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P3 CITY

LAWDA STARTS SCIENTIFIC EXTRACTION OF LILY TO STOP ITS REGROWTH

The department of LAWDA has taken an initiative to extract the lily on most scientific lines & stop its regrowth in future. An area of about 1.71 sq km on the front side of Dolemb extending from NPL

P6
THINK

CONCEIT AND COUNTERFEIT: DEGRADING ACADEMIC ECOSYSTEM IN UNIVERSITIES OF KASHMIR

Higher education in Kashmir is in dire straits, and the academic leadership is doing nothing to fix the system. Acute problems exist across the domains...



P5 STATE

GOVT SANCTIONS RS 200 CR FOR WULLAR LAKE CONSERVATION

Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Dr Owais Ahmad on Monday said the Jammu and Kashmir administration has sanctioned Wullar Action Plan for Rs 200.00 crores for



Reading Is To The Mind, As Exercise Is To The Body.

— Brian Tracy

NEWS DIGEST

Misfire Injures Cop In Shopian

SRINAGAR: A policeman was injured on Monday when his service rifle went off accidentally in south Kashmir's Shopian district. Constable Sajad Ahmad Malla received a shot in his foot when his service weapon accidentally went off inside a police vehicle in the south Kashmir district, reports said. Malla, was removed to the district hospital Shopian with bullet injury in his foot. His condition is said to be stable. Reports said that Malla was part of the police team that was way to Kathulallan Keller area for practice fire.

Falling Tree Kills Timber Smuggler

SRINAGAR: A timber smuggler died when he along with his associate, were trying to cut a large tree illegally in Tosamaidan in Khag area of Central Kashmir's Budgam district, reports said Monday. The incident took place when the duo was trying to cut a large tree, illegally with the aim to smuggle it later, news agency KNT reported. However, the tree fell on them suddenly and the duo was critically injured. One of them, identified as Ghulam Mohd Mantoo (52) son of Ghulam Rasool Mantoo, died on the spot. The deceased is a resident of Sutharan Khag. The other critically injured person, ● [More On P10](#)

Police Recover Rs 7L Fine From Violators

SRINAGAR: Police on Monday said that as many as 4909 people were penalised and a fine of over Rs seven lakh was realised from them for violating Covid norms and guidelines across the Valley. In a statement issued here, a police spokesman said that during the last 24 hours, Police arrested three persons, lodged three FIRs and also realized fine to the tune of Rs 7,00080 from 4909 people throughout the Kashmir valley for violating the various guidelines, rules and SOPs regarding Covid-19. "Besides, 23 vehicles were also seized for ● [More On P10](#)

Youth Dies After Car Falls Into Gorge

SRINAGAR: A youth died while his friend sustained injuries after their car skidded off the road and fell into a gorge in Gantamulla area of North Kashmir's Baramulla district on Monday. The duo, who are the residents of Bernate village of Boniyar, were on their way to home. Police sources said that one among the two travelling in the vehicle (JK05-B4607) died on the spot while another was shifted to hospital for treatment. The deceased has been identified as Muhammad Ashraf Sood son of Ghulam Qadir Sood, a resident of Bernate Boniyar. Police have taken cognizance of the incident. (KNT)

....SOPORE ENCOUNTER

LeT Commander, 2 Aides Killed; Soldier Hurt: Police



File Photo: Abid Bhat

Muhammad Raafi

SRINAGAR: A top Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) commander and his two associates, including a foreigner were killed and a soldier injured in a nightlong gunfight in Sopore town of Baramulla district, police said Monday. LeT Commander Mudasir Pandith, his aides Khursheed Ahmad Mir of

Brath Kalan and a foreigner identified as Abdullah alias Asrar were killed in an overnight encounter with a joint team of police, army and CRPF Gunt Brath village of Sopore, a police spokesperson said. The trio, he said, were part of a group involved in various attacks, including the attack at the Municipal office Sopore on March 29 in ● [More On P10](#)

Good Number Of Foreign Militants In Kashmir: DGP

Director General of Police (DGP) Dilbag Singh said on Monday that there were a "good number" of foreign militants in the Valley but were "lying low" and "keeping a distance". Addressing a joint news conference at the Police Control Room (PCR) here with GOC Kilo Force, HS Sahi, the police chief said that only two foreign militants have been killed in twin gunfights this year. "Both were killed in ● [More On P10](#)

Shots Fired At CRPF Party In Shopian

Unidentified militants on Monday attacked a party of paramilitary CRPF in south Kashmir's Shopian district, however no one was injured. According to ● [More On P10](#)

IGP KASHMIR THANKED PEOPLE for helping in killing the LeT commander which is a big relief for the local population."

Govt Transfers 16 Officers In J&K

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir government on Monday transferred an IAS and fifteen JKAS officers in the interest of administration with immediate effect.

According to a government order issued here, Kumar Rajeev Ranjan (IAS), Additional Secretary to the Government, Revenue Department, holding additional charge of Additional CEO, Jammu and Kashmir Land Records Management Agency, has been transferred and posted as Commissioner, Survey and Land Records, J&K, against an available vacancy. "He shall continue to hold the charge of the post of Additional CEO, Jammu and Kashmir Land Records Management Agency, in addition to his own duties, till further orders,"



A farmer carrying wooden plough walks towards his paddy field in south Kashmir's Tral on Monday. KO Photo, Abid Bhat

Govt Amends Rules Regarding CID Verification Of New Appointees

Agencies

SRINAGAR: Government on Monday amended rules regarding verification of character and antecedents by CID department as regards the new appointees, asking the investigation agency to complete the process within one month and not beyond two months under any circumstances.

As per an order, the amendment has been made in the Instruction 2 of the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Verification of Character and Antecedents) Instructions,

1997, notified vide Government Order No.1918-GAD of 1997 dated 09.12.1997, read with Government Order No.597-GAD of 1999 dated 26.05.1999, Government Order No.681-GAD of 2000 dated 14.06.2000 and Government Order No.1328-GAD of 2016 dated 07.12.2016.

"The appointing authorities, on the receipt of attestation forms from the candidates shall forward these forms with a covering letter (sealed and marked secret) in the form prescribed to this Government Order directly to the CID Headquarter for conducting the verification of the

Character and Antecedents of the selectees," the order reads.

"The CID shall conduct the verification of the Character and Antecedent of the selectees and forward the same to the requisitioning authority within one month from the date of receipt of the list of selectees," it said, adding, "In case the verification process in respect of some candidates requires more time, the CID may seek another one month in respect of such candidates only while forwarding the completed cases."

However, the entire time period in the ● [More On P10](#)

Foot-And-Mouth Disease Breaks Out In Budgam Hills

Ajaz Ali

SRINAGAR: Hundreds of sheep and cattle have died after the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in the upper reaches of central Kashmir's Budgam district, locals said Monday.

They said that scores of shepherds, mostly from Chopan community take their livestock to the green pastures in the upper reaches of Diskhal, Danideran, Corag, Zandeqabar, Liddermud, Mechikhenan, Bargah, Shidak for grazing. According to the

locals, scores of sheep and cattle have perished after foot and mouth disease outbreak early this month. The locals also alleged that the animal husbandry was paying no heed to their request for vaccination.

Mohammad Sidiq Dar, Brenwar told Kashmir Observer that he has been pleading before the officials from last two months to vaccinate his herd. However, the officials, he said, paid no heed to his requests saying that they don't have vaccines available in stock. ● [More On P10](#)

All Eyes On PAGD Meeting Today



File Photo: Abid Bhat

Izhar Nazir Ali

SRINAGAR: The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), an amalgam of five mainstream parties will hold a meeting on Tuesday to take a call on government of India's dialogue offer. According to insiders, the five party

conglomerate, including National Conference (NC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Communist Party of India- Marxist (CPI-M), Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Movement (JKPM) and Jammu and Kashmir Awami National Conference (JKANC) will meet tomorrow

DELIMITATION IS CERTAINLY NOT THE AGENDA. It's not in the ambit of PM but the Election Commission. Most probably, the PM's meeting is more about the restoration of statehood."

Is Modi Govt Doing A Political Swivel On J&K?

KO Monitoring Desk

The Modi government could be doing a political swivel on J&K. Else why has it made a soft outreach to the leaders it once derided

as "the Gupkar gang (working) with foreign powers... to subvert the Valley"? according to one of India's foremost political scientists. He said this in the backdrop of the latest initiative by the BJP led

government on Kashmir.

"The first call was made to the most estranged and recalcitrant adversary, Mehbooba Mufti, whose uncle was also simultaneously released from incarceration – almost as if

the rulers wanted to underline their new mood of appeasement. I guess the government finds itself in the vortex of a complex political algorithm, Editor-in-Chief Raghav Bahl wrote in an ● [More On P10](#)

Covid-19: Amarnath Yatra Cancelled for 2nd Year In Row

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: For the second consecutive year the Amarnath Yatra has been cancelled in view of Covid-19 pandemic, the Jammu and Kashmir government announced on Monday. Last Yatra was cut short following New Delhi's decision to strip Kashmir of its semi-autonomous character on August 5, 2019.

The 56-day Amarnath Yatra was due to start simultaneously on both Pahalgam and Baltal routes from June 28 and culminate on August 22.

The decision to put off nearly two-month pilgrimage to the cave shrine was taken after a threadbare discussion with the members of the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB), including Swami Avdheshanand, DC Raina, Dr. Devi Prasad Shetty, Prof Anita Billawariya, Sudarshan Kumar, Prof. Vishwamurti Shashtri, Pandit Bhajan Sopori, Dr. C.M. Seth and Mrs. Tripta Dhawan on the present Covid-19 situation before arriving on the decision, a government spokesperson said Monday. "It's important ● [More On P10](#)

J&K Logs 362 Coronavirus Cases, Lowest In 82 Days

10 More Succumb To Virus, Death Toll Reaches 4262

Firdaus Ali

SRINAGAR: In a significant decline in daily coronavirus cases, Jammu and Kashmir on Monday reported 362 fresh cases of Covid-19, the lowest count in the last 82 days while ten more people succumbed to the infection across the Union Territory during the last 24 hours.

While Kashmir Valley reported 261 fresh cases of coronavirus on Monday, the remaining 101 were detected from various districts of Jammu division, officials said.

Giving district-wide details, the officials said that Srinagar reported

79, Baramulla 14, Budgam 37, Pulwama 21, Kupwara 22, Anantnag 44, Bandipora 11, Ganderbal 13, Kulgam 18, Shopian 2, Jammu 9, Udhampur 10, Rajouri 15, Doda 27, Kathua 1, Samba 1, Kishtwar 8, Poonch 9, Ramban 13 and Reasi 8 new cases of coronavirus.

Moreover, they said, 1224 more patients have recovered—264 from Jammu Division and 960 from Kashmir. 300135 patients have recovered so far, leaving active cases at 7759—2876 in Jammu and 4883 in

Kashmir. Regarding deaths, the officials said that three were reported ● [More On P10](#)

Case Positivity Rate Dips To 1.2% In J&K: Govt

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir government said on Monday that the daily number of coronavirus cases have reduced from an all-time high of over 5400 to 585 over a month while the same period has also witnessed a reduction in the

case positivity rate from 13% to 3.3%, which has further reduced to 1.2% in last 24 hours.

J&K Chief Secretary, Dr. Arun Kumar Mehta informed a high-level meeting chaired by the Union Home Secretary, Ajay Bhalla, that the Union Territory has vaccinated 85% of health care workers, ● [More On P10](#)



SCHOOL STUDENTS PERFORM YOGA to mark the 7th Yoga Day in Srinagar on Monday. KO Photo Abid Bhat.

Patient Rush Goes Down By 60 Percent In Srinagar Hospitals



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: As the positivity and mortality rate goes considerably down in Kashmir, main hospitals in Srinagar are almost back to normal business as 50 per cent beds that otherwise were occupied with Covid patients till June first week are now lying vacant.

After two months, the doctors as well as the paramedical staff dealing with the Covid patients at different hospitals in Srinagar are heaving a sigh of relief as the number of patients being admitted on a regular basis have declined by nearly 60 per cent, the officials said.

Medical Superintendent at JVC Hospital (SKIMS Bemina), Dr

Shifa Deva said that the flow of patients at the hospital has declined to a large extent and there are more than 50 per cent beds that are lying vacant at present.

Dr Saleem Tak, Medical Superintendent at Chest Diseases (CD) hospital also admitted the decline in the admissions of Covid patients at the hospital, saying that at present there is 50 per cent bed occupancy against 100 per cent in April and May.

A senior medico at SMHS stated that as against 30-40 patients, the hospital is receiving nearly 10 patients on a regular basis from the past couple of days. "The flow of patients has declined by almost 60 per cent at SMHS and 50 per cent beds are

also lying vacant," he said.

At SK Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), the officials also confirmed the decline in the Covid patients being admitted on a regular basis. "The flow of patients is linked with the number of cases being recorded on a daily basis. As the figure of positive cases is on decline, the flow too has reduced by nearly 50 per cent at the institute," he said.

Meanwhile, the health workers and paramedical staff said that there was a huge burden on them in the past two months as the number of cases being admitted at the hospitals were rising with each passing day.

However, they said that the reduction in the number of admissions is giving them a sigh of relief, but appealed to people to follow the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in letter and spirit.

"There is a possibility of Covid third wave and it is people only who can prevent it by following SOPs. We are here to serve the people by treating patients, but they should also serve the society by following all Covid protocols to prevent the third wave," the health workers said, hoping that things improve further and third wave stays away from Kashmir if it arrives God forbid. (Agencies)

Police Arrest Six Gamblers In Srinagar

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir Police in Srinagar arrested six gamblers from a gambling site and seized 21,480/- stake money.

A police spokesperson said that acting on specific information, a

police party from Police Post Qamarwari raided a gambling site at Qamarabad following an input about gambling activities and apprehended six gamblers.

"Officers have seized stake money of 21,480/- and playing cards from the gamblers.

They have been arrested and shifted to Police Station where they remain in custody."

Accordingly, a case FIR No. 177/2021 under relevant sections of law has been registered in PS Parimpora and investigation has been initiated.

LAWDA Starts Scientific Extraction Of Lily To Stop Its Regrowth



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The department of LAWDA has taken an initiative to extract the lily on most scientific lines & stop its regrowth in future.

An area of about 1.71 sq km on the front side of Doledeemb extending from NPL bund towards Kabutar Khana has been targeted to be extracted this year. Accordingly tenders were floated to outsource the extraction of lily from the area with the help of pontoon based lily harvesters.

Today on 21-6-2021 the pontoon based machines were launched in Dal Lake & extraction work had been started. The VC LAWDA along with engineers of LAWDA kick started the lily extraction programme in Dal Lake. This is in addition to the other de-weeding activities carried out by J&K LDA through manual mode and through the machines available with the authority. De-weeding activity is being carried out to remove the extra weed and to maintain the aesthetics of the lake.

Our Goal To Provide Easy Access To Justice For Every Citizen: Magrey



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Justice Ali Mohammad Magrey Monday inaugurated "VIDHIK SEVA KENDRA" & "E-Seva Kendra" at District Court Complex, Srinagar also presided the awareness programme cum webinar on "E-Learning : Challenges & Success", which was attended by thirty eminent persons by physical mode & 980 participants through virtual mode.

The programme was organized by District Legal Services Authority, Srinagar in collaboration with Directorate of School Education.

At the onset of the programme, Principal District & Sessions Judge and Chairman, DLSA, Srinagar, Mohammad Akram Chowdhary, formally welcomed the Chief Guest, Justice Ali Mohammad Magrey and all the other dignitaries who attended the program through both physical and virtual mode.

Magrey said, "Children are future of the Nation & their Education is of Prime Importance, & E- Learning is supplement to the formal Educa-

tion & not a Substitute."

Magray said, "Our goal is to provide easy access to justice for every citizen. He said while availing Services at Vidhik Seva Kendra, one can file petition to the High Court through online & while availing services of E- Seva Kendra, One can obtain status of cases very easily besides cause list will be available in the E-Seva Kendra."

He further said that we are living in a country having vast & Unique diversity in preserving the Constitutional rights of every citizen.

Justice Magrey on the occasion hailed the initiative of Directorate of School Education in developing Learning Management System, LMS, App through which E-Learning programmes are being imparted, by which teacher/lecturers have been made accountable.

Meanwhile, One Contempt petition was today received by "Vidhik Seva Kendra" from Advocate Mir Naveed Gul which was scanned & forwarded to dedicated email of Ld. registrar Judicial High Court of J&K.

ISM Directorate Celebrates Yoga Day At Unani Hospital Shalteng

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Joining 7th Yoga Day celebrations being held across Jammu and Kashmir, Director Indian Systems of Medicine (ISM), J&K, Dr Mohan Singh, today launched the global event at Government Unani Hospital Shalteng, Srinagar.

The event witnessed practical sessions on Common Yoga Protocol (CYP) conducted by yoga specialists who delivered informative lectures and demonstrations to the staff of the hospital and ISM Directorate amid strict observance of COVID protocols.

Pertinently, as per the guidelines of Ministry of AYUSH and current year's theme "Be with Yoga, Be at Home" due to prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, most of the activities were organized from various virtual platforms.

The Yoga specialists and Medical Officers of ISM highlighted that Yoga has always been instrumental towards maintaining a healthy mind and soul since time immemorial and it is the traditional science of mindfulness, awareness and consciousness.

Directorate of ISM (Ayush) had already launched celebration of Yoga week from 14th of June 2021 wherein video documentaries depicting utility of Yoga in the prevalent health crisis and various other health challenges of day to day life demonstrating

PS YSS Propagates ‘Be With Yoga, Be At Home’ Message

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Principal Secretary Youth Services & Sports, Alok Kumar, Monday urged upon the participants to be the ambassadors of the department in carrying forward the message "Be with Yoga, Be at Home" and make Yoga a daily routine for their physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

He also emphasised upon them to further motivate and involve their family members in yoga to fulfil the dream of making India Fit.

Most of the programmes

were conducted online in about 285 blocks and district headquarters of Jammu and Kashmir; cutting across all the age groups, thousands of citizens, students, officers and officials participated in the celebrations through both virtual and physical mode.

Pertinently, the Department of Youth Services and Sports (YSS) celebrated 7th International Day of Yoga with great fervor and enthusiasm in Botanical Garden at the foot hills of Zabarwan that provided an ideal ambience to the event.

Preceding to the International Day of Yoga, the Department of Youth Services & Sports started organizing practice sessions a week before to make 7th International Day of Yoga a memorable event.

The Yoga Instructors initially briefed the participants about the essence of Yogic exercises and thereafter held a 45 minute practice session with demonstration of different Yoga asanas. The message "Be with Yoga, Be at Home" was disseminated among the masses through different social media platforms besides hoardings and banners.

Yoga awareness to every nook and corner of the UT by involving common people through PRLs and other organizations. He further stated that multidisciplinary discussions and webinars in collaboration with other line departments like ICDS, NHM, Directorate of Health Services Jammu and Kashmir, Youth Services and Sports, PRLs, School Education Department, Higher Education Departments, NGOs were held wherein discussions on utility of Yoga in various fields was deliberated with a purpose to integrate Yoga in different spheres of life.

DIAL-EMMA

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

AIRPORTS

SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311



RAILWAYS



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

HIGHWAY STATUS

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

This Day in History

- 217 BC - Battle of Raphia: Ptolemy IV of Egypt defeats Antiochus III the Great of the Seleucid kingdom.
- 168 BC - Battle of Pydna: Romans under Lucius Aemilius Paullus defeat and capture Macedonian King Perseus, ending the Third Macedonian War.
- 1377 - Richard II succeeds Edward III as king of England
- 1476 - Battle at Morat/Murten: Charles the Stout invades Switzerland1533 - Ferdinand of Austria and Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent sign peace treaty
- 1593 - Battle of Sisak: Allied Christian troops defeat the Turks.
- 1596 - Cornelis de Houtmans fleet reaches Banten Java
- 1611 - Henry Hudson set adrift in Hudson Bay by mutineers on his ship Discovery & never seen again
- 1633 - Galileo Galilei forced to recant his Copernican views that the Earth orbits the Sun by the Pope (Oct 311992 Vatican admits it was wrong)
- 1980 - Pope John Paul II beatifies Kateri Tekakwitha, making him the 1st Native American to be beatified
- 1981 - Iran president Bani Sadr deposed
- 1983 - 1st time a satellite is retrieved from orbit by Space Shuttle
- 1987 - The International Labour Organisation, meeting for its annual conference in Geneva, calls for international sanctions against South African minerals
- 1987 - A bomb blast in a Johannesburg video-game arcade kills an unborn baby and injures ten people
- 1990 - Nelson Mandela addresses the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid in New York, saying that nothing has occurred in South Africa to reverse the ANC's position
- 1991 - Underwater volcano, Mount Didicas, erupts in Philippines
- 1992 - Two skeletons excavated in Yekaterinburg, Russia identified as Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra
- 1994 - FIFA World Cup: USA beats Colombia 2-1 in 1994 world cup match (1st win since 1950)
- 2002 - An earthquake in western Iran measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale kills more than 261 people.
- 2009 - Two Metro subway trains collide in Washington, D.C., killing 9 and injuring over 80
- 2012 - Two Baghdad market bombings kill 14 people and injure 106
- 2015 - South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley calls for the removal of the Confederate flag from statehouse grounds in wake of killings in a Charleston church
- 2015 - JAMA Internal Medical Journal announces obese Americans now outnumber those just overweight

From KO Archives

Quit Worrying On Hurriyat: PM To Atal

NEW DELHI - Brushing aside the charge that the Government mishandled Hurriyat leaders' visit to Pakistan, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has affirmed its commitment to take the Indo-Pak dialogue process forward while ensuring that India's vital interests are fully safeguarded.

Replying to a letter from former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on June 15, Singh emphasised that there was no room for ambiguity regarding India's position on Jammu and Kashmir in its discussions with Pakistan or actions.

"I have reiterated on every possible occasion that there can be no redrawing of boundaries. We have also ruled out any role for a third party — either through intervention or as guarantor or as mediators—in am form," he said in his letter dated June 20 to Vajpayee.

He said that India had consistently held that the dialogue with Pakistan was predicated on its commitment to end cross border terrorism, as outlined in the joint statement of January six 2004. The centrality of this position was recently reflected in the Joint Statement released after my meeting with President Musharraf." With regard to the Hurriyat leaders' visit to Pakistan, he said it was not correct to state that the authorities on the Indian side had mishandled it.

By allowing the Hurriyat leaders to travel beyond Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Islamabad violated the understanding reached between the two countries on the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service.

Drawing Vajpayee's attention to the fact that the Hurriyat leaders have regularly met dignitaries from Pakistan visiting India as well as its diplomats in the last four or five years, the Prime Minister said that their track to Pakistan-administered Kashmir using Srinagar-Muzaffarabad was cleared on the basis of agreed procedures. "That Pakistan decided to invite them to visit Islamabad and other cities in Pakistan violated an understanding on these procedures that had been reached between India and Pakistan," Singh said.

He said passports were issued to those Hurriyat leaders who did not possess it and made request for the issue of such documents.

Noting that Hurriyat Conference was one of the groups that is outside the electoral process in Jammu and Kashmir, the Prime Minister said that nevertheless, the Government was willing, to enter into dialogue with such groups provided they agree to abjure the path of violence.

(Kashmir Observer, 22 June, 2005)

Israel Foreign Minister Yair Lapid To Visit UAE In First Official Visit



Agence France-Presse

JERUSALEM: Israel's Foreign Minister Yair Lapid will visit the United Arab Emirates, in the first official ministerial visit since the two nations agreed to normalise ties, his office said Monday.

Israel and the UAE, along with Bahrain, normalised ties in September, and the Jewish state also last year agreed to normalise relations with two other Arab nations, Morocco and Sudan.

"Foreign Minister Yair Lapid will hold the first and historic official visit of an Israeli Foreign Minister to the UAE," a statement read.

He will be hosted by Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan on his two-day visit from June 29-30, it added.

Lapid is the architect of a coalition government in Israel that came to power on June 13, ousting long serving prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who presided over last year's normalisation accords.

Israeli ministers have previously visited the UAE, but Lapid is the most senior Israeli to make the trip, and the first to travel on an official journey.

"Ties between Israel and the UAE are an important relationship, the fruits of which will be enjoyed not only by the citizens of the two countries, but by the

entire Middle East," the statement added.

Lapid will inaugurate the Israeli Embassy in Abu Dhabi, as well as the Consulate General of Israel in Dubai.

In October 2018, Miri Regev, then Israel's Minister of Culture and Sports, travelled with the national judo team to Abu Dhabi, but it was not an official visit.

Another Israeli minister, Ayoub Kara, then Minister of Communications, spoke in October 2018 at an international conference on telecommunications in Dubai.

In March, a planned official prime ministerial visit to the UAE by Netanyahu was cancelled due to a "dispute" with Jordan over the use of its airspace, according to Israeli officials.

etanyahu -- replaced as prime minister by Jewish nationalist Naftali Bennett in Israel's new government -- had already postponed in February a visit to the UAE and Bahrain, amid travel restrictions imposed to stem the coronavirus pandemic.

Israel's normalisation accords with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan -- known as the Abraham Accords -- were last year brokered by then US president Donald Trump's administration. Israel has already signed a raft of deals with both UAE and Bahrain, ranging from tourism to aviation and financial services.

On Monday, the Israel-based i24News television network said it would open an office in Dubai, a first for an Israel-based media outlet.

The normalisation accords have been condemned by the Palestinians as they break with years of Arab League policy which has held that there should be no relations with Israel until it makes peace with the Palestinians.

Iran President-Elect Says Wouldn't Meet Biden

'The US Is Obligated To Lift All Oppressive Sanctions Against Iran,' Raisi Says At News Conference



Agencies

DUBAI: Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi Monday struck a defiant note saying that he would not meet with President Joe Biden nor negotiate over Iran's ballistic missile programme and its support of regional allies while demanding the United States must return to full compliance with the 2015 landmark nuclear deal with Iran.

This was Raisi's first news conference following his landslide victory in last week's election.

Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi also described himself as a "defender of human rights" when asked about his involvement in the 1988 spate of executions of members of West backed Mojahedin Khalq terror group. It marked the first time he's been put on the spot on live television over these executions at the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

"The US is obliged to lift all oppressive sanctions against Iran," Raisi said at the news conference.

Raisi sitting in front of a sea of microphones looked nervous at the beginning of his comments but slowly became more at ease over the hourlong news conference.

Asked about Iran's ballistic missile program and its support of regional militias, Raisi described the issues as "non-negotiable."

Tehran's fleet of attack aircraft date largely back to before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, forcing Iran to instead invest in missiles as a hedge against arch enemy Israel and its regional Arab neighbors, who have purchased billions of dollars in American military hardware over the years. Those missiles, with a self-imposed range limit of 2,000 kilometers can reach across the Mideast and US military bases in the region.

Iran also relies on allies like Yemen's Ansarallah and Lebanon's Hezbollah for counterbalance against enemies such as Saudi Arabia and Israel, respectively. It also wields enormous influence in two other key Arab countries of Iraq and Syria.

On a possible meeting with Biden, Raisi simply answered: "No." His moderate competitor in the election, Abdolnasser Hemmati, had suggested during campaigning that he'd be potentially willing to meet Biden.

The White House did not immediately respond to Raisi's statements Monday. Raisi will become the first serving Iranian president sanctioned by the US government even before entering office.

The victory of Raisi, a protégé of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei, came amid the lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history. Millions of Iranians stayed home in defiance of a vote they saw as tipped in Raisi's favour after a constitutional body disqualified his strongest competition.

Of those who did vote, 3.7 million people either accidentally or intentionally voided their ballots, far beyond the amount seen in previous elections and suggesting some wanted none of the four candidates. In official results, Raisi won 17.9 million votes overall, nearly 62% of the total 28.9 million cast.

Raisi's election puts hard-liners firmly in control across the government as negotiations in Vienna continue to try to save a tattered deal meant to limit Iran's nuclear program, at a time when Tehran is enriching uranium at 60%, its highest levels ever, though still short of weapons-grade levels.

Representatives of the world powers party to the deal returned to their capitals for consultations following the latest round of ne-

gotiations on Sunday.

Then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the landmark agreement in 2018, setting in motion months of tensions across the region.

Raisi's election victory has raised concerns that it could complicate a possible return to the nuclear agreement. In his remarks on Monday, Raisi called sanctions relief as "central to our foreign policy" and exhorted the US to "return and implement your commitments" in the deal.

On Saudi Arabia, which has recently started secret talks with Iran in Baghdad to reduce tensions with Iran, Raisi said that Iran would have "no problem" with a possible reopening of the Saudi Embassy in Tehran and the "restoration of relations faces no barrier." The embassy was closed in 2016 when relations deteriorated.

Raisi also touched on the issue of Saudi-led war on Yemen, saying, "The Islamic Republic stresses that the war against Yemen must come to a rapid halt and Yemen must be run by Yemenis."

"It is only for the Yemeni people to decide how their country should be managed," Raisi said, emphasizing that there should be no interference in Yemen's affairs by Saudi Arabia or countries that support Saudi Arabia in Yemen.

Raisi struck a defiant tone when asked about the 1988 executions.

After the eight year imposed war ended in 1988, members of the Iranian opposition group MeK, heavily armed by Saddam Hussein, stormed across the Iranian border from Iraq in a surprise attack. Iran ultimately blunted their assault.

Those caught by the Iranian forces were given an option. Those who showed their willingness to "clear minefields for the army of the Islamic Republic," were pardoned and those who refused were sent to gallows on charges of treason. Raisi served on the commissions.

"I am proud of being a defender of human rights and of people's security and comfort as a prosecutor wherever I was," he said. "All actions I carried out during my office were always in the direction of defending human rights."

He added: "Today in the presidential post, I feel obliged to defend human rights."

Taliban Say 'Islamic System' Only Way To Afghan Peace, Women's Rights

Agencies

The Taliban said on Sunday they remain committed to peace talks but insisted a "genuine Islamic system" in Afghanistan was the only way to end the war and ensure rights -- including for women.

Talks between the militants and the Afghan government have been deadlocked for months, and violence has surged across the country since May, when the US military began its final withdrawal.

Fears are also growing that if the Taliban return to power, they will reimpose their harsh version of Islamic law, under which girls were banned from school and women accused of crimes such as adultery were stoned to death in stadiums.

Despite the rise in violence, Taliban Co-Founder and Deputy Leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar said on Sunday that the group was committed to the peace talks.

"Our very participation in the negotiations... indicates openly that we believe in resolving issues through (mutual) understanding," Baradar said in a statement.

He said the only way to end the conflict in Afghanistan was to establish an Islamic system after the departure of all foreign forces.

"A genuine Islamic system is the best [method] for solution of all issues of the Afghans," Baradar said.

His statement acknowledged the fears in Afghanistan and abroad about the kind of system



that would emerge -- and its impact on women -- saying that it fell "within the ambit of the intra-Afghan negotiations."

Baradar also assured that the rights of all Afghans, including women would be accommodated in that system, according to "the glorious religion of Islam" and Afghan traditions.

'Taliban destroying Afghanistan' But many fear that the Taliban's interpretation of rights will clash with the changes that have happened in Afghan society since 2001.

In May, a US intelligence report said the gains made over the past two decades on women's rights would be rolled back if the militants returned to power.

As the US military presses ahead to meet the September 11 deadline to complete the troop withdrawal, the Taliban have fought daily battles with government forces and claim to have captured 40 districts.

The growing fear and uncertainty about the future have forced many Afghans to try and leave, including thousands of men and women who fear reprisals because they worked with foreign forces.

'We Love You Catalonia': Spain To Pardon Jailed Separatists



By Alasdair Fotheringham

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has confirmed controversial plans to pardon nine Catalan separatists who were jailed for their role in the illegal independence referendum of 2017.

The Socialist leader made the widely expected announcement during a speech in Catalonia's capital, Barcelona, on Monday morning.

"Tomorrow, guided by this constitutional spirit of forgiveness, I will propose that the cabinet approve the pardon," Sanchez said.

His speech was briefly interrupted by a young pro-separatist, while dozens more protesters stood outside. Some said pardons did not go far enough, calling instead for amnesty.

The government had argued last year that the sedition laws which saw the nine figures jailed for up to 13 years were excessively harsh.

The move to spare the separatists of punishment has garnered a mixed reaction in Spain.

One recent survey said more than 60 percent of Spaniards were opposed to the plan and last week, thousands gathered to protest against the pardons.

Most Catalans, however, approve.

The Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations (CEOE), Spain's business community leader, had also said it favoured the move.

The country's right-wing parties, meanwhile, currently on the rise in the polls, will be certain to use the pardons, even if -- as seems likely -- they will only be partial, as a rallying cry.

Last Sunday, conservative Isabel Diaz Ayuso, Madrid's regional president, suggested they could place King Felipe in a difficult situation, as according to the Spanish Constitution, he would have to sign off the measures.

The pardons also leave the question of Carles Puigdemont, the former Catalan president currently in self-imposed exile and who faces charges for his role in the independence bid, unresolved.

"It's extremely risky, politically," Oriol Bartomeus, professor of political science at Barcelona's Universidad Autonoma, told Al Jazeera. "The dialogue which will start now could end up going badly. Forces contrary to it, both headline separatists and on the hard right in Spain, could end up getting stronger."

Saudi Seeks Religious Reset As Clerical Power Wanes



Agencies

Muezzins issuing high-decibel calls to prayer have long been part of Saudi identity, but a crack-down on mosque loudspeakers is among contentious reforms seeking to shake off the Muslim kingdom's austere image.

Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest Muslim sites, has long been associated with a rigid strain of Islam known as Wahhabism that inspired generations of global extremists and left the oil-rich kingdom steeped in conservatism.

But the role of religion faces the biggest reset in modern times as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, spurred by the need to diversify the oil-reliant economy, pursues a liberalization drive in parallel with a vigorous crackdown on dissent.

Chipping away at a key pillar of its Islamic identity, the government last month ordered that mosque loudspeakers limit their volume to one-third of their maximum capacity and not broadcast full sermons, citing concerns over noise pollution.

In a country home to tens of thousands of mosques, the move triggered an online backlash with the hashtag "We demand the return of mosque speakers" gaining traction.

It also sparked calls to ban loud music in restaurants, once taboo in the kingdom but now common amid liberalization efforts, and to fill mosques in such large numbers that authorities are forced to permit loudspeakers for those gathering outside.

But authorities are unlikely to budge, as economic reforms for a post-oil era take precedence over religion, observers say.

"The country is re-establishing its foundations," Aziz Alghashian, a politics lecturer at the University of Essex, told AFP.

"It's becoming an economically driven country that is investing substantial effort in trying to appear more appealing -- or less intimidating -- to investors and tourists."

'Post-Wahhabi era'

In the most significant change that began even before the rise of Prince Mohammed, Saudi Arabia neutered its once-feared religious police, who once chased people out of malls to go and pray and berated anyone seen mingling with the opposite sex.

In what was once unthinkable, some shops and restaurants now remain open during the five daily Muslim prayers.

As clerical power wanes, preachers are endorsing government decisions they once vehemently opposed -- including allowing women to drive, the reopening of cinemas, and an outreach to Jews.

Saudi Arabia is revising school textbooks to scrub well-known references denigrating non-Muslims as "swines" and "apes."

The practice of non-Muslim religions remains banned in the kingdom, but government advisor Ali Shihabi recently told US media outlet Insider that allowing a church was on "the to-do list of the leadership."

Authorities have publicly ruled out lifting an absolute ban on alcohol, forbidden in Islam. But multiple sources, including a Gulf-based diplomat, quoted Saudi officials as saying in closed-door meetings that "it will gradually happen."

"It's not an exaggeration to say that Saudi Arabia has entered a post-Wahhabi era, though the exact religious contours of the state are still in flux," Kristin Diwan of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington told AFP.

"Religion no longer has veto power over the economy, social life and foreign policy."

UN Warns Of Worst 'Cascade Of Human Rights Setbacks In Our Lifetimes'

Agencies

The UN rights chief called on Monday for "concerted action" to help recover from the worst global deterioration of rights she had seen, highlighting situations in China, Russia and Ethiopia, among others.

"To recover from the most wide-reaching and severe cascade of human rights setbacks in our lifetimes, we need a life-changing vision, and concerted action," Michelle Bachelet told the opening of the UN Human Rights Council's 47th session.

"Extreme poverty, inequalities and injustice are rising. Democratic and civic space is being eroded," she warned.

The session, which lasts until July 13 and which is being held virtually due to continued Covid-19 restrictions, is due to feature an eagerly anticipated report



about systemic racism, and draft resolutions focused on a range of concerning rights situations, including in Myanmar, Belarus and Ethiopia's northern Tigray region.

'Executions, sexual violence'

In her opening address, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said she was "deeply disturbed" by reports of "serious violations" in Tigray, wracked by war and with some 350,000 people threatened by famine.

She pointed to "extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, sexual violence against children as well as adults, and forced displacement," and said she had "credible reports" that Eritrean soldiers were still operating in the region.

Other parts of Ethiopia, which was holding elections on Monday, were also seeing "alarming incidents of deadly ethnic and inter-communal violence and displacement... linked to increasing polarisation about long-standing grievances," Bachelet said. "The ongoing deployment of military forces is not a durable solution," she said, calling for national dialogue.

'Chilling impact'

The UN rights chief also pointed to the "chilling impact" of a sweeping national security law introduced in Hong Kong.

The law, which took effect on July 1, 2020, is seen as the spear tip of a sweeping crackdown on Beijing's critics in the semi-autonomous city of Hong Kong following 2019's huge democracy protests.

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NEWS MAKERS

Prime Minister Imran Khan Refrains From Criticizing China On Uyghur Situation In Xinjiang Province

muzzamil mehboob

Prime Minister Imran Khan refrained from criticizing China on the matter of treatment of Uyghur Muslims. When he was questioned about it, he replied, "This is not a case."

When he was further pressurized, Khan stated that how he refrains from commenting on the situations of other countries. He added that he is more concerned about his own country. He said that the issue of Kashmir is the main concern right now.

Muslims of Xinjiang

According to reports, around 11 million Uyghurs -- a largely Turkish-speaking ethnic group -- resides in China's northwestern province, Xinjiang. As per a US report in 2018,



since 2017, China had detained probably 2 million Uyghur and other members of Muslim minorities in internment camps.

G-7 Meeting With China

At the conclusion of the G-7 Summit in Cornwall, Britain, from June 11 to 13, the leaders of the member countries issued a joint statement in which they, among other things, "[called on] China to protect human rights and basic freedoms, particularly in relation to Xinjiang."

However, the meeting did not end

well as the leading spokesman of the Chinese Embassy in the UK said, "The Group of Seven (G-7) takes advantage of Xinjiang-related issues to engage in political manipulation and interfere in China's internal affairs, which we firmly oppose."

Imran's Thoughts on China

In his Axios interview, Prime Minister Imran said, "Our discussions with the Chinese will always be behind closed doors," which would lead one to believe that disagreements are shared in private because the only thing that makes its way to the public is resounding praise. In January this year, Khan lavished some more of it on China, by saying, "If we can learn from any one country in the world, it is China. Their development model suits Pakistan the best."

Bachelet Seeks Xinjiang Trip Amid Reports Of Uighur Persecution

Agencies

UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet has said she hopes to agree terms for a visit this year to China, including its Xinjiang region, to look into reports of serious violations against the Uighur minority.

"I continue to discuss with China modalities for a visit, including meaningful access, to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," Bachelet said on Monday, addressing the opening of a Human Rights Council session in Geneva.

"[I] hope this can be achieved this year, particularly as reports of serious human rights violations continue to emerge."

Bachelet's remarks marked

the first time she has publicly suggested a timeline for any such visit, which her office has been negotiating the terms of since September 2018.

She is under growing pressure from Western states to secure unfettered access to Xinjiang, where at least one million Uighurs, a largely Muslim ethnic group, have been detained in internment camps in the province, according to the UN.

Mass internment camps

Critics, including the UK and the US, say inmates at the camps have been subjected to human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, forced labour, torture, forced sterilisation and family separation.

Will Reimpose Restrictions If Covid SOP's Not Followed: DC Ganderbal



GANDERBAL: The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ganderbal, Kritika Jyotsna Monday said that strict adherence to Covid SOPs is imperative to defeat the pandemic.

She said that weekend curfew and other Covid restrictions are over in the district but night curfew from 8 PM to 7 AM shall remain in place. She said

though restrictions are over but if Covid appropriate behaviour is not followed by all, the restriction scenario can be back and urged upon people to follow the guidelines and SOPs strictly besides avoiding public gathering which would be imperative to combat the third wave of pandemic.

Giving details on positivity rate, the DC said that last week 7000 test were done in the district in which 3.5% tests were positive and in this week 9300 tests have been conducted and positivity rate is just 1.5%. Besides last week 249 cases were active and in this week 133 cases are active in the district, she added.

Elaborating on tests done at Covid Care Centres, she said that

SKUAST-K Gets One-Year Extension For World Bank-Funded Project



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has granted a one-year extension of its World Bank-funded National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP) to Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology Kashmir.

The one-year extension of the project was announced Monday during a function held to felicitate the coordinators, consultants and other staff after SKUAST-Kashmir was rated among the best performers among 58 agricultural institutions of higher education and research in the country during the recently held annual review of the project.

Vice-Chancellor, SKUAST-Kashmir, Prof JP Sharma was the chief guest and Deputy Director General Education ICAR and National Director NAHEP, Dr RC Agarwal was the guest of honour of the function.

National Coordinator NAHEP

Dr Ramasundaram together with Directors, Deans, Registrar, other officers of University and University Scientists comprising Core Coordinators of NAHEP, Faculty Coordinators, Innovation Ambassadors and NAHEP staff attended the function that was conducted in hybrid mode (Offline + online).

National Director NAHEP Dr RC Aggarwal lauded SKUAST-Kashmir for effective implementation of the institutional development plan of SKUAST-K. He hoped that SKUAST-K will develop a Model Agricultural Higher Education Setup for the whole Country. Dr P Ramasundaram, National Coordinator NAHEP complimented SKUAST-Kashmir for achieving all the targets and meeting all the timelines of the project implementation. The innovative approach adopted by SKUAST-K during the implementation of the project to circumvent the limitations imposed by continuous lockdowns was also highlighted.

7-Year-Old Girl Abducted, Raped In Doda

Observer News Service

BHADERWAH: A seven-year-old girl was allegedly abducted and raped by a man in a remote village in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, police said on Monday.

Sohan Singh (35) has been arrested and booked under section 363 (abduction) and 376 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code and provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, Superintendent of Police, Bhaderwah, Abdul Qayoom said.

He said the incident took place at Kundi-Chiralla village of Thathri on Saturday night dur-



ing a marriage function there.

Singh, a resident of Chhaksoo village, allegedly took the girl into a nearby forest and assaulted her sexually before fleeing the scene, the officer said, adding he was arrested soon after a complaint was received at the local police station.



SHUGUL ORGANIZATION MONDAY held an event to mark Yoga Day at Zero Bridge In Srinagar at IDPS Zakura Srinagar in collaboration with Knovatic Help Foundation and FORTUNE Info-Media.

Govt Sanctions Rs 200 Cr For Wullar Lake Conservation

Observer News Service

BANDIPORA: Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Dr Owais Ahmad on Monday said the Jammu and Kashmir administration has sanctioned Wullar Action Plan for Rs 200.00 crores for conservation and management of Wullar Lake.

He discussed the Action taken Report of directions issued by the Principal Secretary regarding the development of the tourism sector in Bandipora district and also discussed the status of DPRs for the construction of Boulevard Road around Wullar Lake.

DC also reviewed the status of works being executed in the Wullar with physical and financial achievements, operationalisation of Huts in the Wullar Vintage Park, Construction of TRC at Bandipora and providing of Solar Lights to the left-out households of Banayari village by WUMCA.

While reviewing the progress of dredging works in Wullar, the Deputy Commissioner directed to send a joint team of officers of R&B, Revenue, WUCMA, Forest, Geology and Mining and other allied departments to Wullar to pre-



pare a Detailed Project Report for the construction of Boulevard Road 3 Kilometers in the initial instance from Banyari to Garoora. He asked the joint team to submit their report within shortest possible time so that further necessary action is taken to complete the project at earliest.

Dr Owais also directed the officers of the tourism department to come up with a proposal immediately to revive the water sports in Wullar. He said the introduction of water sports in Wullar will help the local youth to earn their livelihood and will open the doors for further job

opportunities to the local unemployed youngsters.

He said the Wullar lake is the valuable asset of not only the district but for the whole UT. He said if the tourism potential is exploited fully, it will entirely change the socio-economic condition of the local population of the district. He said there is a huge potential for Water Sports besides having a huge fish stocks in the lake. He said the administration also intends to develop a Golf Club on one of the islands inside the Wullar. He said the restoration of the lost glory of the lake is in full swing.

DC ALSO REVIEWED THE STATUS OF WORKS BEING executed in the Wullar with physical and financial achievements, operationalisation of Huts in the Wullar Vintage Park, Construction of TRC at Bandipora and providing of Solar Lights to the left-out households of Banayari village by WUMCA.

Eco-sensitive Zone Of Hirpora Wildlife Sanctuary Notified

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has notified 120.56 square kilometres around Hirpora Wildlife sanctuary as eco-sensitive zone.

The Ministry has declared the ESZ around the wildlife sanctuary after seeking suggestions from the public over it. "The eco-sensitive zone shall be to an extent of 0 (zero) to 1.0 kilometre around the boundary of Hirpora Wildlife Sanctuary and the area of the eco-sensitive zone is 120.56 square kilometres," the Ministry said in a notification.

The draft proposal for declaring the ESZ around the sanctuary was put in public



domain by the Ministry on June 9, 2020.

Spread over an area of around 341.25 square kilometres, the sanctuary got its name from village Hirpora, a small hamlet that lies on the North-Eastern outskirts of the protected area and forms its gateway.

"It came into existence on March 19, 1987. While framing the organisational set up of the department of Wildlife Protec-

tion, the Government of J&K again notified the establishment of Hirpora wildlife sanctuary on May 13, 1991."

Later, the government through a notification in 2007 extended the area of the sanctuary to 341.25 square kilometres.

The sanctuary has vast vegetative covers which provides an ideal habitat for mammal and other faunal species.

It also provides habitat for the some rare, endangered and threatened species like markhor (near threatened), Kashmir musk deer (endangered), common leopard (vulnerable), Himalayan griffon vulture (near threatened), bearded vulture (near threatened), Kashmir flycatcher (vulnerable).

DC Kulgam Urges People To Adhere To Covid SOPs

Observer News Service

KULGAM: The Deputy Commissioner Kulgam, Dr. Bilal Mohi-Ud-Din Bhat Monday inspected several locations in Kulgam Town and took stock of implementation of various COVID-19 related advisories and guidelines which also includes use of face masks, social distancing, rotational opening of business establishments etc.

The Deputy Commissioner visited Naikpora market, main market Kulgam, Qazigund adda market, hospital market etc.

During the visit it was observed that most of women are not wearing masks in market



places and were appealed to adhere to SOPs and use face masks.

The DC also impressed upon service providers to follow all the guidelines and precautions in view of the pandemic.

APSCC Demands Inclusion Of Minorities For Redrawing Constituencies In J&K

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee (APSCC) on Monday demanded inclusion of minorities like Sikhs, Gujjars and Pahari in the ongoing consultations of the Delimitation Commission as part of its exercise in Jammu and Kashmir.

The APSCC in a statement said the exclusion of minorities is unacceptable and it would be fought tooth and nail by the members of concerned communities.

APSCC chairman Jagmohan Singh Raina said that members of different minorities need to be taken on board by the Delimitation Commission before any decision about the redrawing of assembly constituencies is taken.

Raina said that any exercise without the participation of minority community members would be useless and meaningless.

"It is imperative that members of minority communities like Sikhs, Gujjars and Pahari are consulted by the Delimitation Commission since their population is large in many assembly segments. The suggestions put forward by the political parties and minority community members should be put in public domain before any final decision is taken by the Home Ministry," he said.

Raina said that in case members of minority communities are left out in the exercise then they would be constrained to come on roads and lodge protest.

He said that minorities have suffered in Jammu and Kashmir and time has come to apply balm on their wounds.

The APSCC has demanded reservation of three seats in Kashmir and four seats in Jammu division for the Sikh community.

GMC Hospital Jammu Resumes OPD Services

Observer News Service

JAMMU: With Covid cases declining in Jammu and Kashmir, the Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital here reopened its Out Patient Department (OPD) services after over two months, but only with a prior appointment, officials said Monday.

The OPD services in various Covid-dedicated hospitals including the GMC were suspended in April following a surge in cases, with some of them reopening over the past two weeks.

Sharing the telephone numbers for booking an appointment in different departments including eye, orthopaedics, medicine and surgery, an official spokesperson said the total number of appointments per speciality per day

would not exceed 25 which is also subject to revision based on the future trend of the pandemic.

He said the dedicated phone number would be operational from 10 am to 4 pm on all working days for fixing the appointments.

The spokesman said Covid-appropriate behaviour would be observed by everyone in all departments of the hospital including the registration and OPD area, and sought people's cooperation.

"Each patient will be accompanied by not more than one attendant who must be wearing proper face masks. The patients are advised to attend the OPD by prior appointment only, failing which they may be liable not to be examined by the doctors in OPD, he said.

Principal GMC Anantnag Transferred

Observer News Service

Government on Monday transferred Dr. Showkat Ahmad Jeelani, Principal, Government Medical College, Anantnag and "temporarily" assigned the charge of the post to Dr. Tariq Syed Qureshi, Professor and Head, Department of Ophthalmology, Government Medical College, Srinagar "till a regular arrangement is made."

According to an order by Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Medical Education Department, Atal Dulloo (IAS), Dr. Showkat Ahmad Jeelani, Principal, Government Medical College, Anantnag has been

posted as Secretary Technical in the Health and Medical Education Department with immediate effect. "During his posting as Secretary Technical in the Health and Medical Education Department, his salary shall be drawn against the post of Principal, Government Medical College, Anantnag," reads the order.

Dr. Tariq Syed Qureshi shall continue to draw his salary against the post of Professor, Department of Ophthalmology, Government Medical College, Srinagar during the period he holds the charge of the post of Principal, Government Medical College, Anantnag, the order added.

Govt Suspends SSP Ramesh Kumar

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir government on Monday suspended Senior Superintendent of Police, pending enquiry, officials said.

"Pending enquiry into his conduct, Ramesh Kumar Bhat (JKPS: 1999), Senior Superintendent of Police, presently attached in the Home Department, is hereby placed under suspension, with immediate effect, in terms of Rule 31 of the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1956," reads a government order issued by Principal Secretary Home, Shaleen Kabra.

During the period of his suspension, Ramesh Kumar Bhat has been ordered to remain attached in the Home Department, the order added.

Two Chemists Booked For Violating Norms

Observer News Service

BARAMULLA: Legal Metrology department Baramulla has registered cases against two medical shops in the district for violating the labelling norms in the sale of pulse Oximeters

An official said that a medical shop was selling Oximeters with dual MRP, while medical shop was selling Oximeters without statutory declarations.

He said that legal metrology team seized the deceptive products and initiated further legal proceedings.

Yoga Day Celebrations Held Across Kashmir

SRINAGAR: 7th International Yoga Day celebrations were held across J&K.

Owing to Covid-19 SOPs, the number of participants was restricted and all the necessary steps were taken to adhere to the Government guidelines.

Junaid Azim Matoo, Mayor, SMC was the chief guest at one of the events held at TRC Football/Cricket ground Srinagar.

Nuzhat Gull, Secretary J&K Sports Council expressed her gratitude to the entire administration, Dignitaries, Officers, officials and media fraternity for turning to the venues early morning and making this event a grand success.

Meanwhile, the health department, Srinagar also organized similar event here with the theme "BE WITH YOGA, BE AT HOME."

The session was organized as per the guidelines of Ministry of AYUSH Govt of India and the

Covid 19 SOPs. The event was conducted by Dr Asif Kundanagar, Dr Rehana (Yoga therapist) and Dr Ruhail John.

ANANTNAG

The department of Youth Services and Sports in collaboration with Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) Anantnag organised the main event at sports stadium Anantnag where students, volunteers and officials participated amid strict observance of Covid SOPs.

PULWAMA

District Administration Pulwama in collaboration with Department of Youth Services and Sports and AYUSH and NYK Monday organised a function in connection with celebration of 7th International Day of Yoga with the theme "Be with Yoga, Be at Home"

KUPWARA

Yoga Day was celebrated across district Kupwara with zeal and enthusiasm. Apart

from participation of school children in 24 blocks of the district, people from different walks of life including women, adults and youth, participated in various yoga events held in the district. The theme of this year's International Yoga Day is 'Be with Yoga, be at Home'.

SHOPIAN

Youth Services & Sports Department Shopian in collaboration with Indian Systems of Medicine, AYUSH Monday organized 7th International Yoga Day at Bohrihallan Shopian. On the occasion, different expert Yoga teachers initially briefed about the essence of Yogic exercises on the health of individuals.

KULGAM

International Day of Yoga 2021 with a theme, "Be with Yoga Be at Home" celebrated at Kulgam today.

The Yoga sessions were orga-

nized by District Administration Kulgam in collaboration with AYUSH and Youth Services and Sports Department.

The Deputy Commissioner Kulgam Dr. Bilal Mohi-Ud-Din-Bhat also participated in Yoga session and performed various yog Asanas.

BANDIPORA

Deputy Commissioner Bandipora Dr Owais Ahmad led the celebrations of the International Yoga Day by practicing yoga at SK Stadium Bandipora on Monday morning.

BARAMULLA

To mark the celebration of International Yoga Day 2021 being observed every year on 21st of June, a special yoga event was today organized here at Government Boys Higher Secondary School Baramulla in which students from several educational institutions, among

other concerned stakeholders, participated with overwhelming zeal and enthusiasm. This year's theme is 'Be with Yoga, Be at Home'.

GANDERBAL

Department of Youth Services & Sports and Department of ISM&H (AYUSH) Ganderbal Monday jointly organised District level 7th International Day of Yoga in the lawns of Mini Secretariat Ganderbal in which officials of district administration participants.

BUDGAM

District Youth Services & Sports Office Budgam organised an event on the occasion of 7th International Yoga Day at Sports Stadium Budgam, which witnessed participation of huge number of Students. On the occasion, different expert Yoga teachers initially briefed about the essence of Yogic exercises for the health of individuals.

KASHMIR OBSERVER

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K O V I E W

Fingers crossed

After days of speculations, the centre has invited fourteen leaders from fourteen political leaders from Jammu and Kashmir to a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on June 24. Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla called up J&K leaders for the meeting. Among those who have been invited include former chief ministers of the erstwhile state – National Conference's Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti and Congress' Ghulam Nabi Azad. Union Home Minister Amit Shah is also expected to be present during the meeting.

This would be the first such meeting since the revocation of J&K's special status and its bifurcation into two Union Territories was announced in August 2019. The meeting thus assumes an extraordinary significance. Some reports are saying that its agenda is the restoration of J&K's statehood. Similarly, the meeting is expected to discuss the ongoing delimitation exercise set to redraw the constituencies in the former state. The completion of the exercise is expected to lead to holding of elections to the Assembly. It is not yet clear whether elections would follow statehood or vice versa.

However, in a surprise decision on Sunday, the PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti decided she won't attend the meeting. Earlier, in an apparent confidence building measure, government had released the senior PDP leader Sartaj Madni from his monthslong detention.

A hectic political activity is underway in the run up to the meeting. The parties are holding internal meetings to decide the course of action. Congress has sought restoration of full statehood and conduct of elections as a way forward to restore democracy. Addressing a press conference in New Delhi, Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala said that undoing of J&K statehood was a direct attack on the democracy and the constitutional principles.

Interestingly Pakistan has also taken note of the meeting. The country's foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has called on India to refrain from taking any "further illegal steps" in Kashmir after its actions of August 5, 2019.

So much is riding on the meeting. There is, for once, a hope that the meeting will come up with a roadmap for the elections and the statehood for J&K. It remains to be seen how Kashmiri parties would approach the meeting. Their main demand is the reversal of the withdrawal of Article 370 that granted J&K autonomous status under India's constitution. As things stand, the centre is unlikely to accede to this demand. Even the full statehood remains doubtful. However, untill the meeting actually takes place two days later, there's not much we can do beyond speculating what is going to happen.

OTHER OPINION

Take the Lead

India's reoriented vaccination strategy, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 7, kicks in from today, with the Centre procuring 75 per cent of the shots and distributing them to the states for free. This is expected to remove the supply deficit that has hobbled anti-Covid inoculation in the past two months. But the project will also require a push on another front. Just as many people have anxiously waited their turn for the shots, several others have, reportedly, been reluctant to go to the vaccinators. Misinformation and misplaced beliefs have led to suspicions about the potential ill-effects of the shots, especially in large pockets of rural India. Allaying fears, removing scepticism and combating vaccine hesitancy will require sustained engagement at the community-level, and even door-to-door counselling. Creating a circle of trust will require a broad-spectrum effort with critical roles for elected political leaders, among others.

Its basic premise is not very complicated: Follow the science. Regulatory bodies and government agencies must, of course, conduct themselves transparently, answer queries and remove doubts with alacrity. But the work of vaccinators becomes difficult when vaccine safety issues get embroiled in adversarial politics. Unfortunately, this cardinal principle has been violated — examples include SP leader Akhilesh Yadav's denigration of Covaxin as the "BJP vaccine", and, most recently, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera wading into the fuss over the use of calf serum in the Bharat Biotech manufactured shots. State governments and some Opposition leaders did raise valid questions about vaccine shortage and, along with the Supreme Court, pushed the government to change its strategy. But the political leadership, as a whole, has not taken ownership of the vaccine hesitancy crisis. They must lose no time now in reaching out to their constituencies and party workers at the grass roots level with the message: No one is safe till everyone is safe and the vaccine is the best known shield against the virus.

The Indian Express

Conceit and Counterfeit Degrading Academic Ecosystem in Universities of Kashmir



Flooded Amar Singh College, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir. Emblematic of the state academic culture of higher educational institutes in Kashmir

Muhammad Tahir

Higher education in Kashmir is in dire straits, and the academic leadership is doing nothing to fix the system. Acute problems exist across the domains: there is a lack of 'strategic plan' at the administrative level, research output is substandard, pedagogical approach is outmoded, teacher evaluation process and student feedback and surveys hardly exist, and a highly bureaucratized culture prevails, perpetuating a rule by mediocrities. Lack of accountability and exaggerated reputation has further compounded the problem.

Take the case of the University of Kashmir (KU), one of the oldest educational institutions of higher learning in Kashmir. KU's vision statement reads: "To be a world class University committed to create and disseminate knowledge for human development and welfare." It is a nice ideal, but a cursory glance at the research output of the senior faculty shows that this vision statement is just rhetoric, a sheer formality. What is being flaunted as research is mostly a showpiece of shoddy scholarship. Nearly two-third of articles written by the university faculty have appeared in predatory and fake/cloned journals. Predatory journals and publishers are defined as "entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices."

Both, the faculty and the university is at fault, though the larger share of blame lies with the university which has failed to integrate its professed values into the university's eco-system to encourage work ethics, induce professionalism and rigor required to produce knowledge. There is no real incentive for the permanent faculty to publish (They can get promotions through other, mostly administrative, activities). Otherwise what can explain the case that some senior professors in the School of Social Sciences haven't published any research article since last eight years? So, it is easy to say that your university is "committed to create knowledge" than actually operationalizing that vision in everyday processes of the university.

Whatever little research the senior faculty of KU has published is substandard. Because they have chosen to publish in predatory and fake/cloned journals. Except for a couple of young Assistant Professors, who have recently published their research through reputed international academic publishers like Rout-

ledge and Oxford University Press, there is hardly anything to show by the senior faculty in terms of solid piece of scholarship that could be cited by international scholars/researchers interested in the Kashmir studies. Either for convenience or lack of confidence, senior faculty often opt for self-publishing, if they have a manuscript. Many faculty members go for local Srinagar-based publishers who are infamous for their poor editorial processes and do not follow standard academic publishing practices, such as peer-review, which is an essential component of knowledge production in academia.

It should be a cause of great embarrassment that a senior professor of the Department of History has listed two fake journals in his "Published Research Papers" column. One of the journals is even highlighted as having an impact factor of 4.6. A simple search on Scimago or JCR website would have made it clear that the journal is not even indexed on credible databases. An investigative blogpost about this journal is open access on the internet and for everyone to read. But university officials seem not to fact-check before posting information on their official website. Or, they simply do not have a mechanism to address this issue.

Information shared by the Department of Economics is equally scandalous. In the Publications column on their website, they have listed 38 Published Papers. All of these by just three senior faculty members. But what is interesting is that four out of these 38 papers have appeared in a little-known journal called European Academic Research and that too in the same year: 2013. This journal is neither listed on Scimago nor on Web of Science or any other credible academic database. The journal charges a processing fee of \$US30 (approx. 2000 Rupees) and this money must be transferred to the account name: Kogaion Publishing Centre SRL which is based in Bucharest Romania. Dig a little deeper and you will find that Kogaion Publishing Centre SRL features in the List of Predatory Journals. Is this a case of casual approach in profession, a professor not exercising due diligence? May be or maybe not.

But, what would you say about the case that one faculty member has published a staggering nine articles in a single year. And some of these articles have appeared in journals that are published by the same organization called International Journals of Multidisciplinary Research Academy (IJMRA). On its website, IJMRA has listed at least six different journals, which charge publication fee of 1800 rupees for a single author and 2500 rupees for three authors. Of course, if your faculty chose such paid-for

journals you can have as many articles as your pockets allow.

No wonder then that the most cited articles and books on the Kashmir conflict are from non-local authors. According to Google Scholar, Sumantra Bose's Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace (2003) has been cited by 606, while Victoria Schofield's Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War (1996) has been cited by 585. Similarly, Sumit Ganguly's The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace (1997) has been cited by 446 and his article Explaining the Kashmir Insurgency: Political Mobilization and Institutional Decay (1996) has been cited by 218. Why is that none of the professors from KU or any other university within J&K is as widely cited despite their local knowledge and expertise on the Kashmir issue? Reasons have been already highlighted above. There could be other reasons also, about which they can tell. But it is time for the senior faculty at KU – because they hold important positions and wield power at an institutional level – to introspect and work towards improving research done at their institution. Wallowing in false glory and exaggerated reputation isn't going to serve society. Public money that goes into fat salaries of professors must go for the public good, not for self-promotion and creation of false impressions.

UGC Care List will, no doubt, address the issue of shoddy scholarship to some extent, but even then human resource at the universities in J&K must be properly trained to understand the different categories. I know a case of a young scholar whose article published in Q1 international journal was not considered because the examining persons did not find the journal in the UGC Care List. They didn't care to check the relevant website for instructions.

If the KU wants to salvage its reputation, and is serious about its vision statement, it must fix the problems enumerated above. It must not encourage shoddy scholarship and unethical practices, and the first step it can take towards necessary reformation of the system is to immediately remove the names of the predatory and fake journals from its website. Their presence on the website, which is accessible worldwide, reflects badly on the institution.

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

Muhammad Tahir is an independent researcher



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Need for Urgent and Rapid Implementation of WHO and FSSAI Guidelines

In recent times there has been upsurge of diseases like diabetes and heart ailments people especially among the younger lot. The increased consumption of packaged food and sedentary lifestyle are said to be the primary reasons for it. Studies by WHO and the Lancet medical journal reveal that 15,735,95 deaths in India are caused by an inadequate diet. This study conducted by WHO claims that youngsters are resorting to cheap and unhealthy food options that mainly comprise snacks. The mindless consumption of these calorie dense and nutrient deficient

foods has become pervasive because of its easy availability and cheap pricing. The factors responsible for its immense popularity and low pricing is a debate for another day, to be precise it's a consequence of Neocolonisation. The repercussions of its substitution for pure traditional home cooked meals are chilling. A human standard business report suggest that in 2017, "an estimated 11 million deaths were attributed to poor diet. Diets high in sodium, low in whole grain and low in fruit together accounted for more than half of all the diet related deaths globally

in 2017". A recent report by print suggests that Nestle which is originally a Swiss company has admitted that over 60% of its food and beverage products are unhealthy. Not only does the consumption of this "Ultra processed" food lead to obesity and health ailments but it also inhibits the absorption of vital nutrients from other foods. Dr Subhasree Ray who is a certified diabetes educator writes in her article, "In India's booming junk food market, there is little room for nutrition" about the link between decreased Vitamin D level and frequent consumption of instant

noodles. There theT. These trends are alarming and will lead to a disaster if there is no timely intervention, there is a dire need for the government to step in and ensure the guidelines issued by WHO and FSSAI (Food safety and standard authority of India) are strictly implemented. The need to have a robust and strong immune system has become even more important during the pandemic as good immunity is what is enabling people to fight off the deadly coronavirus.

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Adjusting the Posture

Reducing the Impact of Virtual Classrooms on Children's Physical Fitness

Vijay GarG

Another key to mitigating any long-term consequences of the virtual classroom is the scheduling of activity breaks. In school, children are active in between classes, or in their lunch breaks, or even simply walking up the stairs to their classrooms at the start of the day. Parents need to make sure their children remain just as active in between lessons

From getting worried about the excessive exposure to digital screens to a world of on-line classrooms, parents today must think about posture, excessive screen-time, and the inclusion of physical activities to ensure the health and wellness of the next generation.

Children should be seated with their neck and back straight, elbows relaxed, with adequate support. Students are perfectly at home with virtual learning now. Where last year was spent getting to grips with learning in an online classroom, this year students, their classmates, their teachers, and even their parents are far more at ease learning and interacting off a computer screen.

The first year was all about adapting to a new way of life and learning for parents, teachers, and students across the country amid uncertainties about the effectiveness of virtual learning. This year, with those concerns laid to rest and with on-line learning increasingly looking like it is here to stay amid the still-raging pandemic, the focus is shifting to the ergonomics of the 'study from home' classroom mode.

As classrooms moved to the virtual world last year, it soon became apparent that students were logging in sitting on the floor, on the sofa, or even on their beds. Apart from maybe a study table, used primarily in pre-pandemic days for a short duration, post-school studies, or homework, households naturally didn't have "classroom" infrastructure.

But students are now spending as many as six hours attending classes at home on a laptop – and sometimes on handheld mobile devices with much smaller screens. As a result, 41% of children complained of eye strain issues.

Health experts warn the resultant poor posture, lack of physical activity and prolonged screen time could lead to severe long-term consequences putting children at risk of developing spinal problems and musculoskeletal disorders.

Poor posture is bad for everyone. But it can take an exacting toll on children as their bones aren't yet properly fused. This puts them at increased risk of incorrect spinal alignment, causing the spine to form an 'S' or 'C' shape in a condition known as Scoliosis, which in turn can lead to slouching or Kyphosis.

As a result, parents must ensure their children are seated correctly, have plenty of breaks, and are engaged in physical activity that keeps them moving from time to time and while homes will never fully mimic classrooms or the school environment, there are plenty of simple ways parents can do this.

To begin with, parents need to explain the 90-90-90 rule to children. The back and the thighs



should form a 90-degree angle while sitting; knees should also be at a 90-degree angle, and the feet and the ankle should be at a 90-degree angle as well. Parents should invest in an ergonomic desk, an adjustable chair of the right size, laptop stands that can be adjusted to make sure they are at the right height, a separate keyboard, and a mouse. At the same time, the study area should be properly illuminated to reduce the strain on the children's eyes.

Children should be seated with their neck and back straight, elbows relaxed, with adequate support. Feet should also firmly rest on the ground or on a footrest to avoid awkward knee and foot postures.

If a child has to sit on a sofa or the floor or the bed, parents should again ensure they adopt the right posture and use a portable table that will ensure their laptop screens are at eye level so they don't have to look down.

Parents should create a task-appropriate environment that is equally sensory soothing for children. Ensure the room is properly ventilated, lighting is adequate, and non-distracting during learning time. If possible, leave the windows & doors open, and add some indoor plants to their study area for some freshness.

Another key to mitigating any long-term consequences of the virtual classroom is the scheduling of activity breaks. In school, children are active in between classes, or in their lunch breaks,

or even simply walking up the stairs to their classrooms at the start of the day. Parents need to make sure their children remain just as active in between lessons. Parents need to carefully include micro-breaks in the children's routine which do not affect their concentration & school routine and equally ensure adequate physical movement. It can be taking a short walk or motor activities like coloring or physical writing with a pen or pencil so the child doesn't miss out on developing those muscles or those skills in a digital world.

Equally, after sessions, parents can engage their children in fun physical activities to build or maintain their aerobic fitness. Before the pandemic, children would go out, cycle, play cricket or football, or play playground games with their friends. That's not possible amid the pandemic, so parents need to be equally creative to get children involved in fun physical activities like animal movements, treasure hunt games where children involve core exercise postures while playing.

Being indoors and forced to live our lives virtually is not ideal for anyone, not least our children. But there are steps we can take to mitigate the consequences of being locked down. They may not replicate the physical and ergonomic features of a full-fledged school environment. But they will go a long way towards ensuring the health and wellbeing of our children.

The author is a Retired Principal

Is your Phone Eavesdropping?

Dana Rezazadegan

Have you ever chatted with a friend about buying a certain item and been targeted with an ad for that same item the next day? If so, you may have wondered whether your smartphone was "listening" to you.

But is it really? Well, it's no coincidence the item you'd been interested in was the same one you were targeted with.

But that doesn't mean your device is actually listening to your conversations — it doesn't need to. There's a good chance you're already giving it all the information it needs.

Can phones hear?

Most of us regularly disclose our information to a wide range of websites and apps. We do this when we grant them certain permissions, or allow "cookies" to track our online activities.

So-called "first-party cookies" allow websites to "remember" certain details about our interaction with the site. For instance, login cookies let you save your login details so you don't have to re-enter them each time.

Third-party cookies, however, are created by domains that are external to the site you're visiting. The third party will often be a marketing company in a partnership with the first-party website or app.

The latter will host the marketer's ads and grant it access to data it collects from you (which you will have given it permission to do — perhaps by clicking on some innocuous looking popup).

As such, the advertiser can build a picture of your life: your routines, wants and needs. These companies constantly seek to gauge the popularity of their products and how this varies based on factors such as a customer's age, gender, height, weight, job and hobbies.

By classifying and clustering this information, advertisers improve their recommendation algorithms, using something called recommender systems to target the right customers with the right ads.

Computers work behind the scenes

There are several machine-learning techniques in artificial intelligence (AI) that help systems filter and analyse your data, such as data clustering, classification, association and reinforcement learning (RL).

An RL agent can train itself based on feedback gained from user interactions, akin to how a young child will learn to repeat an action if it leads to a reward.

By viewing or pressing "like" on a social media post, you send a reward signal to an RL agent confirming you're attracted to the post — or perhaps interested in the person who posted it. Either way, a message is sent to the RL agent about your personal interests and preferences.

If you start actively liking posts about "mindfulness" on a social platform, its system will learn to send you advertisements for companies that can offer related products and content.

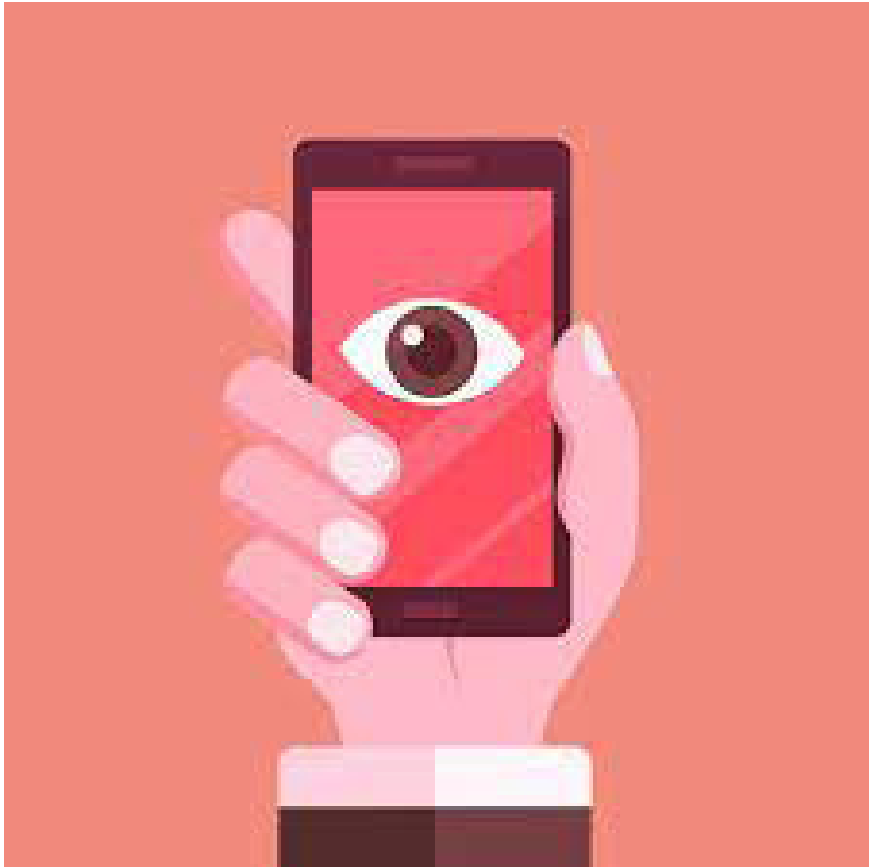
Ad recommendations may be based on other data, too, including but not limited to:

- other ads you clicked on through the platform
- personal details you provided the platform (such as your age, email address, gender, location and which devices you access the platform on)
- information shared with the platform by other advertisers or marketing partners that already have you as a customer
- specific pages or groups you have joined or "liked" on the platform.

In fact, AI algorithms can help marketers take huge pools of data and use them to construct your entire social network, ranking people around you based on how much you "care about" (interact with) them.

They can then start to target you with ads based on not only your own data, but on data collected from your friends and family members using the same platforms as you.

For example, Facebook might be able to recommend you something your friend recently bought. It didn't need to "listen" to a conversation between you and your friend to do this.



Well, it's no coincidence the item you'd been interested in was the same one you were targeted with. But that doesn't mean your device is actually listening to your conversations — it doesn't need to. There's a good chance you're already giving it all the information it needs

Exercising your right to privacy is a choice

While app providers are supposed to provide clear terms and conditions to users about how they collect, store and use data, nowadays it's on users to be careful about which permissions they give to the apps and sites they use.

When in doubt, give permissions on an as-needed basis. It makes sense to give WhatsApp access to your camera and microphone, as it can't provide some of its services without this. But not all apps and services will ask for only what is necessary.

Perhaps you don't mind receiving targeted ads based on your data, and may find it appealing. Research has shown people with a more "utilitarian" (or practical) worldview actually pre-

fer recommendations from AI to those from humans.

That said, it's possible AI recommendations can constrain people's choices and minimise serendipity in the long term. By presenting consumers with algorithmically curated choices of what to watch, read and stream, companies may be implicitly keeping our tastes and lifestyle within a narrower frame.

Don't want to be predicted? Don't be predictable

There are some simple tips you can follow to limit the amount of data you share online. First, you should review your phone's app permissions regularly.

Also, think twice before an app or website asks you for certain permissions, or to allow cookies. Wherever possible, avoid using your social media accounts to connect or log in to other sites and services. In most cases there will be an option to sign up via email, which could even be a burner email.

Once you do start the sign-in process, remember you only have to share as much information as is needed. And if you're sensitive about privacy, perhaps consider installing a virtual private network (VPN) on your device. This will mask your IP address and encrypt your online activities.

Try it yourself

If you still think your phone is listening to you, there's a simple experiment you can try.

Go to your phone's settings and restrict access to your microphone for all your apps. Pick a product you know you haven't searched for in any of your devices and talk about it out loud at some length with another person.

Make sure you repeat this process a few times. If you still don't get any targeted ads within the next few days, this suggests your phone isn't really "listening" to you.

It has other ways of finding out what's on your mind.

By arrangements with the Conversation

Study: Adults who skip morning meal likely to miss out on nutrients

Agencies

Adults who skip breakfast are likely to miss out on key nutrients that are most abundant in the foods that make up morning meals, a study by Ohio State University suggests.

The study was published online in the journal- Proceedings of the Nutrition Society.

An analysis of data on more than 30,000 American adults showed that skipping breakfast- and missing out on the calcium in milk, vitamin C in fruit, and the fibre, vitamins and minerals found in fortified cereals- likely left adults low on those nutrients for the entire day.

"What we're seeing is that if you don't eat the foods that are commonly consumed at breakfast, you have a tendency not to eat them the rest of the day. So those common breakfast nutrients become a nutritional gap," said Christopher Taylor, professor of medical dietetics in the College of Medicine at The Ohio State University and senior author of the study.

According to the US Department of Agriculture's latest dietary guidelines, calcium, potassium, fibre and vitamin D are considered "dietary components of public health concern" for the general US population- with iron added for pregnant women -- because shortages of those nutrients are associated with health problems.

Most research related to breakfast has focused on the effects of the missed morning meal on children in school, which includes difficulty focusing and behavioural problems.

"With adults, it's more like, 'You know how important breakfast is.' But now we see what the implications really are if they miss breakfast," Taylor said.

He completed the study with Ohio State School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences graduate students, Stephanie Fanelli and



Christopher Walls. The research, which was supported by a regional dairy association.

The team used data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which collects health information on a nationally representative sample of about 5,000 people every year through interviews, laboratory tests and physical exams.

The sample for this study included 30,889 adults age 19 and older who had participated in the survey between 2005 and 2016. The Ohio State researchers analyzed data from

24-hour dietary recalls participants completed as part of the NHANES survey.

"During the recall, participants self-designate their eating occasions as a meal or a snack, and they tell you at what point in time they ate whatever food they report," said Fanelli, first author of the study. "That's how we determined whether someone was a breakfast eater or a breakfast skipper."

In this sample, 15.2 per cent of participants, or 4,924 adults, had reported skip-

ping breakfast.

The researchers translated the food data into nutrient estimates and MyPlate equivalents using the federal Food and Nutrient Database for Dietary Studies and daily dietary guidelines, and then compared those estimates to recommended nutrient intakes established by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academies.

On several key recommendations measured, from fibre and magnesium to copper and zinc, breakfast skippers had

taken in fewer vitamins and minerals than people who had eaten breakfast. The differences were most pronounced for folate, calcium, iron, and vitamins A, B1, B2, B3, C and D.

"We found those who skipped breakfast were significantly more likely not to meet the bottom threshold of what we hope to see people eat," Fanelli said.

Compared to the Healthy Eating Index-2015, which assesses how well a set of foods aligns with federal recommendations, breakfast skippers also had an overall lower-quality diet than those who ate breakfast.

For example, breakfast skippers were more likely than those who noshed in the morning to eat more added sugars, carbohydrates and total fat over the course of the day -- in part because of higher levels of snacking.

"Snacking is basically contributing a meal's worth of calorie intakes for people who skipped breakfast," Taylor said. "People who ate breakfast ate more total calories than people who didn't eat breakfast, but the lunch, dinner and snacks were much larger for people who skipped breakfast, and tended to be of a lower diet quality."

While the data represent a single day in each participant's life, the huge sample provides a "nationally representative snapshot for the day," Taylor said.

"It shows that those who skipped breakfast had one nutrient profile and those who ate breakfast had a different nutrient profile," he said.

He added, "It helps us identify on any given day that this percentage of people are more likely to be skipping breakfast. And on that day, their dietary intake pattern showed that their consumption didn't capture those extra nutrients that they have basically missed at breakfast."

Mask-wearing might increase social anxiety struggles: Study

Agencies

The findings of a recent study suggest that people who have social anxiety might experience increased distress due to mask-wearing during and even after the coronavirus pandemic.

The paper authored by researchers from the University of Waterloo's Department of Psychology and Centre for Mental Health Research and Treatment also has implications for those who haven't necessarily suffered from social anxiety in the past. The study was published in the jour-

nal Anxiety, Stress and Coping.

"The adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health outcomes, including anxiety and depression, have been well-documented," said David Moscovitch, professor of clinical psychology and co-author of the paper. "However, little is known about effects of increased mask-wearing on social interactions, social anxiety, or overall mental health."

Moscovitch added, "It is also possible that many people who didn't struggle with social anxiety before the pandemic may find themselves feeling more anxious than usual as we emerge out of the pandemic and into a more uncertain future -- especially within social situations where our social skills are rusty and the new rules for social engagement are yet to be written."



Social anxiety is characterized by negative self-perception and fear that one's appearance or behaviour will fail to conform with social expectations and norms. Social anxiety disorder is an extreme manifestation that affects up to 13 per cent of the population.

The researchers reviewed existing literature addressing three factors that they hypothesized might contribute to social anxiety associated with

mask-wearing: hypersensitivity to social norms, bias in the detection of social and emotional facial cues, and propensity for self-concealment as a form of safety behaviour.

"We found that mask-wearing by people with social anxiety is likely to be influenced by their perception of social norms and expectations, which may or may not be consistent with public-health guidelines and can vary widely by region and context," said Sidney Saint, an undergraduate psychology student at Waterloo and lead author of the paper.

The paper also highlights that

people with social anxiety have difficulty detecting ambiguous social cues and are likely to interpret them negatively. These individuals also tend to worry about sounding incomprehensible or awkward. "We believe that both issues are likely to be magnified during interactions with masks," Saint said.

Another highlighted impact is that masks can function as a type of self-concealment strategy that enables people with social anxiety to hide their self-perceived flaws. Therefore, the desire for self-concealment may motivate their use of masks over and above their desire to protect themselves from contagion. "Due to their self-concealing function, masks may be difficult for some people to discard even when mask-wearing is no longer required by public health mandates," Saint said.

In addition to contributing insights to guide clinicians toward effective assessment and treatment, the paper shows that people with social anxiety may be particularly vulnerable to periods of norm transitions where expectations for mask-wearing are in flux or become a matter of personal choice. (ANI)

'Use rewards effectively to boost employees' creativity'

Agencies

To boost employees' creativity, managers should consider offering a set of rewards for them to choose from, according to a new study by management experts at Rice University, Tulane University, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and National Taiwan Normal University.

The study, co-authored by Jing Zhou, the Mary Gibbs Jones Professor of Management and Psychology at Rice's Jones Graduate School of Business, is the first to systematically examine the effects of reward choice in a field experiment, which was conducted in the context of an organization-wide suggestion program. An advance copy of the paper is published online in the Journal of Applied Psychology.

"Organizations spend a lot of resources and exert a great deal of effort in designing

incentive schemes that reward the employees who exhibit creativity at work," Zhou said. "Our results showed that the effort may be a bit misplaced. Instead of discovering one reward type that is particularly effective at promoting creativity, what is more, effective is to provide the employees with the opportunity to choose from several reward types, if they submit one or more ideas that are among the top 20% most creative ones."

Workers in the study were given a range of options: a financial reward for the individual employee or their team, a self-discretionary reward such as getting priority to select days off, or a donation the company made to a charity selected by the employee. Those choices had positive, significant effects on the number of creative ideas employees generated and the creativity level of those ideas, Zhou and her co-authors found.

The researchers arrived at their find-

ings by conducting a quasi-experiment at a company in Taiwan over the course of several months. Then they conducted a second experimental study that included employees from 12 organizations in Taiwan to replicate the first study's results and compared the results with a control group.

The studies also found that rewards aimed at helping others, such as making a donation to a charity, might be especially powerful. But for less-creative employees, alternative rewards that benefit those in need might actually lower creativity and should be avoided, the authors said.

The researchers also found that the choice of rewards fostered creativity by raising the employees' belief in their ability to be creative. Alternative rewards also had a powerful impact on boosting the creativity of employees who earlier had scored high on an assessment of creative personality characteristics.

Study says high genetic running capacity promotes healthier metabolism as we age

Agencies

A new study investigated the effects of genetic running capacity and aging on tissue metabolism. The study revealed that adipose tissue may have a key role in healthy aging.

The findings of the study were published in the journal 'Geroscience'.

High running capacity is associated with health and longevity. However, whether high genetic running capacity promotes more efficient metabolism with aging is not known.

This study conducted in collaboration between the universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (China) and Jyväskylä (Finland) investigated the effects of genetic running capacity and aging on tissue metabolism. The study revealed that adipose tissue may have a key role in healthy aging.

Running capacity, expressed as aerobic capacity, refers to an individual's capacity to utilize oxygen and is known to decrease with age, thereby affecting the whole body's metabolism and health.

"We currently lack the information whether high genetic aerobic capacity pro-



Running capacity, expressed as aerobic capacity, refers to an individual's capacity to utilize oxygen and is known to decrease with age, thereby affecting the whole body's metabolism and health.

motes healthier metabolism in different tissues as we age," explained Academy of Finland postdoctoral researcher Siru Karvinen from the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

To study the question, animal models of high-capac-

ity runners (HCR) and low-capacity runners (LCR) were utilized. These rodent lines differ in their aerobic capacity genetically. Samples of serum, muscle and adipose tissue were harvested from young and aged animals to explore the tissue metabolites.

"According to our results, high genetic running capacity was associated with more efficient amino acid metabolism in skeletal muscle. Inefficient amino acid metabolism is linked to increased adiposity and risk of metabolic diseases," said Karvinen.

High genetic running capacity and aging interactively affected lipid metabolism in muscle and adipose tissue, possibly contributing to healthier metabolism with aging.

The results suggest that adipose tissue may have a more significant role in promoting healthy aging than previously thought. According to the current literature, around 50 per cent of an individual's aerobic capacity is genetically inherited and the other 50 per cent can be gained via physical activity.

"Regular exercise promotes health whether you have genetically high or low aerobic capacity. Hence, it is highly recommended to promote one's metabolism with exercise especially at older age, when aerobic capacity as well as other health parameters decline," said the principal investigator, Professor Heikki Kainulainen from the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

ICC To Sell Tickets For WTC Final Reserve Day At Reduced Rates



Press Trust of India

SOUTHAMPTON: The ICC will be slashing the ticket rates for the reserve sixth day of the World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand which has been severely affected by inclement weather.

After the entire first day's play was washed out, the second day witnessed 64.4 overs being bowled while 76.3 overs were sent down between the two teams on the third day on Sunday.

The fourth day's play is also affected with the first session already washed out and the sixth

day, which ICC had kept as the reserve, is certainly coming to effect.

"Yes, the prices of the tickets for the sixth day will be reduced. It's a standard practice for Test matches played in United Kingdom. Since the Test match is only open to UK residents, ICC is following the same guidelines," an ICC source told PTI on Monday.

For the WTC final, the tickets are priced at three slabs—GBP 150 (INR 15,444), GBP 100 (INR 10,296) and GBP 75 (INR 7,722).

The new rates will be GBP 100 (INR 10,296), GBP 75 (INR 7,722) and GBP 50 (INR 5,148).

Important One-Off Games Like WTC Final Should Not Be Played In UK: Pietersen

Press Trust of India

SOUTHAMPTON: Former England captain Kevin Pietersen feels that no "one-off" cricket games of "incredible importance" should ever be held in the UK, which is famous for its fickle weather as one is witnessing during the World Test Championship final.

The match between India and New Zealand is staring at a stalemate with barely 140-plus overs of play out of a possible 270 held during the first three days.

"It pains me to say it, but a ONE OFF & incredibly important cricket game should NOT be played in the UK," Pietersen tweeted taking a dig at the ICC for opting Hampshire Bowl in Southampton as the

venue for a marquee final.

For Pietersen, the final of an event like this should always be held in Dubai, where there is minimal chance of weather-related interruptions. "If it was up to me, Dubai would always host a one off match like this WTC game. Neutral venue, fabulous stadium, guaranteed weather, excellent training facilities and a travel hub! Oh, and ICC home is next to the stadium," the flamboyant former England batsman wrote.

Former Indian opener Virender Sehwag was even more sarcastic in his criticism of ICC. "Batsman ko bhi Timing nahi mili dhang ki, aur ICC ko bhi," he tweeted. It meant that "neither the Indian batsmen nor the ICC got their timing right".

France Forward Ousmane Dembele Out Of Euro 2020 With Knee Injury

Agencies

PARIS: Ousmane Dembélé has been ruled out of the European Championship because of a knee injury, the French soccer federation said Monday.

Dembélé sustained the injury during a 30-minute appearance as a substitute before being replaced late in the team's 1-1 draw with Hungary on Saturday. The French team said Dembélé had X-rays at a hospital in Budapest on Sunday.

"The length of recovery time needed is incompatible with keeping him in the squad," the team said.

Teams can replace injured goalkeepers but not outfield players once they have played their first match in the tournament. Dembélé's exit means France coach Didier Deschamps will have only 25 players to choose from for the rest of Euro 2020. France leads Group F and will next face Portugal in Budapest on Wednesday.

Dembélé plays for Barcelona. The French federation said its doctors talked with staff at the Spanish club before making the decision to release him.

The 24-year-old Dembélé was a member of the France squad that won the 2018 World Cup.

Sports Departments Celebrate 7th International Yoga Day Across Valley



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Jammu & Kashmir Sports Council (JKSC) and the Department of Youth Services and Sports (DYSS) on Monday celebrated the 7th International Yoga Day by holding multiple events at different places across Kashmir Valley.

Similar events to mark the day were held in Jammu region as well. In Srinagar, the JKSC organized a Yoga-centric event at TRC Football Ground with Junaid Azim Mattoo, Mayor, SMC as the chief guest.

While the DYSS held an event to commemorate the day at Botanical Garden. The yoga asanas were demonstrated by Yoga Instructor of the department, Mohammad Tahir.

Principal Secretary, DYSS, Alok Kumar, and Joint Director, DYSS

Kashmir, Bashir Ahmad and District Officer, Srinagar, Balbir Singh also participated in the Yoga session.

The Youth Services and Sports department conducted similar events at various sports stadiums and Government schools and departments in Anantnag, Pulwama, Kupwara, Shopian, Kulgam, Bandipora, Baramulla, Ganderbal and Budgam.

The Sports Departments invited different expert Yoga instructors and teachers who briefed about the impact of Yogic exercises on health of individuals. The events were marked by the presence of students, volunteers and government officials, who also participated in the Yoga sessions.

According to an official statement, all the events were held under strict adherence to COVID SOPs

and the public participation was limited keeping the same in mind.

"Preceding to the International Day of Yoga, the Department of Youth Services & Sports started organizing practice sessions a week before to make 7th International Day of Yoga a memorable event," the official statement reads.

The department also asked the participants to be their ambassadors in propagating "Be with Yoga, Be at Home" message.

"Most of the programmes of DYSS were conducted online in about 285 blocks and district headquarters of Jammu and Kashmir, where thousands of citizens, across all age groups, students, officers and officials participated in the celebrations through both virtual and physical mode," the statement said.

IND Vs NZ, ICC WTC Final

Day 4 Washed Out, Southampton Finale Turning Out To Be Damp Squib

Press Trust of India

SOUTHAMPTON: The fickle English weather played spoilsport in a game promising high quality contest as day four of the inaugural World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand was washed out due to rain.

For the second time in the one-off clash, a whole day was lost after no play was possible also on the opening day. With the weather not improving since morning at the Hampshire Bowl, the umpires took the call almost four hours and 30 minutes after the scheduled start time of 10.30 am local time (3 pm IST).

"Day four of the #WTC21 Final has been abandoned due to persistent rain," read an ICC update.

The fans who were patiently waiting for the play to start had to leave disappointed.

"We thank our fans who turned up and kept the tempo high. See you again, tomorrow," the BCCI added.

Rain is not forecast for the remaining two days of the big final but it is likely to remain overcast as it has been the case so far when play did take place. When it wasn't the rain, bad light stopped play on



both day two and day three.

A maximum of 196 overs can be played in the game to force a result. The trophy will be shared if the game is drawn.

The final was nicely poised at stumps on day three with New Zealand reaching 101 for two in response to India's 217 all out. The Black Caps however remain in control of the game despite a late strike from Ishant Sharma close to stumps.

Weather has played havoc with the first ever World Test Championship final and former cricketers

including Kevin Pietersen has questioned the scheduling of the game in the UK.

"It pains me to say it, but a ONE OFF & incredibly important cricket game should NOT be played in the UK," tweeted the former England batsman, who wants these kind of games to be played in the UAE with minimal chance of weather intervention.

Former India opener Virender Sehwag was also among the ones who questioned ICC's decision to host the final in Southampton.

Ball That Got Virat Could Have Got Any Batsman, Says Kyle Jamieson



Press Trust of India

SOUTHAMPTON: Rookie New Zealand pacer Kyle Jamieson, who rattled India with a fifer, on the second day of the World Test Championship final, feels that any batsman could have been dismissed with that inswinger that got rid of rival skipper Virat Kohli. Jamieson got a five wicket haul as New Zealand dismissed India for 217 on the third day of the WTC final and then scored 101 for 2 at close of play.

Asked if setting up Kohli with outswingers and then bringing one back in like they did in New Zealand is a template they have said, Jamieson answered in affirmative.

"Oh, I guess yes. May be there is some sort of pattern and this we know talk about huge amount, the one that I was able to get him (Kohli) today certainly seemed back a little-bit.

"And that was pretty hard to control as a bowler and pretty harder to manage as a batter no matter who you are. So I don't think it is necessarily just for him (Kohli)," Jamieson said at the virtual post-day press conference.

According to the 26-year-old lanky speedster, who returned with fine figures of 5-31, Kohli's dismissal played a key part in how things unfolded on the second day.

"Yeah, obviously he (Kohli) is a massive part of their team and pretty big wicket to get, so to get him pretty early morning, was I guess was nice and pleasing and pretty crucial for how the day followed," added the right-arm pacer.

However he didn't feel that Kohli has any apparent glitches in his technique.

"Oh, not really I think, he is (Kohli) world class batter and those guys don't tend to have too many chinks in their armoury. He is obviously a massive part of their line-up and to get him early certainly set things up nicely for us."

Jamieson at times got the ball to wobble and it was satisfying to keep Kohli under control as the Indian captain in his 132-ball innings had a single boundary to his name.

"It is pleasing in terms of for myself trying to wobble the ball and try and keep him in check a little-bit and to get that was pleasing and it was a great start for our day," the lanky pacer signed off.

Sponsorship Pours In For IOA After Dropping Chinese Kit Partner



Agencies

NEW DELHI: India's cricket board (BCCI) has offered \$1.35 million in financial support to the country's National Olympic Committee, which dropped Chinese sportswear maker Li Ning as its official kit partner citing public sentiment ahead of the Tokyo Games.

Chinese companies have faced a backlash in India since 20 Indian soldiers were killed in a clash with Chinese forces in a Himalayan border dispute last year.

Earlier this month, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) ended its 60 million rupees deal with Li Ning two months before it was due to expire after the Tokyo Games.

The BCCI said it hoped the "monetary gesture" would help Indian athletes bring home a record number of medals from Tokyo.

"The BCCI wishes all the athletes representing India in the

Olympics all the very best and hopes that they return with more medals than ever before."

The IOA also received notice of support last week from MPL Sports Foundation, which came on board as principal sponsor in a deal worth 80 million rupees that covers the Tokyo Olympics as well as the Asian and Commonwealth Games next year. The IOA also welcomed Indian conglomerate JSW Group and dairy product brand Amul as its Tokyo partners last week, each bringing in 10 million rupees.

"We have been negotiating with different firms not just for Tokyo but also for the future events," IOA President Narinder Batra told a news agency by telephone.

"It's an ongoing process, not a reaction to the departure of our earlier kit sponsor.

"But we are thankful to the BCCI for their support for the Tokyo Games," Batra added.

New Zealand Weightlifter To Become First Transgender Athlete To Compete At Olympics

Agencies

WELLINGTON: Laurel Hubbard hefted 628 pounds (185 kilograms) in two lifts on the way to qualifying in the women's super-heavyweight division for the Tokyo Olympics.

That's heavy. But it's nowhere near the figurative weight Hubbard has carried to become the first transgender athlete to compete at an Olympic Games.

Hubbard was among five weightlifters confirmed Monday in New Zealand's team for Tokyo. At 43, she will also be the oldest weightlifter at the games, and will be ranked fourth in the competition on Aug. 2 for women 87 kilograms (192 pounds) and over.

Hubbard won a silver medal at the 2017 World Championships and gold in the 2019 Pacific Games in Samoa. She competed at the 2018 Commonwealth Games but sustained a serious injury that set back her career.

"I am grateful and humbled by the kindness and support that has been given to me by so many New Zealanders," Hubbard said in a statement. "When I broke my



arm at the Commonwealth Games three years ago, I was advised that my sporting career had likely reached its end. But your support, your encouragement, and your aroha (love) carried me through the darkness.

"The last eighteen months has shown us all that there is strength in kinship, in community, and in working together towards a common purpose. The mana of the silver fern comes all of you and I will wear it with pride."

The additional burden Hubbard has had to carry is that her efforts have made her a flashpoint in the

debate around the fairness of trans athletes competing in women's events. She has faced anger, scorn and ridicule, and has been directly criticized by some opponents.

Competing as Gavin Hubbard, her birth name, Hubbard set national records in junior competition and had a best, combined snatch and clean and jerk total of 300 kilograms (661 pounds).

Hubbard transitioned eight years ago at the age of 35. She has since met all of the requirements of the International Olympic Committee's regulations for trans athletes and fair competition.

Tokyo Olympics To Allow Limit Of 10,000 Local Fans At Venues

Agencies

TOKYO: The Tokyo Olympics will allow some local fans to attend when the games open in just over a month, organizing committee officials and the IOC said on Monday.

Organizers set a limit of 50% of capacity up to a maximum of 10,000 fans for all Olympic venues.

The decision was announced after so-called Five Party talks online with local organizers, the International Olympic Committee, the International Paralympic Committee, the Japanese government and the government of metropolitan Tokyo.

The decision contradicts the country's top medical adviser, Dr. Shigeru Omi, who recommended last week that the safest way to hold the Olympics would be without fans. He had previously called it "abnormal" to hold the Olympics during the pandemic. The Tokyo Games are set to open on July 23.

Fans from abroad were banned several months ago. Officials say local fans will be under strict rules. They will not be allowed to cheer, must wear masks, and are being



told to go straight home afterwards. Organizers say between 3.6-3.7 million tickets are in the hands of Japanese residents.

Having fans in the venues presents a risk of spreading the COVID-19 infections, and not just at the venues, since it causes more circulation on commuter trains, in restaurants and other public spaces.

Tokyo and other areas are under "quasi-emergency" status until July 11. This replaced a tougher full state

of emergency that was in effect until last weekend. The new rules will allow restaurants to serve alcohol during limited hours.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who has favored allowing fans, said before the official announcement that he would bar fans if conditions change.

"If a state of emergency is necessary, I will be flexible and open to no fans in order to achieve that the games give top priority to safety and security for the people," Suga

said. "In case of a state of emergency, it is quite possible ... for safe and secure (games) I will not hesitate to have no fans."

He said he took "seriously" Omi's recommendations but did not follow them. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike also said before the talks that fans may need to be banned if conditions change.

"Under this COVID-19 pandemic, people in Tokyo, people in Japan, are feeling very uneasy. We have concerns and the experts are also making recommendations about the risk of spreading the infection," Koike said. "If there should be a major change in the sanitary situation, or infection situation, we need to revisit this matter among ourselves and we may need to consider the option of having no spectators in the venues."

In recent polls, support seems to be increasing for holding the Olympics, though opposition is strong, depending how the question is worded. An Asahi newspaper poll of June 19-20 of almost 1,500 people showed 62% supported another postponement or cancellation of the games.

LeT Commander

which two BJP councillors and a policeman were killed.

"They were also involved in an attack on a police party at Main Chowk Sopore on June 12 in which two police personnel and two civilians were killed and two more police personnel and two civilians were injured," the police spokesperson said.

The encounter, he said, had started after a joint search operation was launched during the intervening night of June 20/21 on the basis of information generated by police about the presence of militants in the village. He said that a soldier was injured in the initial exchange of fire when the militants were given an opportunity to surrender.

Divulging more details about the slain LeT men, he said, Pandith had a long history of militancy including attacks on Police and security personnel and "civilian atrocities"

"He was also involved in an attack on fruit merchants at Dangerpora on September 6, 2019 in which four civilians got injured. Moreover, he was also involved in killing of several ex-militants, Hurriyat activists, Sapanches/Panches in Sopore area," he said.

Pandith's aide Mir, the police spokesperson said, was part of this group involved in an attack on CRPF at Lawaypora area of Srinagar on March 25, in which three CRPF personnel got killed. The foreign militant Abdullah alias Asrar, he said, was active in north Kashmir since 2018 and remained the part of the group and several cases were also registered against him for his involvement in civilian atrocities and attacks on Police and state forces.

"Arms, ammunition & other incriminating materials were recovered from the site of the encounter. In this connection police have registered a case under relevant sections of law and investigation has been initiated," the police spokesperson said.

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

Quoting IGP Kashmir Vijay Kumar, the police spokesperson said that Police had issued a poster for reward after which a lot of information was received about the militants and it was due to a lot of public support as a result of which militants were pinpointed by police.

"IGP Kashmir thanked people for helping in killing the LeT commander which is a big relief for the local population," he said, adding that Kumar appealed to the families of militants not to give shelter to them to avoid any trouble.

"He also appealed to youth to stay away from Drugs as narco-militancy was destroying them. He urged parents and society to keep strict vigil on their wards to prevent them falling prey to it," he added.

Good Number

Sopore, including one on Monday and it clearly indicates that foreign militants are present here," Singh said, adding "We have their details, according to which our operations are launched,"

The DGP said a strict check on infiltration and the understanding on the ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan have had a positive impact on the situation in the valley.

He said that the infiltration has been strictly kept under check this year. The understanding at a high level on the ceasefire pact between the Indian and Pakistani armies has had a positive impact and we welcome that.

"But it would be wrong to claim that there are no foreign militants. They are here in good numbers and our operations will target them in the coming days," he said.

He said that the militants killed in an overnight gunfight were involved in a number of activities including the recent attack on two policemen in Sopore town.

"One of the most wanted militants, Mudasar Pandit, a Pakistani militant Abdullah, alias Asrar and Khursheed Mir were among the three militants killed in an overnight encounter with forces in Sopore," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, GOC Kilo Force, HS Sahi said that the foreign militants have networked with the local militants in Kashmir and they operate together. He said that the militants receive local support and appealed the people to stop supporting these networks so that "innocent" people do not get killed.

Sahi said that the aim of security agencies is to break and destroy the "nexus" of local and foreign militants so that there is no hindrance in peace and development in the region.

He also sought the help of local populace and civil society to "destroy the existing system, and by stopping youngsters from joining the militant ranks". He said it will help eradicate the militancy.

He also asked the local militants to surrender and warned them of meeting the same fate as the three militants killed in a gunfight in Sopore on Monday.

Shots Fired At CRPF

reports, unknown militants opened fire upon the personnel of CRPF 178 battalion manning a checkpoint in Babapora village of the district on Monday afternoon. The militants, reports said, fled from the spot after carrying out the attack. No loss to life or injuries has been reported in the incident. Soon after the attack, additional reinforcements of police and CRPF reached the area.

All Eyes On

morning at the Gupkar residence of PAGD President Dr Farooq Abdullah to discuss New Delhi's invitation for talks.

"The meeting is scheduled to take place at 11 am tomorrow. We have sent out invitation to all the constituents," PAGD spokesperson, Muhammad Yousuf Tarigami told Kashmir Observer Monday

"The only agenda of tomorrow's meet is not whether we should go ahead with talks or not but besides that we will exchange our views. The purpose of the meeting, the approach which we should adopt will be discussed tomorrow," he added.

To a question that BJP is also holding a meet to discuss counter strategy of PAGD, Tarigami said that the ruling party has already done what they wanted to do.

"What else is there for them to do now," he said.

When asked if the PAGD will go with a single-point agenda to attend the PM convened meet, Tarigami ducked the questions saying "please let's discuss it tomorrow."

It is pertinent to mention here that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has invited as many as 14 leaders from J&K, including four former chief ministers of the erstwhile state for a meeting in New Delhi scheduled to be held on June 24. Among those invited are former Chief Ministers--Farooq Abdullah and his son Omar Abdullah, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, and PDP

chief Mehbooba Mufti.

Meanwhile, a senior mainstream leader told Kashmir Observer that the meeting has been convened to decide whether the parties will go individually to the PM's meet or nominate leaders as a united face of PAGD.

"Tomorrow's meeting will decide who will go to New Delhi and what will be the agenda in the upcoming meet with PM. Will we raise a united voice, or will we go in individual capacities," the senior leader, wishing not to be named said.

He also ruled out that the PM convened meeting had anything to do with the delimitation exercise.

"Delimitation is certainly not the agenda. It's not in the ambit of PM but the Election Commission. Most probably, the PM's meeting is more about the restoration of statehood," he said.

When asked if the mainstream camp will settle down if the statehood is returned, the senior leader said that before doing so, a conscious decision has to be arrived keeping in view the reaction of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, especially in the backdrop of special status revocation.

"See, we are fighting a legal battle in court against the unlawful abrogation of J&K's special status. That case is going on. Apart from that, we need to have a state assembly to protect our land and jobs. And for that, statehood is imperative," he said, while hinting that statehood for now, was the best bet for the mainstream camp.

The PAGD meeting comes two days after PDP authorised party President Mehbooba Mufti to take a call on attending All-Party Meeting in New Delhi to be chaired by PM Modi.

NC Upbeat, Says

chaired by Prime Minister Modi on June 24.

"We have been saying that nothing has changed on the ground for the last two years. It is good that they have this realisation that things will not work here without the local mainstream. All their huge promises have turned hollow on the ground and nothing has been achieved," NC provincial president, Kashmir, Nasir Aslam Wani told reporters here.

Wani said the change from "demonising" the mainstream parties in Jammu and Kashmir to inviting them for talks was "good".

"It is a good change. As much and how much you can demonise the mainstream of J-K, you cannot do without it because the mainstream in J-K has always proven.

"For that matter, the NC, being the premier political party of the erstwhile state, has that grass-roots reach, without its involvement in such kind of dialogues and such kinds of conference, you cannot go ahead," he said.

The NC leader claimed that contrary to the credit "they have taken these two years, they have achieved nothing". The Centre had on August 5, 2019 abrogated Article 370, which gave special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, and bifurcated it into union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

"It is always the people's representatives who can deliver in this trouble-ridden state," Wani asserted. Asked if the party felt there was any international pressure on the Centre over Kashmir, the NC leader said, "Whatever be the reason, what is happening is good".

"Don't you think something is there? For whatever reason it has happened, it is good. Whether there was any pressure, or there is no pressure or the PM had this realisation and thought that the UT has to see the peaceful times ahead, it is a better realisation and we are hopeful that there is peace and not only internally, but externally as well," he said.

BJP Plans Counter

Jammu and Kashmir since August 5, 2019 when the Central government abrogated the state's special status and bifurcated it into UTs.

The PM's meeting with the political parties from Jammu and Kashmir is part of the Centre's initiatives to bolster political processes, including holding assembly elections, in the union territory.

"We have convened an emergency meeting of all prominent party leaders at Trikuta Nagar party headquarters at 11 am tomorrow (Tuesday) to chalk out the counter-strategy against Gupkar Alliance (People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration) PAGD which is meeting in Srinagar around the same time to discuss Centre's invitation)," Raina said.

The PAGD is an amalgam of six mainstream parties in Jammu and Kashmir, including the National Conference (NC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), formed in the aftermath of the Centre's August 2019 decision to nullify Article 370 and split J&K into two union territories.

The leaders of eight political parties -- the NC, PDP, BJP, Congress, Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party, CPI(M), People's Conference, and the Panthers Party -- were telephonically invited by Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla for participation in the meeting to be held at the prime minister's residence in the national capital at 3 pm on Thursday.

The invitees include four former chief ministers -- National Conference president Farooq Abdullah, his son Omar Abdullah, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti.

Raina said the leaders of the party from across Jammu region would discuss and deliberate all issues with focus on the strategy to be taken to counter the Gupkar Alliance which is demanding restoration of the pre August 5, 2019 position to Jammu and Kashmir.

On Sunday, PAGD spokesperson and senior CPI(M) leader M Y Tarigami said the meeting of the alliance is scheduled to take place on Tuesday to discuss the invitation and a united approach will be "good for the health of our society and our politics". "...there would be a commonality in our approach this way. That is what is required," he had said. (PTI)

Is Modi Govt

opinion piece for The Quint.

"There is an aggressive China, armed to the teeth and staring us down across a treacherous 4000-km border from north to east. Then America is planning to hand over Afghanistan to the Taliban, creating a new dread in our north-west neighbourhood. On top of all this is an assertive Joe Biden administration, gently-but-firmly reading the riot act on human rights" Bhal wrote.

He went on saying, "Finally, two years of a strong-arm administration, directly controlled by the Union government, may have alienated and hardened local attitudes. So, the peace overture to Pakistan could have been the first impact of this algorithm".

Hailing the initiative from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bahl however hastened to add that the follow-through will have to be honest and substantial, much beyond a mere gesture.

Advocating restoration of full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir "not the abridged version that has been crafted in Delhi", Bhal suggested broad based delimitation exercise with inputs from everybody, including its detractors so that a free and fair election is held which will lead to the installation of a government that is accepted as "legitimate" in the (Kashmir) Valley.

He said if all of these things were to happen, in a politically honest and visible manner, Prime Minister Modi would win back a chunk of his currently diminished international acclaim.

Pak Seeks US

Pakistan had 160 nuclear warheads as of January last year, it said.

"I don't know where they've come up with this. Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is simply a deterrent, to protect ourselves," Prime Minister Khan said during an interview with the news programme Axios on HBO, which was reported by Dawn online.

Khan said that he was "not sure" whether it was growing. "As far as I know, it's not an offensive thing. Any country which has a neighbour seven times its size would be worried."

He was responding to a question by the interviewer who asked, "Intelligence analysts say Pakistan has the fastest growing nuclear arsenal anywhere in the world. Why?"

Khan went on to say that he was "completely against nuclear arms".

"I always have been. We've had three wars against India and ever since we have had a nuclear deterrent, there has been no war between the two countries. We've had border skirmishes but we've never faced war.

"The moment there is a settlement on Kashmir, the two neighbours would live as civilised people. We will not need to have nuclear deterrents," the cricketer-turned-politician said.

To another question, Khan said that the US had a big responsibility when it came to Kashmir.

"If the Americans have the resolve and the will, [the Kashmir issue] can be sorted out," he said.

India has repeatedly ruled out any role for a third party, asserting that any issue between India and Pakistan should be resolved bilaterally under the provisions of Simla agreement and the Lahore declaration.

Asked why he was so outspoken about Islamophobia in the West but silent about the alleged genocide of Uighur Muslims in China's Xinjiang, Khan said that all issues were discussed with China "behind closed doors".

"China has been one of the greatest friends to us in our most difficult times. When we were really struggling, China came to our rescue. We respect the way they are and whatever issues we have, we speak behind closed doors.

"I look around the world, what's happening in Palestine, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan. Am I going to start talking about everything? I concentrate on what is happening on my border, in my country," Khan said.

"Why is that (Kashmir) not an issue?" Khan asked, adding that he considered it to be "hypocrisy".

Talking about the open letter he had written to leaders of Muslims states calling on them to unite against Islamophobia, Khan said: "There is a big communication gap between the Islamic world and Western societies. It happened after 9/11 when the world "Islamic" terrorism came into currency."

The moment you say Islamic terrorism, the common man in the West thinks there is something within the religion which leads to terrorism, he said. After 9/11 any time there was a terrorist act where a Muslim was involved, 1.3 billion Muslims across the world started becoming targets, he said.

Asked whether he was "happy" about the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the premier said: "Happy in one way because there was never gona be a military solution in Afghanistan."

He went on to say that there were also feelings of anxiousness. "Without a political settlement there is the possibility of a civil war."

He stated that in his view, a political settlement would mean a coalition government between the Taliban and the Afghan leadership. "There is no other solution."

Asked whether the US had made a mistake by announcing the date of the withdrawal, Khan said: "They have got themselves in such a big mess. They had to give some sort of timeframe, but the moment they gave a timeframe the Taliban would have considered that a victory."

He said that as far as Pakistan is concerned, it would deal with whoever represented the people of Afghanistan.

"Does it not concern you that this group of people (Taliban) is accumulating power right next to you?" the interviewer asked.

"Look, I'm not a spokesman for the Taliban. For me to say what they [should] be doing, shouldn't be doing is pointless. In case the Taliban go for an all out victory, there is going to be an incredible amount of bloodshed and the country that will suffer the most after Afghanistan, is going to be Pakistan," Khan said.

There must be a political settlement before the Americans leave, he said.

Talking about the recent visit of CIA Director William Burns, the prime minister said that since 9/11 the intelligence agencies of the two countries have been in "constant touch". However, he denied meeting the CIA chief.

"Would you allow the American government to have the CIA here in Pakistan to conduct cross-border counterterrorism missions against Al-Qaeda, ISIS or the Taliban?" the interviewer asked.

"Absolutely not. There is no way we are going to allow any bases, any sort of action from Pakistani territory into Afghanistan. Absolutely not," he replied.

"Pakistan suffered 70,000 casualties, more than any other country by joining the American war. We cannot afford anymore military actions from our territory. We will be partners in peace, not in conflict."

Asked whether Pakistan would allow the US Air Force to use its airspace for air strikes against the Taliban, the premier reiterated that Pakistan "would not be a part of any conflict".

Asked to respond to his comments linking the incidence of rape to obscenity, Khan said: "It is such nonsense. I never said that [...] I said the concept of purdah which is to avoid temptation in society."

"If a woman is wearing very few clothes, it will have an impact on men unless they are robots. I mean it's common sense," he said. If you have a society where people haven't seen that sort of

thing it will have an impact on them, he said.

Covid-19: Amarnath

to save people's lives. So, it is not advisable to hold and conduct this year's pilgrimage in the larger public interest. Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board is aware of the respect the sentiments of millions of devotees, and to keep the sentiments alive, the Board shall continue the live telecast of morning and evening Aarti from the Holy Cave shrine," Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said, as per official spokesperson.

The LG, he said, stressed upon the need to follow Covid protocol on the significant and pious days like Pratham Pooja, Samapan Pooja. He further stressed that saints visiting the Shrine cave to perform Aarti as per "Shastra" would follow Covid appropriate behavior.

Earlier, Sinha, who is also SASB Chairman held a detailed deliberations with his Principal Secretary Nitishwar Kumar, who is also the CEO of Shrine Board, Chief Secretary Dr. Arun Kumar Mehta, DGP, Dilbag Singh and Principal Secretary Home Shaleen and directed that devotees should be enabled to attend to morning and evening Aarti in online mode.

The LG, he said, asserted that it would help them to pay their obeisance while also avoiding travel and exposure."

The meeting was informed that the Shrine Board has put in place a virtual and televised mechanism for live Darshan of Aarti from the holy cave.

CEO Shrine Board Nitishwar Kumar, as per the official spokesperson said that all arrangements have been made for the mace of Lord Shiva-Chhari Mubarak' to be taken to the holy cave on 22nd August, when the yatra is to conclude coinciding with the festival of Raksha Bandhan.

"Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board has been assessing the Covid situation in the Union Territory and the country. Our focus is on containing the pandemic and strengthening health infrastructure," Kumar said, as per official spokesperson.

The CEO, he said, announced that both morning telecast of Aarti at 6 AM and evening Aarti at 5 PM, each for 30 minutes, is to be live-streamed on Shri Amarnath ji Shrine board official website and the app specifically dedicated for the devotees.

The devotees can pay their virtual obeisance to the Holy Ice Lingam online through the Shrine Board's link www.shriamarnathjishrine.com/AartiLive.html. The same may also be streamed through the Shrine Board's mobile based application which may be downloaded through the link <http://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ncog.shriamarnath> from the Google play store.

Third Year of Disruption

In 2019 the then J&K administration had curtailed Amarnath Yatra two weeks ahead of its scheduled closure saying the unprecedented measure was necessitated by intelligence inputs that terrorists were planning to target it. The order directing pilgrims as well as tourists to curtail their stay in the valley had triggered panic.

Days later Delhi striped Jammu and Kashmir of its special status and statehood downgrading it into two union territories.

J&K Logs 362

from Jammu Division and the rest seven from Kashmir, taking the fatality count 4262.

One new confirmed case of mucormycosis (black fungus) has been reported today, bringing the cumulative number of confirmed cases to 25 in J&K. (With GNS inputs)

Govt Transfers

reads the order.

Rachna Sharma (JKAS) awaiting orders of adjustment in the General Administration Department, has been posted as Special Secretary to the Government, Cooperatives Department.

Dr. Narupa Rai (JKAS) awaiting orders of adjustment in the General Administration Department, has been posted as Additional Registrar, Cooperatives, Jammu, against an available vacancy.

Abid Hussain (JKAS) Joint Director, Education (Central), Kashmir, has been transferred and posted as Additional Commissioner in the office of Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir.

Babu Ram (JKAS) awaiting orders of adjustment in the General Administration Department, has been posted as Additional Secretary to the Government, Labour and Employment Department. Tazayun Mukhtar (JKAS) General Manager, DIC, Srinagar, has been transferred and posted as Joint Director, Industries and Commerce (S&M), Kashmir, against an available vacancy. "She shall also hold the charge of the post of Director, Industries and Commerce, Kashmir, in addition to her own duties, till further orders."

Rakesh Kumar (JKAS), awaiting orders of adjustment in the General Administration Department, has been posted as Additional Secretary to the Government, Housing and Urban Development Department.

Masrat Hashim (JKAS), Registrar, District Srinagar, has been transferred and posted as Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Development Authority, Pahalgam.

"Syed Hanief Balkhi, ADC, Srinagar, shall hold the charge of the post of Registrar, District Srinagar, in addition to his own duties, till further orders," the order said.

Sunil Kumar (JKAS), Additional Secretary to the Government, Department of Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, has been transferred and posted as Regional Transport Officer, Kathua (Har: Lakhampur).

Sunaina Sharma (JKAS), awaiting orders of adjustment in the General Administration Department, has been posted as Additional Secretary to the Government, ARI and Trainings Department.

Ms. Vinakshi Koul (JKAS), Registrar, GCET, Jammu, has been transferred and posted as Deputy Labour Commissioner, Jammu, against an available vacancy.

Prem Singh (JKAS), awaiting orders of adjustment in the General Administration Department, has been posted as General Manager, DIC, Kathua, relieving Puneet Sharma, JKAS, ADDC, Kathua of the additional charge of the post.

Mohammad Ashraf (JKAS), awaiting orders of adjustment in the General Department Administration, has been posted as Joint Director, Employment, Jammu, against an available vacancy.

Amreet Singh (JKAS), Additional Secretary to the Government, Housing and Urban

Development Department, has been transferred and posted as Deputy Labour Commissioner (Central), against an available vacancy.

Hamida Akhter (JKAS), awaiting orders of adjustment in the office of Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, has been posted as General Manager, DIC, Srinagar.

Surinder Pal Sharma (JKAS), Deputy Secretary to the Government, Finance

Department, has transferred and posted as General Manager, DIC, Samba, against an available vacancy.

Case Positivity

84% of frontline workers, and 10% of the population in 18- 45 age category, an official spokesperson said.

The Chief Secretary, he said, assured the Central Government of achieving 100% vaccination in 45 age category by 30th June 2021 and 30% coverage in 18- 45 age category by 15th July 2021 through robust vaccination drives which have been ramped up to a capacity of administering 1.6 lakh doses per day.

"Further, the Chief Secretary informed that through Government's timely response, the daily number of COVID cases has reduced from an all-time high of over 5400 to 585 over a month. The same period also witnessed a reduction in the case positivity rate from 13% to 3.3%, which has further reduced to 1.2% in last 24 hours," he added.

Giving a brief of the measures being taken in J&K to contain the spread of COVID, Mehta, as per the official spokesperson informed that the Government has instituted a rural medical and testing grid through panchayat-level COVID care centres to provide timely medical care to patients in rural areas.

"These centres provide various COVID related medical services and conduct daily COVID tests for early detection of emerging hotspots, besides raising awareness on the COVID appropriate behaviour", he added.

Currently, Jammu and Kashmir is among the leading regions in the country in vaccination of above 45 years age group having vaccinated 75% of its eligible population which is well above the national average of 42%, while achieving universal coverage in 4 districts- Ganderbal, Jammu, Samba and Shopian, and Wayun village in Bandipora district.

Regarding augmentation of medical infrastructure and facilities in the Union territory, the official spokesperson said that the meeting was informed that the Government has more than doubled the number of COVID-dedicated beds and tripled the medical oxygen supply to cater to COVID-related eventualities.

Considering the gradual lifting of restrictions in line with recovery from COVID's second wave, the Home Secretary, as per the official spokesperson asked the UT Government to vigorously promote COVID appropriate behaviour through strict enforcement of SOPs and proper crowd management at market places, mandis, and religious places.

He further said that while reviewing the COVID situation in the Union territories, the Home Secretary said that the UTs have witnessed a sharp decline in cases over the past few weeks. "The positivity and fertility rates have come down to 7.6% and 1.3%, respectively", he added.

Lauding J&K's well-drawn strategy in combating COVID-19, Member, NITI Aayog, Dr. V. K. Paul said that J&K is emerging as a role model amongst entities with large territorial areas in conducting targeted testing, stratified vaccination and providing grass root-level medical care. J&K's model has assisted the Union territory in bringing down COVID caseload & related deaths per million population to 894 and 62, respectively over the last two weeks.

"The Home Secretary asked the UT Administrations to remain in a state of readiness to mitigate future surges, besides undertaking a combined strategy of test-track-treat COVID cases, micro containment of emerging hot spots, speedy vaccination, enforcement of COVID appropriate behaviour and ramping up of COVID dedicated medical facilities for successful containment of the disease," the official spokesperson said.

Govt Amends Rules

verification process should not be more than two months under any circumstances, the order said. "The appointing authority , on the receipt of the satisfactory verification report, issue the appointment order and the candidates in whose case the report is received at a later stage (after the part selection list is operated upon) shall on the receipt of a satisfactory verification report be appointed notionally from the date the earlier appointments are made.

In case of receipt of an adverse report and on confirmation thereof by the State/Divisional/District Level Screening Committee, as may be the case, shall automatically stand cancelled without any notice.

Foot-And-Mouth

"The officials ask us to buy vaccines from the open market. If the government makes tall claims, why don't they provide vaccines to us," he said. Director Animal Husbandry Kashmir, Bashir Ahmad Khan told Kashmir Observer that the claims of shepherds about FMD outbreak may be right or wrong. He said his department had vaccinated the livestock in Khansahib and adjoining areas after making a grid.

The Central government had taken responsibility for vaccination but somehow it got delayed. However, we carried out vaccination vigorously," Khan said.

"We will send a team tomorrow to the affected areas," he added.

Falling Tree Kills

Ghulam Hassan Sheikh son of Muhammad Shaban Sheikh, also a resident of Sutharan Khag has been shifted to SMHS Hospital Srinagar for treatment.

One horse also died in the incident, as per locals.

Police Recover Rs 7L

violating Covid norms," police said.

"The special drive against the violators of Covid-19 guidelines/rules continued throughout all the districts of Kashmir Valley to ensure that people adhere to SOPs/guidelines envisaged by the government to curb COVID-19 pandemic."

CS Reviews Execution Of Mining Leases In J&K

Major Minerals To Be E-Auctioned This Fiscal



SRINAGAR: The Chief Secretary, Dr. Arun Kumar Mehta, chaired a meeting to review the execution of mining leases in Jammu and Kashmir.

Administrative Secretaries of departments of Mining, Forest, Ecology & Environment, besides Director, Ecology, Environment & Remote Sensing, Member Secretary, Pollution Control Board (PCB) and concerned HoDs participated in the meeting.

The Chief Secretary asked the Mining Department to ensure sustainable exploration of major minerals in Jammu and Kashmir by adopting e-auction procedure in the current financial year.

Emphasizing the importance of time-bound systematic and scientific exploration of minerals in J&K, the Chief Secretary impressed upon the Department to undertake a pre-assessment of the min-

ing blocks before their auction through an inter-disciplinary committee of officers drawn from concerned departments.

For the minor minerals blocks which are currently under the process of obtaining environmental clearance, the Department was directed to expedite 35 cases pending public hearing by 30th June 2021 followed by another batch of 32 cases by 30th July 2021; meanwhile completing the documentation of remaining cases.

Further, the Divisional Commissioners of Kashmir and Jammu were directed to rationalize existing rates of minor minerals in various districts and prevent illegal mining through strict surveillance.

Dr. Mehta asked concerned officers to ensure availability of minerals at reasonable rates to people as well as various Government agencies for speedy development of the UT.

What Mukesh Ambani Defines As "Prerequisite For Every Business"

Bloomberg

Mukesh Ambani, Asia's richest man, plans to transform each of the units under his refining-to-retail conglomerate to create a sustainable business model as Reliance Industries chases a net carbon-zero goal by 2035.

"We have no option as a society, as a business but to really adopt a sustainable business model," Mr Ambani told Bloomberg Television's Haslinda Amin as part of the Qatar Economic Forum Monday. "I think that's a prerequisite for every business to survive as we go forward."

When asked if this green push will require dialing back on some of Reliance's businesses, Mukesh Ambani said "it means transforming our businesses and integrating that with the future," without sharing more details.

The pivot toward a greener, cleaner version of itself won't be an easy one for India's most valuable company, which got about 60% of revenue from its hydrocarbon-fueled energy operations for the year ended March. The push comes at a critical time, as rival tycoons including India's second-richest man, Gautam Adani, are doubling down on their green initiatives amid a broader policy directive by the Narendra Modi-led government.

Energy giants around the world are coming under pressure from socially conscious investors to improve their environmental policies and move toward a low-carbon future.

Carbon-Neutral Oil

Reliance last year set itself a target of becoming a net-zero carbon company by 2035 - a shorter time frame compared to the 2050 cut-off self-imposed by many of its global peers including BP and Royal Dutch Shell.

Mukesh Ambani's group bought its first cargo of carbon-neutral crude oil in February and said it was looking for more such partnerships. The greenhouse gas emissions involved in the extraction, processing and shipping of such cargos have been offset by the crude oil suppliers.

The company already has a "proprietary technology to convert transportation fuels to valuable petrochemical and material building blocks," Mr Ambani told shareholders last year, adding that its focus will be on clean energy with hydrogen, wind, solar, fuel cells and batteries. In April, Reliance helped set up India H2 Alliance, a new energy transition coalition for commercializing hydrogen tech-

nologies -- a cleaner alternative to fossil fuels.

'Inevitable'

"Reliance can't stay away" from this broader trend when even the traditionally oil-dependent economies including Saudi Arabia are boosting their green initiatives, according to Kranthi Bathini, chief market strategist at WealthMills Securities in Mumbai. "Such a change is going to be inevitable for the conglomerate."

The Adani-led conglomerate is also raising its game in clean energy goals. Adani Green Energy agreed last month to buy SoftBank Group's \$3.5 billion renewable power business in India, in a bid to achieve its goal of having 25 gigawatts of renewable power capacity by 2025. The green focus has led to a share rally with Adani Green jumping more than 570% and Adani Total Gas by 712% since the beginning of last year.

Government officials have been debating whether to set a goal to cut India's greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 to zero, a decade before China.

Reliance, however, will have to balance its priorities as it pursues cleaner energy goals on one hand and seeks to create a partnership with Aramco, Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil exploration company, on the other.

Mukesh Ambani's appearance at the forum came as the country recovers from a devastating second wave of coronavirus infections that gave it the world's fastest-surging Covid-19 outbreak.

"I believe this pandemic will not be the last health crisis that humanity has seen," Mr Ambani said in the interview. He added the primary challenges now were to "get rid of the vaccination divide" and a digital access divide as more people are forced to stay home to work and study in a pandemic-hit world.

Reliance Jio Infocomm, aims to close this access gap and boost connectivity, which according to Mukesh Ambani is now akin to a basic need. "The digital divide must be bridged," he said. "Both among nations and within nations."

Explore New Tourist Destinations, Advisor Khan To Officials



KO NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR: Advisor to Lieutenant Governor, Baseer Ahmad Khan on Monday chaired a meeting to review functioning of all the Tourism Development Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir.

During the meeting, the Advisor passed on directions to the CEOs for improvement of services in their respective areas for the better experience of tourists. He said that CEOs need to be self driven and take initiatives for improving services, besides exploring new tourist destinations.

He also directed them to display the relevant information like contact numbers of the officers. Also, complaint boxes should be installed at the designated locations at all the tourist destinations. He said that the public utilities at the tourist spots should be in working order, neat and clean and proper mechanism should be in place for garbage disposal and sewage treatment.

He said that the Tourism sector has been designated as a priority sector for Covid vaccination and was informed by the Secretary Tourism that 85 percent of people associated with the travel trade have been vaccinated. Emphasising that there is no dearth of vaccines, Advisor asked the officers to ensure that 100 percent of the people associated with the trade should be vaccinated for maximum security. He

also said that it is heartening to see people are following Covid appropriate behaviour and have started going to tourist spots but we must not lower our guard under any circumstances regarding Covid protocols and officers should remain proactive in ensuring that Covid measures are taken meticulously.

The Advisor said that the idea of conceiving Development Authorities was to have systematic development of tourist locations and exploration of new destinations. He said that the CEOs of the Development Authorities are the custodians of their respective master plans and they should remain vigilant in all respects. He directed them to report violations and take strict cognizance of any violation taking place in their areas of jurisdiction.

The Advisor directed the CEO's that they should maintain inventories of their infrastructure and come up with a concept plan delineating each and every parameter determining the shortcomings so that a road map is formalized and adopted to improve upon all the aspects for betterment of the tourist resorts and to enhance the tourist experiences.

Emphasising upon the concept paper he directed the CEOs from both the divisions to submit it within a week encompassing all the details like infrastructure, tourism potential, short and long term plans, accommodation, connectivity,

sanitation among other things of their respective Authorities. He said that this would give us an idea about the whole tourism sector in all respects and we will be in a better position to evaluate the situation and prepare our way forward. He directed both the Directors of Tourism Kashmir as well as Jammu to compile the information and send it to the Administrative department within ten days.

Advisor took a brief from each CEO about the facilities available at the tourist spots and discussed in detail the works plans, status of Master plans, Status of STPs, Tourist grievance redress mechanism, wayside amenities and new initiatives taken for improving tourist service. He stressed on the quality infrastructure and future plans of each development authority.

The Advisor also asked the CEOs to focus on adventure tourism and keep adventure equipments available at the tourist locations for purpose of hiring to the tourists interested in adventure tourism.

The Advisor also directed the officers to strictly adhere to the given timelines and complete their respective projects within the stipulated time. He asked the authorities to work in a co-ordinated manner and expedite the works of the ongoing projects under PMDP and other centrally sponsored projects so that they are completed within the

THE ADVISOR ALSO ASKED THE CEOs TO FOCUS ON adventure tourism and keep adventure equipments available at the tourist locations for purpose of hiring to the tourists interested in adventure tourism.

Dir Handicrafts Inaugurates 3-Day Workshop On Natural Dyeing

KO NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR: The Director Handicrafts and Handloom department Kashmir, Mahmood Ahmad Shah today inaugurated a 3-day awareness workshop cum training program on natural dyeing at the campus of Indian Institute of Carpet technology (IICT) bagi Ali Mardan Khan, Nowshera in Srinagar srinagar.

The workshop cum training program will be conducted under the expert guidance of one of the reputed resource person from the field Badshah Miya of Jaipur Rajasthan and receipt of Shilp Guru and National award who has more than 30 years of experience in the field of Natural dyeing.

The objective of the workshop is to generate awareness among the stakeholders regarding the importance of natural dyeing in today's competitive market where the customers are demanding eco-friendly products.



The workshop assumes significance in light of the fact that the trend setters have become aware about the damage posed by the synthetic dyes to the ecology and the environment.

Practical demonstrations and sample development of natural dyeing on different types of raw materials in the handicrafts and handloom sector will be the training component for the next two days of the program.

The event assumes significance and is expected to address concerns like color fastness,

shade matching, availability of standard quality of natural dyes.

Besides Director Handicrafts & Handloom Kashmir Mahmood Ahmad Shah , Director IICT Zubair Ahmad, Joint Director Handloom Nargis Suraya, President FCIK Shahid Kamili, Rouf Punjabi Ex president KCCI, participants from CDI, MEERAS society, TAHAFUZ society, Kashmir carpet cluster development along with some of the leading exporters, dyers, artisans associated with the field were present on the first day of the workshop.

Facebook, WhatsApp Urge HC To Stay CCI Notice In Privacy Policy Matter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Facebook and WhatsApp on Monday urged the Delhi High Court to stay the Competition Commission of India (CCI) notice asking them to furnish certain information in relation to a probe ordered by it into the instant messaging app's new privacy policy.

A vacation bench of Justices Anup Jairam Bhambhani and Jasmeet Singh said it will pass an order on the application.

During the hearing the bench said since it was sitting on a vacation bench, it did not want to delve into the merits of the matter even as the main petitions are pending before a bench headed by the chief justice.

"We will pass an order. The matter will be listed on July 9 (the date already fixed for the main petitions)," the bench said.

The case relates to the appeals of Facebook and WhatsApp against a single judge order dismissing their pleas against the probe CCI ordered into the instant messaging app's new privacy policy.

The high court had earlier issued notices on the appeals and asked the Centre to respond to it. In their fresh applications filed in the pending appeals, Facebook and WhatsApp sought stay on the CCI's June 4 notice asking them to furnish certain information for the purpose of inquiry conducted by it.

Senior advocate Harish Salve, representing WhatsApp, said the problem is that they have received a fresh notice on June 4 and the last date to respond is today, that is June 21.

He said the privacy policy is already under challenge in the Supreme Court and the Delhi High Court by way of a batch of petitions and even the government is looking into it.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Facebook, said the question here is of propriety and it is not correct as the highest court of the coun-



try, that is, the Supreme Court is looking into the matter.

"Why did they wait for June 4 evening to issue the notice? They could have done it earlier," he said.

Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aman Lekhi, representing CCI, opposed the pleas saying at the stage of inquiry furnishing of information will not lead to any order by the CCI and the notice is in pursuance to the inquiry which was not stayed by the high court and that this not the first notice issued to them.

ASG Balbir Singh, also appearing for CCI, said since there is a statutory order against Facebook and WhatsApp, they should not use the high court's order and say that they will not furnish the information sought by CCI and the information should not be stalled at this stage.

When the court asked what was the hurry of issuing notice by CCI, Lekhi said the question was not of hurry but the matter itself requires a lengthy process.

He said till a report is submitted by the Director General to the CCI, there will be no precipitate action against them.

The high court had on May 6 issued notice and sought reply of CCI on the appeals filed by Facebook and WhatsApp.

The single judge on April 22 had said though it would have been "prudent" for the CCI to await the outcome of petitions in the Supreme Court and the Delhi High Court against WhatsApp's new privacy policy, not doing so would not make the regulator's order "perverse" or "wanting of jurisdiction".

Petrol, Diesel Prices Unchanged On Monday

City	Petrol	Diesel
Delhi	97.22	87.97
Mumbai	103.36	95.44
Chennai	98.40	92.58
Kolkata	97.12	90.82

Source: Indian Oil

Agencies

Petrol, Diesel Price Today: Petrol and diesel prices remained unchanged across the metros on Monday, June 21, 2021, according to information provided by Indian Oil Corporation (IOC). In New Delhi, the petrol prices were steady at 97.22 per litre and diesel prices were constant at 87.97 per litre. In Mumbai, petrol prices were at Rs 103.36 per litre and diesel was priced at 95.44

per litre. Fuel rates vary across the states in India due to value-added tax. (Also Read: How To Check Latest Petrol And Diesel Rates In Your City)

The state-run oil marketing companies - IOC, Bharat Petroleum, and Hindustan Petroleum align the rates of domestic fuel with that of the global crude oil prices by taking into account any changes in foreign exchange rates. Any changes in fuel prices are implemented with effect from 6 am every day.

SHORT TAKES

Govt Plans To Bring Stricter E-Commerce Rules, Flash Sales May Be History

IANs

The government plans to revise the e-commerce regulations in the country and bring about stricter norms, wherein the much talked-about flash sales may be prohibited.

As per the new draft regulations, no e-commerce entity shall allow any display or promotion of misleading advertisements, whether in the course of business on its platform or otherwise.

Further, if the norms come into effect, every e-commerce shall establish an adequate grievance redressal mechanism having regard to the number of grievances ordinarily received by such entity from India.

Amazon and Flipkart, among others, will have to appoint a Chief Compliance Officer, a Resident Grievance Officer and a nodal contact person in



India. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), which has long demanded stricter

e-commerce norms to protect the interest of offline traders, has hailed the draft norms.

CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal termed the new draft as a "guiding stone to purify e-commerce landscape of the country which has been greatly vitiated by various e-commerce global companies to the extent that not only the domestic trade has been damaged but even the consumers are also feeling the heat of their unethical business practices".

Khandelwal said that the CAIT will study the new draft rules in depth and will submit its comments.

Maruti Suzuki India To Hike Prices In Jul-Sep Qtr Amid Rise In Input Costs

Press Trust of India

The country's largest automobile maker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Monday said it will hike prices of its cars in the second quarter of the current fiscal due to increase in the input costs.

"Over the past year, the cost of the company's vehicles continue to be adversely impacted due to increase in various input costs. Hence, it has become imperative for the company to pass on some impact of the above additional cost to customers through a price rise," Maruti Suzuki India said in a regulatory filing.

The company did not reveal the quantum of the proposed price hike.

The price rise has been planned in the second quarter (July-September period) of the current financial year and the increase shall vary for different models, the company added.



On April 16, Maruti Suzuki announced the weighted average price increase in ex-showroom Prices (Delhi) across models of 1.6 per cent.

On January 18 this year, the automaker had announced price hike of select models by up to Rs 34,000 due to rise in input costs.

MSI sells a range of models from entry-level hatchback Alto to S-CROSS, priced between Rs 2.99 lakh and Rs 12.39 (ex-showroom prices Delhi) lakh, respectively.

Pawar Meets Poll Strategist Prashant Kishor, Calls Meeting Of Opposition Leaders On Tuesday



Agenceis

NEW DELHI: Ahead of Prime Minister's meeting on Jammu and Kashmir, opposition leaders in Delhi are scheduled to hold a meet at Sharad Pawar's residence on Tuesday at 4 pm.

Before this meeting, Sharad Pawar met poll strategist Prashant Kishor, the second time in ten days. The buzz is that Kishor-Pawar meet may be a part of larger scheme of things in view of the next general elections and aimed at uniting like-minded parties.

Though the agenda for the opposition parties meet is unclear, but it's in the backdrop of the Prime Minister's meeting on J&K. The invitation has been extended to 15 opposition parties, but a few of them so far have confirmed participation. The Congress is not yet said yes to the meet.

It would be interesting to see whether Congress will attend the meet or not. Till the afternoon on Monday, there was no confirmation from the Congress but 7 parties have confirmed participation in the meet.

The NCP has called a meeting of its own national office bearers on Tuesday morning, ahead of the opposition parties meeting.

Kishor, who was instrumental in the Trinamool Congress' victory in the recent West Bengal Assembly elections, had also met Pawar on June 11, fuelling the talk of opposition parties coming together against the BJP.

According to sources, former finance minister and now a TMC leader Yashwant Sinha, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Manoj Jha and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Sanjay Singh are also expected to call on Pawar on Tuesday.

Kishor, who had been part of the BJP's 2014 Lok Sabha campaign, later became a poll strategist for several non-NDA parties.

He had handled the poll strategy of the TMC in the West Bengal Assembly polls and for the DMK in the Tamil Nadu assembly elections this year. He had also been a poll strategist for the Janata Dal-United (JD-U) and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) alliance in the 2015 Bihar assembly polls. — Agencies

Centre Initiates Disciplinary Proceedings Against Ex-WB Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay



Agenceis

NEW DELHI: The Centre has initiated major penalty proceedings against former West Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay for alleged misconduct and misbehavior, officials said on Monday.

Bandyopadhyay, now an adviser to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, has been asked to reply to a "memorandum", within 30 days, sent to him by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) mentioning the charges, they said.

The former Chief Secretary has been warned of major penalty proceedings that allows the central government to withhold pension or gratuity, or both, either in

full or in part, the officials said.

Bandyopadhyay was supposed to retire on May 31, but his tenure was extended by the Centre upon request from the state government.

The wrangle over Bandyopadhyay began after the chief minister and he both skipped a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi over Cyclone Yaas last month.

The Centre called Bandyopadhyay back to Delhi the same day, but instead, he chose to retire and was appointed special advisor to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The latest bone of contention comes within a month of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party losing to Mamata Banerjee's TMC in Bengal Assembly elections. — Agencies

Lakshadweep Admin Moots Proposal To Shift HC Jurisdiction From Kerala To Karnataka

Agenceis

The Lakshadweep administration, which has been facing widespread public protests on the islands over some of its policies, has mooted a proposal to shift its legal jurisdiction from the Kerala High Court to the Karnataka High Court, officials said.

However, late on Sunday night Lakshadweep district collector S Askar Ali said that there was no such move. Earlier, there was no response either from Ali or from Advisor (chief Secretary) A Anbarasu to emails queries sent to them on June 17 (Thursday) on the move of shifting the jurisdiction.

"There is no proposal of Lakshadweep administration to shift its legal jurisdiction from the Kerala High Court to Karnataka High Court. The news of shifting the jurisdiction of high from Kerala to Karnataka is baseless and is devoid of truth," Ali said in a WhatsApp message.

The proposal was initiated by the administration in the backdrop of several litigations being moved before the Kerala High Court against the decisions taken by the islands' new administrator Praful Khoda Patel.

These decisions included revising standard operating procedures for COVID-appropriate behaviour, the introduction of the "Goonda Act" and demolishing hutments of fishermen for the widening of roads.

Patel, who is the administrator of Daman and Diu, was given the additional charge of the Union Territory of Lakshadweep in the first week

of December last year when the former administrator Dineshwar Sharma died after a brief illness.

This year, as many as 23 applications, including 11 writ petitions, have been filed against the administrator of Lakshadweep and also against the alleged high-handedness of either the police or the local government of the islands.

However, for reasons best known to the island's administration, which is under the spotlight over its handling of these issues, it has made a proposal for shifting its legal jurisdiction from the high court of Kerala to Karnataka.

The jurisdiction of a high court can be shifted only through an act of Parliament, according to the law. "Parliament may by law constitute a high court for a Union Territory or declare any court in any such territory to be a high court for all or any of the purposes of this Constitution," according to Article 241 of the Constitution.

Section 4 of the same article mentions that "nothing in this article derogates from the power of Parliament to extend or exclude the jurisdiction of a high court for a state to, or from, any Union Territory or part thereof".

Talking to PTI over phone, Lok Sabha member Mohammed Faizal P P said, "This was his (Patel) first attempt to shift the judicial jurisdiction from Kerala to Karnataka."

"Why was he so particular to transfer it... it's totally a misappropriation of the post. The mother tongue of the people on these islands is Malayalam," he said.

Is Covid Wave 2 Over? Positivity Rate Below 5 Pc For 14 Days, But Experts Say End Still Far



Agenceis

NEW DELHI: India on Monday crossed the important milestone of a Covid positivity rate of less than 5 per cent for 14 consecutive days, conforming to the WHO's recommended requirement for a region to reopen, but experts were wary of declaring the devastating second wave over.

With 53,256 new coronavirus infections, the lowest in 88 days, and a positivity rate of 3.83 per cent, it would seem the present phase of the Covid-19 crisis is over and it is a good time to lift restrictions.

This optimistic picture, however, must be edged with abundant caution, said several scientists, citing the emergence of new variants, the still high absolute number of cases, the many districts where positivity rate remains over 5 per cent and concerns over reliability of data.

"With the current positivity rate at less than 5 per cent, India's Covid-19 second wave is on the wane as quickly as it rushed to its peak, but the end of it may yet be far away as more transmissible new variants such as Delta plus variant are emerging," said Naga Suresh Veerapu, associate professor at the School of Natural Sciences (SoNS), Shiv Nadar University, Delhi NCR.

The Delta plus variant has been formed due to a mutation in the Delta or B.1.617.2 variant, first identified in India and considered one of the drivers of the second

wave in the country and also in several others including the UK.

The test positivity rate or TPR—the percentage of all coronavirus tests performed that turn out to be positive—is an important metric through which the public health system keeps tabs on the level of Covid transmission.

The WHO recommends that test positivity should remain at 5 per cent or lower for 14 days before countries or regions reopen. In February this year, the country was celebrating the end of the first wave and conveniently ignored an imminent second wave, Veerapu said.

"The Delta variant that emerged in March spread across the different parts of India, then cases surged to the peak yielding a second wave. The second wave conjoined with the first when the latter was at 1 per cent positivity rate," he told PTI.

Public policy expert Chandrakant Lahariya added that while the cases are on the decline, the absolute number of cases are still very high.

"While the national level test positivity rate has come down, there are still many districts where TPR is above 5 per cent," the Delhi-based physician-epidemiologist and health systems expert told PTI.

"Therefore, before saying that the second wave is over, I would like to wait for the TPR to come down below 5 per cent everywhere and sustain for two weeks

or longer," he said.

Scientist Gautam Menon agreed with Lahariya, noting that some states such as Kerala are still seeing positivity rates over 5 per cent. He added that it is unclear whether this reflects just better testing than other states or if the situation is still to improve there.

Positivity rate was 10.84 per cent in Kerala on Sunday.

According to Health Ministry data on Monday, India's total tally of Covid-19 cases is 2,99,35,221 (2.99 crore/29.9 million) while active cases have reduced to 7,02,887.

The second wave of the pandemic overwhelmed the healthcare system of the country, leaving hospitals struggling to cope with the surge in cases and critical drugs and oxygen in short supply. Infections have now slowed down and restrictions have been relaxed in most states.

Agreeing that the drop in India's cases has been quite dramatic, Menon noted, "From all we know, this is a genuine decline, both in urban and rural India."

"There is no strict definition of a 'wave', let alone of how and when it might be ending, but this is a good time as any to consider opening up, although with caution," Menon, professor, Departments of Physics and Biology, Ashoka University in Haryana, told PTI.

The experts also believe test positivity rates provide valuable information only if testing is broadly accessible across all regions. PTI

No Scientific Evidence Of COVID Vaccination Causing Infertility In Men, Women: Union Health Ministry

Agenceis

The Union health ministry on Monday reiterated there is no scientific evidence of COVID-19 vaccination causing infertility in men and women and asserted the jabs are safe and effective.

There have been media reports expressing concern regarding infertility due to COVID-19 vaccination among people of reproductive age, the ministry said in a statement.

Over the last few days, certain media reports have highlighted the prevalence of various superstitions and myths in a section of healthcare workers (HCWs) and frontline workers (FLWs) including the nurses, it said.

Such misinformation and rumours were spread during the vaccination drives against polio and measles-rubella too, it added.

The ministry said it has clarified in the FAQs (frequently asked ques-



tions) posted on the website that none of the available vaccines affect fertility, as all the vaccines and their constituents are tested first on animals and later on humans to assess if they have any such side effects.

Vaccines are authorized for use only after their safety and efficacy is assured, the statement said.

"Furthermore, in order to curb the prevalent myth regarding infertility due to COVID-19 vaccination, the government of India has

clarified that there are no scientific evidences suggesting COVID-19 vaccination can cause infertility in men and women. The vaccines have been found to be safe and effective," it stated.

The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC) has recommended the COVID-19 vaccination for all lactating women, terming it as safe with no need to stop or pause breastfeeding before or after the vaccination.

Class 12 Evaluation: Concerns Galore; SC Seeks Response From CBSE, CISCE

Agenceis

The Supreme Court on Monday asked CBSE and ICSE to respond by Tuesday to the concerns raised by some students and parents on the schemes of both the boards formulated to evaluate Class XII students, whose examination was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A parents' association and students flagged several concerns with regard to the CBSE and ICSE schemes for evaluation for Class 12 results and said that many clauses are arbitrary and would be detrimental to future prospects of the students.

A special bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari said that it will hear the response of counsels for CBSE and ICSE on Tuesday on the concerns raised by interveners.

The bench also directed registry to list all pending petitions in the matter on Tuesday, June 22, in which they have challenged the decision of CBSE to cancel class 12 examination and raised concerns on the evaluation schemes of both the boards.

examination but they are likely to suffer due to poor performance by the ex-students.

"The present batch of students (or for that reason any student) may suffer because the marks obtained by ex-students in the reference year is lower than what present batch of students have obtained in any subject," he said, adding that maximum the student would be given is the grace of two marks.

Singh said, "Such irrational policy of linking the present batch of students with that of past performance of ex-students cannot be legally sustained under any circumstances. The present batch of students cannot be penalised for the past performances of ex-students".

He said that there should be uniformity in evaluation scheme as English has been made mandatory for calculating average marks in CISCE scheme, while in CBSE there is no such requirement and best of three marks are taken.

"The policy of internal assessment should be uniform for both central boards. There is practically no scheme of internal assessment envisaged by ICSE. There are only



At the outset, senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for intervenor UP Parents Association, Lucknow, said that option to students for external examination as given in the CBSE's scheme will be "a premium" for those students who could not do well in internal assessment.

Singh said, "This option should be given at the very initial stage to both student and school to opt for either external examination or internal assessment. If any school or student does not want to opt for this internal assessment then a date may be fixed for external examination in mid of July or any date found conducive for holding of examination".

The bench said that there should be some ray of hope for the students and there should not be any confusion.

"The decision for cancellation of examination has been taken at highest level and we have in-principle accepted it," the bench said.

Singh said there are several concerns with regard to the evaluation scheme of the students which are increasing uncertainty and no one knows what exactly would happen.

He said that it has been provided in the CBSE scheme that marks obtained by a student in any subject in internal assessment (based upon marks obtained in class X (30 per cent), class XI (30 per cent) and class XII pre-board examination (40 per cent)) shall not exceed the best marks obtained by ex-students in the said schools in the specific reference year (best year subject-wise amongst past three class 12 board exams) by more than 2 marks.

Singh said that there may be a case where due to past poor performance of students in a particular subject, the school hires a good teacher and the students performed well in their internal

few letters to that effect. There are various variables which are not defined namely weightage for board exams is nor defined anywhere. There is no clarification and teachers are in utter confusions" he said.

The senior lawyer said that he had discussion with a maths teacher about the evaluation formula suggested by the board to which he had said that it is very complicated. The bench said that what kind of maths teacher he is if he don't understand the formula and added that court is not going by the perception of individuals and looking at the institutional response.

Advocate Abhishek Choudhury, appearing for private students and those with second compartment, said that CBSE has said that they will be facing difficulties in admission to higher institutes as CBSE class exam 12 will be held when the situation is conducive, may be in July or August.

The bench said it might direct that admissions will be subject to the outcome of the board exam results but asked him to argue the points on Tuesday.

The bench listed the matter for further hearing on Tuesday at 2PM.

On June 17, the top court had said that there is no question of reversing earlier decision to cancel class 12 board exams, and had approved the assessment schemes of the CBSE and the ICSE, which has adopted 30:30:40 formulas for evaluation of marks for students based on results of class 10, 11 and 12 respectively.

The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE) said however that it would consider the performance of students for last six years, unlike CBSE which is taking note of performance in class 10, 11 and 12 exams, in finalising the final board results.

Both the boards had said they would declare the class 12 results on or before July 31.

Man Hurts Dog, Arrested After 'Phone Call From Maneka Gandhi'

Agenceis

SITAPUR (UP): In an audio that surfaced on social media, MP and animal rights activist Maneka Gandhi is purportedly heard telling a police officer to register a case here and slap a man for breaking a dog's leg.

Police have arrested the man who allegedly broke the dog's leg with a stick, but are not confirming the authenticity of the audio clip.

In the audio, the Sultanpur MP is purportedly heard instructing SO Kotwali Sitapur to arrest the man, besides asking him to slap the accused on her behalf and taking the cost of the dog's treatment from him. SO Kotwali TP Singh told PTI that a local man came to Kotwali on Sunday evening and gave his phone to the police officer, claiming that Gandhi was on the line.

"During the conversation, she told me to arrest accused Ramesh Verma of Gwal Mandi area, who



had fractured a dog's leg using a stick, and take appropriate action against him," he said.

He said this incident took place on June 18, but a complaint was lodged on June 20 by animal rights activist Meraj Ahmad. Police went to the accused's home for investigation but he was not present there, he added.

Later in the evening, they got a call purportedly from Gandhi, the

officer added.

On the authenticity of the video, the SO said that the conversation took place on another person's phone so he could not comment on it. A case has been registered under Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the accused arrested, he said.

The dog is safe and undergoing treatment at a veterinary hospital, the officer added.