 1:** Officers presently serving in the Central Government Ministries/ Departments, Army, Navy, Airforce, Autonomous Bodies, Public Sector Undertakings, State Government Departments and State Government Public Undertakings and satisfying the prescribed eligibility criteria may also apply for the post on Deputation basis in the prescribed proforma along with copy of ACRs/APARs for last five years, No Objection Certificate (NOC) and Vigilance Clearance (VC). Those applying for appointment on deputation basis can be of any age. Subsequent to their retirement they may be allowed to continue in NHIDCL on contract basis subject to both party agreeing to it. If their parent organisation need them to revert back for retirement formalities, they may be allowed to do so for a period up to one week. Thereafter they can continue on contract basis on the terms and conditions applicable to Contract employees.

**NOTE 2:** Any change or amendment in this Vacancy Circular will be posted on the NHIDCL Website only.

**NOTE 3:** Incomplete applications or those received after the prescribed date shall be summarily rejected.

Dy. General Manager (HR)

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE, BUILDING THE NATION

### DIAL-EMMA

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

### AIRPORTS

SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311

### RAILWAYS

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

### HIGHWAY STATUS

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

### This Day in History

- 536 St. Agapetus I ends his reign as Catholic Pope
- 1056 - Supernova Crab nebula last seen by the naked eye
- 1073 - Pope Alexander II buried and Ildebrando chosen as Pope Gregory VII
- 1145 - 19th recorded perihelion passage of Halley's Comet
- 1164 - Raynald of Dassel names Guido di Crema as anti-pope Paschalis III
- 1370 - Building begins on the Bastille fortress in Paris
- 1500 - Pedro Álvares Cabral is the first European to discover Brazil, landing near Monte Pascoal, claims it for Portugal
- 1521 - French King Francois I declares war on Spain
- 1529 - Treaty of Saragosa: Spain & Portugal divide eastern hemisphere
- 1648 - English army claims King Charles I responsible for bloodshed
- 1659 - Lord Protector Richard Cromwell disbands English parliament
- 1671 - King Charles II sits in on English parliament
- 1674 - Netherlands & Munster sign peace treaty
- 1676 - Battle of Etna - Neth/Spain vs France, M de Ruyter fatally wounded
- 1677 - Battle at Catania: between French & Dutch fleet
- 1692 Edward Bishop is jailed for proposing flogging as a cure for witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts
- 1809 - Battle at Eckmühl - Napoleon beats Austria Archduke Karl
- 1817 - Curacao prohibits use of white paint due to fierce sunlight
- 1823 - Baltic Club (Exchange) forms in London
- 1823 - R J Tyers patents roller skates
- 1838 - English steamship "Sirius" docks in NYC after crossing the Atlantic, first transatlantic steam passenger service
- 1864 - US mints 2 cent coin (1st appearance of "In God We Trust")
- 1876 - Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky completes his ballet "Swan Lake"
- 1876 - Philadelphia Nationals Wes Fislser scores baseball's 1st run
- 1884 - Thomas Stevens starts 1st bike trip around world (2 yrs 9 mths)
- 1884 - US recognizes King Leopold II's Congo Free State
- 1889 - A 1.9 million-acre tract of Indian Territory for white colonial settlement in Oklahoma officially starts at 12pm
- 1893 - Francis Dhanis army occupies Kasongo
- 1915 - 1st military use of poison gas (chlorine, by Germany) in WW I
- 1915 - The Second Battle of Ypres begins on the Western Front
- 1916 - France battles at Fort Douaumont
- 1916 - Karl Spindler scuttles the Aud near Daunt's Rock, to prevent its cargo of 20,000 rifles destined for Irish republicans falling into enemy hands
- 1926 - Persia, Turkey & Afghanistan sign treaties of security
- 1930 - US, Britain & Japan sign London Naval Treaty
- 1930 - British troops battle pro-independence revolutionaries in the Jalalabad hills near Chittagong in Bengal province, British India leaving 80 troops and 12 revolutionaries dead.
- 1931 - Egypt & Iraq sign peace treaty



HIJRI CALENDAR

09

RAMAZAN -UL-MUBARAK

1442

### PRAYERS

FAJR 4:23

ZUHR 12:32

ASR 5:13

MAGRIB 7:10

ISHA 8:37

### From KO Archives

## SAYEED, MANGAT CLASH AT CABINET MEETING

Observer News Service

**JAMMU -** Deputy Chief Minister Mangat Ram Sharma snubbed Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed at a cabinet meeting here Tuesday, telling him he was not a "headmaster" who could dictate terms to his seniors in politics.

Sharma walked out of the cabinet meeting in a huff, the second time he has done so in the past 16 months. He later flew to New Delhi, telling reporters he would appreciate the Congress party leadership about Sayeed's "dictatorial behaviour".

Cabinet meeting was later postponed to April 22.

On Jan 24, almost in similar circumstances, Sharma walked out of a cabinet meeting on being overruled on the appointment of Kashmir's senior most Indian Administrative Service officer KB. Pillni as chairman of the State Public Service Commission.

Ultimately, Sharma had to relent and reconcile to the choice of the chief minister.

Tuesday's walkout followed a verbal duel between the two over the use of 'improper' language by Sharma while conversing with Chief Secretary Sudhir S Belloria.

The meeting was to discuss a major administrative and police reshuffle in the state.

Sayeed termed Sharma's conversation with the chief secretary as 'improper.'

"You should not use such language with the chief secretary," Sayeed told Sharma in the presence of the entire cabinet and some top officials.

Sharma allegedly told Belloria 'kar do Ji' (do it) instead of 'kar deejlye' while marking the agenda for the day.

Sayeed corrected him in front of the cabinet after which the deputy chief minister replied that he did not have to be (taught how to deal with the bureaucracy).

Sharma told Sayeed: "I am senior to you in politics by 11 years. You cannot treat me like a headmaster, and I am leaving."

Sharma then burst out of the meeting Sayeed, the sources said, rubbed salt into Sharma's wounds by saying: "If you want to go, no one is going to stop you." He suggested that Congress President Sonia Gandhi should be informed about this incident. Chief Minister was quoted as saying, "How can the govt run amid this indiscipline?"

(Kashmir Observer, 22 April, 2005)

## N Ireland Referendum To Leave UK Would Fail Today



**A** Northern Ireland referendum on leaving the United Kingdom would fail today, a poll indicated on Tuesday, but most of those questioned said they believed the region would leave within the next 25 years.

A 1998 peace deal largely ended three decades of violence between Catholic Irish nationalists seeking to merge with Ireland and Protestant unionists seeking to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Under the peace deal, the British government can call a referendum on whether Northern Ireland should leave the United Kingdom if a 'yes' majority looks likely.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday told the BBC Spotlight documentary that he did not expect such a vote for "a very, very long time to come."

that if a vote was held today some 43% of the region's voters would vote to leave the United Kingdom, while 49% of the region's voters would vote to remain and 8% were undecided.

However, 51% said they believed Northern Ireland would no longer be part of the United Kingdom in 25 years, with 37% saying they believed it would still be.

Some in the region expect higher birth rates among Catholic Irish nationalists to change the balance of power within a generation. Others believe many Catholics will ultimately balk at the upheaval that leaving would entail.

Of those polled, 48% said the Northern Ireland Protocol of Britain's European Union exit deal should be scrapped while 46% said they wanted it retained.

The British government and European Commission are engaged in talks on reducing trade frictions caused by the protocol that have disrupted parcel deliveries and left some supermarket shelves empty earlier in the year. **REUTERS**

**BRITISH PRIME MINISTER BORIS** Johnson on Tuesday told the BBC Spotlight documentary that he did not expect such a vote for "a very, very long time to come."

## US Warns Against Travel To 80% Nations Amid Surge



**WASHINGTON:** The US has advised its citizens to reconsider travelling to 80 per cent of the world.

It has also warned them against travelling to India, even if they are fully vaccinated as there is a 'very high level' of Covid-19 in the country. They have been asked The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) released travel recommendations by destination. The CDC uses science-based Travel Health Notices to alert travellers about health threats around the world and advises on how to protect themselves.

The CDC has a four-level system for Covid-19 and in that India is placed in 'Level 4: Very high level of Covid-19'. The department noted that "the

pandemic continues to pose unprecedented risks to travellers". The CDC said: "If you must travel to India, get fully vaccinated before travel. All travellers should wear a mask, stay 6 feet from others, avoid crowds and wash hands." The State Department said it would begin to update its travel advisories to more closely align with those from the CDC.

The advisories, it said, also take into account logistical factors, including in-country testing availability and current travel restrictions for US citizens. "This update will result in a significant increase in the number of countries at Level 4: Do Not Travel, to approximately 80 per cent of countries worldwide," the State Department said. — **PTI**

# US Ex-Cop Derek Chauvin Convicted Of George Floyd's Murder

Agencies

**MINNEAPOLIS, UNITED STATES:** Derek Chauvin, a white former Minneapolis police officer, was convicted Tuesday of murdering African-American George Floyd after a racially charged trial that was seen as a pivotal test of police accountability in the United States.



A jury deliberated less than 11 hours before finding the 45-year-old Chauvin guilty of all three charges against him -- second-degree murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter.

A crowd gathered outside the heavily guarded downtown Minneapolis courtroom erupted in cheers when the verdicts were announced after a three-week trial that had an entire nation on edge.

Chauvin, who had been free on bail, was put in handcuffs after Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill read out the unanimous verdicts reached by the racially diverse seven-woman five-man jury.

Wearing a facemask and displaying no visible emotion, Chauvin was escorted out of the courtroom by a deputy as one of George Floyd's brothers, Philonise Floyd, embraced prosecutors.

Chauvin faces up to 40 years in prison on the most serious charge -- second-degree murder. Sentencing will be at a later date.

Chauvin, a 19-year veteran of the Minneapolis police force, was seen on video kneeling on the neck of Floyd for more than nine minutes as he lay face down and handcuffed on the ground saying repeatedly "I can't breathe."

The 46-year-old Floyd's death during his May 25, 2020 arrest for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill sparked protests against racial injustice and police brutality around the world.

Ahead of the verdict, cities across the United States had been braced for potential unrest and National Guard troops have been deployed in Minneapolis.

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris called

members of the Floyd family after the verdicts.

"Nothing is going to make it all better but at least God now there's some justice," Biden said. "We're all so relieved -- not just the one verdict but all three, guilty on all three counts."

"This is a day of justice in America," said Harris, America's first Black vice president. "History will look back at this moment."

The White House said Biden also planned to make formal remarks to the nation later Tuesday.

**'Justice'** - Floyd family lawyer Ben Crump hailed the verdict as a landmark victory for civil rights and a springboard to legislation to reform police forces in their dealings with minorities.

"This verdict is a turning point in history and sends a clear message on the need for accountability of law enforcement," Crump tweeted. "Justice for Black America is justice for all of America!"

Barack Obama, America's first Black president, said "a jury did the right thing" but "true justice requires much more."

Three other former police officers involved in Floyd's arrest are to go on trial later this year.

Minneapolis has been tense awaiting the verdict in the Chauvin trial and the city has seen nightly protests since Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man, was shot dead in a suburb of the Minnesota city on April 11 by a white policewoman.

In Washington, the National Guard said some 250 troops were being deployed "to support local law enforcement" in response to

potential demonstrations.

Prosecutors, in closing arguments on Monday, showed excerpts from the harrowing bystander video of Floyd's death that was seen by millions around the world.

"This case is exactly what you thought when you saw it first, when you saw that video," prosecutor Steve Schleicher told the jury.

"You can believe your eyes," Schleicher said. "It's exactly what you knew, it's what you felt in your gut, it's what you now know in your heart."

"This wasn't policing, this was murder," Schleicher added. "Nine minutes and 29 seconds of shocking abuse of authority."

Much of the evidence phase of the trial involved testimony from medical experts about Floyd's cause of death.

A retired forensic pathologist called by the defense said Floyd died of cardiac arrest brought on by heart disease and the illegal drugs fentanyl and methamphetamine.

Medical experts for the prosecution said Floyd died from a lack of oxygen from Chauvin's knee on his neck and that drugs were not a factor.

Among the 38 witnesses who testified for the prosecution were some of the bystanders who watched Floyd's arrest and pleaded with Chauvin to get off him.

Darnella Frazier, the teenager who took the video that went viral, said Floyd was "scared" and "begging for his life."

"It wasn't right. He was suffering," Frazier said.

**NOTHING IS GOING TO MAKE IT ALL BETTER BUT AT LEAST** God now there's some justice," Biden said. "We're all so relieved -- not just the one verdict but all three, guilty on all three counts."

## Verdict Is "Turning Point In History": George Floyd's Family Lawyer



Agencies

**MINNEAPOLIS, US:** Civil rights

attorney Ben Crump hailed the conviction Tuesday of a sacked white police officer for the

murder of African-American George Floyd as a "turning point in history" for the deeply divided United States.

"Painfully earned justice has finally arrived for George Floyd's family," tweeted Crump, the Floyd family lawyer, as Derek Chauvin was found guilty in a unanimous decision by a Minneapolis jury.

"This verdict is a turning point in history and sends a clear message on the need for accountability of law enforcement. Justice for Black America is justice for all of America!"

## Eu Agency Links J&J Shot To Rare Clots, Says Odds Favour Use

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**LONDON:** The European Union's drug regulatory agency said Tuesday that it found a possible link between Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine and extremely rare blood clots and that a warning should be added to the label.

But experts at the agency reiterated that the vaccine's benefits outweigh the risks.

The European Medicines Agency made those determinations after a very small number of blood clot cases in people who had gotten the vaccine were reported in the United States.

The agency said a warning about the blood clots should be added to labels for the Johnson & Johnson's vaccine and that these rare blood disorders should be considered very rare side effects of the vaccine.

The EMA also recommended a label change for the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine after finding a link between it and rare blood clots.

In both cases, the agency said the benefits of being immunized against COVID-19 still outweighed the very small risks of recipients developing the unusual clots.

Last week, Johnson & Johnson halted its European roll-out of the vaccine after US officials recommended a pause in the vaccine, when they detected six very rare blood clot cases among nearly 7 million people who had been vaccinated.

European officials said they considered all currently available evidence from the U.S., which consisted of eight reports of serious cases of rare blood clots associated with low blood platelets, including one death.

All of the cases occurred in people under age 60, but the EMA said that it hadn't been able to identify any specific risk factors.

Last week, J&J halted its European rollout of its one-dose vaccine after the US Food and Drug Administration recommended of-

officials pause its use while the rare blood clot cases are examined.

Officials identified six cases of the highly unusual blood clots among nearly 7 million people who were immunized with the shot in the US.

Johnson & Johnson advised European governments to store their doses until the EU drug regulator issued guidance on their use; widespread use of the shot in Europe has not yet started.

The delay was a further blow to vaccination efforts in the European Union, which have been plagued by supply shortages, logistical problems and concerns over unusual blood clots also in a small number of people who received the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

Experts worry the temporary halt on J&J's shot could further



shake vaccine confidence and complicate worldwide COVID-19 immunization efforts.

Last week, South Africa suspended its use of the vaccine in the wake of the US pause, and countries including Italy, Romania, the Netherlands, Denmark and Croatia put their J&J doses into storage.

The blood clots linked to the J&J vaccine are occurring in unusual parts of the body, such as veins that drain blood from the brain.

Those patients also have abnormally low levels of blood platelets, a condition normally linked to bleeding, not clotting.

In its statement, the EMA said the cases it reviewed of unusual blood clots in people who received the J&J shot were very similar to the cases that occurred with the COVID-19 vaccine developed by AstraZeneca.

## Indonesia Searching For Missing Submarine With 53 On Board



**JAKARTA:** Indonesia's navy is searching for a missing submarine with 53 people on board that went missing on Wednesday and is seeking help from neighbouring Australia and Singapore in the hunt, the Indonesian military chief told Reuters.

The German-made submarine, KRI Nanggala-402, was conducting a torpedo drill in waters north of the island of Bali but failed to relay the results as expected, a navy spokesman said.

"We are still searching in the waters of Bali, 60 miles (96 km) from Bali, (for) 53 people," military chief Hadi Tjahjanto told Reuters in a text message.

The military chief confirmed that assistance in the search for the submarine and missing crew members had been sought from Australia and Singapore. He said contact with the vessel was lost at 4:30 a.m. on Wednesday.

Representatives of the defence departments of Australia and Singapore did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The 1,395-tonne KRI Nanggala-402 was built in Germany in 1978, according to the Indonesian cabinet secretariat's website, and underwent a two-year refit in South Korea that was completed in 2012.

Indonesia in the past operated a fleet of 12 submarines purchased from the Soviet Union to patrol the waters of its sprawling archipelago.

But now it has a fleet of only five including two German-built Type 209 submarines and three newer South Korean vessels.

Indonesia has been seeking to upgrade its defence capabilities but some of its equipment still in service is old and there have been deadly accidents involving in particular ageing military transport planes in recent years. **REUTERS**

### NEWS MAKERS

## Senior Pakistani Journalist Shot In Islamabad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**ISLAMABAD:** Unidentified gunmen shot a senior Pakistani journalist on Tuesday while he was taking a walk near his house in Islamabad.

Absar Alam, who also served as a chairman of Pakistan Electronic Media Authority (PEMRA), the country's electronic media watchdog, was rushed to a hospital where he was out of danger.

Alam confirmed the attack in a video message uploaded on Twitter. "I've been hit in my ribs," he said, adding that he had not lost hope.

My message to those who did this is that I am not going to be scared by such tactics," Alam said. So far, nobody has taken responsibility of the attack.

The Islamabad Police have constituted a special team to investi-



gate the matter from all aspects. team has been directed to use all scientific and forensic methods to trace the accused involved in the incident, according to a tweet by Islamabad Police.

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry condemned the incident in a message on Twitter, adding that the police had been asked to investigate the attack. PML-N Vice-President Mary-

manded that the people involved in the incident be arrested.

"An inquiry should be launched into the incident," Bilawal said as he prayed for the early recovery of the journalist.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan also strongly condemned the "assassination attempt" on the senior journalist.

"HRCP sees such cowardly acts of violence against journalists as an assault on an already muzzled media," it added.

Pakistan is considered as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists.

The Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) in its Media Freedom Report 2020 said that at least 10 journalists were murdered and several others threatened, kidnapped, tortured and arrested in the country in 2020.

## Oscar-Nominated Bosnian Film Highlights Srebrenica Genocide

**S**urvivors of the Srebrenica genocide hope that an Oscar-nominated Bosnian film about the massacre of mainly civilian 8,000 Muslims by Bosnian Serb forces will shed light on the atrocity and help counter denial that genocide occurred.

The July 1995 killings of men and boys in the United Nations-protected eastern Bosnian town shocked the world and have stood out as Europe's only atrocity since World War Two constituting genocide.

"Quo Vadis, Aida?" ("Where are you going Aida?"), by acclaimed Bosnian director Jasmila Zbanic is one of five contenders in the international feature film category for this year's Oscars.

Shot in silence due to its sensitive theme in ethnically-divided Bosnia, the film depicts how the genocide



unfolded through the eyes of a female interpreter working at the United Nations base in Srebrenica.

It was based on a true story by a Bosnian Muslim interpreter who could not save his family. Zbanic chose to tell the story through a woman, Aida, honouring all those women who struggled to save their husbands and sons amid confusion and impotence of U.N. officials as the Bosnian Serb forces advanced.

"I was strongly disturbed by the film. I found myself again in 1995,

amidst the struggle to save my son Nermin," said Munira Subasic, who chairs an Association of Srebrenica mothers who lost husbands and sons.

Even though two international courts have declared that the killings constituted genocide and its main masterminds were convicted by a U.N. court, most Serbs in Bosnia and Serbia deny it occurred.

"For us, this film is even more than a film," Zbanic said after the Oscar nomination was announced. "This is a reminder that genocide ... must not be denied or forgotten".

Custodians at the Srebrenica Memorial Centre, housed in an old battery factory which served as the U.N. base during the Bosnian war of 1992-1995, hope the film will raise awareness of the importance of a culture of remembrance. **REUTERS**

## Six Migrant Labourers Test Positive For Covid-19 In Bhabdarwah

**Observer News Service**

**BHABDARWAH:** Over 240 migrant labourers were screened for COVID-19 on Wednesday in a special drive as they gathered in search of work here in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district, officials said.

Of the labourers, six were found to be positive for the infection and were shifted to hospital, they said.

Doda had recorded 64 COVID-related deaths among total 3,553 infected cases since the outbreak of the pandemic last year, while the active cases in the district stands at 60 till Tuesday evening.

In a surprise move, a team of paramedics from sub-district hospital Bhabdarwah, along with police, cordoned off the historic Chowgam market early in the morning, where a large number of migrant labourers, mostly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, had gathered to be hired by local residents, the officials said.

They said the labourers were subjected to Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) during the drive, which was welcomed by both migrant labourers as well as local residents, who were apprehensive of engaging the labourers in view of a sudden spike in COVID-19 cases across the union territory.

"Despite heavy downpour, we carried on with our first major exercise after the outbreak of the second wave of the infection and tested 240 labourers, out of which six were tested positive and were immediately isolated and shifted to hospital," Nodal

Officer Aarif Khateeb, who was leading the drive, said.

He said the aggressive testing, which was started in Bhabdarwah town on Wednesday, would continue to cover all high risk groups.

The labourers extended co-operation to the administration and said they would make themselves available for any test or any kind of verification whenever required.

"It is a very good initiative taken by the administration. We are cooperating with the administration as it is good for us," Mohd Allaud-Din, a labourer from Bihar, said.

Muhammad Afroz Alam, also from Bihar, said, "I have been working in Bhabdarwah since the last six years and when we came here recently, we got tested at Lakhampur - the gateway to Jammu and Kashmir bordering Punjab."

"Now, today we again went through the COVID-19 test and the maximum of us turned negative. We are happy with the initiative as the local residents were apprehensive about us in view of a sudden spike across the country," he said, leaving with a local resident for work.

Additional Deputy Commissioner, Bhabdarwah, Rakesh Kumar on Tuesday issued protocols for all passengers and visitors arriving in the additional district by road or on foot through hills.

"All visitors arriving by road or on foot through hills into the jurisdiction of Bhabdarwah shall be 100 per cent tested for COVID-19 using RT-PCR or RAT," an official release said. (PTI)



A MASKED MAN PRAYING INSIDE 14TH CENTURY KHANQAH-E-MOULA, also known as Shah-e-Hamadan Masjid, as coronavirus resurgence cast its shadow on the vibrant Ramadan gatherings in the valley.

## Transporters On Strike As Fresh Covid-19 Guidelines Come Into Effect In J&K

**Press Trust of India**

**JAMMU:** Private transporters in Jammu went on an indefinite strike on Wednesday to protest a government order capping the seating capacity to 50 per cent in public transport vehicles in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new guidelines, which also include restrictions on opening of shops at market places and malls as part of steps to prevent the spread of the coronavirus infection amid a recent spike, came into effect on Wednesday morning.

Protesting against the order, the transporters launched a strike to press for hiking of fares.

While most private buses, mini-buses and cab operators suspended work in response to the strike call given by the J&K Transporters Welfare Forum (TWF), three-wheelers were seen plying normally, bringing some relief to commuters.

"The government has taken a decision without consulting us. It is not feasible for transporters to ply their vehicles with 50 per cent passengers on board. The fuel prices are skyrocketing and the transporters were the hardest hit since the outbreak of the pandemic," TWF president T S Wazir said.

The government, in the meanwhile, pressed State Road Transport Corporation (SRTC) buses on different routes to facilitate commuters, but the non-availability of the public transport caused much inconvenience.

Policemen were also seen patrolling main markets in the city to enforce the government order to keep 50 per cent of the

## Overcrowded Public Transport Vehicles Continue To Ply In Kashmir

**Observer News Service**

**SRINAGAR:** Despite the government's directive asking the transporters to operate at 50 per cent occupancy, private transporters in Kashmir are operating at the normally full capacity in thereby putting lives at risk.

LG Manoj Sinha Tuesday while extending night curfew to the urban areas of all 20 J&K districts also issued directions to the respective district administrations to ensure only 50 per cent occupancy in the public transport vehicles to ensure social distancing among passengers to contain the spread of coronavirus.

The transporters, however, said that such orders were incurring them heavy losses and said that the authorities should consider their situation while issuing orders.

The public transport vehicles were on Wednesday seen operating at the normal capacity throwing covid SOPs to the winds. Such violations were witnessed on many routes.

Jehangir Chowk-Rangreth route, Jehangir Chowk-Hyderabad-Humhama routes witnessed public transport vehicles operating at full capacity. Similar scenes were witnessed on the Srinagar-Chadoora route.

In Srinagar city, the traffic police did crackdown on the erring vehicles, those in peripheries went off the hook in absence of the required checks.

After the police action on the erring drivers, the drivers plying on the Jehangir Chowk-Rangreth route halted the service in protest.

The drivers demanded a hike in the passenger fare in case they were to reduce the seat capacity to half.

"How will the half seat occupancy for the same fare suffice our needs when 90% of the earned amount would be spent in filling diesel?" a driver asked.

Pertinently, transporters in Jammu division are currently on strike against the government order saying they had suffered too much due to the earlier lockdowns.

**HOW WILL THE HALF SEAT occupancy for the same fare suffice our needs when 90% of the earned amount would be spent in filling diesel?"**

shops closed.

Among the new COVID-19 control measures announced on Tuesday, the government imposed a night curfew in municipal and urban local body limits of all 20 districts in the union territory.

It also said that public transport (matadors/mini-buses/buses) shall be permitted to ply only at 50 per cent of its authorised seating capacity, and only half of the shops in market complexes, bazaars and malls within the municipal or urban local body limits shall be opened on an alternate basis through a rotation system.

**THE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN A DECISION WITHOUT consulting us. It is not feasible for transporters to ply their vehicles with 50 per cent passengers on board. The fuel prices are skyrocketing and the transporters were the hardest hit since the outbreak of the pandemic."**

## Mirwaiz Grieved Over Demise Of AAC Leader

**Observer News Service**

**SRINAGAR:** Jammu and Kashmir Awami Action Committee's (AAC) senior leader and lifelong associate of Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq, Muhammad Shafi Khan passed away after a brief illness yesterday night at SKIMS.

A resident of Nawab Bazar, Khan was presently residing in Qamarwari.

A statement of AAC said that an emergency condolence meeting was held paying tributes to Khan for his contribution to the party and its ideals.

The meeting described the demise of Muhammad Shafi Khan as an irreparable loss for the organisation.

AAC chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq expressed deep grief over the demise of Khan and paid glowing tributes to him calling his death a personal loss.

Mirwaiz could not participate in the Namaaz-e-Janaazah of the deceased due to house arrest.

Quoting Mirwaiz, the statement said, the role and contribution of Khan to AAC has been exemplary and is a guiding light for party workers to emulate.

## GMC Anantnag Faces Shortage Of Anaesthesiologists

**Observer News Service**

**ANANTNAG:** The government medical college in Anantnag is facing a shortage of Anaesthesiologists due to which work of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is suffering.

Official sources said that ICU lacks manpower and there are only four beds for the patients needing ventilator support.

They said that the ICU unit has four beds placed in a room that has also a dialysis section with no attached washroom.

"Unless ICU gets trained staff, it is virtually of no use," they said.

They said all patients in need of invasive ventilation are shifted to Srinagar hospitals putting more burden on them.

Principal Government Medical

College Anantnag Dr Showkat Jeelani acknowledged that there is requirement of 20 anaesthesiologists.

"There is no shortage of nurses and technicians, however, if ICU will get more trained staff, we could do more work," he said, adding that he has already written to higher-ups.

"We have 80 beds with high flow oxygen available designated for Covid-19 patients and there is adequate oxygen supply available at the hospital," he said, adding that they are ready to face any challenge.

On patients requiring invasive ventilation being shifted, Jeelani said they are working as per Covid-19 protocol as GMC Anantnag is level 2 Covid-19 hospital.

"As per protocol patient requiring invasive ventilation is to be shifted to level 3 hospital," he said—(KNO)

## DC Ang For Strict Action Against Covid SOP Violators

**Observer News Service**

**ANANTNAG:** Deputy Commissioner Anantnag, Dr. Piyush Singla Wednesday called for strict legal action against the violators of Covid SOPs for larger public safety and urged the magisterial and police authorities to ensure the same.

He also directed the concerned officers to ensure smooth implementation of the government restrictions to contain the 2nd Covid Wave. He passed these directions while taking a meeting of elected public representatives and concerned officers here at Dak Bangalow Khanabal.

Stressing on strategizing the Covid prevention measures at local level, the DC urged for taking the trade associations, transporters, Atuq Committees and other stakeholders on board so the restrictions on markets, transport and gatherings are implemented in letter and spirit.

Dr. Singla called for aggressive testing of the family members of the deceased patients besides the above 60 comorbid persons by using Swasthya Nidhi data.

He also passed directions for augmenting ventilator facilities at the District Hospital besides ensuring uninterrupted and stable power supply there.

## Ladakh Reports 250 Covid Cases, One Death

**JAMMU:** Ladakh on Wednesday reported 250 new COVID-19 cases, taking the tally to 12,556, while one death pushed the toll to 134.

According to the media bulletin released by the Directorate of Health Services of Ladakh, of the total cases, 236 cases were reported from Leh and 14 from Kargil.

Of the total deaths reported in the union territory, 90 were in Leh and 44 in Kargil, it added.

The bulletin said 136 patients have been discharged after recovery.

With this, the total number of active COVID-19 cases in Ladakh has increased to 1,812, including 1,730 in Leh district and 82 in Kargil district, it said.

So far, a total of 10,610 patients have recovered from the infection since the outbreak of the pandemic.

## KU North Campus Students Protest, Seek Online Exams

**'Dozens Of Students, Faculty Members Have Tested Covid Positive'**

**Observer News Service**

**SRINAGAR:** The first semester MBA students of Kashmir University (north campus) Wednesday staged a protest to press for the online examinations, saying that several students and faculty members have tested positive for the coronavirus in the campus.

Holding placards in their hands, "conduct online exams, exams in COVID is a murder," dozens of students, including girls amid slogans appeared at Press Enclave and staged a protest to press for the online examinations.

Students said the varsity administration cannot put the lives of hundreds of students at risk by forcing them to share space with the students and faculty members having tested positive for COVID-19 recently.

They said the KU authorities must cancel offline exams for the larger interest of the students and issue fresh date sheets for online exams.

"If the exams of 2nd and 3rd semester MBA students could be conducted through online mode, why is this facility denied to us? Dozens of students and faculty



members were tested positive for COVID-19 in north campus recently, how could we share space with the COVID patients," a girl student told the media.

She urged the varsity administration to consider their demand on a humanitarian basis so that the lives of hundreds of students are saved.

"Our date sheet for offline exams was issued recently, but we were not ready for exams given a sharp spike in COVID-19 cases throughout India including Jammu and Kashmir. How could they put our lives in danger under such circumstances," she added.

### NEWS MAKERS

## Div Com Jammu Directs Private Hospitals To Increase Bed Capacity For Covid Patients

**Observer News Service**

**JAMMU:** Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Dr Raghav Langer Wednesday convened a meeting of Health and Medical Education Department regarding rationalisation of Covid cases management in designated private health care institutions.

Keeping in view the surge in Covid-19 cases in recent times and to keep all possible facilities in place for treatment of Covid-19 positive cases, the Div Com directed the ASCOMS and Narayana Hospitals to increase their bed capacity for Covid-19 cases with all necessary facilities like ICU, Ventilators etc. The Div Com also directed both the institutions to share regular details of bed occupancy with MD NHM and Director Health Services.

The Divisional Commissioner asked both the private institutions to provide details of the tariff being charged by them for management of covid positive cases under various packages. It was discussed during the meeting that in order to rationalize the expenditure being incurred by patients; many States/ UTs have ordered for a capping on the

rates being charged by private hospitals under the provisions of Disaster Management Act. The CEO Ayushman Bharat, J&K apprised the Div Com that at present there is a huge gap between the reimbursement under covid management package of Ayushman Bharat and rates being actually charged by the private institutions; thereby leading to excessive out of pocket expenditure by the poor patients.

It is noteworthy that in order to prevent charging of exorbitant rates; many states have put a ceiling on the rates being charged by private covid health care institutions for isolation beds, O2 supported high dependency unit, ICU with / without ventilators etc, with inclusions/exclusions defined clearly. The Div Com also obtained comments of both private health care institutions for requisitioning certain no. of covid beds in their facilities for usage strictly based on referral by the Government.

"As the Covid-19 positive cases are increasing there may be more demand of Covid-19 hospitalization in near future so there is a need to enhance critical care capacity for treatment of Co-

vid-19 cases", The Div Com said.

The Div Com also directed Deputy Commissioner, Jammu and MD NHM and other concerned officers to hold a meeting with private nursing home associations in this regard and make a comprehensive plan for successful management of Covid-19 positive cases; based on the level of facilities available in some suitable private institutions for Covid management.

Earlier, the Divisional Commissioner and IGP, Jammu Mukesh Singh, also convened a meeting with Presidents of Market Associations of Jammu and asked them to comply with the Government orders and strictly follow Standard Operation Procedures to successfully combating Covid-19 spread.

The meeting was attended by SSP Jammu, Chandan Kohli; Additional Commissioner Jammu, ADC Jammu besides President Chamber of Commerce, Presidents of Raghunath Bazar Association, President Residency Market, Apsara Market, Ware House Market Association and other representatives of market associations.

The Divisional Commissioner urged associations to comply

## Markets To Open On Odd Even Basis In Rajouri

**Observer News Service**

**A**mid the rising COVID-19 cases in the district, Deputy Commissioner Rajouri, Rajesh Kumar Shavan Wednesday met with representatives of market associations and held a threadbare discussion in connection with the regulation of markets in the district.

The District administration and traders associations agreed to open 50 per cent shops in markets on one day and the rest the second day by adopting the odd-even strategy.

The district administration has also allowed the 50 per cent shops to remain open within municipal limits from morning 08 AM till 08 PM six days a week, while the markets will be closed on Sunday.

However, the shops selling essential items like chicken, mutton, dairy, fruit and vegetables, medicines, bakeries shall remain open on all days from 07 AM to 07 PM.

The night curfew has also been imposed within the municipal limits of the district from 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM with the relaxation to be given for morning and Travi prayers. There would be no restrictions on emergency services.

## Poonch Admin Schedules Opening Of Shops, Plying Of Transport

**Observer News Service**

**POONCH:** District administration Poonch Wednesday scheduled opening of shops and operating of public transport as per fresh Covid containment guidelines.

As per an order issued after deliberations with the representatives of Market Associations, District Magistrate, Poonch, in exercise of powers vested in me u/s 34 of Disaster Management Act, 2005 and section 144 of CrPC do, ordered that the shops/establishments shall be allowed to open/operate within the Municipal Limits/Urban Local Body Limits of District Poonch as per the notified schedule.

The Chemist Shops/Testing Labs and Health Clinics/

all medical and optical facilities, besides Milk Shops, Vegetable & Fruit Shops, Bakeries, Eateries and Chicken/Mutton Shops/Street Vendors shall operate daily, while Stationery shops, book shops, Photostat shops

Mobile and electronic shops; Fans/Coolers (Electrical) shops; Hardware and sanitary goods; Cement/building material shops Automobile showrooms and service stations will open on Monday, Wednesday & Friday.

Similarly, Cloth shops, Readymade garments and shoes shops, Manyari/cosmetics shops, Crockery & utensils shops, Karyana and Grocery shops, Jewellers shops, Gift shops, Shops selling multiple items falling

in more than one category will open on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Barbers and Saloons will open on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Any shop/establishment not mentioned above shall operate on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

However, these shops/establishments on their days of opening shall be allowed to operate with the conditions that SOPs related to COVID-19 including maintaining social distance, wearing of face masks and placing of sanitizers at the entrance shall be strictly followed.

This order shall come into force with immediate effect on 21st of April 2021 and shall remain in force till further order.

with government orders and follow all preventive measures which are necessary to contain

the spread of the virus. He also asked them to avoid gatherings in the markets.

Threadbare discussions were held on various preventive measures and the association members gave their valuable suggestions for containing further spread of virus.

KASHMIR  
OBSERVER

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Editor-in-Chief: Sajjad Haider

Legal Counsel: Tasaduq Khwaja

Switchboard: (0194) 2106304

Editorial: (0194) 2502327

Email editorial: editor@kashmirobserver.net

## K O V I E W

## Paying for the vaccine

Addressing the nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday asked states to avoid lockdown as India fights a new wave of Covid-19 infections. He said the states should consider the lockdown as "the last option", urging them to focus on micro-containment zones. Last year, the PM had imposed lockdown at a short notice of four hours. It had lasted for over two months. But in the process the lockdown had crippled the economy, denting the Gross Domestic Product by one-fourth. On the ground, it meant destruction of businesses and loss of lakhs of jobs. A year on, the economy is yet to return to normal growth path, albeit some sectors like autos and domestic tourism had started witnessing major growth. Green shoots were also visible in other sectors. So, the PM's reluctance to re-impose lockdown is understandable. The economy cannot afford one more year of low growth. It could wreak havoc with the lives of people.

That said, the situation on Covid-19 front remains grim. India is now the world's second-worst hit country, lagging only the U.S. The daily cases are now over three lakh. This has pushed country's health system to breaking point. Hospitals around the country are reporting severe shortages of beds and medical oxygen. Governments in Maharashtra and New Delhi have been forced to impose restrictions on movement. Delhi is currently under a week-long curfew. An apocalyptic like situation has brought the nation's benchmark stock indices to their lowest since end-January. Rupee too has depreciated.

Union Government has been, as a result, forced to lift the age bar on vaccination. Beginning May 1, vaccination will be open to all age groups. There's a problem though: now the people will have to pay for vaccines. According to government's latest decision, around 50 percent of the doses produced by vaccine makers will be provided in the open market to be bought by the state governments and private hospitals. They can administer these doses to those between the ages of 18 and 45 years on payment. However, those above the age of 45 are eligible for free vaccinations at government centres and at a reduced rate of Rs 250 per dose at private facilities.

Introduction of vaccination against payment is not a right step at this time. There's already a deep vaccine hesitancy that is preventing people from taking shots, now people will also shy away from vaccination for reasons of having to pay for it. This would detrimentally affect the efforts to expedite the vaccination in the country. It is important that the union government rethinks the decision.

## O T H E R O P I N O N

## Managing an Upheaval

A combination of panic, public pressure and comprehension of the magnitude of the crisis that India is in seems to have prompted the Centre to authorise vaccines to anyone above 18 and give States more control over procurement. This is despite the problems in scaling up production, and in the supply and management of vaccines amid the surge in cases. The step could not have been easy to take. For one, the processes initiated by the government in early January to expand India's manufacturing capacity were under the assumption that it would be at least August before vaccines could be fully opened up for all. In December, it was announced that India's priority would be to fully inoculate 300 million of the most vulnerable. Given that about 127 million doses have been administered, including a section of those above 45 without underlying health conditions, around 17 million have been fully inoculated — or about 5% of the intended beneficiaries.

At the optimistic rate of three million doses a day, it would take at least 260 days from today for every adult to get at least a single shot.

Eight months ago, India had begun a decline in daily infections to the extent that by January, India's leadership itself — going by its own policy actions — believed that a devastating second wave was unlikely. There is no other explanation why India, following the example of the U.S. and the U.K., did not tie up orders to inoculate most of its adults within this year. India also applied different standards: waiving critical trials for Covaxin, but having stringent requirements for foreign companies. The supply lines are thus inadequate. The second wave, the hospitalisation and medical-oxygen crisis, have derailed all previously laid out plans. Opening up vaccines for all on May 1 and letting States negotiate deals with manufacturers does sound like the government is 'listening to the people', but given the background of supply constraints until June, there is a likelihood that the story of 'vaccine shortage' will surface more acutely. Leading international vaccinators such as Pfizer and Moderna have supply commitments already tied up and it is unclear if merely the policy move of liberalising vaccine supply will leave States in India with the finances and negotiating power to procure enough stocks of vaccines. Moreover, given that this is the hottest month in India, lockdowns are resurfacing in cities, and no end is in sight for the second wave, the logistics of administration will continue to be challenging. It was always going to be impossible to rapidly inoculate a nation of a billion. But chaos and confusion, which now seem inevitable, could have been averted with some foresight and planning. Pragmatism and preparedness should replace hope that runs on nothing more than hype.

The Hindu



## Abdication of Leadership

The mainstream politics in Kashmir by its very nature doesn't lend itself to a fight for a bigger cause

RIYAZ WANI

“This politics is good for nothing, largely unrepresentative. It abdicates its basic role of articulating the interests of its people, let alone being responsive to the sentiment on the ground. The latter it has often found beyond its moral authority to represent. This politics can make a severely limited set of demands, most of these in the domain of development

Though the political process in Kashmir is deemed to have long resumed, other than a few leaders who have tried to respond to the evolving situation, the political parties have chosen to play possum, behaving as if they don't exist. The reasons for it are obvious: majority of leaders don't want to be on the wrong side of New Delhi and suffer as a result. More so, when the centre has let them be under no illusion as to their fate should they dare to question its policies in Kashmir or demand reversal of the revocation of Article 370 that granted J&K a semi-autonomous status within Indian Union. In fact, most of these leaders were in jail when the constitutional provision was withdrawn on August 5, 2019. So, the memory of those days must be raw.

To be sure, there was a brief interregnum when it had appeared that the mainstream parties might be able to put up some resistance to August 5 move. In August last, six parties including the main regional outfits like National Conference and the PDP got together to form People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration to demand restoration of J&K's special status. But a month on, they were working at cross-purposes in the District Development Council polls by putting up candidates against the official PAGD candidates. Subsequently, the People's Conference led by Sajjad Lone quit the alliance citing the fielding of proxy candidates by the constituent parties in the DDC election. He has since gone about strengthening his party in the north. Former PDP patron Muzaffar Hussain Beigh has joined him, so has Mansoor Hussain and Khurshid Alam, two senior PDP leaders. Basharat Bukhari of the National Conference too is now a PC member. Earlier, many PDP leaders went on to found the Apni Party led by businessman turned politician Altaf Bukhari, also a former PDP leader.

There are apparently no worthwhile political or ideological reasons for this switching of sides. They are primarily about a personal political

rehabilitation, so, in a sense, are an exercise in rank opportunism. As things stand, the effort is on to redraw the political landscape of the Valley, if not that of Jammu. This is leading to fragmentation of the political representation with the mandate sought to be divided among several parties, none of them in a position to form a government on its own in a future election. There's also an effort to undermine some parties and promote others, something that is now triggering the exit of the leaders from one party and influx into another deemed to be favourably placed in the given situation.

In the process, the pursuit of the reversal of Article 370 move has been given up as a cause - notwithstanding the few voices still vocal about it, one of them that of the PDP president Mehbooba Mufti and an-

ry job. A significant proportion of the people who man these political outfits are opportunists. Their words are posturing, their deeds are phony. As for the high-sounding agendas of the parties, they are more of an electoral necessity than a political ideology.

This politics, as a result, doesn't lend itself to a fight for a bigger cause. It offers deep structural impediments for such a pursuit: For its survival, it has to run with its local constituency and hunt with New Delhi. This has created a breed of leaders who defer to New Delhi's conditions and have, in turn, been shaped by them. Facing a predicament like the one Kashmir is saddled with now, they would thus prefer silence over talk, and compromise over confrontation. The recent party hopping of some leaders is a reflection of this state of affairs.

“A significant proportion of the people who man these political outfits are opportunists. Their words are posturing, their deeds are phony. As for the high-sounding agendas of the parties, they are more of an electoral necessity than a political ideology.

other that of the National Conference leader Aga Ruhullah. There are several reasons for it: one, the centre has raised the cost - both personal and political - for the politicians and the political parties seeking this reversal. Second, the demand for restoration of J&K autonomy is deemed as a lost cause. And third, the mainstream politicians generally don't think it is their place to struggle for a cause. Establishment politics in Kashmir has never been a site for principles and ideology. It is no place for struggle and sacrifice. People don't join it for conviction or a cause. Their reasons to join are generally self-serving in nature: to enjoy a good life and some petty power. Such political parties may model themselves as a movement for a larger good, but, in practice, they are not fully in control of even the delivery of basic governance, their prima-

Where does this kind of politics leave Kashmir? Nowhere. This politics is good for nothing, largely unrepresentative. It abdicates its basic role of articulating the interests of its people, let alone being responsive to the sentiment on the ground. The latter it has often found beyond its moral authority to represent. This politics can make a severely limited set of demands, most of these in the domain of development. This is perhaps why, at a time, when Kashmir more than ever needs a leadership, nobody is ready to rise to the occasion.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer

The author is the Political Editor of Kashmir Observer

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MAIL

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

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## Help to survive

The rapid spread of the COVID 19 has created a crisis on the livelihood of millions of families in the country. Thousands of migrant workers are

returning to their homes. The lockdown affects the employment of people at the local level. The government should ensure food security by supplying free ration to poor fami-

lies. It is necessary to reach government facilities to needy people timely. All of us should strive together to offer food and water for the birds and animals in this pandemic. This is the

need of the hour.

Amit Singh Kushwaha  
amitsk68@gmail.com

# A case for reasoned debates and civil discourse

SAAD HAFIZ

It's the free communication of thoughts and ideas through dialogue that sets democracy apart from totalitarian systems. The forceful presentation of contending political philosophies is essential. Both reasoned debates based on thoughtful positions backed by evidence and the even-handed delivery of the truth, facts, objectivity are crucial to revitalising the culture of democracy

These days there are few things that we can probably agree on across the political spectrum. One is that open debate is vital for a healthy democracy. The other is that inflammatory, divisive, and vicious language can poison the civil discourse.

The 2020 US presidential election showed this. Despite the confrontational tone, the debates offered voters a contrast between the candidates. But former President Donald Trump's false allegations of "stolen election victory" and "outrageous electoral fraud" stirred up resentment among his supporters. It agitated them to attack the Capitol Building.

There are powerful lessons from the violent events in Washington. The dilution of democracy can happen slowly, over years, in small gradual pieces: mean-spirited politics, extreme political polarization, warring partisan factions and rancorous citizen engagement.

As the Trump experience showed, the system can go off the rails when leaders attempt to grab power at any cost. The disrespect for opponents and institutions created conflict. And the ratcheting-up provocation, paranoia, and disinformation broke democratic norms.

Even at the best of times, democracy is a tough balancing act. It is easy to forget the shared purpose and destiny that bind a nation together as grievances and belligerence drive people poles apart. It is a hard challenge to protect democratic values and principles. A vibrant democracy needs constant public action, engagement, and vigilance.

Reasoned debates based on thoughtful positions backed by evidence are important. It's the free communication of thoughts and ideas through dialogue that sets democracy apart from totalitarian systems. The forceful presentation of contending political philosophies is essential.

But there's no question that undiluted propaganda, divisive slogans and aggressive language curtail civil discourse. And unverified claims, lies, and conspiracy theories can subvert democracy. Politicians and the press have a key



role in removing toxicity from the public discourse. The even-handed delivery of the truth, facts, objectivity are crucial to revitalising the culture of democracy.

Conflict and disagreements are essential parts of a robust democracy. The competition between opposing views of government can be fruitful. But conflict can boil over from being valuable to damaging quickly, without warning. Personal and bitter election campaigns and extreme partisan attacks are troubling signs. Reading the warning signs and managing the change is a significant test for modern democracies.

No-holds-barred negative campaigning only clouds the actual issues and challenges we face. Accepting that the manipulation of truth and facts is as old as politics itself isn't good enough. Political contests need a moderation of language and a change in tone. Incivility and making enemies of opponents have no place in election campaigns. Voters must punish candidates who resort to such tactics at the ballot box.

Polls show that the public expects reasonable standards of

speech and behavior from elected officials. Raising voices in a debate is acceptable, but personal attacks are not. There is a higher tolerance for pointing out flaws in an opponent's policy positions. But lower tolerance for deliberately distorting their record. The public dislikes ridicule, character assassination, and the questioning of patriotism. Violence and destruction, whoever commits it, are unacceptable.

Despite political disagreements, democracies need to find common ground above party, economic interest, and ideology. Civil society action and engagement is a key component of the process. It's the only way to overcome polarization, fragmentation, and hatred. More fellow feeling, empathy, and common civility can help. It can lead to a greater understanding of diverse viewpoints and encourage compromise increasingly missing in politics.

Part of putting democracy back on track is exposing prospective voters to critical thinking and new ideas. Young voters must also see value in the idea of a free press, peaceful transfers of power, and

greater transparency and accountability in government. Debates are the best way to communicate political positions and differences to the voters. They can serve as a useful tool to shape voter's choices and effecting the electoral outcome.

Many voters, in both parties, are anxious about the future of democracy and the country. They would appreciate reasoned debates and civil discourse over the acrimony and deception currently on offer. Political leaders have to look beyond political purity and party ideology. They have to set the example by instilling a willingness to appreciate arguments and positions running counter to their own.

But improving politics and strengthening democracy is a collective responsibility. All citizens must oppose anti-democratic behavior: using falsehoods in debates and intimidating and silencing others with differing viewpoints. To ensure a just society, we must strive for justice, dignity, and well-being for all.

Oped News

Can Russia accept living peacefully next to a sovereign, independent, and undivided Ukraine? Or is open war inevitable? This has long been the paramount question for Eastern Europe, and it has abruptly returned to the fore with the massive buildup of Russian military forces in Crimea and along Ukraine's eastern border.

Ukrainian independence was the issue that definitively broke up the Soviet Union three decades ago. While the departure of other Soviet republics would not necessarily have been an existential threat, Ukraine's declaration of independence absolutely was. It sealed the Soviet Union's fate, a collapse remembered by Russian President Vladimir Putin as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the twentieth century.

For two decades after the Soviet Union's breakup, Russia focused primarily on building its own state and forging its own identity. That changed when Putin decided to return to the presidency for a third term in 2012 (having served a single term as prime minister while his crony, Dmitri Medvedev, held the presidency until Putin was constitutionally eligible to run again). Now, he embarked on a revisionist course to create a so-called Eurasian Union.

Ukraine, meanwhile, had developed a strong preference for alignment with its Central European neighbours. And though these countries had joined the European Union, there was no reason why closer ties with them should weaken Ukraine's historical and cultural links with Russia.

In this context, the EU's Eastern Partnership, which resulted in its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with Ukraine, was part of a broader attempt to meet Ukraine halfway. None of the EU-Ukraine trade agreements were incompatible with the trade agreement that Ukraine had with Russia. But the Kremlin saw things differently. Unable to accept these agreements, it started pressuring Ukraine's weak and vacillating president, Viktor Yanukovich, to turn away from the EU. That prompted a popular uprising that ousted Yanukovich (who fled to Moscow) and set the stage for the war that began in 2014.

The Kremlin saw Ukraine as a weak and fractured state that would fold un-

## War or peace in Ukraine?

For two decades after the Soviet Union's breakup, Russia focused primarily on building its own state and forging its own identity.

CARL BILD



der sustained pressure. To justify Russian revanchism, officials subjected the outside world to lectures about how Ukraine was really just a collection of the pieces left over from defunct empires. While true to some extent, the same could be said about Russia and every other modern nation-state, depending on how far back one goes.

Committed to the idea that Ukraine isn't a real country, the Kremlin seems to have convinced itself that snatching Crimea in early 2014 would precipitate Ukraine's collapse. The hope was that Russia could then carve out a so-called

Committed to the idea that Ukraine isn't a real country, the Kremlin seems to have convinced itself that snatching Crimea in early 2014 would precipitate Ukraine's collapse. The hope was that Russia could then carve out a so-called New Russia (Novorossiya) in Ukraine's east and south, while leaving a rump "Western Galicia" in what remained outside its control

New Russia (Novorossiya) in Ukraine's east and south, while leaving a rump "Western Galicia" in what remained outside its control.

With these grand ambitions in mind, Russia started deploying insurgents, "volunteers", and weapons, accompanied by a massive disinformation operation to turn Ukrainians against one another. But this effort failed. Invading other countries is rarely a good way to make friends, and this time was no exception. Instead of dividing Ukraine, the Kremlin managed to unite the Ukrainian population like never

before. By 2014, Russia had to deploy regular army battalion battle groups to rescue what was left of its separatist redbut in Ukraine's Donbas region.

Since then, efforts to achieve a political settlement (through the two Minsk agreements) have failed. The ongoing low-level conflict has taken 14,000 lives and forced millions to flee their homes. While the Ukrainian public has had difficulties accepting some of the compromises that any settlement would entail, the real barrier to progress has been the Kremlin's refusal to give up its enclaves in Ukraine. The nationalist segment of Russian public opinion, the bedrock of Putin's support, will have a hard time swallowing "defeat" in Ukraine.

Now, according to Russia's Defense Minister, Russia has amassed two full armies and three airborne units to Ukraine's east and south, supposedly for the purpose of holding military exercises. But exercise for what? The mobilisation is clearly directed at Ukraine. Putin's own spokesman has explicitly said as much, claiming that Russia intends to intervene if necessary to prevent attacks on Russian speakers in Ukraine.

Regardless of whether this brinkmanship leads to open conflict in the coming weeks or months (of this even Kremlin decision-makers probably aren't sure), the situation will remain dangerous until Russia gives up its revanchist ambitions. The question ultimately is about war or peace. Until Russia can accept living alongside a sovereign, democratic Ukraine, there can be no stable middle ground.

The outcome has implications far beyond Russia and Ukraine. A successful Russian revisionist agenda would not stop with the reconquest of Kyiv, but rather would seek to unravel Europe's entire post-Cold War security order. That would be profoundly dangerous for everyone, not least Russia itself. As long as the Kremlin remains locked in confrontation with the rest of Europe, it will not be focused on building the democratic and prosperous future the Russian people deserve.

One way or the other, the broader region's fate is now tied to that of Ukraine.

Project Syndicate

# Study reveals your neighbourhood may affect your brain health

## Agencies

Middle-aged and older people living in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods – areas with higher poverty levels and fewer educational and employment opportunities – had more brain shrinkage on brain scans and showed a faster decline on cognitive tests than people living in neighbourhoods with fewer disadvantages, according to a new study.

The study published in the online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. Researchers say such brain ageing may be a sign of the earliest stages of dementia.

"Worldwide, dementia is a major cause of illness and a devastating diagnosis," said study author Amy J. H. Kind M.D., PhD, of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health in Madison.

"There are currently no treatments to cure the disease,

so identifying possible modifiable risk factors is important. Compelling evidence exists that the social, economic, cultural and physical conditions in which humans live may affect health. We wanted to determine if these neighbourhood conditions increase the risk for the neurodegeneration and cognitive decline associated with the earliest stages of Alzheimer's disease and dementia."

For the study, researchers identified 601 people from two larger studies of Wisconsin residents. Participants had an average age of 59 and no thinking or memory problems at the start of the study, although 69% had a family history of dementia. They were followed for 10 years.

Participants had an initial MRI brain scan and then additional scans every three to five years. With each scan, researchers measured brain volume in areas of the brain linked to the development of Alzheimer's dementia. Participants also took thinking and memory tests every two years, including tests that measured processing speed, mental flexibility

and executive function.

Researchers used the residential address of each participant and a measure called the Area Deprivation Index to determine if each participant lived in an advantaged or disadvantaged neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods in the index are determined by census areas of 1,500 residents. The index incorporates information on the socio-economic conditions of each neighbourhood and its residents, ranking neighbourhoods based on 17 indicators including income, employment, education and housing quality.

Of all participants, 19 people lived in the 20% of most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in their state and 582 people lived in 80% of all other neighbourhoods in their state. People in the first group were then matched one to four to people in the second group for race, sex, age and education and compared.

At the start of the study, there was no difference in brain volume between people living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and those in other neighbourhoods. But in

the end, researchers found brain shrinkage in areas of the brain associated with dementia in people in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, while there was no shrinkage in the other group. Researchers also found a higher rate of decline on tests that measure the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

"Our findings suggest that increased vigilance by health-care providers for early signs of dementia may be particularly important in this vulnerable population," said Kind. "Some possible causes of these brain changes may include air pollution, lack of access to healthy food and healthcare and stressful life events. Further research into possible social and biological pathways may help physicians, researchers and policymakers identify effective avenues for prevention and intervention in Alzheimer's disease and related dementia."

Limitations of the study included a small number of participants from highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods and a limited geographic setting. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse groups of people over longer periods of time.

# 'Later school start times let students get adequate sleep'

## Agencies

A new study explored the significant benefits of later school start times for middle and high school students' sleep schedules.

The findings of the study were published in the journal *Sleep*. Sleep is essential to a student's overall health, social development, and academic achievement, yet lack of sleep is common among children and adolescents. Biological changes to sleep cycles during puberty make falling asleep early difficult for adolescents. This, coupled with early school start times, means that students often end up with insufficient sleep.

Approximately 28,000 elementary, middle, and high school students and parents completed surveys annually, before changes to school start times and for two years afterward. Participating elementary schools started 60 minutes earlier, middle, 40-60 minutes later, and high school started 70 minutes later.



Student and parent surveys separately asked about students' typical bedtime and wake time on both weekdays and weekends. The surveys also asked respondents to report on students' quality of sleep and their experience of daytime sleepiness.

Researchers found that the greatest improvements in these measures occurred for high school students, who obtained an extra 3.8 hours of sleep per week after the later start time was implemented.

More than one in ten high school students reported improved sleep quality and one in five reported less daytime sleepiness. The average "weekend oversleep," or additional sleep on weekends, amongst high schoolers dropped from just over two hours to 1.2 hours, suggesting that with enough weekday sleep, students are no longer clinically sleep deprived and no longer feel compelled to "catch up" on weekends.

Likewise, middle school students obtained 2.4 additional hours of sleep per week with a later school start time. Researchers saw a 12 per cent decrease in middle schoolers reporting daytime sleepiness. The percent of elementary school students reporting sufficient sleep duration, poor sleep quality, or daytime sleepiness did not change over the course of the study.

The benefits of later start times were similar across racial and socioeconomic groups, but survey results indicated differences in weekday bedtimes. The authors encourage steps to be taken to "identify and ameliorate systemic factors that contribute to these differences," recommending education programs developed in partnership with families to ensure that guidance for adjusting bedtimes and increasing sleep opportunities are sensitive to sociocultural and environmental factors. Previous studies have not concurrently considered the impact of changing start times on sleep for students from Kindergarten through 12th grade, a key factor in policy outcomes due to the need for school districts to stagger start times to accommodate transportation schedules.

"This study is remarkable due to the large sample size, the inclusion of elementary and middle school students, the two-year follow-up, and both student and parent report. It also provides the strongest evidence to date that moving elementary school start times to 8:00 am caused no significant negative effect on student sleep or daytime sleepiness. As students return to in-person learning, it is important for districts to consider healthy start times for all students," the authors concluded.

# Study reveals how to ensure your neck is in better health, avoid or deter pain

## Agencies

A recent study has found that while the poor neck and head postures are indeed the primary determinants of neck pain, body mass index, age, and the time of the day also influence the neck's ability to perform sustained or repeated movements.

The study led by researchers at Texas A&M University is published online in the journal *Human Factors*, a flagship journal in the field of human factors and ergonomics.

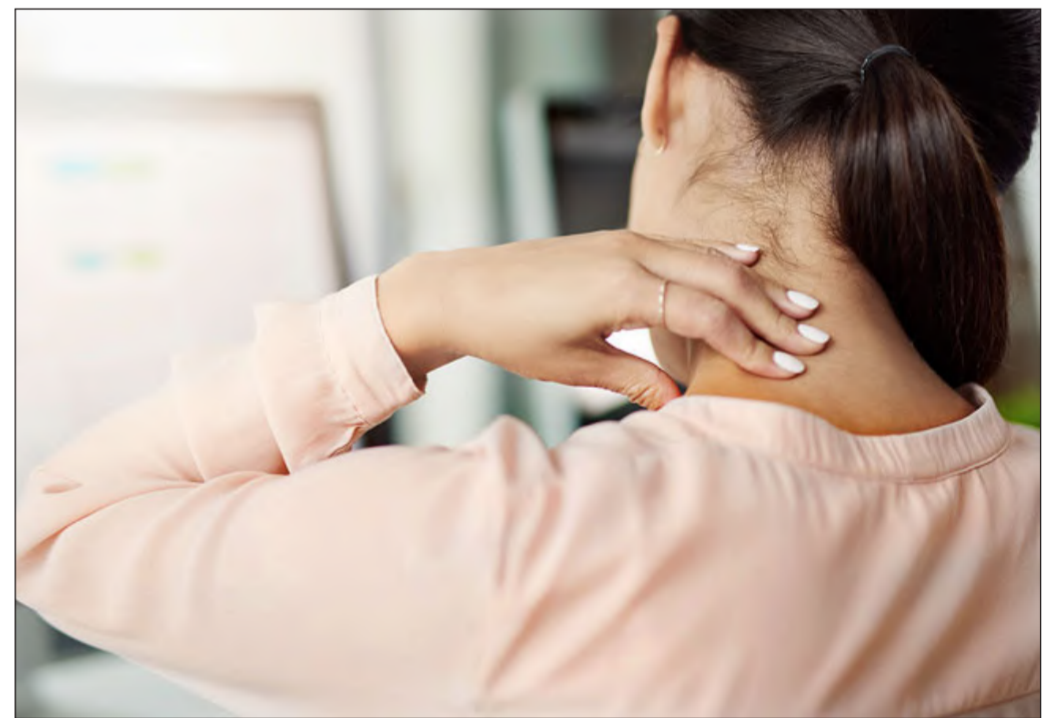
"Neck pain is one of the leading and fastest-growing causes of disability in the world," said Xudong Zhang, professor in the Wm Michael Barnes '64 Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering.

"Our study has pointed to a combination of work and personal factors that strongly influence the strength and endurance of the neck over time. More importantly, since these factors have been identified, they can then be modified so that the neck is in better health and pain is avoided or deterred."

According to the Global Burden of Disease Study by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, neck pain is ranked as the fourth leading cause of global disability. One of the main reasons for neck pain has been attributed to lifestyle, particularly when people spend long durations of time with their necks bent forward. However, Zhang said a systematic, quantitative study has been lacking on how personal factors, such as sex, weight, age and work-related habits, can affect neck strength and endurance.

For their experiments, Zhang and his team recruited 20 adult men and 20 adult women with no previous neck-related issues to perform controlled head-neck exertions in a laboratory setting. Instead of asking the participants to hold a specific neck posture for a long time, similar to what might happen at a workplace, they performed "sustained-till exhaustion" head-neck exertions.

"In the laboratory, conducting experiments where subjects



**In the laboratory, conducting experiments where subjects do long tasks with their neck can take several hours of data collection, which is not very practical for the experimenters and, of course, the participants in our study**

do long tasks with their neck can take several hours of data collection, which is not very practical for the experimenters and, of course, the participants in our study," said Zhang. "To solve this problem, our experiments were strategically designed to mimic workplace neck strains but in a shorter period of time."

In these exercises, subjects were seated and asked to put on an augmented helmet that allowed them to exert measurable force by the neck. Then, the researchers asked them to either keep their necks straight or maintain their neck tilted in a forward or backward position. In this position, a force was applied to their head and neck on an adjustable frame. This exertion was either to their maximum capacity of half of it. Before testing, the researchers noted their subjects' age, body

mass index and time of day.

When Zhang and his team analyzed their data, they found that, as expected, work-related factors like head/neck posture play a very important role in determining both neck strength and endurance. But they also observed that while there was no significant difference between male and female subjects' in neck endurance, body mass index was a significant predictor of neck endurance. Also, to their surprise, the time of day affected the neck's ability to sustain an exertion without fatigue.

"It is intuitive to think that over the course of the day, our necks get more tired since we use it more," Zhang said. "But roughly half of our participants were tested in the morning and the remaining half in the afternoon. Also, some of the participants had day jobs and

some worked the night shift. Despite this, we consistently found the time-of-day effect on neck endurance."

The researchers said their database of neck strength and endurance is also necessary for building advanced musculoskeletal biomechanical models of the neck, which can then be used to, for example, tease apart specific neck muscles that are more vulnerable to injury.

"Looking ahead, we might have the data to begin evaluating if patients recovering from neck injuries are ready to return to work based on whether their neck strength and endurance are within the norm," Zhang said.

"Also, engineers and designers could utilize our data to make wearable devices, like helmets, that are more ergonomic and less stressful on the neck."



## Consumer Confidence Among Urban Indians Weakens In April: Survey



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Consumer confidence among urban Indians weakened by 1.1 percentage points in April 2021 amid a surge in COVID-19 cases in the country, as per a monthly Refinitiv-Ipsos Primary Consumer Sentiment Index (PCSI) survey.

Consumer sentiment was down across all 4 indices -- jobs, personal finances, economy and investments for the future, the survey said.

The online survey was conducted between March 26, 2021, and April 9, 2021. A sample size of 500 adults from Ipsos' India online panel aged 16-64 years were interviewed.

The monthly PCSI is driven by the aggregation of the four weighted sub-indices.

PCSI Employment Confidence (Jobs) sub-index is down by 0.6 percentage points, Current Personal Financial Conditions (Current

Conditions) sub-index fell 1.5 percentage points, and Investment Climate (Investment) sub-index declined 0.9 percentage points.

Economic Expectations sub-index slipped by 0.8 percentage points in the survey.

"The second wave of the coronavirus is in full swing and it is already starting to impact normalcy and livelihoods. Businesses had started recovering post the first wave, and now the new wave (which is more infectious) has already started to negatively impact the sentiment around jobs, finances for the daily running of households, savings and investments and the economy," Ipsos India CEO Amit Adarkar said.

Refinitiv-Ipsos India Primary Consumer Sentiment Index is a monthly survey of consumer attitude on the current and future state of local economies, personal finance situations, savings and confidence to make large investments.

## India Ranks 87th Among 115 Countries In Global Energy Transition Index



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI: India has been ranked at the 87th position among 115 countries in the Energy Transition Index (ETI) that tracks nations on the current performance of their energy systems across various aspects, according to a report.

The report from the World Economic Forum (WEF) released on Wednesday and prepared in collaboration with Accenture also draws on insights from ETI.

The top 10 countries in the index are Western and Northern European countries, and Sweden is in the first position followed by Norway (2nd) and Denmark (3rd).

"China (68) and India (87), which collectively account for a third of global energy demand, have both made strong improvements over the past decade, despite coal continuing to play a significant role in their energy mix," the report said.

As per the report, India has targeted improvements through subsidy reforms and rapidly scaling energy access, with a strong political commitment and regulatory environment for the energy transition. "China's improvements

primarily result from reducing the energy intensity of the economy, gains in decarbonising the energy mix through the expansion of renewables and strengthening the enabling environment through investments and infrastructure," it added.

The index benchmarks 115 countries on the current performance of their energy systems across three dimensions -- economic development and growth, environmental sustainability, and energy security and access indicators -- and their readiness to transition to secure, sustainable, affordable, and inclusive energy systems.

The latest report is based on a revised ETI methodology that takes into account recent changes in the global energy landscape and the increasing urgency of climate change action.

As per the report, 92 out of 115 countries tracked on the ETI increased their aggregate score over the past 10 years, which affirms the positive direction and steady momentum of the global energy transition.

"As we enter into the decade of action and delivery on climate change, the focus must also encompass speed and resilience of the transition.

## Don't Close Shops, Control Crowds In Markets: Traders To Sgr Admin

### '50 % Opening Of Shops A Futile Exercise, Admin Should Consider Lockdown On Weekends'

Agencies

SRINAGAR: The traders' community here in Srinagar has termed the government order regarding 50 per cent opening of shops as futile exercise, saying that the government should rather consider imposing lockdown on weekends to control the crowd in the market places.

"In wake of the surge in the COVID-19 cases, there is a need to control the crowd in the markets instead of closing down the shops and other business establishments," the traders said.

According to the news agency, the shopkeepers from Polo view to Ganta Ghar (Clock Tower) including Residency Road, Bund, Lambert lane, Fair Deal complex and Regal Chowk here have reconstituted the Traders Joint coordination Committee today to come up with a joint suggestions and other strategies in wake of the spike in the cases.

Fayaz Ahmad Punjabi, President of the Traders Joint coordination Committee said that the odd-even and 50 per cent opening of the shops will not force the people to come out of their homes. "This order is simply useless as it will not help in curbing the crowd in the markets. We want that the working hours in the markets should be from 11:00 AM to 05:00 PM and impose lockdown on weekends like being done in Delhi at present," he said.

He said that they were called by the authorities today in this regard and they put forth their suggestions. "We are meeting the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar tomorrow in this regard



**IN WAKE OF THE surge in the COVID-19 cases, there is a need to control the crowd in the markets instead of closing down the shops and other business establishments," the traders said.**

and will put forth our suggestions there as well," Punjabi said. Meanwhile, Kashmir Traders Manufacturing Federation (KTMF) President, Muhammad Yasin Khan told news agency that the trade body has also held a meeting over the government's directive about shops. "This order was nothing less than a shock to us as we have to focus on curbing the crowd in the markets instead of closing down the shops, which will affect the economy," he said.

He added that one fails to understand why the markets are being targeted only when the government offices, banks and other

places too are witnessing huge rush of people almost every day. "The government instead of closing the business establishments should focus on other alternative measures that will help in combating the virus," Khan said.

Pertinently, District Magistrate, who is also the chairman DDMA, Mohammad Ajaz had said on Tuesday that markets having shops on both sides of the road will remain open on a rotation basis on a particular day while markets having shops on one side of the road will remain open on an odd-even basis.

"Shops on one side of the road only shall open on a particular day/date. The other side shall remain closed completely. The sequence of opening shall be on Rotation basis. Markets having shops on one side of the Road only will be open on an odd-even basis. Odd numbered shops to open on odd dates and even numbered shops to open on even dates," reads the order--(KNO)

## Brace For Hike In Petrol, Diesel Prices Post Elections

Agencies

NEW DELHI: Petrol and diesel prices may increase soon at the end of the ongoing Assembly elections with oil companies looking to raise the retail price of the two auto fuels between Rs 2 and Rs 3 per litre in phases and make up for the losses they incurred by keeping the prices at artificially low levels in the run up to the local elections.

Government sources said that oil companies are making losses to the tune of Rs 3 and Rs 2 per litre on sale of petrol and diesel, respectively, due to rise in global crude prices that also impacted the international product prices.

This would need to be compensated through gradual increase in petrol and diesel retail prices over few days before the fuel is brought at par with the global market rates.

Petrol and diesel prices have not been raised since February 27, but actually the prices of auto fuels have fallen on four occasions in March and April, bringing petrol prices down by 77 paise per litre and diesel by 74 paise per litre in the national capital.

The fall has come even though the average Indian basket crude price stood at around \$61.22 in February, at a lower than average of \$64.73 in March and averaging close to \$66 a barrel in April so far.

Though the retail price of petrol and diesel price is determined on the basis of 15-day rolling average of product price globally, downward revision of retail prices have resulted in OMCs running in losses on sale of the two prod-



ucts and would not wait anymore post the elections to revise the pump prices upwards.

There is, however, a caveat. The revision would depend on indications coming from the government.

A source at a public sector oil company said that a stronger rupee would make crude cheaper for companies and hence actual adjustment in retail prices of petrol and diesel may not be heavier. But it would all depend how rupee settles against the dollar in April.

"Oil PSUs have avoided hiking oil prices in tandem with global crude rates for more than a month now and the pattern may well continue till the end of the month, when the state elections get over. So, it would not come as a surprise if domestic oil prices witness a sharp spike after the election season comes to a close, unless the Centre issues fresh advisory to stagger the required hike to prevent a public outrage amid the raging pandemic," said an energy sector expert of a global audit and consulting firm, who did not wish to be named.

The OMCs have been soft on increasing petrol and diesel prices since the beginning of March 2021 when election dates for the states were announced.

## Covid Impact: Transporters Suffer Rs 1000 Crore Per Day Losses Due To Fresh Restrictions, Lockdowns



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI: Truckers' body AIMTC on Wednesday said the transporters are suffering losses of around Rs 1,000 crore per day due to the fresh restrictions and weekly lockdowns in some of the states, and these losses spike further if certain relief measures are not taken by the government to mitigate the situation.

On April 12 when restrictions were imposed in Maharashtra, the research unit of the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) had assessed daily loss of about Rs 315 crore per day, AIMTC said in a statement.

According to fresh assessment, the daily losses to the transport industry have mounted to about Rs 1,000 crore per day, which are rising further with intensity and duration of the pandemic-induced lockdowns and curbs, it said.

It sought proactive steps from the government such as on moratorium on equated-monthly installment (EMI) payments, tax and insurance waiver and extension in e-way bill validity to avoid imminent financial

crisis in the industry. The lockdown and night curfew has been extended to other states (after Maharashtra first imposed it), due to rising number of COVID-19 cases, has disrupted the business and financial delinquencies have hit micro loans, MSME and commercial vehicles' financing segment, it said.

"This is going to further deepen the crisis," the AIMTC said.

The intensity and duration of lockdowns and curbs will further hit the sector badly. Therefore, immediate, prudent and proactive steps must be taken by the government to avoid another crisis in the offing, before it is too late, it warned in the statement.

States such as Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and others have also imposed strict restrictions on the movement of non-essential goods, which has resulted in demand for vehicles going down by about 50 per cent and the subsequent increase in idle capacity, said the statement.

## Impact Of Covid-19 On India's Economy Won't Be Very Large: Chief Economic Adviser

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The impact of COVID-19 on the economy would not be 'very large' as the country has worked very well on converting the crisis created by the pandemic into an opportunity, Chief Economic Adviser K.V. Subramanian said on Tuesday. Participating in the 'Distinguished Thought Leaders' lecture series, organised by the Great Lakes Institute of Management, (GLIM), he said that the foundation (to revive the economy) has been laid a lot.

"I am confident that the impact on the economy due to COVID will not be very large. India has really worked on converting this (COVID-19 impact on economy) crisis into an opportunity and I think there is a lot of good fundamental aspects that have been put in place to enable the impact of the pandemic was minimal," he said.

However, the CEA said the only cause of worry was that there should not be any loss of "production capacity" to smaller firms.

"I think the only worry I have is there should not be any loss of production capacity and that



is why we have focused a lot on small firms (by offering measures like) emergency credit," he said.

In the past year, during the pandemic, large firms have done 'pretty well' in managing the crisis, but 'smaller firms' were 'more impacted'. That is the reason the government focused more on reducing the damage caused to smaller firms like issuing emergency credit, he said.

"For instance we have changed the Bankruptcy Code, ensuring that the production capacity was impacted the least on smaller firms," he said.

However, Subramanian cautioned that the situation must be reassessed once the second wave of the outbreak is over.

"We are still amid the second wave of the pandemic, and it is good to assess once the second

wave is over. What I had said earlier is based on the impact caused by the first wave. We have to reassess after the second wave, but still I think that the impact will not be very large in the long run," he said.

Subramanian said India as a large economy has implemented a 'slew of reforms' and has used the crisis to actually 'herald a change in economic thinking'.

"Atmanirbhar's idea is focused on enabling the private sector. That is why it is different from the pre-1991 experience of actually trying to build a self-sufficient India and not a self-reliant India," he said.

India's emphasis on capital expenditure-driven growth would lead to a far more "sustainable" growth, ensuring that the fiscal and monetary policies remain in sync, rather than contrasting with each other, he said.

To a query on privatisation of public sector enterprises, the CEA cited an example and said privatising Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd led to an increase of Rs 55,000 crore value to the oil marketing company, benefiting the taxpayer and the government.

### SHORT TAKES

#### Instagram's New Feature To Combat Hate Speech, Abuse

Agencies

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook-owned Instagram on Wednesday announced a new feature to protect people from seeing abusive direct messages (DMs), as well as the ability to prevent someone you've blocked from contacting you from a new account.

The new feature is designed to help protect users from potentially offensive or abusive DM requests.

"Using this feature doesn't share the content of your DM requests with us unless you report them," the company said in a blogpost.

In February, the photo-sharing platform had shared an update on their work to combat abuse and hate speech on Instagram, which included stricter penalties for people who send abusive DMs.



"We understand the impact that abusive content -- whether it's racist, sexist, homophobic or any other kind of abuse -- can have on people. Nobody should have to experience that on Instagram," the company said.

"But combatting abuse is a complex challenge and there isn't one single

step we can take to eliminate it completely," it added.

According to the company, because DMs are private conversations, the company doesn't proactively look for hate speech or bullying the same way it does elsewhere on Instagram.

"That's why we're introducing a new tool which, when turned on, will automatically filter DM requests containing offensive words, phrases and emojis, so you never have to see them," the company said.

The new tool focuses on DM requests because this is where people usually receive abusive messages -- unlike regular DM inbox, where you receive messages from friends.

Users can turn both comment and DM request filters on and off in a new dedicated section of your Privacy Settings called Hidden Words.

#### Netflix Subscriber Growth Slows After Pandemic Boom, Shares Fall 11%

Agencies

Netflix Inc said slower production of TV shows and movies during the pandemic hurt subscriber growth in the first quarter, sending shares of the world's largest streaming service down 11% on Tuesday.

Roughly 3.98 million people signed up for Netflix from January through March, below the 6.25 million average projection of analysts surveyed by Refinitiv.

Netflix estimated it will add just 1 million new streaming customers in the second quarter. Analysts had expected a forecast of nearly 4.8 million.

Shares of Netflix sunk 11% in after-hours trading to \$489.28, wiping \$25 billion off the com-



pany's market capitalization. Its stock has risen 27% over the past 12 months compared with a 63% increase in the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index.

Netflix said it did not believe competition changed materially in the quarter or impacted its new sign-ups "as the over-forecast was across all of our regions." The company projected membership growth

would accelerate in the second half of the year when it releases new seasons of "You," "Money Heist," and "The Witcher" and action movie "Red Notice," among other titles.

A year ago, Netflix added a record 15.8 million customers as the pandemic forced people around the world to stay home. The company said on Tuesday the pandemic hindered filming new shows.

"These dynamics are also contributing to a lighter content slate in the first half of 2021, and hence, we believe slower membership growth," the company said in its quarterly letter to shareholders.

Analysts project people will spend less time streaming from their living rooms as COVID-19 vaccinations spread and more people emerge from their homes.

Rival media companies have declared streaming their priority and are spending billions to compete with Netflix. Walt Disney Co's Disney+ crossed 100 million subscribers in March.

Netflix's total streaming customers stood at 207.6 million at the end of March. REUTERS

# Militants Abduct 3 ONGC Employees From Rig Site In Assam

Press Trust of India

**GUWAHATI/ NEW DELHI:** Five armed militants early on Wednesday abducted three employees of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) from a rig site in Assam using a company vehicle driven by a driver employed by the firm.

The militants, suspected to be belonging to the banned ULFA(I) group, later abandoned the vehicle and its driver near Nimonagarh jungle close to the Assam-Nagaland border, a company official said.

At about 1.30 am on Wednesday, five armed militants raided the company's remote rig site under the Lakwa oilfield in Sivasagar district of Assam. They first locked the two security guards posted at the site before bundling the three young employees into the company's emergency-cum-medical vehicle stationed at the rig site to drive away.

The official said the company has filed a complaint with the local police and beefed up security at installations in Assam.

No gunshot was fired during the abduction. "We don't know how the entire episode unfolded. The police are looking into it," he said.

Local and central control

rooms have been activated to coordinate with the police to get the employees released.

"A high-level review of security of employees and their families has been held and we are taking additional measures," the official said, refusing to elaborate on steps being taken. "We are also taking help from local police."

ONGC has around 2,000 employees, officers and support staff in the Sivasagar asset.

Whereabouts of the kidnapped employees weren't known and kidnappers haven't made any contact with family or the company so far, the ONGC official said.

"The abducted employees were taken by the miscreants in an operational vehicle belonging to ONGC. Later, the vehicle was found abandoned near the Nimonagarh jungles, close to the Assam-Nagaland border," the company said in a statement, adding it was a medical emergency response vehicle stationed at the site.

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said an investigation into the kidnapping is underway.

"Strongly condemn the abduction of ONGC employees

Shri Mohini Mohan Gogoi, Shri Alakesh Saikia and Shri Ritul Saikia," he tweeted. "I have asked CS Shri Jishnu Barua and @DGPAssamPolice Shri Bhaskariyoti Mahanta to take all possible measures for their release."

He said, "Special DGP, L&O Shri @gppsinghassam is at Lakwa and investigation regarding the abduction is underway".

A senior official of Sivasagar District Administration said suspected ULFA(I) militants are behind this kidnap and they escaped through Nagaland.

"These are very preliminary findings. We can talk about it after some investigation," he added. No demand for ransom or any other form of contact has been received so far from anybody.

ONGC said a complaint has already been lodged with the local police and higher officials have reached the site.

"Local administration has been informed about the incident and ONGC is in constant touch with the higher authorities," it added.

A senior official at the Assam Police Headquarter told PTI that five militants reached the rig site at around 1:30 am and asked the three employees to accompany them.

"They also asked the ambulance driver to take them. The vehicle moved through various tea gardens of the area and reached the hills along the Assam-Nagaland border. There the militants got down from the vehicle and asked the driver to return," he added.

Out of the five militants, three were seen carrying sophisticated weapons as per the driver and all of them were speaking in the Assamese language, thereby creating the suspicion that they were from the ULFA(I), the police official said.

"We have alerted the Nagaland Police and all other security agencies. The Unified Command of security forces has also been intimated. All agencies are working to find the whereabouts of the three employees," he added.

Earlier during the first week of April, drilling superintendent Pranab Kumar Gogoi and radio operator Ram Kumar of the Quippo Oil and Gas Infrastructure were released by ULFA(I) after three-and-half months of their kidnap on December 21 last year.

The duo were kidnapped from Kumchaikha hydrocarbon drilling site in Changlang

district of Arunachal Pradesh with a demand for ransom of Rs 20 crore.

"3 ONGC employees, 2 Junior Engineer Assistants (Production) & a Junior Technician (Production) have been abducted by unknown armed miscreants in the early hours of 21 April 2021. The abduction took place on a rig site of ONGC in Lakwa field of Sivasagar District," the company said.

All three employees are local Assamese. They have been identified as M M Gogoi and Ritul Saikia -- both junior engineer assistants (production) -- and Alakesh Saikia, a junior technician (production).

The official said all the three were young employees, hailing from Dibrugarh and Jorhat.

ONGC has been exploring and producing oil and gas in Upper Assam since the early 1960s.

"Higher officials of the State Police are on the site. The local administration has been informed about the incident and ONGC is in constant touch with the higher authorities," it added.

The official said ONGC has made contact with the families of the abducted and providing every possible assistance.

## Naxals Claim Drones Dropped Bombs; Police Rubbish Allegation

Press Trust of India

**RAIPUR:** Naxals on Wednesday alleged that the Central and state security forces in a joint operation dropped bombs near two villages in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh, a claim described as baseless by the police.

Naxal outfit Dandkaranya special zonal committee in a statement claimed the "airstrike" took place on April 19 and was aimed at boosting the morale of the security forces who lost 22 personnel in an encounter with the Maoists in the state earlier this month.

"We averted a big danger by changing location just before the strike," the statement said.

The Maoists alleged the drone attack targeted them and shared some images of the purported attack in support of their claim. Inspector-General of Police Bastar Range Sundarraj P dismissed the claims as baseless.

"The allegations being levelled by Maoists regarding airstrike/drone attack are baseless and an outcome of fear and confusion in the rank

and file of Maoist cadres," the senior police official said.

"Security forces in Bastar operate within the legal framework with a single objective of protecting the life and property of the native population of the region. It is the CPI Maoist cadres who have taken away the lives of thousands of innocent civilians by using IEDs and explosive materials.

"They haven't even spared children, women and animals also during their desperate attempts to harm the security forces by using IEDs. Even today in Narayanpur one ITBP officer was seriously injured and one cow got killed in an IED explosion triggered by the Maoists," he said.

Maoists, who are responsible for killing thousands of innocent villagers including women and children don't have any moral authority to level such baseless allegation against the security forces, he said.

"It is high time the Maoists restrain from unleashing cruelty against innocent tribals of Bastar and let the native population lead a peaceful life," Sundarraj said.

## CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

### Covid-19: J&K Sees

64, Kupwara 65, Anantnag 61, Bandipora 14, Ganderbal 32, Kulgam 109, Shopian 8, Jammu 461, Udhampur 52, Rajouri 41, Doda 8, Kathua 127, Samba 51, Kishtwar 4, Poonch 12, Ramban 16 and Reasi 133 fresh cases of coronavirus. The number of active cases has risen to 14928-6216 in Jammu and 8712 in Kashmir.

Meanwhile, 733 more patients have recovered - 254 from Jammu Division and 479 from Kashmir Valley.

### Situation Challenging

Department, Simrandeep Singh, Dulloo said the situation in Jammu and Kashmir is challenging because the COVID-19 cases and deaths are rising.

"We have 13,400 active cases till date. Last year, the maximum of 22,000 active cases were in September," he said, adding the recovery rate in Jammu and Kashmir stands at 89.6 percent, while the mortality rate has been 1.38 percent since the outbreak of the pandemic.

In April this year, 77 deaths have taken place while the positivity has reached 2.5 percent which is more than the cumulative positivity of last year, he said.

The positivity on Tuesday was 5.2 percent, Dulloo said.

"We are following the five pillar strategy to deal with the situation -- testing, containment and surveillance, isolation and treatment, covid-appropriate behavior and vaccination," he said.

He said Jammu and Kashmir is conducting 40,000 tests daily -- 10,000 RT-PCR ones and 30,000 RAT (Rapid-Antigen Test) ones -- and its average stands at 2,500 tests per million per day.

"The RT-PCR testing facility is available in all government medical colleges (GMC) hospitals. We are further augmenting the facilities and have installed a newly acquired machine at Soura medical institutions, while another one is on its way and will be installed at GMC Jammu and another requisitioned for GMC Srinagar," he said.

He said so far, 68.33 lakh tests have been conducted, while 1.64 lakh contacts of positive cases were traced this month. As many as 120 locations were declared containment zones, where 32,000 tests were conducted, leading to the detection of 1,680 positive cases, he said.

"We have earmarked 6000 beds for the COVID patients in dedicated hospitals and our rate of occupancy at present stands at 13 percent.

"There is no dearth of oxygen-supported beds and in the next few weeks, we will be adding 2,000 more oxygen-supported beds after commissioning of oxygen plants in 23 hospitals, out of total 36 hospitals where the facility is being installed," he said.

Dulloo said more hospitals would be converted into COVID hospitals to deal with any emergency.

He also said the vaccination drive progressing smoothly and so far 17.50 lakh doses were administered to the people of eligible categories.

"We have covered 74 percent healthcare workers, 77.5 percent frontline workers and 36.76 percent of the population over the age of 45 years. The response of the public is encouraging," he said, adding there are two lakh doses available and no shortage of drugs anywhere.

He said there are presently 1,608 vaccination centres operating in the Union Territory which would be enhanced to 3,000 to ensure people get their doses next to their homes.

"We have the capacity to vaccinate two lakh people in a day," he said, adding the government would take a decision whether the 18-plus population would get the vaccine free.

As far as 45-plus population is concerned, Kansal said Jammu district has done well by covering 60 percent of the population category, followed by 52 percent in Ganderbal and Baramulla.

We have a target to complete this category by next month, he said.

Responding to a question on RT-PCR method

reportedly failing to detect new variants of the virus, Dalloo said "It is a challenge and we have no solution right now."

"We have 28 confirmed cases of UK variants in Jammu and none in Kashmir," he said.

He said emergency surgeries, cancer treatment and trauma cases are being attended to in all hospitals.

### Mercury Rises

Qazigund, the gateway town of Kashmir, received 2.0mm of rain during 24 hours till 0830 hours and recorded a low of 7.4 degree Celsius against previous night's 4.9 degree Celsius, the official said.

Pahalgam, the famous resort in south Kashmir, received 3.8mm of rain and recorded a low of 5.3 degree Celsius against 1.4 degree Celsius on the previous night, he said.

Kokernag, also in south Kashmir, received 5.2mm of rain during the time and recorded a low of 5.8 degree Celsius against previous night's 4.8 degree Celsius the official said.

Kupwara in north Kashmir had 0.3mm of rain and recorded a low of 7.7 degree Celsius against 4.5 degree Celsius on the previous night, the official said.

Gulmarg, the world famous skiing resort in north Kashmir, received 1.6mm recorded a low of 1.4 degree Celsius against minus 1.0 degree Celsius on the previous night, the official said.

Fairly widespread light rain/TS is expected in Jammu and Kashmir," the official said regarding the forecast for next 24 hours.

For subsequent two days, the official said that "widespread light to moderate rain/TS are expected" in Jammu and Kashmir.

### Jammu Bound

official said. "Commuters are advised not to travel on Jammu-Srinagar highway without confirming the status of road from TCU Jammu/Ramban/Srinagar in view of inclement weather prediction issued by Met department upto 22-04-2021."

### Zojila Pass

was opened after a closure of 110 days, in comparison to an average period of 150 days, they said.

The renewed focus on infrastructure development of border areas mandated the requirement of keeping the closure of Zojila pass to the minimum, they added.

### NIT Orders

further orders," reads an order issued by the institute. "There will not be any offline interaction or activity with the faculty / Supervisors till further orders," it adds. The order also directs all the residential students to vacate the hostels immediately without any delay.

"Final year residential students are directed to complete their No Dues Certificate within the next 2-3 days before vacating the hostels. No UG / PG day-scholars and research scholars will be allowed to enter the Institute premises till further orders," reads the order.

It also directs Dean Students Welfare to ensure the closure of all hostels within one week and Chairman Mess Committee to ensure the closure of mess facilities within 1 week.

### SKIMS Shuts

"We have shut down the services for non Covid patients for the procedure that can be delayed for some time. Emergency services for non-Covid patients, like cancer management and all other emergencies are open at the moment," Director SKIMS A G Ahangar said.

He said that the institution was treating 156 Covid-19 patients admitted in the hospital while 260 more beds have been reserved for such patients. He further said that 3 Covid-19 patient care centres have been set-up at the institute.

Ahangar also acknowledged that the institute was facing shortage of manpower and shortage of vaccines but the same has been taken up with the government for speedy action.

He also informed that the current

consumption rate of oxygen in the institute is 3.93 lakhs litre per hour and additional required amount of oxygen is 1.5 lakh per hour.

Director SKIMS said that he assures the people of Jammu and Kashmir that the SKIMS will leave no stone unturned to assist people in all possible capacity. (KNS)

### J&K Bank Director

Finance said. Vikamsey's appointment is for a second term is of five years with effect from April 22, 2021, subject to approval of shareholders of the company, it added. He has been on the company's board for nearly five years which expires on April 21.

He is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) since 1985.

PNB Housing also said Gaurav Vallabh has completed his five year term as an independent director on Wednesday.

### What 'Necessitated'

with non-local registration mark for checking their veracity vis-a-vis the documents and the bonafide entry into the territorial limits Jammu and Kashmir. However, the court said that such exercise shall be undertaken by the officials of the transport department only.

Earlier, RTO Kashmir, who was present through virtual mode, submitted that the decision to notify the circular was taken in a meeting convened by the Secretary to the Government, Transport Department for ensuring screening of the vehicle which bears the non-local registration. The officer upon being pointedly asked by the court as to whether any exercise was undertaken to meet the requirements of Section 46, 47 and 50 of the Motor Vehicles Act by the Transport Department, he submitted that he has no records to that effect.

"Since the officer was not in a position to satisfactorily demonstrate the origin of the circular and his authority to issue it, the court feels it appropriate to ask the officer to file his affidavit before the court by tomorrow (April 22), indicating therein as to what necessitated the issuance of circular and remain present in person along with records on the next date," the court ordered.

The Secretary to the Government, Transport Department, Civil Secretariat, Jammu, shall also remain present through virtual mode on April 21, the court said further.

Last week, the court had also directed the authorities to file response to the petition filed by one Irshad Hussain Munshi, a resident of Buchpora Srinagar. The court has however already declined to hear the plea as a Public Interest Litigation.

The petitioner, Munshi, has sought directions to the concerned authorities to quash RTO Kashmir's circular dated March 27, mandating the vehicle owners who have purchased their vehicles bearing outside registration number to apply for a new registration as per the provisions of Section 47/50 of Motor Vehicle Act 1988 within a prescribed period of 15 days, failing which action as warranted shall be initiated against them.

He also sought directions also clarify by way of a circular or order on the issue of levying of tax on the vehicles purchased outside J&K if the previous owner of the vehicle has already paid the tax on the vehicle.

He also sought directions to clarify by way of circular from which period the tax is to be levied on the vehicles.

Munshi has also sought directions to the concerned not to seize or impound or fine the vehicles bearing outside registration number in pursuance of the RTO's circular.

He also sought direction to the authorities concerned to give the public ample period of time for submitting their documents for re-registration and also sought directions to amend/relax the rules in order to avoid inconvenience to the general public. (GNS)

### Seeks Law Secretary's

the proposal could not be considered by the competent authority. The officer submitted that after the High Court completed all

the requisite formalities and submitted the financial implications involved in the creation of posts proposed, the matter is being considered by the competent authority. As a matter of fact, the court observed that there is one communication of law secretary with the reply affidavit which indicates that a meeting was convened on 19 April 2021 in the office chambers of Financial Commissioner, Finance to discuss issue and take a final decision on the recommendation made by High Court. What is the outcome of meeting, however, is not shared, the court observed.

B A Dar, Sr. AAG, sought four weeks' time to file fresh affidavit, indicating the decision taken by the law secretary with regard to the creation of posts already recommended by the High Court with all the requisite formalities complete.

On last date of hearing, the court had castigated the Law Department for not filing of status with regard to recommendation made by the court on the issue.

The petitioners, employees appointed as Data Entry Operators in Srinagar wing of high court, have filed the petition, seeking creation of four posts of Selection Grade Data Entry Operators, two posts of Section Officer (Computer), two posts of Assistant Registrar-I and One post of Assistant Registrar-II so that they would be entitled for fair chance of promotion.

They sought a direction from the court that the authorities be directed to remove the stagnation of the petitioners by creating promotional avenues on the analogy as has been evolved in the cases of other categories of posts in the court.

### Govt To Fire

of the Concerned Department, as necessary, not below the rank of Additional Secretary shall be the members.

"The terms of reference of the Special Task Force shall be to scrutinize cases of employees suspected of activities requiring action under Article 311(2)(c) of the Constitution of India," reads the order.

The order also empowers the STF to compile records of such employees, wherever necessary and to refer it to the Committee constituted vide Government Order No. 738-JK(GAD) of 2020 dated 30.07.2020. It also orders STF to engage with other members of the Terror Monitoring Group (TMG) for identifying such other employees, as necessary besides taking the assistance of other Agencies and Department(s) in this regard, as necessary.

"The Special Task Force shall speedily scrutinize such cases in a time-bound manner and shall be serviced by the Criminal Investigation Department," the order adds.

### Defence Ministry

Airport for which DPR revised at Rs 128.35 crore for which approval (is)awaited from MOD," the status report further reveals.

According to the report, Rs 107 crore has been released for the project till date but there has been no expenditure.

It is worthwhile to mention here that Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled Rs 80000 crore package for infrastructure building in Jammu and Kashmir during a public rally at SK Park, Sonawar on November 7, 2015.

### 'Very Small

people received the second dose of which only 695 (0.04 per cent) tested positive for COVID-19, Bhargava said.

Of Covishield, 11.6 crore doses have been given. Ten crore received the first dose and 17,145 i.e. 2 per 10,000 people contracted the infection. About 1,57,32,754 individuals took the second dose of covishield and of that 5,014 (0.03 per cent) got infected. Two to four per 10,000 breakthrough infections have occurred, a very small number. This was mainly healthcare workers prone to more occupational hazards, he said. According to the data, 5,709 people contracted the infection after the second dose of either of the two vaccines.

"This is a very small number and not at all worrisome. Secondly, the highly transmissible

second wave also contribute miniscule to the percentage so this could have been even zero per cent," he said.

NITI Aayog Member (Health) V K Paul noted that there is a risk even after taking vaccination so "we stress people to follow COVID appropriate behaviour even after taking the vaccination".

Amid oxygen shortage in the country, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said that 7,500 metric tonnes of oxygen is being produced in the country per day and 6,600 metric tonnes is being supplied to the states for medical use.

"Presently, we have issued instructions that, leaving a few industries, the supply of industries will be restricted so that more and more oxygen can be made available for medical use. We have allocated 6600 MT out of 7500 MT to states," he said.

### 2 TRF Workers

arrested by police for their involvement in militant activities as well as actively harbouring and providing shelter and logistics to TRF militants, a police spokesperson said Wednesday. The OGWs were also found to be evoking the emotions of gullible youth and motivating them to join militant ranks.

"The OGWs have been arrested and incriminating material has been recovered from them," the police spokesperson said.

He further said that the arrests were made on the basis of an input jointly developed by police, army's 14 RR and CRPF that some individuals were involved in aiding and abetting militants.

"The input led to the uncovering of a militant module of the TRF Organisation. After thorough investigation and technical analysis, two OGWs of the outfit were arrested," he said.

He added that a case under the relevant provisions of law has been registered in Police station Aragam and further investigation is underway.

### Missing Man

village Ahlan of Kokernag on Wednesday, reports said. Naik, as per the reports, was missing since April 16.

The body was handed over to the family by police after completion of legal and medical formalities.

The family has alleged that the man has been murdered and demanded a thorough investigation.

Meanwhile, police have started inquest proceedings to ascertain the cause of his death.

### Six People Injured

locals, reports said. All the injured were shifted to district hospital Bandipora and were given anti-rabies vaccine (ARV).

Medical Superintendent DH Bandipora, Dr Bashir said that free anti-rabies injections were given to all the six injured persons initially and they will be assisted in future courses as well.

Locals of the area said that they have stopped sending their children out of their homes as they fear stray dogs are roaming in the village and attack whoever comes in their way. They have appealed to authorities to act against the increasing population of the canines. (KDC)

### Budgam Teen

some poisonous substance at his home during the intervening night of April 20-21, local news agency KDC reported. The Teenager, the report said, was immediately rushed to nearby hospital, where doctors declared him dead on arrival.

Meanwhile, police have taken cognizance of the incident and have registered a case under various sections of law and taken up further investigations in this regard, an official said.

### Mentally Unsound

his cousin sister Makdoom Begum has gone missing. Following Ahmed's missing report, a police team launched searches and found the missing woman's body at Mendhar river in Sagra village, Station House Officer (SHO) Mendhar, Manzoor Kohli said. (GNS)

## RR's Liam Livingstone Pulls Out of IPL 2021 Due To Bubble Fatigue



Press Trust of India

**MUMBAI:** Rajasthan Royals' English recruit Liam Livingstone has pulled out of the IPL due to bio-bubble fatigue, his franchise announced on Tuesday.

Livingstone has flown back home late on Monday due to bubble fatigue "accumulated over the past year".

The franchise confirmed the development and said that it respects his decision and will continue supporting the cricketer in any way it can.

"Liam Livingstone has flown

back home late last night, due to bubble fatigue accumulated over the past year. We understand and respect his decision, and will continue supporting him in any way we can," the franchise said in a tweet.

RR had already lost Ben Stokes to a finger injury after their first game of the season. They are also without Jofra Archer for at least the initial phase of the tournament. Archer had undergone surgery on his hand and is back to training.

RR have so far played three matches and won one.

## Rishabh Pant Hails DC Batsmen For 'Adjusting To Chepauk Pitch'

Press Trust of India

**CHENNAI:** Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant said it was good to see his batsmen quickly adjusting to the Chepauk track after playing the first three games on a more batting friendly Wankhede pitch.

Delhi Capitals defeated Mumbai Indians by six-wickets in their IPL on Tuesday, their first win over the five-time champions in five meetings.

"It (the travelling) is slightly challenging because of Covid. But I think, as a team we are not focussing on all this outside thing too much, because BCCI has done really well to give us a good bubble and travelling things.

"So we are focussing more on cricket and it is good to see people adjusting to the pitch like this, especially when you are coming from the Wankhede," Pant said at the post-match press conference.

Delhi promoted all-rounder Lalit Yadav and Pant said the team management is trying to groom him.

"He (Lalit) is a good youngster and we are trying to groom him and we thought on this kind of wicket, he can do wonders. Yes, good to see some maturity from him," the skipper noted.

Pant said he focuses on match scenarios than match-ups.

Asked about his match-up against Jasprit Bumrah, Pant said, "As a player, you don't focus on match-ups too much, because (it) doesn't matter what you are doing or what you have done before, every day is a new



day in cricket.

"And as you can see they bowled him (Bumrah) because they have to bowl him at that time, there was no other option and I had to go for my shots because we were chasing, so I think you need to focus on the scenarios much more rather than match-ups."

Asked about the leadership aspect, Pant who replaced injured Shreyas Iyer as Delhi Capitals skipper said, "As a wicket-keeper I keep on reading the game and it has helped me a lot, but with the seniors around and Ricky Ponting in our management, I think it is going great."

He also defended rival skipper Rohit Sharma's decision to opt to bat saying he would have done the same had he won the toss.

"We were also thinking to bat first, so I don't think that it was a bad decision," Pant signed off.

## Girls T20 Cricket Open Tournament Concludes At Kulgam



Observer News Service

**KULGAM:** A T20 Girls Cricket Open Tournament on Wednesday concluded here at Sports Stadium, Kulgam.

The tournament was organized by District administration Kulgam in collaboration with District

Youth Services and Sports, Kulgam.

The closing ceremony was presided over by the Additional District Development Commissioner Kulgam, Riyaz Ahmad Sofi.

Final match of the tournament was played between Knight Riders Kulgam and GHSS Kulgam.

Later, Trophies and Medals were distributed among Winner and Runner up teams besides Uniforms were also distributed among the players.

DYSSO, Ghulam Hassan, other officers and locals were present on the occasion.

IPL 2021, RCB Vs RR

## Undefeated RCB Face Off Against A Stumbling Rajasthan Royals

Press Trust of India

**MUMBAI:** Off to the best possible start with three wins on the trot, a confident Royal Challengers Bangalore will hope to keep the juggernaut rolling when they take on Rajasthan Royals in an IPL match in Mumbai on Thursday.

Both sides have endured contrasting campaigns so far.

RCB head in to the game after three morale-boosting victories. The Virat Kohli-led side edged past defending champions Mumbai Indians in the tournament opener before getting the better of Sunrisers Hyderabad and Kolkata Knight Riders to jump to the top of the points table.

On the other hand, the Royals have managed to win only one of their three fixtures. They lost to Chennai Super Kings in their previous match to slip down to the sixth spot. Sanju Samson and his men will be eyeing a second win.

The Royals have struggled to perform as a cohesive batting unit. While Samson led the team to within touching distance of victory with his sensational century against Punjab Kings, it was the South African duo of David Miller and Chris Morris that pulled off a win against the Delhi Capitals.

Against CSK, opener Jos Buttler looked dangerous but the other batsmen failed to provide any valuable contributions. For the former champions to do well, the side must click as a batting unit with Samson and the Englishman playing key roles.

The Royals bowling unit has been underwhelming to say the least,



apart from the game against Delhi Capitals, the bowlers have leaked runs. Pacer Jaydev Unadkat shone against the Rishabh Pant led-side, registering the impressive figures of 3/15, while young Chetan Sakariya has shown promise.

In the absence of Jofra Archer, more will be expected out of the likes of Chris Morris and Bangladesh speedster Mustafizur Rahman.

For RCB, Ab de Villiers and new-recruit Glenn Maxwell have been the standout players with the willow. While the South African continues to deliver season after season, the Australian all-rounder is proving to be a valuable addition to the middle order.

Kohli has got decent starts in a couple of games but the talismanic skipper will be itching to padikkal, who impressed everyone last sea-

son, has also looked rusty and is yet to perform to his full potential. After two failures Rajat Patidar will, too, look to make amends.

The RCB bowling department has been impressive with pacers Harshal Patel and Mohammed Siraj boasting economy rate of 5.75 and 5.81 respectively. The former pulled the rabbit out of the hat with a five-wicket haul against MI while left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahmed (3/7) changed the complexion of the match in just one over against the Sunrisers.

In an interesting move RCB played only three foreigners instead of four in the game against KKR. It will be interesting to see if they go for a similar playing XI or get in the likes of leg-spinner Adam Zampa, pacer Kane Richardson or experienced all-rounder Daniel Christian, who hasn't impressed with the bat or ball, back into the team.

## 'Enjoyed Dismissing Rohit Sharma, Kieron Pollard,' Says Amit Mishra

Press Trust of India

**CHENNAI:** Delhi Capitals spinner Amit Mishra, who picked up a match-winning four-wicket haul against Mumbai Indians, said he particularly enjoyed dismissing opposition skipper Rohit Sharma and Kieron Pollard.

Mishra led the bowling charge with figures of 4/24 to help the Delhi franchise restrict the Mumbai Indians to 137/9.

"The wickets of Rohit Sharma and Kieron Pollard were special for me because they have been game changers for MI for many years. I always go for wickets in every match that I play," said the 38-year-old in a team release.

"I had a clear-cut plan about where I should bowl and how I could dismiss each of the big players in the Mumbai Indians side through my variations. And I am very happy that I could execute my plans. I am even more happy about the Delhi Capitals winning the match."

The Delhi Capitals had just a day's gap between their match against Punjab Kings in Mumbai

and their game against Mumbai Indians in Chennai.

However, Mishra said that the quick change of venues didn't affect the players.

"It was a challenge to be ready for a game in a different venue in a short period of time, but as professional cricketers we know how to motivate ourselves and recover for the next match.

"The physio's work is very important in these situations. And once we step on the field, we focus on our performance and we don't think about anything else."

Asked if DC's recent poor record against MI was playing on the players' mind before the match on Tuesday, Mishra said, "In T20s, we have to forget the past and take a fresh start in every match that we play in, because anyone can change the match on any given day.

"I don't think any of the players were thinking about our recent record against MI. Like (Delhi Capitals Head Coach) Ricky Ponting has told us, we take every day as a new day, and we play positively in every match."

## ICC Bans UAE Cricketer Qadeer Khan For 5 years Over Corruption Charges



Press Trust of India

**DUBAI:** The ICC on Wednesday banned United Arab Emirates (UAE) player Qadeer Khan for five years from all cricket after he admitted breaching the anti-corruption code and also charged Mehardeep Chhayakar on six counts for corruption. Khan was charged in October 2019.

"Mr Khan's period of ineligibility has been backdated to 16 October 2019, when he was provisionally suspended," the ICC release said.

The ICC said that Khan admitted to six breaches that relates to failing to disclose approaches or invitations received in relation to the Zimbabwe v UAE series in April 2019.

Khan disclosed inside information in August 2019 in circumstances where he knew or should have known that the information might be used for betting purposes.

He failed to disclose to the ACU full details of any approaches or invitations received in relation to the Netherlands v UAE series in August 2019.

He also failed to disclose full details of any facts or matters that came to his attention that may evidence corrupt conduct under the Code by another participant. He refused to cooperate with an investigation in relation to possible corrupt conduct under the Code.

He also concealed information that may be relevant to that investigation.

Alex Marshall, ICC General Manager Integrity Unit, said, "Qadeer Khan is an experienced international cricketer who has received anti-corruption training. He should have avoided the people he knew were corrupt and reported any suspicions immediately."

Meanwhile, the ICC has charged Chhayakar, who has played domestic cricket in Ajman (UAE) with six counts of breaching the ICC Anti-Corruption Code.

"The ICC laid the charges on its own behalf as well as on behalf of Cricket Canada as its Designated Anti-Corruption Official for the purposes of the Global T20 2019," the ICC release added.

## MI Skipper Rohit Sharma Fined Rs 12 Lakh For Slow Over-Rate



Press Trust of India

**CHENNAI:** Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma was fined Rs 12 lakh for maintaining a slow over-rate during the IPL game against Delhi Capitals in Chennai.

Experienced leg-spinner Amit Mishra (4/24) spun his web around the Mumbai Indians batsman to restrict them to sub-par 137/9 and Delhi chased the target with five balls to spare on Tuesday.

"Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma has been fined after his team maintained a slow over rate during their IPL 2021 match against Delhi Capitals at the MA Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai on April 20," the IPL said in a statement.

"As it was his team's first offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over rate offences, Mr Sharma was fined Rs 12 lakh," the statement added.

## 8 Indian Boxers, Including 7 Women, Enter Youth World Championships Finals

Press Trust of India

**NEW DELHI:** Eight Indian boxers, including seven women, stormed into the finals of the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland, an unprecedented achievement for the country in the marquee age group event.

Apart from the eight finalists, three others settled for bronze medals at the tournament, a performance which betters the 10 medals that India won in its best ever show not too long back in the 2018 edition in Hungary.

The ones who made the finals, to be held on Thursday after a rest day on Wednesday, were Gitika (48kg), Babyrojisana Chanu (51kg), Vinka (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (69kg), Poonam (57kg), Thokchom Sanamachu Chanu (75kg) and Alfiya Pathan (+81kg) among women.

Among men, only Sachin (56kg) made the summit clash while three others signed off with bronze medals.

Gitika defeated Italy's Erika Prisciandaro 5-0 to set up a clash with Poland's Natalia Dominika, while Vinka prevailed 4-1 against Czech Republic's Veronika Gajdova. Vinka will next take on Kazakh-



stan's Zhuldyz Shayakhmetova.

Arundhati had little trouble getting past Uzbekistan's Khadicha-bonu Abdullaeva in a unanimous 5-0 verdict and she will be up against Poland's Barbara Marcinkowska in her summit showdown.

Babyrojisana also notched up a similar result against Italy's Elen Ayari. She has Russia's Valeriia Linkova to contend with in the finals. Manipur's Babyrojisana is the reigning Asian youth champion.

Poonam sailed past Uzbekistan's Sitora Turdibekova 5-0, and France's Stelyne Grosy awaits

her in the gold medal bout.

Sanamachu clinched a 4-1 triumph over Poland's Daria Parada. She will square off against Kazakhstan's Dana Diday in her last bout of the event.

Alfiya had a tough one against Poland's Oliwia Toborek but the Indian did enough to prevail 3-2. Moldova's Daria Kozorez will be her final challenge.

In the evening session, Sachin was the lone Indian to triumph, beating Italy's Michele Baldassi. He will fight it out with Kazakhstan's Yerbolat Sabyr for the top

honours on Friday.

Asian youth silver-winner Anikita Narwal (64kg), Bishwamita Chongthom (49kg) and Vishal Gupta (91kg) ended their campaigns with third-place finishes following semifinal losses.

Ankit and Bishwamitra lost in split 1-4 decisions to Kazakhstan's Sabirzhan Akkalykov and Sanzhar Tashkenbay respectively.

Vishal was beaten 5-0 by Poland's Jakub Straszewski. The tournament was unified for men and women in 2014 for the first time.

## FC Goa Go Down Fighting To Persepolis FC In AFC Champions League

Press Trust of India

**MARGAO:** FC Goa put up a spirited fight before going down 1-2 to Group E leaders Persepolis FC, bringing to an end the Indian club's unbeaten run in the AFC Champions League in Margao on Tuesday.

Quite remarkable, FC Goa grabbed the lead when Edu Bedia headed in to the bottom right corner from the centre of the box in the 14th minute. Bedia was assisted by Brandon Fernandes following a set piece situation.

But the Indian club's joy was short-lived as Persepolis FC fought back strongly to not just equalise but also go ahead in the high-octane contest.

Persepolis FC, last season's runners-up in the Champions League, drew parity when Mahdi Torabi converted a penalty in the 18th minute.

Soon enough, from a cross by Mahdi Torabi following a corner, Seyed Jalal Hosseini unleashed a header from close range to put the fancied visitors ahead in the 24th minute at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

The Goans were forced to make

an early substitution as Amarjit Singh replaced Adil Khan in the 29th minute because of an injury.

Persepolis FC had a chance to extend their lead just before half time, but FC Goa goalkeeper Dheeraj Singh saved a right-footed spot kick by Hossein Kanaani after Ivan Gonzalez committed a foul in the danger zone. Again before half time, Dheeraj made a brilliant save to deny the visitors.

FC Goa's effort to find an equaliser through the second half, which included a few substitutions, did not bear fruit as they settled for a defeat.

Even though the Iranian league champions dominated possession, FC Goa tried to put up a fight.

This was FC Goa's first defeat in the group stage as Persepolis claimed their third straight win.

FC Goa had their moments, tried their best but that was not enough to secure them a third straight stalemate in their maiden appearance in the continent's top-tier league.

FC Goa were placed in the third spot after Tuesday's result as Al Wahda's Fares Juma headed in with the final touch of their game to secure a dramatic 3-2 win over Qatar's Al Rayyan.

## Serum Prices Covid Vaccine for Pvt Hospitals at Rs 600/Dose; For State Govts At Rs 400/Dose



Press Trust of India

**NEW DELHI:** Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine maker, on Wednesday announced a price of Rs 400 per dose for its COVID-19 vaccine 'Covishield' for state governments and Rs 600 per dose for private hospitals.

The company also said for the next two months, it will address the issue of limited capacity by scaling up vaccine production.

"Going ahead, 50 per cent of our capacities will be served to the Government of India's vaccination program, and the remaining 50 per cent of the capacity will be for the state governments and private hospitals," Serum Institute of India said in a statement.

Following the government directives, the price of the Covishield vaccine is Rs 400 per dose for state governments and Rs 600 per dose for the private hospitals, it added.

Considering the global vaccine prices, "we are ensuring that our vaccines are affordable in comparison to any other vaccines in the world", Serum Institute said.

The American vaccines in the private market cost more than Rs 1,500 per dose, while Russian and Chinese vaccines cost greater than Rs 750 per dose, it added.

"...owing to the complexity, and urgency of the situation it is challenging to supply it independently to each corporate entity. We would urge all corporate and private individuals to access the vaccines through the state facilitated machinery and private health sys-

tems", Serum Institute said.

After 4-5 months, the vaccines will be made available in retail and free trade, it added.

The vaccine major said it welcomes the recent announcement made by the Ministry of Health and Finance Ministry to accelerate India's vaccination drive.

"The promising directives will help to scale up vaccine production, and allow state governments, private hospitals, and vaccination centres to procure vaccines directly," it added.

On Tuesday, SII CEO Adar Poonawalla had also said in a tweet, "On behalf of the vaccine industry in India, I would like to thank and applaud Shri @narendramodi ji, @nshiharaman ji, for your decisive policy changes and swift financial aid which will help vaccine production and distribution in India". Covishield comprises over 90 per cent of the 12.76 crore COVID-19 vaccines administered across the country so far, according to government data on Wednesday.

Of the 127,605,870 COVID-19 vaccination jabs administered till now, 11,60,65,107 are of Covishield, while 1,15,40,763 are Covaxin, according to the government's CO-WIN portal.

According to the sources, the government is likely to waive 10 per cent customs duty levied on imported vaccines in a bid to keep the cost of overseas vaccines low, which are being eyed to supplement domestically made shots ahead of the opening of COVID-19 vaccination to all citizens over 18 years of age. PTI

## 24 Patients on Ventilators Die After Oxygen Supply Stops At Nasik Hospital

Press Trust of India

**NASHIK:** At least 24 COVID-19 patients on ventilator support suffocated to death on Wednesday when their oxygen supply stopped suddenly because of a malfunction in the main storage at a civic-run hospital in Nashik in Maharashtra, officials said.

The government will probe if the tragedy at the Dr Zakir Husain Hospital was due to negligence, Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said.

A private company looked after the tank maintenance at the hospital, District Collector Suraj Mandhare said, adding technicians closed the tank valve preventing more deaths.

Three days before the tragedy, the Union health ministry's COVID-19 data compiled between March 16 and April 15 from major cities showed Nashik the worst-hit city in the country in terms of cases per million residents.

Wednesday's disruption of medical oxygen supply was caused by leakage from a storage plant, officials said.

Of the 150 patients admitted to the hospital, 23 were on ventilator support at the time of the incident while the rest were on oxygen support, a senior civic official said.

The municipal corporation shifted cylinders from other facilities in the city to help the patients at the hospital after the leak, which was noticed around 12.30 pm, an official said. Hospital officials then contacted municipal commissioner Kailash Jadhav seeking technical help to stop the leakage.

A 13 kilolitre oxygen tank was set up on the premises of the hospital, located in the Dwarika area of Nashik.

"Around 10 am, a socket of the oxygen storage tank broke and the leakage started. When the hospital staff came to know about it, they deployed jumbo cylinders to supply oxygen to the patients and started shifting some of the patients," an official said.



The leakage has been stopped, the tank repaired and the oxygen supply is being normalised, he said.

Soon after the incident, people rushed to the hospital hindering rescue operations.

"An oxygen tanker had reached the hospital premises when the leak happened. Technicians who came with that tanker and technicians at the hospital broke open the lock of the tank and closed the valve which prevented the further leakage of oxygen," he said.

All of them were on ventilator support, the minister said. The family of each deceased will be given financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh each from the CM relief fund.

"The liquid oxygen which was filled in the tank has the temperature of around (minus) 180-degree celsius. There is extreme pressure on the walls of the tank which supplies oxygen to patients on ventilator support," Tope said.

Jadhav said no patient is in a serious condition now.

The oxygen level was around 25 per cent in the storage tank at the time of the incident, he said.

Two oxygen tanks were set up at the hospital recently and the maintenance work was given to a private company.

An official said the incident occurred when oxygen was being filled in one of the tanks from a

tanker, which disturbed the supply to the patients who were on ventilators as well as to those dependent on oxygen for breathing.

Leela Shelar, who lost her 60-year-old mother in the tragedy was inconsolable. "My mother was admitted on Tuesday and put on ventilator support," she said.

Shelar said as her mother complained of difficulty in breathing, she had requested the nursing staff to help, but they didn't pay heed.

"I didn't admit my mother here to die like this," she said while fighting back her tears.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari expressed anguish over the tragedy.

Police dispersing a crowd of on-lookers and the entry at the hospital was restricted after the incident.

Nashik police commissioner Deepak Pandey said people's emotions are intense, adding arrangements for adequate police deployment have been made. The area has been sealed, he added.

A video of oxygen purportedly leaking from the storage plant went viral on social media in the morning.

Relatives of the deceased reached the hospital soon after hearing of the incident and are demanding that stringent action be taken against those responsible for the tragedy. PTI

## Digital Platforms Emerge As Lifelines For People As COVID Cases Spike

Press Trust of India

**NEW DELHI:** With COVID cases touching new highs, digital platforms - right from Twitter to Tinder - have become lifelines for people looking for hospital beds, medicines and oxygen for the patients.

A total of 2,95,041 fresh infections were registered in a span of 24 hours, while the active cases crossed the 21-lakh mark with a record 2,023 daily fatalities, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Wednesday.

"My grandmother needs oxygen machine (5L). She's aged 80. Location: Kalyan, Mumbai. Have tried all numbers that I have seen here, still not able to get," read a tweet.

Another one urged people for leads on finding a hospital bed in Noida.

Social media timelines on platforms like Twitter and Facebook are filled with desperate requests by family members and friends of patients for hospital beds and medicines. These posts have been reshared to amplify the reach to a larger audience.

While social media platforms had played a significant role last year too amid the lockdown, the situation is grim this year. The unprecedented surge in cases has placed tremendous strain on healthcare services and resources across India, and hospitals are running short of beds and medicines.

Interestingly, a Twitter user, Sohini Chattopadhyay narrated how a plasma match was found for a

friend through a dating app Tinder. Chattopadhyay went on to add, "Dating app 1, govt 0".

While there are calls for help, others are also proactively sharing information on various social media platforms.

Social media posts and WhatsApp messages are aplenty with collated lists of hospitals with available beds, names and phone numbers of distributors of medicines like Remdesivir (used in the treatment of COVID) and even food delivery services for COVID patients.

Various actors and social media influencers are also updating their accounts with details of COVID-19 resources. Some people have gone the extra mile to verify the information, which is often crowd-sourced, to benefit the masses.

Misinformation has been a major challenge for social media platforms in the past. Tech giants Google, Facebook and Twitter have been stepping up efforts to curb misinformation around COVID-19 on their platform.

Facebook, for example, is working with independent third-party fact-checking entities, covering many Indian languages, to identify misinformation around COVID-19.

It had also launched a Coronavirus Information Centre to provide the latest news and updates from MyGov Corona Hub, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) and global health organisations. PTI

## Security Officials Demand Case Against Pigeon Caught Near Pak Border

Agenceis

**AMRITSAR:** The Border Security Force (BSF) wants to register a case against an intruder from Pakistan, that happens to be a pigeon, while the Punjab Police are seeking a legal opinion on this.

The pigeon landed on the shoulder of a BSF soldier at the Rorawala post in Amritsar, Punjab, last Saturday, allegedly after flying across the border, an official said.

A small piece of paper with a "contact number" was wrapped around its leg, the official said. The BSF personnel handed over

the bird to the police with a demand in writing for taking legal action.

Senior Superintendent of Police Dhruv Dahiya said the BSF demanded registration of a case against the pigeon.

"As the pigeon is a bird, I don't think an FIR (first information report) can be registered against it. But we have referred the matter to our legal experts for their opinion," he said today.

The number tagged on the pigeon's leg is being analysed, he said.

Pigeons have been captured earlier as well in border areas with security forces suspecting espionage attempts.

## Door-to-door Covid-19 Vaccination Not Possible: Centre to Bombay HC

Agenceis

**MUMBAI:** The Union government on Wednesday informed the Bombay High Court that door-to-door COVID-19 vaccination was not possible due to various reasons including fear of contamination and wastage.

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare submitted its reply to a public interest litigation filed by lawyers Dhruvi Kapadia and Kunal Tiwari.

The PIL sought at-home vaccination facility for those above 75, the disabled and those who are bed-ridden or wheelchair-bound.

Satyendra Singh, Under Secretary in the Union Ministry of Health, listed in the affidavit several reasons for not providing this facility.

"In case of any Adverse Event Following Immunisation, case management may not be proper and there will be delay in reaching the health facility and challenges in maintaining protocol of observation of the patient for 30 minutes after vaccination," the affidavit said.

Further, there were chances of contamination as during door-to-door inoculation, the vaccine container will be taken

out at each house which could affect its efficacy, it said.

There was also the possibility of high wastage as inoculation drive will take longer, the reply said.

At the request of state governments, more vaccination centres have been approved with special consideration for senior citizens, the Centre's affidavit said. As to the registration for vaccination, it informed that people can register in advance or on site. A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G S Kulkarni is likely to take up the petition for hearing on Thursday.

## Water Sold In Remdesivir Vials For Rs 28,000 To Covid Patients in Maharashtra

Press Trust of India

**NAGPUR:** Two men were held on Tuesday for allegedly selling Remdesivir vials filled with water for Rs 28,000 in Sakardara area of Nagpur, police said.

Abhilash Petkar (28) and Aniket Nandeshwar (21), both working as X-Ray technicians, sold two such bogus vials to a person whose kin was admitted in a COVID-19 facility here by first quoting a price of Rs 40,000 and then bringing it down to Rs 28,000, said Inspector Satyawalan Mane.

"The relative found something suspicious about the vials. He approached police and we nabbed the two after laying a trap at a flyover here in the evening. Searches are underway in their houses in New Subedar Layout and Manevada as part of the probe," the Sakardara police station official added.

The drug, which is a key medicine in the treatment of some COVID-19 patients, is at the centre of several such fraudulent acts amid a rise in demand due to the spike in cases. PTI

## Madras HC Suggests Speed Governors In Two-Wheelers



Agenceis

**T**he Madras High Court on Wednesday recommended to the State and Central governments to fix speed governors in two-wheelers too at the production stage itself to curb road accidents.

A Division Bench of Justices N Kirubakaran and Abdul Quddus, which made the recommendation while enhancing compensation to an accident victim, also said licence-seekers should be taken to hospitals where accident victims are under treatment so that the consequences of violation of road rules would be understood properly first-hand.

The Bench was partly allowing an appeal from the father of a girl challenging the meagre award of Rs 18.44 lakh by a lower court.

The girl sustained grievous injuries in the accident in April 2013. She was hit by a bus belonging to the Metropolitan Transport Corporation.

The court enhanced the compensation to Rs 1.50 crore.

The Bench noted that the Medical Board examined the girl and determined permanent disability at 90 per cent.

Moreover, she is unable to do any work on her own and has to depend on others throughout her life. Taking into various aspects and the pitiable plight of the

victim, the Bench enhanced the compensation.

The other suggestions given by the Bench to eliminate road accidents were provision of modern gadgets like speed gun, speed indication display and drones to find out the speeding vehicles and to punish the drivers besides stringent punishment to the violators of the rules.

Imported vehicles should be calibrated to reduce their speed. Speed-breakers should be laid in accordance with the road safety measures so that they themselves would not become black spots, the judges said. They also suggested that Special Courts should be constituted to deal with traffic offences and the accident claim cases so that the criminal case arising out of the accident and the claim thereof could be dealt with by them together comprehensively.

The State government should rope in celebrities to spread the message of road discipline through the media, as they also have the social responsibility for an orderly and disciplined society.

Lectures by experts, doctors and social workers stressing upon the necessity to follow road rules should be conducted for licence-seekers before the licence is given.

For reporting compliance, the matter has been posted for hearing on August 2.

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