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More 'surgical strikes' in offing in Kashmir University

J&K government is contemplating to ban the Kashmir University Teachers Association (KUTA)

Srinagar, May 16: Continuing its exercise to dismantle the 'intellectual infrastructure' created by the secessionists in Kashmir University, the J&K government is contemplating to ban the Kashmir University Teachers Association (KUTA).

An official revealed that KUTA is one of the half a dozen associations that had played an extremely important role in creating and sustaining the ideological-narrative framework necessary for a militant-secessionist network to thrive and succeed in Kashmir's case as part of a well-thought strategy designed by the hostile Pakistani intelligence agency ISI to eventually defeat the Indian state by turning its own instruments against itself and making the Indian state finance



The secessionist 'infiltration' into this highest institution of learning in Kashmir has a three-decade long history.

its own meltdown.

The secessionist 'infiltration' into this highest institution of learning in Kashmir has a three-decade long history.

Rafi Bhat was serving as an

assistant professor in the sociology department of the University on a temporary basis. Hardly a week after he got the Ph.D. degree from Kashmir University, Bhat was killed on May 6, 2018 along

with four other militants in Shopian district.

Two days before he was killed in an encounter in Shopian district, Rafi Bhat, had put out a series of Facebook posts, which indicated that he had shared his plan to give up teaching and pick up arms with his students.

Rafi served as an archetypal example of what had been going on in the University for over three decades. The 'infiltration' of secessionist elements and their ideologues into the various departments and administrative sections has been no secret.

The 'secessionist intellectualism' had found its ultimate seminary in Kashmir University with the shameful murder of its Vice Chancellor, Mushirul Haq

See KUTA...on Pg-08

Amit Shah to chair security meeting in delhi on J&K

LG, CS Among Top Officials Likely To Participate In Meeting Schedule On Tuesday Morning

Srinagar, May 16: Union Home Minister Amit Shah is scheduled to chair a high level meeting in New Delhi about the security situation of Jammu and Kashmir tomorrow.

According to reports, the meeting is scheduled at 11 am in North Block and will be attended among others from J&K by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, Chief Secretary Dr Arun Kumar Mehta, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) RK Goyal, Director General of Police (DGP) Dilbag Singh and Special DG CID Rashmi Ranjan Swain.

Also Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla and heads of all Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and Central Intelligence agencies as well as other senior officers of the MHA are expected to attend the meeting, they said.

The Lieutenant Governor is already in New Delhi and met defence minister Rajnath Singh.

Sources told GNS meeting is to take overall review of security scenario in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of targeted killings and arrangements for upcoming Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra.

The meeting comes a couple of days after that



Lieutenant Governor constituted a special cell for PM package employees in the L-G secretariat to look into grievances of the Kashmiri Pandit employees.

The cell will coordinate with district administrations and other departments to resolve all

See Amit Shah...on Pg-08

J&K LG meets Rajnath, seeks assistance of BRO for Amarnath Yatra



New Delhi, May 16 : Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday met Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh here, and discussed the road infrastructure for the upcoming Amarnath Yatra.

Sinha requested the Defence Minister for assistance of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to make the difficult stretches in the challenging terrain at high altitudes smooth which will ease the tracking up to the holy cave.

"Met Hon'ble Raksha Mantri, Shri Rajnath Singh Ji @rajnathsingh today and discussed road infrastructure for Shri Ama-

rnath Ji Yatra and @BROIndia assistance at difficult stretches in challenging terrain at high altitudes which will greatly ease the trek to the holy cave," the Office of LG, Jammu and Kashmir tweeted.

It was learnt that LG also requested the Defence Minister for setting up make-shift hospitals by the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) in at least two places, and oxygen booths in the route to the holy cave.

Sinha will also be participating in the high-level meeting chaired by Union

See J&K LG...on Pg-08

Gaurav Arora on shooting in icy cold Kashmir for 'Aadha Ishq'

New Delhi, May 16: 'Broken But Beautiful' fame Gaurav Arora talks about bagging the lead role in the web series 'Aadha Ishq' and shares his working experience in the harsh winters of Kashmir.

He shares: "While shooting for season 2 of 'Asur' I got a call from Mukesh Chhabra for this web show. So, I met the producer and the director and upon the first meeting they told me that the one liner of the show is the mother and the daughter fall in love with the same men so that actually got me interested in it. I mean it's a plot that you don't really see very often."

"In times like this when the OTT space or in general everything is filled with murder mystery you know thrillers, documentaries so romantic stories its a intense romantic story it just a breathe of fresh air. So, I just jumped upon the opportunity and

See Gaurav Arora...on Pg-08

LeT terror module busted in Bandipora, seven held

Srinagar, May 16: A terror module of proscribed terror outfit LeT was busted in Jammu and Kashmir's Bandipora with the arrest of seven terrorists/terrorist associates, including a woman, police said on Monday.

Incriminating materials, including arms and ammunition, have also been recovered from their possession. Six vehicles including four two-wheelers have also been seized.

"During the course of investigation of cases regarding the recent Bandipora encounters, Bandipora police, along with other security forces, busted a terror module of proscribed terror outfit LeT by arresting an active Pakistan-trained terrorist, two hybrid terrorists and four terrorist associates," a police official said.

The Pakistan-trained terrorist has been identified as Arif Ajaz Shehri, son of Ajaz Ahmad alias Anfall, resident of Nadihal, who had gone to Pakistan on a valid visa in 2018 through Wagah Border and infiltrated back to this side after obtaining illegal arms training and started actively working with proscribed terror outfit LeT in Bandipora.

The two hybrid terrorists have been identified as Ajaz Ahmad Reshi, resident of Rampora, and Shariq

Ahmad Lone, resident of Gundpora. They were tasked with carrying out attacks on police/security forces and other soft targets, particularly in Bandipora district."

The four terrorist associates, who include a woman, have been identified as Riyaz Ahmad Mir alias Metha Shehri, resident of Plan Bandipora, Gh Mohammad Waza alias Gul Bab, resident of Tawheedabad Bagh, Maqsood Ahmad Malik, resident of Chitibandy Aragam, and Sheema Shafi Waza, resident of Tawheedabad Bagh.

"Preliminary investigation revealed that the arrested terrorist associates were involved in harbouring terrorists, providing logistics/material support including transportation of terrorist in the Bandipora district. The arrested female terrorist associate was also involved in providing wi-fi hotspot, accommodation and ferrying terrorists in Bandipora town," police said.

Arms and ammunition, including two pistols, three pistol magazines, 25 pistol rounds, and three hand grenades, were recovered from their possession. Besides, an Ecco Van bearing registration number JK15A-1528 which was being used in

See LeT terror...on Pg-08

Finland makes official decision to apply to join NATO

Helsinki, May 16: Finland's President Sauli Niinisto and the government's foreign policy committee took the official decision to start the process of the country's application to become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Niinisto announced the decision officially on Sunday.

"On May 15, the President of the Republic and the Ministerial Committee on Foreign and Security Policy of the government finalised a report on Finland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The report will proceed to the plenary session of the government today... and after its approval, it will be submitted to Parliament," the government said in a statement.

Addressing a joint press conference with Prime Minister Sanna Marin,

See Finland...on Pg-08



"ON MAY 15, THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC AND THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT FINALISED A REPORT ON FINLAND'S ACCESSION TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANISATION. THE REPORT WILL PROCEED TO THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE GOVERNMENT TODAY... AND AFTER ITS APPROVAL, IT WILL BE SUBMITTED TO PARLIAMENT."

Finland, Sweden made a grave mistake: Russian Minister

Moscow, May 16: Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that Finland and Sweden have "made a grave mistake" with their intentions to join the NATO military alliance.

He stressed that Russia would not put up with such a situation and that by doing so, the general level of military tension on the



European continent will increase, RT reported.

"They should not have any illusions that we will simply put up with this, just like in Brussels, Washington and other NATO capitals. That is, the general level of military tension will increase, and there will be less predictability in

See Russian Minister...on Pg-08

Partly cloudy weather, thundershowers likely in J&K during next 24 hours

Srinagar, May 16: Weather remained partly cloudy with thundershowers in Jammu and Kashmir during the last 24 hours. The Meteorological (MeT) department said on Monday that partly cloudy weather with thundershowers at isolated places is likely during the next 24 hours.

"Partly cloudy weather with thundershowers at isolated places is likely

in J&K during the next 24 hours", an official of the department said.

Srinagar had 15.4, Pahalgam 9.1 and Gulmarg 5 degrees Celsius as the minimum temperature.

Drass town in Ladakh had 3.3, Leh 8.6 and Kargil 8.8 as the night's lowest temperature.

Jammu had 30.5, Katra 26.8, Batote 19.1, Banihal 28.2 and Bhandarwah 17.2 as the minimum temperature.

Russia to strengthen border with Finland if NATO deploys weapons

Moscow, May 16: Russia will strengthen its border with Finland if NATO's striking weapons are deployed in the neighbouring country amid the latter's intention to join the military alliance, a top official said in Moscow

"If NATO deploys offensive, striking weapons in Finland, in close proximity to us, we will strengthen our border and increase the presence of Russian troops on the border," Xinhua news agency quoted Viktor Bondarev, chairman of the Defence and Security Committee of the Federation Council, as



saying late Sunday.

He called Finland's intention to join NATO "disturbing" in a geopolitical sense.

Earlier on Sunday, Finnish President Sauli Niinisto and the government's foreign policy committee took an official decision to start the process of the country's application to become a NATO member.

Addressing a joint press conference with Prime Minister Sanna Marin, President Niinisto described the day as historical as a new era is opening.

He said the Finnish security is not "a zero-sum game", not directed against anyone.

In a phone call initiated by Helsinki on Saturday,

See Russia to...on Pg-08

Covid-19: JK reports two fresh positive cases

Srinagar, May 16: The Government today informed that 02 fresh positive cases of novel Corona virus (COVID-19) has been reported today; 01 from Jammu division and 01 from Kashmir division, thus taking the total number of positive cases to 454148.

Moreover, 06 more COVID-19 patients have recovered and been discharged from various hospitals, 03 from Jammu division and 03 from Kashmir division.

The Bulletin also informs that no new case of Mucormycosis has been reported today, thus the

See Covid-19...on Pg-08

Govt making hollow promises to Pahari speaking people: Omar

Srinagar, May 16: National Conference Vice President Omar Abdullah on Monday accused the government of offering only "hollow promises" on ST status to Pahari speaking people. He said the National Conference has been strongly pleading for the grant of Scheduled Tribe status to Pahari speaking people without disturbing the reservation quota already granted to other communities.

This he said while addressing a public gathering at Mendhar today. Among others General Secretary Ali Muhammad Sagar, Senior Leaders Mian Altaf Ahmed, Javed Rana, Chief Spokesperson



Tanvir Sadiq, Provincial President Rattan Lal Gupta, YNC Provincial President Aijaz Jan,

Deputy political secretary to VP Mudassir Shahmiri and Additional Spokesperson Zeeshan Rana were present on the occasion.

Addressing the people, Omar said that National conference has been custodian of interests of all the segments of the society and it was in this context that five per cent reservation in the professional and technical colleges was granted by the NC government to the students belonging to Pahari speaking communities. "The notion that NC is averse to reservation for Paharis is fictitious

See Govt...on Pg-08

Bhardawaj chairs UTLMC of REGP

Subsidy amount of Rs 25 crore released during previous year under the employment programme

SRINAGAR, MAY 16: Additional Chief Secretary, Finance, Vivek Bhardawaj who is also hold the charge of Administrative Secretary, Industries and Commerce Department today held the UT Level Monitoring Committee (UTLMC) meeting of J&K Rural Employment Generation Programme (JKREGP).

The meeting was also attended by Secretary in Industries & Commerce (I&C) Department; Director I&C, Kashmir; Director I&C, Jammu; Director EDI; Secretary/CEO Khadi & Village Industries Board (KVIB); President UTLBC J&K Bank; President Government Schemes J&K Bank; Chairman J&K Grameen Bank; CGM State Cooperative Bank and other officers of J&K KVIB.

Bhardawaj emphasised upon the officers to make the process of establishment of income generating units under such programmes easy for all. He observed that such a kind of programmes are pivotal in reducing the unemployment here. He maintained that the applicants should be provided training through EDI for better management of the units in order to maximize their gains.

It was informed in the meeting that during the previous financial year (2021-22) an amount of Rs 25.00 crores were released for implementation of JKREGP in the UT. It was given out that the Board has disbursed margin money (subsidy) of Rs 24.62 crores to 893 income generating units involving bank loan of Rs 66.84 crores and providing employment avenues to 5358 persons.

Elucidating it was said that the target of Rs. 25.00 crores has been approved for the current financial year under this employment genera-



tion programme. The meeting was apprised that this margin money is earmarked for establishing 1231 income generating units throughout the UT.

It was further informed that the distribution of this subsidy amount is going to be done proportionately based on the rural population

and previous performance of various Micro-Industrial schemes in each district.

It is envisaged that overall the scheme is slated to generate employment opportunities for about 7500 workers/artisans in the UT during the ensuing fiscal, as was disclosed in the UTLMC.

Mega Health Camp organised at Bandipora

BANDIPORA, MAY 16: On the directions of Deputy Commissioner Bandipora Department of Health in Collaboration with CRPF on Monday organised Mega Health Camp at Bandipora.

The Mega Health Camp was inaugurated by Chairperson Block Development Council Bandipora in presence of CO CRPF, Shri Rakesh Sharma; Chief Medical Officer Bandipora Dr. Bashir Ahmad Khan and Block Medical Officer Bandipora Dr. Masarat Iqbal.

On the occasion, people were examined and screened by Doctors of neurology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, ENT, cardiology, urology, chest, gastroenterology, gynecologist and obstetrics, dermatology, endocrinology, child specialist, dental, general medicine and general surgery.

Speaking on the occasion CO CRPF Shri Rakesh Sharma said, it is necessary to organize Health camps to connect the general public with health services and to aware the public about the beneficial schemes of the health department.

He said It should be our endeavor that the benefits of the schemes run by the government should reach the last beneficiary living in remote areas.

He said that People should be health conscious and get their tests done in time and get treated. Better health is our greatest asset, he added.

The camp was conducted in makeshift hospital Pazzalpora and in the far flung areas of Bandipora where patients



were screened and shifted to Pazzalpora for further screening, investigations and surgical treatment with provisions for diagnosis, medicines, food, accommodation and surgical care.

The camp witnessed participation by large number of people across all age groups. Besides ferrying of patients to and fro during the camp and free treatment, the administration has made all arrangements for patients accompanying attendants regarding transportation, accommodation, medicine, food etc

BMO Bandipora Dr. Masrat Iqbal informed that, as of Now More than 2000 registrations have been made so far in the camp and hundreds referred to designated Hospitals for various surgeries and procedures successfully".

Three day historic Mounгри Mela concludes

UDHAMPUR, MAY- 16: - A large number of Men, women and children of all faith attended 3- day historic Shiv Parvati Mounгри Mela observed at Sar Dabar in tehsil Mounгри of district Udhampur, which concluded amid traditional fervor and gaiety here today.

As per the organisers around thirty thousand devotees attended the 3-day festival organised every year.

On concluding, DDC Councilor, Panchari Jasvir Singh was the chief guest, while SSP 19th Battalion IRP Kathua Commandant Benam Tosh was the guest of honour.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief guest appreciated the organisers for holding such types of local fairs in far flung areas of the District. He said that these fairs are a symbol of 'our diverse culture and these not only attract tourists but also help in the economic development of the area.'

Hailing sports events organised during the Mela, he said that sports play a vital role in the overall personality development of the youth besides channelizing their positive energies in the right perspective.

He hailed the Youth Services and Sports Department for organising rural sports competitions and cultural programmes by involving different schools of the area.

The cultural troupes drawn from different educational institutions presented folk dances and cultural programmes depicting the tradition of the areas which was highly appreciated by the round of applause. For the successful conduct of the three-day mela, the district administration Udhampur had made elaborate arrangements of security, drinking water and power supply, Medicare, traffic regulation, additional bus services and stock of commodities etc.

Later, the chief guest distributed prizes and certificates among the participants on the occasion.

DDC Kupwara reviews progress of Languishing projects

Sets timeline for completion of 162 projects worth Rs .417.17 crore approved under LPP

KUPWARA, MAY 16: The District Development Commissioner (DDC) Kupwara, Khalid Jahangir today convened a meeting of concerned officers to review the pace of progress of projects being constructed under the Languishing Projects Programme (LPP).

The meeting discussed threadbare various issues pertaining to timeline and quality standard of the projects.

The DDC took detailed review of all projects one by one and received feedback on the status of the projects. He was informed that 162 projects costing Rs.417.17 crore have been approved under the Languishing Programme, out of which 47 projects have been completed. While 99 projects are under execution and the rest of the 16 have to be taken up.

The meeting was informed that the projects which are under execution include roads and buildings, water supply schemes, health centres, school buildings etc.

Addressing the meeting, the DDC directed the executing agencies to speed up the developmental tempo in the district and ensure completion of all ongoing works within the stipulated timeframe.

The DDC directed concerned offi-



cers to complete all projects by the end of the current financial year and gave different timelines for different projects.

Khalid Jahangir nominated District Statistical & Evaluation Officer Kupwara for monitoring of works for its completion. He further directed executing agencies to incur financial expenditure as per guidelines of the Languishing Projects Programme.

The DDC made all the executing agencies personally responsible for monitoring of works and getting for-

est clearance wherever required as per norms.

The DDC directed district officers to visit border and remote areas like Karnah, Keran, Machill, Jagumud and Kumkadi in groups on rotation basis along with supporting staff to resolve public grievances and developmental issues. For this, he directed JD Planning to issue a Calendar of officers as per roster.

The meeting was attended by JD Planning, all Superintendent Engineers, Executive Engineers and other.

Wildlife deptt continues cleanliness drive around Hokersar

SRINAGAR, MAY 16: Department of Wildlife Protection J&K Government, Wetlands Division Kashmir in joint collaboration with stake holding departments, civil society groups, N.G.O's, Educational institutions is observing "Save Hokersar-Save Srinagar" campaign under the banner "TAWAZUN" which commenced on May 07 and shall culminate on May 21, 2022.

The aim is to launch a comprehensive cleanliness drive in and around Hokersar Wetland Conservation Reserve and to maintain the ecological characteristics of this world famous wetland (RAMSAR Site).

This is also a sequel to the on spot directions of Worthy Chief Secretary, Jammu & Kashmir during his recent visit to the Hokersar.

Accordingly, a cleanliness drive was today conducted in & around Hokersar Wetland Conservation Re-



serve in which Safai karamcharies of Municipal committees of Srinagar and Budgam Districts, Range Officer, lakes along with his field staff, Students of Govt. Degree College Ma-

gam, Boys Higher Secondary School Laweypora, Doon International School Srinagar, different N.G.O's, volunteers, Panchayat members, Forest Protection Force personals

of K-01/K-03 and representatives of different stake holding departments participated.

Today the event was flagged off by Ifshan Dewan, Wildlife Warden, Wetlands Division Kashmir.

During the drive solid waste of about 4 to 5 trucks of load was collected from Haji Bagh Iron Bridge to Soibugh of Budgam district and Laweypora of Srinagar District.

The Solid waste collected from different spots was accordingly disposed off properly, which involved mass efforts of 200 persons.

At the end of today's event, Ifshan Dewan, Wildlife Warden, Wetlands Division Kashmir, appealed all the stakeholders especially students & youth to join hands with the department for the protection and perpetuation of the existing Wetlands in the valley especially "Hokersar Wetland Conservation Reserve".

MD JKRLM visits Rajouri; Interacts with Self Help Groups

JAMMU, MAY 16: Mission Director Jammu & Kashmir Rural Livelihoods Mission (JKRLM), Indu Kanwal Chib today visited Rajouri to take stock of the program activities in different Blocks of the district.

She interacted with Self Help Groups and assessed the implementation of the activities going on in the blocks.

During the interaction, the MD stressed upon the SHG members to avail the benefits envisaged under the Mission and strive for their economic upliftment.

She said that the main objective of JKRLM (UMIED) is ensuring organised development of women, particularly in rural areas, by upgrading their economic and social status.

The MD urged the officers to identify different business models that could be recast and replicated in the villages and offered to women for taking up as enterprises. She directed the officers to assist these women in channelizing their efforts in carving out successful businesses.

The Mission Director said that

apart from focusing on the handicraft, handloom, food processing activities as the source of livelihood generation, the JKRLM intends to let the SHG members take up the service sector as a means of their livelihoods. She further elaborated that the SHG members will be trained in the service sector through training partners.

District programme Manager, Mohammad Owais Karni, informed the chair about the achievements of Mission in Rajouri District. It was informed that 3000 Self Help Groups have been formed in the District where as an amount of Rs 9.33 crore has been provided to the SHGs as capitalization from the Mission.

In addition, the SHGs have been credit linked with the banks to the tune of Rs 1450 crore. The amount has been invested by the members in different Livelihoods like Dairy units, food processing units, Handicrafts, Livestock and poultry farming besides under convergence, various Livelihood initiatives have been successfully initiated with the help of line departments.

DCO Ramban seals 4 unauthorized medical stores in Gool area

RAMBAN, MAY 16: Drug Control Officer (DCO), Ramban Intiyaz Ahmed today conducted an extensive inspection in far flung area of Sub-division Gool.

He inspected medical shops in different villages of Gool and adjoining areas, which includes Salbala, Jamman, Hara etc.

During the inspection, the Drug Inspector sealed 4 medical stores on the spot under section 22(d) of Drugs & Cosmetic Act 1940 for violation of various provisions of Drugs and Cosmetic Rules 1945.

Statutory drug samples of 02 drug formulations were lifted from the market for determining the strength and purity. These samples will be referred to the Drug Testing Laboratory for framing legal opinions to ascertain their quality parameters.

JK Govts' key reforms brought its Financial Structure at par with any progressive system across country

SRINAGAR, MAY 16: "Key reforms introduced by the Jammu and Kashmir government in its financial structure envisaging added transparency and accountability have brought UT's fiscal system at par with any other progressive arrangement across the country".

A departmental official, while elaborating on the subject, maintained that implementation of transformative reforms such as Budget Estimation and Allocation Monitoring System (BEAMS), online submission of bills through J&K PaySys, mandatory administrative approvals, technical sanctions and e-tendering, digital payments, GFR, GeM and related measures have greatly helped the financial systems in J&K to be at par with any other developing financial system in the

country.

Publication of pictorial e-compendiums related to projects completed under Back to Village, District Capex, UT Capex and JKIDFC broadly reflects government's commitment towards engaging with the citizens. This is the first time in the Union Territory of J&K that people are able to oversee works being executed in their areas on a real time basis. During 2020-21, more than 18,000 works were available on the EMPOWERMENT portal for the first time in J&K for public viewing thus bringing in real grass root empowerment.

The sincere initiative of Finance Department to institutionalize prudence in financial management in J&K has truly transformed the Union Territory. The essence of

reforms such as online processing of bills through PaySys, streamlining of GST, e-stamping, e-GRAS, e-auction of liquor licences for retail outlets, digital payments, implementation of GeM, path-breaking reforms in J&K Bank, publication of important manuals relating to Budget and Audit, Back to Village and My Town My Pride initiatives besides 100% physical verification of works which was a most vital program to ensure implementation of projects without cost and time over-runs.

"Promoting good governance in the financial management has been one of the core objectives of the government. The financial system in J&K is one of the most transparent systems anywhere and is among the key changes that have taken roots

in the Union Territory", the official asserted.

Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, during a meeting with the Finance Department highlighted major reforms taken up by the J&K government to bring greater transparency in the financial system making it more robust and result oriented.

Sinha said that unprecedented levels of transparency have been achieved through EMPOWERMENT (Enabling Monitoring and Public Overview of Works being Executed and Resources for Meaningful Transparency), which is a web portal that hosts all the works being executed in the UT and allows public oversight over all works under execution.

"Our government believes in

the mantra of four Ps-Peace, Progress, Prosperity and People-first, for holistic development of Jammu and Kashmir making the UT Atmanirbhar in all respects" LG maintained.

Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, during her recent visit to J&K said the abrogation of Article 370 brought impetus in financial activities, transparency in administration and growth in UT's economy.

"In the past two years, work that has happened in J&K is absolutely stunning. The government procurement, recruitment, government spending of its resources, taxation or deployment of resources, whatever it be, they are now available online 24x7 with all transparency," she asserted. So in terms of bringing transparency

in governance, in terms of being transparent itself tells you that they are accountable for every rupee which is deployed on ground, she added.

"This kind of approach to governance was absolutely unheard of in J&K and for that I would honestly thank the abrogation of (Article) 370. And quickly, please have a look all of you, within the last two years, after the abrogation, the entire administration is now visible for every citizen of J&K to see what's going on here. It cannot be a few families' oligopoly. Money of the people should go to the people and it should be in a transparent process. That is what has been achieved in J&K and I'm very happy to have learnt about it", Nirmala Sitharaman maintained.

Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh says, Centre will train 20,000 Jammu & Kashmir Govt officials in grievance redressal under Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions

SRINAGAR, MAY 16: Centre will train 20,000 Jammu & Kashmir Govt officials in grievance redressal and the task will be undertaken by the Department of Administrative Reforms, Union Ministry of Personnel.

This was announced here today by Union Minister of State (IC) Ministry of Science and Technology; Minister of State (IC) Ministry of Earth Science; MoS of Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, while inaugurating a two day Regional Conference on the theme "Bringing Citizens and Government Closer - Through Administrative Reforms" at SKICC Srinagar.

The Regional Conference is being organized by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), GoI in collaboration with UT of Jammu & Kashmir. The conference is being held in the backdrop of replication of good governance practices in Union Territory of J&K. 16 PM Awardees presented their innovations in the 2 day event.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, Jammu

and Kashmir became the first UT in the country to have Good Governance Index and was also first to launch District Good Governance Index for 20 Districts of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in January this year. He said, the Index represented a major administrative reform in benchmarking good governance at District level and a significant step for timely collation and publication of statistics at State/District level.

Dr Jitendra Singh said that governance reforms must be taken to next level and he proposed the idea of Aspirational Blocks on the lines of Aspirational Districts based on 41 scientifically evolved indices and aimed at bringing districts lagging in certain parameters at par with the best performing districts.

Dr. Jitendra Singh said that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has accorded the top priority in bringing the overall development in J&K UT. "Prime Minister's objective scientific approach even in designing, structuring and planning in administrative re-

forms has worked to a great benefit as it is based on very objective parameters," he said. Citing examples of Baramulla and Kupwara being under the Aspirational District Program (ADP) he lauded the Central Government's such initiative which he called dynamic in approach based on real time evaluation.

Speaking during the meeting, Union Minister said that Central Government is committed to raising the living standards of its citizens and ensuring inclusive growth for all. He said that ADP closely focuses on improving people's ability to participate fully in the developmental economy.

Taking about reforms in governance he said that it becomes imperative to reform rules that have become obsolete over time. Keeping pace with the contemporary time is the need of the hour. Such reforms are an example of minimum government and maximum governance and reform perform and transform slogan, he said. These are not only governance reforms which are being spoken about but also huge

social reforms which are meant to carry India on the path to become a part of the global world.

During the two-day event, presentations are being made on priority programs from the Prime Awards for Excellence In Public Administration, 2021; Promoting "Jan Bhagidari" or People's Participation in Poshan Abhiyan; Promoting excellence in Sports and wellness through Khelo India scheme; Digital payments and good governance in PM SVANidhi Yojana; Holistic Development through One District One Product scheme; Seamless, End-to-End Delivery of Services without Human Intervention (District/Others) and Innovations (Centre, State and Districts). One Session is also on the theme "Improving e-Service Delivery in J&K."

In his address, Secretary, DARPG, Shri V.Srinivas said that the conference is an effort to bring the Government and Citizens closer through various administrative reforms at centre, state and district level.

Southwest monsoon debuts over Andaman & Nicobar islands

New Delhi: Southwest monsoon advanced into the Andaman and Nicobar islands on Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said here, signalling the start of the four-month seasonal rains that are crucial to the largely agri-dependent economy. The Andaman and Nicobar islands and adjoining areas have been experiencing rainfall due to strengthening south-westerly winds in the lower tropospheric levels, the weather office said.

The onset of monsoon over Andaman and Nicobar islands happened a day late as the IMD had earlier said that the seasonal rains would cover the region on May 15.

"Conditions are favourable for further advance of southwest monsoon into some more parts of south Bay of Bengal, entire Andaman Sea & Andaman Islands and some parts of east-central Bay of Bengal during next 2-3 days," the IMD said in a statement here.

Northern parts of India, which were reeling under intense heat wave conditions on Sunday, also got a slight breather on Monday with Dholpur in Rajasthan recording the highest maximum temperature of 46.1 degrees Celsius. The highest maximum temperature recorded at Banda in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday was 49 degrees Celsius.

At least 16 cities reported temperatures in excess of 44 degrees Celsius,

the highest being Dholpur (46.1), followed by Jhansi (45.6), Nowgong (45.5), Bhatinda (45.1) and Varanasi, Patiala and Sidhi (45 each). Under the influence of a western disturbance over central Pakistan, scattered to fairly widespread light/moderate rainfall with thunderstorm/lightning/gusty winds were very likely over Jammu-Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand on Monday and Tuesday.

The weather office had also forecast an isolated hailstorm over Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand on Tuesday. On the monsoon front, the IMD had forecast early arrival of the seasonal rains over Kerala on May 27, five days ahead of the normal onset date of June 1.

The presence of cyclonic circulations over Lakshadweep and north Tamil Nadu coast are expected to bring fairly widespread rainfall with isolated thunderstorm/lightning/gusty winds with isolated heavy to very heavy falls over Kerala, Coastal & South Interior Karnataka during the next five days, it said.

The weather office said isolated heavy rainfall was expected over Tamil Nadu from Monday to Wednesday and over Lakshadweep area over the next two days. It said isolated extremely heavy falls are also likely over coastal & south interior Karnataka on Wednesday.

Punjab CM Mann launches 'Lok Milni' for redressal of grievances of people

Chandigarh, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann heard grievances of people and issued directions for their redressal in a first-of-its-kind public interaction programme, 'Lok Milni', which was launched here on Monday. The chief minister said this interactive programme is aimed at providing a single-window platform to the people for redressal of their complaints.

People from different parts of the state came with several complaints regarding encroachment of panchayat land, land dispute, pending arrears of Shagun scheme and others.

Those people were called who had submitted their complaints and grievances with the AAP-led government in the last two months.

Mann, while launching 'Lok Milni' at Punjab Bhawan here, said, "This is a humble step of my government to make sure that we facilitate resolution of long-pending administrative issues concerning people."

Mann said the top brass of his government would accompany him during this 'Lok Milni' to ensure that the matters flagged by people are immediately resolved on the spot, according to an official release.

Mann said that this endeavour is aimed at ensuring that people do not have to run from pillar to post for getting their

works done.

As many as 61 complainants listed their grievances before the chief minister during this 'Lok Milni'.

He directed the top officers of the various departments present on the occasion to ensure resolution of these complaints in a time-bound manner.

Mann said he would be personally monitoring the status of these complaints every week, adding that any sort of dereliction in this act will not be tolerated at any cost.

Redressing a complaint, Mann asked the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment to immediately release the pending arrears of the 'Shagun scheme' to eligible beneficiaries.

On another complaint, the chief minister asked the Water Resources Department to ensure that drinking water was supplied to each and every beneficiary without any prejudice.

On the complaint of one Dr Seema Rani, whose husband passed away during the COVID-19 pandemic about two years ago, he asked officers to ensure that she gets a job at the earliest under the government's policy.

Mann said the state government is adopting a zero tolerance policy towards the menace of drugs and this curse will be wiped out from the state.

Div Com reviews arrangements for annual Shri Machail Yatra

JAMMU, MAY 16: Divisional Commissioner, Jammu Ramesh Kumar today chaired a meeting of concerned officers to review the arrangements being put in place for smooth conduct of Annual Shri Chand Mata Ji Machail Yatra in district Kishtwar.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner Kishtwar, Ashok Sharma; Additional CEO Shri Mata Vaishno Devi ji Shrine Board, Vishvajeet; Additional DC Jammu, Chief Engineers of JPDC, PWD, PMGSY besides senior functionaries of Reliance, Airtel and other concerned officers. The Deputy Commissioner Doda and District officers of Kishtwar participated in the meeting through video conferencing.

At the outset, the Divisional Commissioner inquired about the overall infrastructure development requirements. The Deputy Commissioner Kishtwar apprised him of progress achieved so far and future work plan.

While reviewing annual Yatra arrangements which generally start from July 25, it was informed that varied works have been initiated for development of basic facilities, roads, power supply, buildings, improvement of communication services etc in the Shrine area and the en-route.

The Div Com reviewed the status of roads and was informed that 66 KM Kishtwar to Gulabgarh (Padder) road was already there and another 16 KM PMGSY road had been completed



from Padder to Kunail. He directed the Executive Engineer to expedite the pace of work and complete more length for smooth conduct of Yatra.

Regarding the power supply facility, the Chief Engineer JPDC informed that a dedicated feeder was already in place for the Shrine area. It was informed that due to floods the cable was damaged and the work was in progress to restore the power supply.

The Div Com instructed Chief Engineer JPDC to ensure power supply to the dedicated feeder at the earliest so that uninterrupted electricity supply was ensured during the Yatra days.

Asking for the provision of dependable telecom services for the pilgrims, the Div Com stressed on the district administration to facilitate the work on installation of towers by telecom service companies, resolve land and power supply issues etc.

It was informed that a website portal/ mobile app will be launched for registration of pilgrims and to provide the information related to Shri Chand Mata Ji Machail Yatra and its history.

The Div Com asked the DC Kishtwar to explore provisions of RFID tracking of pilgrims visiting Machail Mata Yatra this year to ensure their safety.

While reviewing sanitation facilities, the DC apprised the Div Com that temporary toilets would be constructed en-route well before the start of Yatra.

The Chief Engineer PWD (R&B) informed that DPRs have been formulated for the construction/repair of Dharamshala, renovation of existing toilets en-route to Shrine and other additional works.

The Div Com also exhorted upon DC Kishtwar, other concerned officers to explore provisions of installation of solar lights, CCTVs on the entire route and Langer sites.

Regarding accommodation facilities, it was informed that a Dharamshala with the capacity of accommodating 200 persons was already there and the provisions of tentages will also be explored.

The Div Com directed concerned officers to formulate a comprehensive plan for more accommodation facilities, besides provisions of water proof tents for comfortable stay of pilgrims.

The Div Com also reviewed the health care facilities and stressed for provision of adequate medical staff en-route and in the Shrine for providing patient care during Yatra days.

The Div Com also reviewed Development works executed in the Shrine and directed concerned officers to expedite the pace for their time-bound completion.

Smriti Irani faces protests by Congress over price rise during Pune visit

PUNE: Congress workers staged protests and shouted slogans against the Centre over price rise at two different venues during the visit of Union Cabinet minister and BJP leader Smriti Irani to Pune on Monday.

The first protest, by women Congress members, took place outside a hotel where Irani was attending a programme.

"Around 12 noon, Pune city women Congress committee members staged a protest over inflation and rising prices of LPG. Since the central government has failed to check inflation in the country, the women members had gone to present bangles to Union minister Smriti Irani," said a party functionary. The protesting Congress members were detained by police and later released, he said.

Workers of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), an ally of the Congress in Maharashtra's rul-



ing coalition MVA, also organized a separate protest over the issue of price rise outside the hotel. Later in the evening, Congress activists held a demonstration over soaring prices of essential goods outside the Bal Gandharva auditorium when the

Minister for Women and Child Development was attending a book release event. Pune city Congress president Ramesh Bagwe said, "We shouted slogans against the rising prices and showed placards standing outside the Bal Gandharva auditorium."

Centre relaxes procurement norms for shrivelled, broken wheat grains

The Centre on Sunday announced a major relaxation in the Fair and Average Quality (FAQ) norms of wheat by raising the maximum permissible limit of "shrivelled and broken grains" to 18 per cent from the existing 6 per cent.

The move is aimed at providing relief to Punjab and Haryana farmers during the ongoing rabi marketing season.

A statement issued by the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution said: "The Centre has decided to allow FCI to procure wheat in Punjab and Haryana, including UT of Chandigarh, for central pool

by relaxing the FAQ of shrivelled and broken grains up to 18 per cent without any value cut. This decision will reduce the hardship of farmers and avoid distress sale of wheat."

The move comes after the two states wrote to the Centre, seeking relaxation in the Uniform Specifications of Wheat for RMS 2022-23. They had urged the Centre to raise the maximum permissible limit of shrivelled and broken grains to 20 per cent.

According to the Food Ministry, Central teams were deputed in Punjab and Haryana in April-May to collect very

large sized samples from mandis, which were later analysed in FCI labs. "The results indicated presence of shrivelled and broken grains in varying percentages and beyond FAQ norms," the statement said.

"The emergence of shrivelled grains is a natural phenomenon appearing as a result of extreme heat wave that enveloped the northern part of the country in March. These adverse weather conditions are beyond the control of farmers and hence, they should not be penalised for such natural occurrence," it said.

Kumaraswamy hits back at Rahul for remark on regional parties, says Congress has phobia

BENGALURU: Congress is facing a phobia of regional parties, JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy said on Monday while taking a swipe at the grand old party leader Rahul Gandhi for his critical comments on those parties.

In an apparent sarcastic note, he asked the former Congress president to elaborate to regional parties about ideological commitment, while saying that the national party has no presence in most parts of the country.

He said the Congress toppled the I K Gujral-led United Front government, demanding that DMK be kept out of the Cabinet by citing the links of the Dravidian party with the LTTE in the backdrop of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. But, the same Congress in the later years shared a cordial, political relationship with that party.

"Is sharing power with the same DMK for 10 years in UPA-1 and -2 governments, led by Manmohan Singh, an ideological commitment?" he questioned in a tweet.

In his address at his party's "Chintan Shivir" (brainstorming camp) in Udaipur, Gandhi had claimed that regional parties cannot fight the BJP and the RSS as they lack ideology. The Congress can fight them, he had said.

Noting that Rahul Gandhi claims that Congress alone has the strength to defeat the BJP, the former Chief Minister said he (Rahul) should not forget that his party enjoyed power for 10 years on the strength of regional parties.



"Is joining hands (with BJP) for the immoral operation 'Lotus' through the back door, after coming to our (JD-S) door with an alliance proposal and forming a coalition government with us, an ideological commitment? Is destroying alliance partners ideology-based politics?" he further questioned the Congress.

As 2018 polls threw up a hung verdict, Congress and JD(S), which fought elections separately, joined hands to form a coalition government in Karnataka un-

der the leadership of Kumaraswamy. However, the government fell after 14 months due to dissidence within, and with MLAs from both parties resigning and joining the BJP.

Stating that Congress is facing a phobia of regional parties, Kumaraswamy said, "It has no presence in most of the States like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha. Congress is in its last days in Karnataka. It will be better if Rahul Gandhi understands that."

Budh Purnima: DC Poonch pays obeisance at Baba Lohar Devta Shrine

POONCH, MAY 16: On the occasion of Holy festival of Bud Purnima, the Deputy Commissioner Poonch, Inder Jeet paid obeisance at Baba Lohar Devta Shrine at village Ghani where he performed the Havan.

The Commandant of KG 10 Brigade, Rakesh Nair also performed the Havan.

Other officers accompanying the Deputy Commissioner included, Chief Executive Officer, PDA, Dr. Mohammad, Tanveer; Assistant Commissioner Development, Abid Hussain Shah; Executive Engineer Jal Shakti, Rajesh Sethi; Executive Engineer JPDC, Irshad Hussain; District Culture Officer, Dr. Alamdar Adam besides BDC Member, Chowdhary Amanullah, Members of Committee, Rajinder Singh (PP) and other concerned officers.

The management Committee of the Shrine warmly welcomed and greeted the Deputy Commissioner and the team of officers of District Administra-



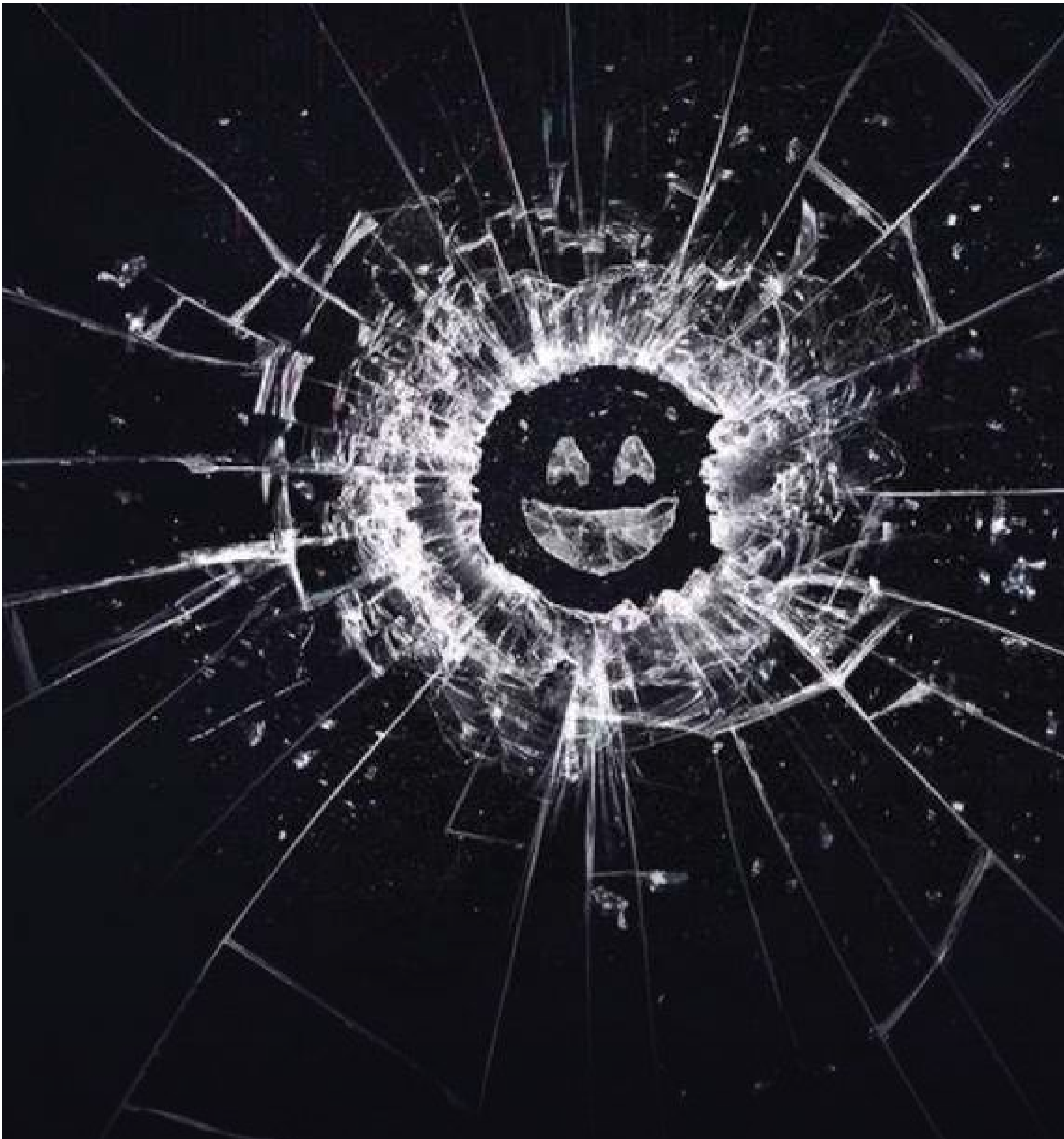
tion. The Committee members raised various demands including installation of a transformer to improve power supply, adequate provision of drinking water, new water schemes, renovation of shrine road and other arrangements.

Responding to the demands, the DC assured the members of the Committee that all their genuine demands would

be addressed in a time bound manner.

The Deputy Commissioner directed the Xen PDD to arrange funds for the installation of the power transformer, while Executive Engineer PHE was asked to make provision for uninterrupted supply of water to the Shrine.

The DC also advocated for promotion of the Shrine as a Heritage and pilgrim destination.



Netflix's Black Mirror to return with Season 6, fans say 'just can't keep calm'

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Netflix's critically acclaimed show Black Mirror is gearing up for its sixth season. The fifth season of the show was released in 2019 and received a mixed response from the viewers. After the news of the new season came to light, fans started reacting to it. Also Read: Black Mirror season 5 review: Twisted and terrifying, Netflix's feel-bad show returns for another round

Details about the cast and specific stories of the show hasn't been confirmed but according to a Variety report, season six is slated to

have more episodes than the fifth one. According to Variety, "The latest season is even more cinematic in scope, with each instalment being treated as an individual film."

The last instalment followed the release of Bandersnatch - an interactive Black Mirror stand-alone film, where viewers are asked at various points to make a choice which affects the storyline. The fifth season starred Andrew Scott, Anthony Mackie, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Topher Grace and Miley Cyrus.

Reacting to the news, one Twitter user said, "The twist is they are going to be really sweet, positive, life affirming stories this time." Another one said, "I hope it's actually good again... The last series was underwhelming." While one wrote, "It's been so long," another one asked, "What's the cast?"

One person said, "Great news! #BlackMirror is brilliant, although real life has felt very black mirror lately which is terrifying." Excited with the news, one fan said, "I just can't keep calm."

According to the Hindustan Times review of the fifth season, "Season 5 can't help but feel like a placeholder, something created only to fulfil certain contractual obligations, or perhaps to buy Brooker more time to create the next Bandersnatch. At five seasons old now, Black Mirror's battery is draining faster than it used to; its body is chipped, its screen cracked. It's too early to start thinking of a replacement, but perhaps a quick trip to the service centre is in order."

Kamal Haasan's 'Vikram' trailer crosses 1.2 crore views within 24 hours

Chennai, May 16: The trailer of superstar Kamal Haasan's latest flick 'Vikram' has garnered 1.2 crore views within 24 hours of its launch on YouTube.

Southern stars Vijay Setupathy and Fahad Faasil are also playing major roles opposite Kamal in the movie.

The movie directed by Lokesh Kanagaraj is all set to release by June 3. 'Vikram' is one of the most anticipated films from the Tamil film industry.

After launching the trailer, Kamal wrote "Our endeavour now belongs to you." The action packed trailer is loved by hardcore fans of Kamal, Setupathy and Fahad and they are eagerly looking forward to the release of the movie.

Anirudh has scored the music. Girish Gangadharan is the director of photography and the movie is produced by Kamal Haasan and R. Mahendran.

'Stranger Things' 'fanboy' Varun Dhawan flaunts favourite show merchandise

Mumbai, May 16: As Volume 1 of the sci-fi horror drama series 'Stranger Things 4' approaches its premiere date, Bollywood star Varun Dhawan, who proclaims to be a 'Stranger Things' fanboy, paid an homage to his favourite series.

The actor flaunted his love for the Netflix show with his very own 'Stranger Things' merchandise. In a new video released by Netflix, the 'Student of the Year' star can be seen giving an elusive tour of his house.

As he walks around, the audience gets to see his geeky side with a range of artefacts and wall art. He also candidly shares his love for the series and its characters.

As he continues on the tour, the atmosphere gets eerie because all favourite elements from the series start to take over, including Varun showcasing his dramatised telekinetic abilities, glimpses of the rift leading to the Upside Down and Varun's very own pet Demodog.

The show, which has become a pop culture obsession, sees its upcoming season picking up six months after the Battle of Starcourt. Vol 1 of 'Stranger Things 4' is set to stream on Netflix from May 27.

'K.G.F: Chapter 2' now available for 'Early Access' rentals on OTT

Hyderabad, May 16: Yash-starrer 'K.G.F: Chapter 2', which broke many records, is now available to rent on Prime Video.

With the introduction of 'Movie Rentals' on Prime Video, fans of the 'KGF' franchise can get early access to the blockbuster film before it becomes available digitally.

Beginning Monday, movie fans both Prime members and non-Prime members can rent the film for Rs 199 on Prime Video and enjoy this pan-India blockbuster from the comfort of their own homes.

The film will be available to rent in HD quality in five languages - Kannada, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam.

Apart from 'K.G.F: Chapter 2', viewers can rent the most recent Indian and international films, as well as a diverse selection of popular films (award winners and franchises) from around the world.



Director Nupur Asthana offers a sip of 'Cutting Chai' in 'Modern Love: Mumbai'

Mumbai, May 16: Directing the 'Cutting Chai' segment in 'Modern Love: Mumbai' has turned out to be an enjoyable experience for Nupur Asthana who has earlier helmed 'Bewakoofiyaa' and 'Chance Pe Dance'.

Asthana, who has directed 'Cutting Chai' - one of the six short love stories in 'Modern Love: Mumbai', confesses that the story is very close to her heart.

"Cutting Chai" is a story very close to my heart, and I enjoyed making every bit of it. It's about a woman who's caught up in the humdrum of everyday married life and has

lost sight of her dreams. While projecting her dissatisfactions onto her partner and her choices, realises that all the answers lie within her.

"I think this movie is an ode to all the lovers who are trying to figure out who they really are in this rapidly changing world and can they do it while keeping their loved ones close. I am so fortunate that Arshad and Chitragada shared the same vision as mine and I really look forward to viewers enjoying 'Cutting Chai' and having a warm cuppa along with it!"

'Cutting Chai' features Chitragada Singh and Arshad Warsi in leading roles.

Inspired by New York Times Blogs, 'Modern Love - Mumbai' is an anthology of six stories released on Prime Video on May 13.

The six anecdotes of people's lives transcend all boundaries and stereotypes of caste, religion, age, and gender and promise a heart-stuttering portrayal of true love.

The series boasts prominent directors like Hansal Mehta, Nupur Asthana, Vishal Bhardwaj, Shonali Bose, Dhruv Sehgal, and Alankrita Shrivastava.



BJP's replacement of Tripura CM with eye on 2023 polls

Agartala, May 16: After Uttarakhand, Gujarat and Karnataka, the BJP has changed its Chief Minister in Tripura, months ahead of the Assembly polls in the Northeastern state, with a view on electoral calculations and gains.

The election to the 60-member Tripura Assembly is due in January-February 2023.

Though the script was written in Delhi, the real drama was played in Agartala to overcome the anti-incumbency factor at least eight to nine months ahead of the crucial Assembly polls, which is expected to be multi-cornered between the CPI-M, the Congress, new entrant Trinamool Congress (TMC), besides the ruling BJP.

A year after the BJP-Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) government assumed charge on March 9, 2018, ending the 25-year rule of the Left Front, Tripura has witnessed waves of revolt by dissident BJP MLAs led by Sudip Roy Barman against Biplab Kumar Deb, who also subsequently announced to obtain a people's mandate by calling a public meeting.

His move was later cancelled following the intervention of the Central BJP leadership.

Amid open resentment by a section of the ruling BJP MLAs and leaders in Tripura, the Cabinet expansion took place on August 31, 2021, by inducting three ministers even as the dissident MLAs and BJP leaders boycotted that swearing-in-ceremony.

The dissidence in May 2019 was sparked off after the State Health and Family Welfare and the Information Technology Minister Roy Barman was sacked following differences with Deb.

Sudip Roy Barman, six other MLAs and many leaders had quit the Congress in 2016 to join the TMC and next year (2017) they joined the BJP



and helped it win the Assembly elections in 2018.

However, then, Sudip Roy Barman and Ashish Kumar Saha, who resigned from the state Assembly and the BJP on February 7, 2022, rejoined the Congress in New Delhi on February 8.

Earlier, BJP MLA Ashish Das, after openly criticising the saffron party and its leadership, including Deb, joined the TMC on October 31, 2021, following which he was disqualified from the state Assembly.

Following the tumult, several senior Central BJP leaders on a number of occasions visited Tripura to quell the internal dispute and plug the shortcomings, both in the govern-

ment and the party organisation.

Political Commentator and Editor of Tripura's leading English daily "North East Colors", Sanjib Deb said that it is clear and loud that though removed from the post of Chief Minister, Biplab Kumar Deb is not going to be dumped, rather the steering is going to remain with him.

"After submitting the resignation, Deb told the media that he is going to remain with the party organisation. What is most important is that in the meeting of the BJP Legislature Party on Saturday, Biplab Kumar Deb had proposed the name of Manik Saha while the Deputy Chief Minister Jishnu Dev Varma seconded it," he told IANS.

He said when Biplab Kumar Deb became the Chief Minister, there were talks in Tripura that the government is the BJP's, Council of Ministers are from Congress (as most Ministers are from the party) and administration is of the CPI-M (as the officials were recruited during the 25 years of Left Front government).

Political analyst and writer Sekhar Datta said the change of Chief Ministership in Tripura was long overdue.

"BJP has taken the decision to avoid the anti-incumbency issues eight to nine months before the crucial Assembly elections. The BJP retained power in Assam (2021) and Manipur (2022) in the Assembly polls.

BJP confident of continuing victory march in Gujarat after 'Chintan Baithak'

Ahmedabad, May 16: The BJP's victory march in Gujarat will continue and the party will set new records in the Assembly elections scheduled later this year, said Pradipsinh Vaghela, General secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Gujarat, as the two-day 'Chintan Baithak' of state level leaders concluded on Monday.

Addressing mediapersons, Vaghela said that at the Chintan Baithak, senior party leaders analysed in detail the results of the recent civic and panchayat polls, and assessed the party's strength and weakness in every seat to chalk out a plan to further strengthen the BJP.

The government programmes were also discussed and it was found that people by and large are happy with the state government's schemes, as they have benefited all sections of people, said government spokesman and Education Minister Jitu Vaghani.

The people are happy with the



BJP rule and they will continue to support the ruling party, he added.

Though the party has a strong network and substantial followers in the state, it has decided to reach out to each voter for which each and every party worker and leader will work shoulder to shoulder, said Vaghela.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP national General Secretary B.L. Santosh, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, Gujarat BJP chief C.R. Patil, among others, attended the two-day Chintan Baithak.

Textbook repeat of Dec 1949 in Babri Masjid: Owaisi on Gyanvapi row

New Delhi, May 16: Amid claims by the Hindu side of having discovered a Shivling in Gyanvapi mosque, AIMIM leader and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi has slammed a court order that directed to seal the place where the Shivling was discovered in the survey.

"This is a textbook repeat of December 1949 in Babri Masjid. This order itself changes the religious nature of the Masjid. This is a violation of 1991 Act. This was my apprehension and it has come true. Gyanvapi Masjid was, and will remain a Masjid till judgement day, Inshallah," Owaisi tweeted.

It was alleged that in 1949, idols were kept inside the disputed Babri Mosque. However, the court in its judgement has given the land to the Ram temple, and the construction is in full swing.

On Monday, the Hindu side advocates claimed that a 'Shivling' had been found inside the well. Lawyer Vishnu Jain said he would go to the civil court to seek its protection. An advocate from the Hindu side, Madan Mohan Yadav, claimed that the 'Shivling' is Nandi faced. Heavy security was deployed as the court-appointed committee reached the spot to conduct the survey on Monday.

NCP screams over inflation, Smriti revels in 2019 Amethi victory!

Pune, May 16: In a flash agitation, hundreds of National Congress Party (NCP) activists staged a massive protest over inflation and fuel prices hike before Union Textiles Minister Smriti Irani here on Monday.

The NCP workers sought to present a box of bangles to Irani as a reminder to her own anti-price hike agitation held during the tenure of then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

However, later an unruffled Irani, surrounded by her security, spoke nothing on inflation but seemed to gloat over her 2019 victory in Amethi trouncing the then Congress President Rahul Gandhi from his traditional stronghold.

"The Congress - and NCP, which has emerged from it - are still shocked at how an ordinary BJP worker like me gave an unprecedented defeat to a sitting Congress President and he had to run to another constituency," smiled Irani victoriously.

Pune City NCP President Prashant Jagtap said that around 2014, when the price of gas cylinders went up by just Rs 5, Irani had sent bangles to Manmohan Singh.

"Today, under the BJP, the gas cylinder prices have shot up from some Rs 350 to over Rs 1,000 now, but Irani has nothing to say and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also silent at the sufferings of the masses," Jagtap said.



The NCP men and women workers shouted angry slogans and carried boxes of bangles for Irani with a plea to hand them over to the Prime Minister to draw his attention at the peoples' sufferings, but were stopped by the Pune Police.

The activists chanted "Mahengai Ki Rani, Smriti Irani!", "Smriti Bhabhi, Jawab do", etc against the Union Minister who had come to attend an event here.

"When the people voted for the BJP and Modi, they had great expectations that he would set

things right. Now, people are regretting that decision," said a woman activist.

Jagtap said that each and every poor family in the country is reeling under the high inflation and runaway fuel prices, but the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi seem "least concerned" at their plight.

The Pune Police detained several scores of NCP men and women activists and rounded them off to local police stations even as Irani departed after completing her function this evening.

Ensure landslide victory in cooperative bodies' poll: Odisha CM to BJD leaders

Bhubaneswar, May 16: Odisha Chief Minister and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik on Monday asked his party leaders to fight the upcoming election for cooperative bodies with all seriousness to ensure a landslide victory.

In the first phase, the elections to more than 6,000 primary societies will be held on June 19 and June 26 and after this process is over, the election to central and apex societies will be held.

While interacting with party functionaries about the cooperative election, Patnaik said that the BJD did very well in the last urban local body (ULB) and panchayat elections.



All the party leaders and workers put in their best efforts to ensure a landslide victory in both, he added.

"The results have been most satisfactory for us, and we have been able to form zilla pari-

shads in all 30 districts. Our party candidates have won as mayors & corporators, chairpersons, vice-chairpersons, and councillors in almost all ULBs and the candidates supported by us have won as chair-

person and vice-chairperson in most of the blocks," he pointed out.

Stating that this has now become the BJD's new benchmark of political strength in the entire state, the BJD president urged his party leaders to utilise this strength strategically everywhere, so that they can fare much better than the last time in cooperative elections.

"This election is very important to us and has to be fought with all seriousness," he told the party functionaries.

The ruling party in Odisha has formed district level committees in each district to monitor the elections at the primary level.

Koli community has little voice in Gujarat politics despite having one-third vote share

Gandhinagar, May 16: The Koli community accounts for one-third of the population of Gujarat and has an equal vote share in the state. They can influence election results in 82 assembly seats with their domination over 44-45 seats, yet they have very little say in the leading political discourse and state politics.

As per youth leaders of the community, this is an outcome of the poor literacy rate in the community and socially and economically weak sub-caste based divisions within the community as community bigwigs are focused on their individual progress and not of the upliftment of the entire community.

Community youth leaders are trying to unite community members but the influential ones within are splitting them on the basis of sub-castes like Talpada Koli, Chuvalia Koli, Kedia Koli, Koli Patel etc. But now the youths have decided to fight them because "our existence and political weightage are at stake," said Ranji Solanki, national president of New Samaj Koli Kranti Sena.

He cited two instances: recently, in the Jamraval municipal elections in Devbhumi Dwarka district, Koli community members contested under Vyavastha Parivartan Party symbol (VPP). It got a thumping majority as out of the 33 seats, 31 went to the Koli community and candidates of VPP.

IITGN researchers develop framework to reduce cyclone impact on power transmission systems

Ahmedabad, May 16: The damage caused to power transmission and distribution systems due to the increased frequency and intensity of cyclones triggered by climate change and their consequent impact at various levels is a major cause of concern in the coastal regions of India.

Odisha, one of the most cyclone-prone states, has suffered economic losses and critical infrastructure damages worth thousands of crores in the past few years because of recurrent and severe cyclones. In such scenarios in coastal regions, power supply is the most significant infrastructure because it directly affects the functioning of other essential systems such as communication, water supply, transportation etc.

Taking understanding of this grave scenario, a team of researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar (IITGN) comprising Surender V. Raj, Udit Bhatia and Manish Kumar studied Odisha's power transmission network damaged during Cyclone Fani in 2019, with a focus on the vulnerability of individual towers to strong winds generated during cyclones.

The researchers developed a comprehensive framework that can help curtail overall losses in the functionality to a substantial extent. The findings of their work have been recently published in the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction (IJDRR).

The team assessed the damage probabilities for more than 41,000 power transmission towers. Subsequently, a series of simulated realistic cyclone scenarios were created to study the functionality of the transmission system and estimate the population that can get affected due to a range of cyclone scenarios.

The research team observed that the loss in functionality of transmission towers depends considerably on the location of the landfall of the cyclone. The damage is greater if the landfall is close to a region



with many substations in the vicinity.

This observation emphasises the need to consider the orientation of the network with respect to the coastline and the realistic properties of the cyclones. The researchers also noted that a simulated cyclone trajectory indicates that it could damage towers even up to 300 km apart from each other.

Damage to power transmission lines at a larger scale leads to a significant and sudden loss of connectivity, consequently increasing the magnitude and duration of disruption in the aftermath of the cyclone, which can sometimes hinder the rescue operations as well.

The framework developed by the team helps in prioritising the towers that should be strengthened to minimise the overall losses in functionality in a cost-effective manner. They used damage-cum-wind speed data to develop a fragility model for towers, which helps assess the functionality of the network and the influence of strategic interventions on the same.

The study results revealed that a greater number of reinforced towers or a greater level of strengthening in them based on the tailor-made and efficient reinforcement prioritisation strategies in a particular region lead to better functionality of power transmission systems.

Cong 'exposes' BJP leaders who visited Aurangzeb grave

Mumbai, May 16: With the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena and MP-MLA Rana couple hounding the Maha Vikas Aghadi government for action against AIMIM chief Akbaruddin Owaisi's visit to the Aurangzeb grave in Aurangzeb, the state Congress made a fresh expose here on Monday.

Congress General Secretary Sachin Sawant has dug out old photos and videos of several BJP leaders who had visited the burial site of the late Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb at Khuldabad and raised uncomfortable questions.

"The BJP National Executive member and Spokesperson, and Jammu & Kashmir Waqf Board President Dr. Darakshan Andrabi had gone to Aurangzeb's tomb during the Corona period," he said.

Similarly, Khalid Qureshi, the Vice-President of BJP's Minority Affairs also had gone there and in 2019, when current Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis was the BJP CM even AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi went to pay homage there in 2019.

"The tomb is under the jurisdiction of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). So why can't the Central government control, restrict or even ban entry to Aurangzeb's grave?" Sawant demanded.

He wondered why Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government doesn't initiate action against the Owaisis and even the BJP leaders who have gone to Aurangzeb's final resting place in Khuldabad.

Sawant slammed the BJP, MNS and the Independent MP Navneet Kaur-Rana and her MLA

husband Ravi Rana for blaming the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government for the May 12 visit to the grave by Telangana MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi.

Some BJP and MNS activists threatened "to bury" Owaisi in a grave right next to Aurangzeb's and the Rana couple challenged Maharashtra Chief Minister to take strong action against Owaisi for his trip there which sparked off a major political row.

Shiv Sena MoS Kishore Tiwari and other MVA leaders have dismissed the 'frivolous demands' from who they term as the BJP's Team B, C or D and said they should not divert from more serious issues like runaway inflation, high prices of fuel and gas, rising unemployment, etc and point at the developments in Sri Lanka.



Suicides By Armed Personnel— MHA Must Conduct Probe

The armed personnel are dealing with multiple situations, especially ensuring law and order on the ground. However, amid providing secure atmosphere to the people, the incidents of suicide among the armed personnel are putting a question mark over the favorable environment being provided to them in the line of duty.

According to the figures available, in the last seven years till 2021, a total of 787 armed forces personnel died by suicide since 2014 with the Army reporting a maximum of 591 such cases.

Such a rise in the suicide incidents is not only a worrying trend, but puts a huge responsibility on the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to investigate the matter and come up with the facts as to what prompted the armed personnel to take such an extreme step.

It is believed that there are several reasons behind these incidents while some of the people blame the adverse relationship between the armed personnel and the officers as well as the volatile situation they are dealing with.

Minister of State for Defence Shripad Naik had said that armed forces have devised measures to deal with mental health issues of their personnel and prevent incidents of suicide and fratricide. Therefore, there is a dire need to come up with such measures without any further delay so that such incidents are prevented in the future.

Besides, working in an unfavorable atmosphere needs to be put to an immediate end as the overburdened armed personnel deserve a peaceful environment within the security establishments. Any adverse relationship despite going through the hectic working schedule is making the lives of the armed personnel miserable and thus leading to the extreme steps as well.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) must conduct a time-bound inquiry in this regard to ascertain the reasons behind the suicides among the armed personnel. The adverse relationship should also be investigated thoroughly so that the positive and favourable decisions are taken well on time.

To tackle Covid, lessons from flood preparedness

K Srinath Reddy

The Indian count of Covid infected persons, as identified by tests, has risen since April. The actual numbers infected or re-infected would be much higher, as many who were asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic would not have gotten tested. However, it was reassuring that most of those who were infected by a member of Omicron's extended family experienced mild illness. This variant clan's inability to penetrate deeper into the lungs and blood vessels may be partly responsible for this feature. Prior immunity, acquired from earlier infection or recent vaccination, may also have been protective against adverse outcomes.

Despite its mild reputation, Omicron infected a very large number globally and claimed many lives. Most of those who became severely ill were either unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated. Even the definition of who is adequately vaccinated is shifting with one or more boosters being added to the earlier two doses and the interval between vaccine doses being reduced as new variants exhibit their enhanced prowess at infection and immune evasion. Mask mandates, withdrawn when Covid appeared to recede, were reintroduced as case counts started a fresh ascent.

In this ongoing match of wits with the virus, will we reach a state of equilibrium where the virus becomes endemic, with manageable seasonal outbreaks that do not steal lives and seal society? Though some commentators have declared that the virus has already become endemic, it is not yet fully predictable in its evolution, behaviour and impact as new variants keep arising. There is presently no global steady state that can be confidently called "endemic". All we can say is that the virus is here to stay and appears to be moving in the direction of endemicity. However, the possibility of new recombinant viruses birthing from the womb of global vaccine inequity and a worrisome potential for recycled animal to human transmission creates uncertainty about whether and when a steady-state will be reached.

Even as we keep vigil, restrictions have to be withdrawn in stages. The lifting of mask mandates cannot be whimsically hasty, while the imposition of travel bans and school closures should not be knee-jerk responses. A calibrated response is needed, which provides the right bal-



Timely vaccine protection must be provided to all who need it without coercion but by building confidence. Still, there will be some who will be highly vulnerable to serious illness during a seasonal outbreak. Civic sensibility must be fostered so that all persons who have any symptoms suggestive of a respiratory illness voluntarily mask up during a seasonal outbreak to protect others.

ance of confidence and caution, both in policy measures and personal protection at each stage of an undulating pandemic. Situationally adaptive responses must be dynamically enacted against the constant backdrop of health system capacity buildup for prevention, surveillance and patient care.

Perhaps flood protection measures can provide a model of endemic preparedness. We get rains seasonally every year but don't experience floods annually. When there is a threat of recurrent floods, we raise the level of our embankments to prevent the surge of floodwaters into our cities. We build dams upstream to control downstream water levels in rivers. We create efficient drainage systems to prevent waterlogging in the streets.

We monitor weather patterns to anticipate the threat of floods during extreme weather events. If such events are forecast, vulnerable groups of people are evacuated to safety and people's mobility is restricted to essential services. If not, life proceeds without disruption even when rains arrive. We leave it to routine municipal services to deal with rainwater clearance and sanitation. Even then, we use umbrellas to protect ourselves from getting wet when we are exposed to rain.

Such adaptability is needed when we move from a heightened pandemic response to a steady-state endemic response, while being ready to shift gears when needed. We need to get early alerts of new virus variants, much like warnings of changing weather patterns. When there is a

threat of a surge in serious cases, we restrict mobility, continue essential services and pay special attention to the safety of the elderly and those with comorbidities. A multi-sectoral response to a public health emergency, prioritising public safety, would be in order.

In an endemic state, routine health services will suffice for testing and treating cases while maintaining a watch on case counts, clusters and clinical profile of cases. People's mobility will not be restricted but masking in public and crowded indoor locations may be advised when seasonal outbreaks occur. Vulnerable groups of people will be specially protected with vaccine boosters. The general public will be advised of personal protection measures but life will be near normal during times of seasonal spikes which do not become dangerous waves.

Cities will get flooded even without storms if rainwater drainage and sanitation services are poor. Even a seasonal spike in endemic Covid can pose a serious threat if our health services are inadequately resourced and poorly managed. We need greater investments for strengthening our health services through better infrastructure, workforce, public health expertise, information systems and management. This requires constant attention, not just a crisis response.

While flood prevention and control require planning and action at multiple levels of government and society, much of the responsibility lies at the municipal level and involves the active engagement of the community. In endemic Covid too, urban local bodies, panchayats, community-based organisations and citizen volunteers must form a coalition that conducts situational analyses and responds with context-relevant prevention, control and relief measures. Health communication must be effective through community networks to prevent panic and protect against misinformation. Community based mental health services will help to allay anxiety, prevent illness.

Timely vaccine protection must be provided to all who need it without coercion but by building confidence. Still, there will be some who will be highly vulnerable to serious illness during a seasonal outbreak. Civic sensibility must be fostered so that all persons who have any symptoms suggestive of a respiratory illness voluntarily mask up during a seasonal outbreak to protect others. Infected persons must isolate, with the assurance of medical and social support during the period of illness.

If cases build-up, masking outside home must be mandated, so that asymptotically infected persons do not pose a threat. As we walk in the rain, we take care not to splash water on others. Likewise, in endemic Covid, it will be our civic duty not to infect others.

Brace yourself for higher interest rates

Radhika Pandey

The second-order impact of higher fuel prices is also visible as inflation in transport and communication surged to nearly 11 per cent, from 8 per cent in the previous month. The April data again showed that rural inflation outpaced urban inflation as the rural consumption basket gives more weightage to food. This is not good news for rural demand, which is yet to show a sustained pick-up.



Data released by the National Statistical Office showed that retail inflation had surged to an eight-year high of 7.79 per cent in April, driven by higher food and fuel prices. The former rose to 8.38 per cent driven by double-digit inflation in edible oils and vegetables, while inflation in cereals surged in April because of higher wheat prices. Inflation has now remained above the RBI's upper tolerance limit of 6 per cent for four months in a row.

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tion basket gives more weightage to food. This is not good news for rural demand, which is yet to show a sustained pick-up.

The latest data also indicates that inflation is becoming broad-based. With the lifting of Covid restrictions and a pick-up in demand, services sector inflation captured by the "miscellaneous" category has surged to 8.03 per cent. And with demand rebounding, the pass-through of higher input costs is also gaining momentum. Considering that demand for goods recovered faster than services, goods producers passed on input costs to consumers. But as services recover, there will be greater pass-through of prices to consumers in the coming months. Concerns about rising services infla-

tion were also reflected in the April S&P Global Purchasing Managers' Index survey for India's services sector. The surveyed service providers highlighted a sharp surge in their operating expenses from March to April prompting them to pass the impact of rising input costs to consumers.

While there may be a slight moderation, inflation is expected to remain above the RBI's threshold of 6 per cent in the coming months. While global food prices measured by the FAO's Food Price Index eased marginally in April, they are still 30 per cent above that in April 2021. The Ukraine conflict continues to impact markets for foodgrains and vegetable oils. Rising fertiliser prices are likely to push

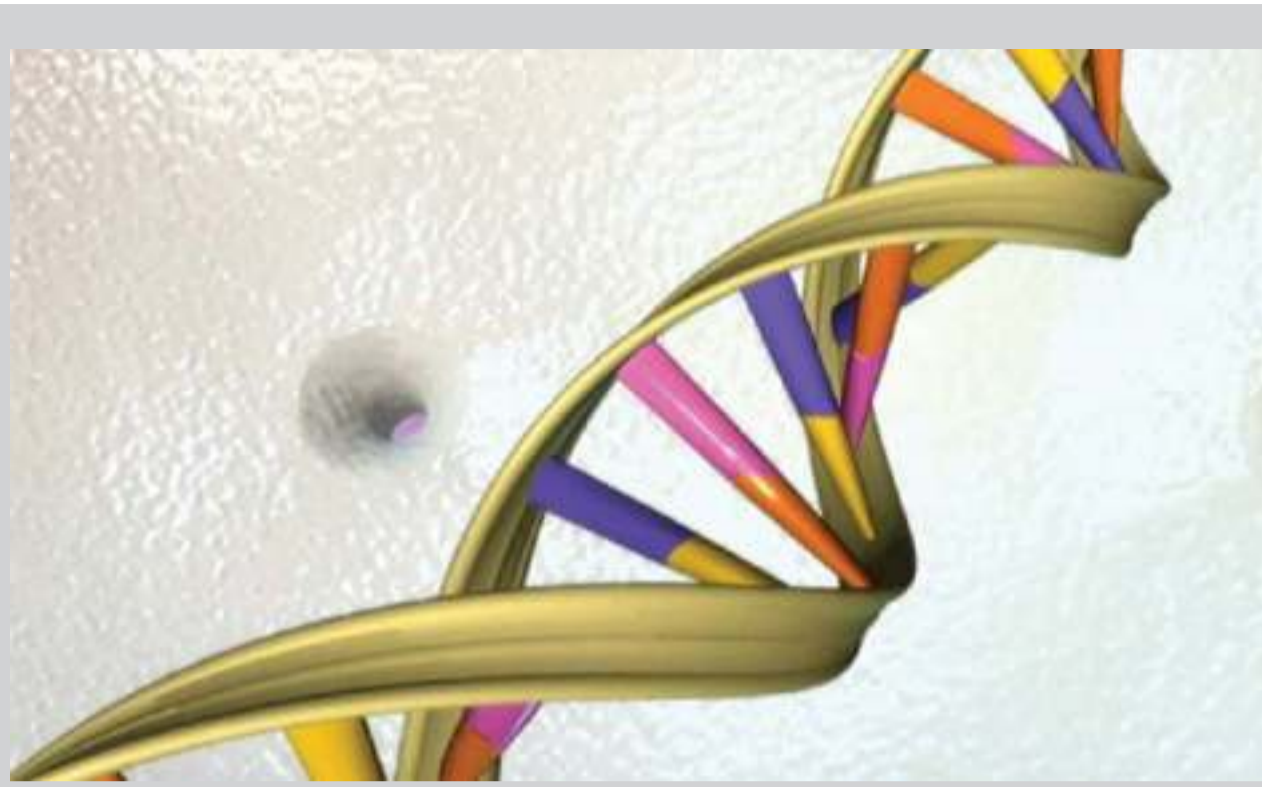
up farmers' production costs, leading to high food prices. While the government has extended price support through higher subsidies, if this will be enough to cool prices needs to be seen.

With sticky crude oil prices and continuing supply-side disruptions amplified by the Covid-induced lockdowns in China, the RBI has rightly reverted its focus on inflation targeting. This is needed as central banks around the world are pursuing tight monetary policies to control inflation. The US Fed followed its 25 basis points hike by another 50 basis points rise in May. These will be followed by hikes of similar magnitude in the coming months. The Bank of England has raised the policy rate by 25 basis points, its highest in 13 years to tackle inflation. Other countries' central banks are also contemplating rate hikes.

In its April policy, the RBI announced the withdrawal of excess liquidity but did not raise the policy rate. The expectation of a sharp spike in inflation led it to announce an off-cycle 40 basis points hike in the policy repo rate. The RBI is now likely to respond with aggressive rate hikes to prevent the price spiral from getting entrenched. By committing to bring down inflation through rate hikes, it can anchor inflationary expectations. Unanchored expectations will further fuel inflationary pressures. The continued strength of the dollar index and sharp rupee depreciation in the last few days could impose further pressure on prices through higher imported inflation. This reinforces the need for interest rate hikes.

In addition to calibrated rate hikes, the RBI needs to fast-track the withdrawal of the ultra-accommodative liquidity support provided during the pandemic. It needs to present a revised projection of inflation for the current year and its views on the possible trajectory of interest rates. Rising inflation will cut back discretionary spending and adversely impact consumption that had only just started picking up. There are concerns about a recession in advanced economies as rising prices have started manifesting in a decline in purchasing power and a fall in consumer sentiments. The demand destruction could trigger a moderation in prices. Base metals prices have eased from the peak seen in the last few months.

Monetary policy support needs to be accompanied by fiscal support measures. The policy response will have to be tailored to the evolving geopolitical situation and the paths of commodity and food prices while balancing the imperatives of fiscal consolidation.



Intermittent fasting may slow ageing, fight cancer and diabetes: Study

New York, May 16: While people tend to follow new diets to get fit and reduce their weight, research has shown that in addition to weight loss, people who indulge in intermittent fasting may also have benefits like slow ageing, and be capable of fighting cancer as well as diabetes.

Intermittent fasting diets fall generally into two categories: daily time-restricted feeding, which narrows eating times to 6-8 hours per day, and so-called 5:2 intermittent fasting, in which people limit themselves to one moderate-sized meal two days each week.

"Intermittent fasting could be part of a healthy lifestyle," said neuroscientist Mark Mattson, Professor of Neuroscience at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and who has studied the health impact of intermittent fasting for 25 years, and adopted it himself about 20 years ago.

In a review article published in the New England Journal of Medicine, Mattson said that an array of animal and some human studies have shown that alternating between times of fasting and eating supports cellular health, probably by trig-

gering an age-old adaptation to periods of food scarcity called metabolic switching.

Such a switch occurs when cells use up their stores of rapidly accessible, sugar-based fuel, and begin converting fat into energy in a slower metabolic process.

Mattson noted that studies have shown that this switch improves blood sugar regulation, increases resistance to stress, and suppresses inflammation.

In the article, he said that four studies in both animals and people found intermittent fasting also decreased blood pressure, blood lipid levels and resting heart rates.

Evidence is also mounting that intermittent fasting can modify risk factors associated with obesity and diabetes, said Mattson.

Two studies at the University Hospital of South Manchester NHS Foundation Trust of 100 overweight women showed that those on the 5:2 intermittent fasting diet lost the same amount of weight as women who restricted calories, but did better on measures of insulin sensitivity and reduced belly fat than those in the calorie-reduction group.

Mattson added that preliminary studies have suggested that intermittent fasting could benefit brain health too.

A multicentre clinical trial at the University of Toronto in April found that 220 healthy, non-obese adults who maintained a calorie restricted diet for two years showed signs of improved memory in a battery of cognitive tests.

While far more research needs to be done to prove any effects of intermittent fasting on learning and memory, Mattson said if that proof is found, the fasting -- or a pharmaceutical equivalent that mimics it -- may offer interventions that can stave off neurodegeneration and dementia.

"We are at a transition point where we could soon consider adding information about intermittent fasting to medical school curricula alongside standard advice about healthy diets and exercise," he said.

But, some experts argue that intermittent fasting may not be everyone's cup of tea. Mattson said that it may take some time for the body to adjust to intermittent fasting, and to get beyond initial hunger pangs and irritability that accompany it.

Tiny bots can deep clean teeth: Study

Bengaluru, May 16: Nano-sized robots manipulated with a magnetic field can help kill bacteria deep inside dentinal tubules and boost the success of root canal treatments, says a new study by researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and IISc-incubated startup, Theranautilus.

Root canal treatments are routinely carried out to treat tooth infections in millions of patients. The procedure involves removing the infected soft tissue inside the tooth called the pulp, and flushing the tooth with antibiotics or chemicals to kill bacteria that cause the infection.

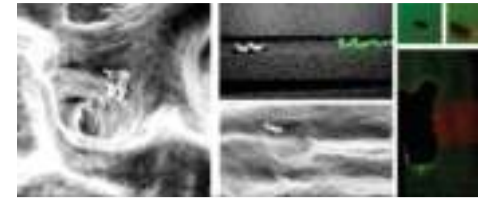
Often times, the treatment fails to completely remove all the bacteria (especially antibiotic-resistant bacteria such as *Enterococcus faecalis*) which remain hidden inside microscopic canals in the tooth called dentinal tubules.

"The dentinal tubules are very small, and the bacteria reside deep in the tissue. Current techniques are not efficient enough to go all the way inside and kill the bacteria," explains Shanmukh Srinivas, Research Associate at Centre for Nano Science and Engineering (CeNSE), IISc, and co-founder of Theranautilus.

In the study published in *Advanced Healthcare Materials*, the researchers designed helical nanobots made of silicon dioxide coated with iron which can be controlled using a device that generates a low intensity magnetic field. These nanobots were then injected into extracted tooth samples and their movement was tracked with a microscope.

By tweaking the frequency of the magnetic field, the researchers were able to make the nanobots move at will and penetrate deep inside the dentinal tubules. "We have also established that we can retrieve them as they can be pulled back out of the patient's teeth," says Srinivas.

Crucially, the team was able to manipulate the magnetic field to make the surface of the nanobots generate heat, which can kill the bacteria nearby. "No other technology in the market can do this right now," says Debayan Dasgupta,



Research Associate at CeNSE, and another co-founder of Theranautilus.

Previously, scientists used ultrasound or laser pulses to create shock waves in the fluid used to flush out bacteria and tissue debris in order to improve the efficiency of root canal treatment.

"But these pulses can only penetrate up to a distance of 800 micrometers, and their energy dissipates fast. The nanobots were able to penetrate much further - up to 2,000 micrometers. Using heat to kill the bacteria also provides a safer alternative to harsh chemicals or antibiotics," the researchers explain.

Theranautilus was spun out of several years of work on magnetically-controlled nanoparticles carried out in the lab of Ambarish Ghosh, Professor at CeNSE.

His group, along with collaborators, have previously shown that such nanoparticles can trap and move objects using light, swim through blood, inside living cells, and stick strongly to cancer cells. "These studies have shown that they are safe to use in biological tissues," says Dasgupta.

The team has tested the dental nanobots in mice models and found them to be safe and effective. They are also working on developing a new kind of medical device that can easily fit inside the mouth, and allow the dentist to inject and manipulate the nanobots inside the teeth during root canal treatment.

"We are very close to deploying this technology in a clinical setting, which was considered futuristic even three years ago," says Ghosh.

Prediabetes may raise higher heart attack risk in young adults

New York, May 16: Young adults with higher than normal blood sugar levels that signal prediabetes were more likely to be hospitalised for heart attack compared to their peers with normal blood sugar levels, according to a research.

Having prediabetes means that one's blood sugar levels are higher than normal, with fasting blood sugar between 100 to 125 mg/dL, although not high enough to be diagnosed as Type 2 diabetes.

Prediabetes is common and increases the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

The study found that young adults with prediabetes had 1.7 times higher chances of being hospitalised for a heart attack

compared to their peers without prediabetes.

"Prediabetes, if left untreated, can significantly impact health and can progress to Type 2 diabetes, which is known to increase a person's risk for cardiovascular disease," said Akhil Jain, a resident physician at Mercy Catholic Medical Center in the US.

"With heart attacks happening increasingly in young adults, our study was focused on defining the risk factors pertinent to this young population, so that future scientific guidelines and health policies may be better able to address cardiovascular disease risks in relation to prediabetes," he added.

Israel to test floating sun-tracking system to generate clean electricity

Jerusalem, May 16: Israel has announced a project for testing an artificial intelligence (AI) floating system to generate electricity by tracking the sun, the state's Finance Ministry and the Israel Innovation Authority (IIA) said in a joint statement.

The project was announced on Sunday, Xinhua news agency reported. The solar pilot project will be carried out jointly by the Israeli company Xfloat, which developed the system, and Mekorot national water company, according to the statement. This photovoltaic system is designed to move and track the sun while floating on reservoir water.

Explained: How Covid-19 damages lungs, other organs



London, May 16: Some cells infected with Covid-19 can "explode", leading to serious damage of the lungs and other internal organs, found a team of UK researchers including one of Indian-origin.

SARS-CoV-2 is known to cause acute respiratory distress and death in some patients. Although severe Covid is linked to substantial inflammation, how the virus triggers inflammation is not clear.

A phenomenon called a cytokine storm - when the immune system releases too many infection-fighting proteins called cytokines which then attack healthy tissue - has also long been known to cause severe damage in response to Covid infection, often leading to multiple organ failure.

However, the study, led by a team from Royal Free London (RFL), showed that immune cells infected by Covid can undergo a "cell explosion" known as pyroptosis - and causes the harmful inflammation in patients who become seriously unwell with the virus.

Although pyroptosis kills the virus, it also leads to inflammatory contents being released into the bloodstream. These inflammatory contents travel around the body, damaging the lungs and other internal organs, they said in the paper published in the journal *Nature*.

The new findings, however, will help researchers develop more effective treatments for stopping the process, said co-author RFL consultant hepatologist Gautam Mehta.

"The pyroptosis pathway acts as an 'alarm system'; if it senses bacterial or viral particles within the cell it leads to an 'explosion' of the cell and the release of pro-inflammatory contents. This has the benefit of eliminating the infection but can lead to severe inflammation as a result. Pyroptosis literally implies a 'fiery' mode of cell death," Mehta said.

The same process can happen in liver patients where bacteria from the gut has infected the liver. In order to expel the bacteria, the liver cells undergo the same pyroptosis process - the cells explode and release inflammatory materials that harm surrounding cells.

Fortis Hospital, Noida, told IANS.

During summers, there is also widening or expansion in our blood vessels which leads to lower pressure of blood. Excessive sweating and loss of sodium through profuse sweating could be another major reason for low blood pressure.

"Some people are at higher risk of being affected by humidity, including people over 50, those who are overweight, or those who have heart, lung or kidney conditions. Heat and sweating also can lower the amount of fluid in the body, which can reduce blood volume and lead to dehydration. This can interfere with the body's ability to cool off and may create strain on the heart," Dr Ramakanta Panda, world's leading cardiac surgeon and head of Asian Heart Institute, Mumbai, told IANS.

How hypertension can cause damage to your health

New Delhi, May 16: High blood pressure or hypertension, which is often dismissed as a common lifestyle disease affecting scores of people across the world, can damage vital organs if not recognised and controlled at the right time, said experts on Monday ahead of World Hypertension Day, observed annually on May 17.

Hypertension affects more than 30 per cent of the adult population worldwide, which is more than one billion people around the world.

According to a latest report by the India Council for Medical Research, one in four adults in India suffer from hypertension and only 10 per cent of patients have their blood pressure under control.

Hypertension is defined as a condition where the force of the blood against the artery walls is too high. The more blood the heart pumps, the chances are higher for the arteries to become narrow, which therefore increases the blood pressure.

It is the main risk factor for cardiovascular diseases, especially coronary heart disease and stroke, but also for chronic kidney disease, heart failure, arrhythmia and dementia.



"Hypertension sometimes strikes without warning, which becomes life threatening. High blood pressure is frequently dismissed, as a common occurrence, and people may fail to recognise the problem until it damages vital organs," said Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Senior Consultant, Internal Medicine, Paras Hospitals, Gurugram.

"Consistent high blood pressure affects major organs such as the brain, heart and kidneys and is a major cause of premature deaths. Hypertension can be treated with common inexpensive drugs but the

problem is people themselves decide to stop the hypertension drugs thinking they are cured which can be dangerous," added Shuchin Bajaj, Founder Director, Ujala Cygnus Group of Hospitals.

Further, high blood pressure is a common risk factor in diabetes patients because of the impact of diabetes on the walls of the arteries and the fluid balance.

Both conditions often occur together and have multiple risk factors and causes in common. The risk of developing one condition also increases when a person has another.

How intense heat waves in North India can harm high BP patients

New Delhi, May 16: Even as several parts of North India, including the national capital, sizzled due to intense heatwave, high blood pressure patients may be at particular risk, said experts on Monday, ahead of World Hypertension Day, observed annually on May 17.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday reported that some areas in Delhi saw mercury crossing 49 degrees Celsius, while neighbouring Gurugram in Haryana recorded 48.1 degrees Celsius, the highest since 1966.

The mercury leaped to a whopping 47.4 degrees Celsius in several areas in Punjab, and several areas in Jammu, Madhya Pradesh, and Mumbai also saw significant heat waves. The

weather office has also predicted some relief from the heatwave from Monday evening owing to inclement weather.

According to experts, during extreme summer weather, the body attempts to radiate heat which affects blood pressure levels. An increase in temperatures and humidity can raise blood flow to skin, causing the heart to beat faster while circulating twice as much blood per minute than on a normal day. "Intense atmospheric temperature leads to increased blood flow to skin, causing a spike in sweating and dehydration. This leads to decrease in blood pressure especially on changing postures, that is, while getting up from a lying down or sitting position," Dr Ajay Agarwal, Director and HOD - Internal Medicine,

During summers, there is also widening or expansion in our blood vessels which leads to lower pressure of blood. Excessive sweating and loss of sodium through profuse sweating could be another major reason for low blood pressure.

"Some people are at higher risk of being affected by humidity, including people over 50, those who are overweight, or those who have heart, lung or kidney conditions. Heat and sweating also can lower the amount of fluid in the body, which can reduce blood volume and lead to dehydration. This can interfere with the body's ability to cool off and may create strain on the heart," Dr Ramakanta Panda, world's leading cardiac

surgeon and head of Asian Heart Institute, Mumbai, told IANS.

According to Panda, when the temperature is high, it increases the discomfort and stress hormone levels in the body, affecting sleep patterns.

"Lack of sleep or less sleep in the long run is also linked with multiple health issues such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease, which can indirectly affect BP levels in hypertensive patients," he noted.

Panda advised BP patients to get adequate sleep of at least 8 hours during summer months.

Besides people with hypertension, patients who had normal normal blood pressure or low blood pressure may also suffer dehydration leading to decrease in blood pressure

and cause dizziness and leg cramps.

"The population above 50 with low blood pressure are more vulnerable. So it is advisable for people who have a history of low BP to monitor their blood pressure regularly and also consume liquids and electrolytes to stay hydrated. Rush to the doctor if blood pressure records less than 100 as this is alarming," Dr. Anand Kumar Pandey, Director and Senior Consultant-Cardiology, Dharamshila Narayana Superspeciality Hospital.

The experts suggested people with both low and high blood pressure to drink plenty of oral fluids, salts and remain indoors. Even brief exposure to heat can result in decreased blood pressure and as such they should be monitored carefully.

Dip in mercury, forecasts of rain bring relief in India amid scorching heat wave

NEW DELHI: Dip in mercury and rainfall in different parts of India brought relief to its people on Monday, even as the country continued to reel under scorching heat wave. India has been witnessing heat wave conditions since March, and not just Monday's weather, but forecasts hinting at spells of rain, arrival of monsoon or further drop in temperatures also came as sigh of relief for the citizens.

Maximum temperatures in Haryana and Punjab too came down by a few notches, even as they remained well above normal. Delhi, meanwhile, did not breach the 45-degree mark on Monday.

Delhi sees partly cloudy sky

Delhi-NCR got some respite on Monday with parts of the national capital witnessing partly cloudy skies. The maximum temperature at Safdarjung, Delhi's base station, was recorded at 42.4 degrees, while the minimum was recorded at 30.8 degrees Celsius.

The heat wave conditions abated, thanks to a Western Disturbance over the Western Himalayan Region, IMD said. Partly sky with possibility of dust storm and thunderstorm, have been forecast for Tuesday.

The Delhi Parents Association (DPA), meanwhile on Monday, has written to L-G Anil Bajaj, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPDR), demanding that the summer vacation be declared in city's schools immediately in view of the scorching heat.

Slight drop in mercury in most parts of Rajasthan

Most cities in Rajasthan got relief from sweltering heatwave conditions on Monday as maximum temperatures dropped by two to five degrees Celsius. Dholpur was the hottest place in the state with a maximum temperature of 46.1 degrees Celsius.

The maximum temperature in other major cities was recorded between 42.6 degrees Celsius and 39.6 degrees Celsius. The weather department has predicted dust storms in Jhunjhunu, Alwar, Bharatpur, Dholpur, Sri Ganganagar, Hanumangarh and Churu districts during the next 24 hours.

Haryana, Punjab see dip in maximum temperatures

In Haryana's Gurugram, the mercury came down to 44.7 degrees Celsius from 48.1 degrees Celsius on Sunday, according to the meteorological department.

Hisar recorded a high of 42.8 degrees Celsius,



down from 47.3 degrees Celsius on Sunday. Sirsa's maximum temperature dropped to 41.8 degrees Celsius from 47.2 degrees Celsius a day ago.

In Punjab, Amritsar recorded a high of 42.6 degrees Celsius, down four notches from Sunday. The mercury settled at 41.7 degrees Celsius in Ludhiana, 42.1 degrees Celsius in Patiala, 41.8 degrees Celsius in Jalandhar and 41.4 degrees Celsius in Mohali.

Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states, recorded a high of 41 degrees Celsius.

Dry spell ends in western Odisha

The dry spell in western Odisha ended with moderate to heavy overnight rains. Kotpad in Koraput district received 79 mm of rainfall between

Sunday evening and Monday morning. Several areas in Sambalpur, Bargarh, Jharsuguda, Kandhamal and Boudh received moderate rainfall, the MeT department said.

It said rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and dusty winds is likely in Odisha over the next three-four days due to strong southwesterly winds from the Bay of Bengal towards northeast and eastern India.

Bolangir recorded a maximum temperature of 42.8 degrees Celsius, the highest in the state, followed by 42.5 degrees Celsius in Subarnapur and Boudh. The mercury settled at a high of 35.8 degrees Celsius in Bhubaneswar and 35.6 degrees Celsius in Cuttack.

Monsoon likely to arrive in MP by mid-June
Madhya Pradesh is also likely to receive respite from heatwave conditions, with the MeT department forecasting a drop in mercury over the next few days. The temperature is likely to fall by two to four degrees Celsius in the next three days, the IMD's said.

The monsoon is likely to arrive in Madhya Pradesh by mid-June, it said.

Rain, thunderstorms in Himachal expected
The MeT department in Himachal Pradesh's Shimla said thunderstorms and rain along with light hailstorms are expected in parts of the state from Monday to Wednesday.

Rain and snowfall are likely in higher altitude areas of the state, it said.

Monsoon advances into Andaman & Nicobar islands

Southwest monsoon advanced into the Andaman and Nicobar islands on Monday, the IMD said, signalling the start of the four-month seasonal rains that are crucial to the largely agr-dependent economy.

The Andaman and Nicobar islands and adjoining areas have been experiencing rainfall due to strengthening south-westerly winds in the lower tropospheric levels, the weather office said.

The onset of monsoon over Andaman and Nicobar islands happened a day late as the IMD had earlier said that the seasonal rains would cover the region on May 15.

From the Front Page...

KUTA...

and his secretary, Abdul Gani Zargar whose bodies were found on April 10, 1990, four days after the duo was kidnapped by the terrorists from their office in the University.

Valley's highest seat of learning remained under the de facto control of the secessionists who ensured their control by positioning 'loyalists' at vital positions in academia and administration.

The only debate in the inner circles of this University for three decades was whether Kashmir should become independent or merge with Pakistan. Remaining a part of India was out of the question.

The radicalisation of the University was so complete that even admissions to various departments were done on recommendation of the secessionist leaders and militant commanders.

Shootouts between those who stood for 'independence' and those for merger with Pakistan were reported from within the campus during the mid 1990s.

Intelligence agencies, both Central and state, had mountain loads of inputs about the radicalisation of the University students.

As a senior intelligence officer put it, "Those were reports, but not all of them had actionable inputs and whenever we got actionable inputs, we acted".

In layman terms, 'actionable input' meant the presence of a militant with weapons or presence of some communication network or any information about a wanted person hiding inside the campus.

What unfortunately was missed during all the past years was that for creating the 'soldiers of Jihad' you don't need the presence of weapons.

The nurseries of 'Jehad' are nurtured in young and intellectually impressionable minds and that was what had been happening in the University.

Interestingly, even during the official functions where the chancellor (state Governor) and the vice chancellor would be present, no student would stand up in deference to the national anthem.

The worst part of that story was that even some of the faculty members would also refuse to stand up when the national anthem was being played.

The recent dismissal of professor Altaf Hussain Pandit of the University's chemistry department has proved that the intelligence agencies have been able to find what they call 'actionable evidence'.

Pandit's dismissal could be the beginning of an operation clean up, the Lt Governor Manoj Sinha's government has decided to undertake in the University.

Post abrogation of Article 370, two discreet analyses of academic and student activities in Kashmir University have been carried out, said top intelligence sources.

These analyses have shown that "Three faculty members have been contaminated to an extent that requires immediate action.

"12 faculty members have been found contaminated to a lesser extent that needs a graded response.

"24 members of different faculties are contaminated to an even lesser extent who need counselling and observation," intelligence sources revealed.

The intelligence reports have also suggested long term measures to carry out reforms to ensure a free academic atmosphere in the University and also an atmosphere for recruitments that is free from nepotism, corruption and favouritism.

Presently, the intelligence agencies are carrying out analyses of the non-teaching staff.

What becomes clear from these intelligence reports is that in not a very distant future, the University would see more heads rolling to restore the academic excellence for which the University was once famous. IANS

KUTA...

issues. The administration is expected to present blueprint of the scheme to relocate the PM Package employees to districts and tehsils considered safer.

On Friday last, Union Home Secretary held a meeting to review the conduct of upcoming Shri Amarnath Ji yatra, 2022 in which the Chief Secretary, Dr Arun Kumar Mehta briefed him about the arrangements made by the administration for

its successful commencement.

The Chief Secretary had apprised the meeting that this year 'state of the art arrangements' have been made by the administration for smooth conduct of the yatra. He observed that the yatra is going to be performed after a gap of 2 years post covid-19 pandemic so it is expected that the number would be much higher than previous years.

Dr Mehta further informed that, unlike previous years, the tentment capacity enroute holy cave has been exceptionally enhanced to 70000 yatrins from existing 29000 till last yatra. He also gave out that this year a pilgrim could undertake yatra in a single day from Srinagar-Holy Cave-Srinagar by using the helicopter services.

The Home Secretary was also briefed that formulation of comprehensive sanitation plan has been made to make the yatra ODF++ this year. Elucidating it was said that the arrangements have been made on the analogy of Kumbh Mela and there will be one sanitation worker for every 10 toilets and a supervisor for 10 sanitation workers.

Regarding security arrangements it was said that Joint Police Control Rooms (JPCRs) and Emergency Operation Centres as per NDMA suggestions has been established. Deployment of Mountain Rescue Teams by Police, NDRF, SDRF, CRPF has also been done to meet any eventuality.

Overall there would be a capacity of more than one lakh pilgrims at 147 locations with a provision for proper toilets/baths, langars and dozens of medical centres, as given in the meeting. The yatra would be conducted in a very pleasant atmosphere as enhanced number of cloak rooms, water dispensers, dust bins, bottle catchers, steel benches and signages have been erected by the Shrine Board this year.

Others who participated includes representatives from Ministries of Health, Road Transport, Telecom, IMD, NDRF from Government of India and other relevant stakeholders. (GNS)

J&K LG...

Home Minister Amit Shah on the preparedness of Amarnath Yatra on Tuesday in North Block.

Along with him, officials of the Jammu and Kashmir administration and police chief Dilbag Singh will be participating in the meeting wherein they will make a presentation of a 'blueprint' prepared for this 45-day long Yatra.

This annual pilgrimage is commencing from June 30 after a hiatus of two years and expecting a huge participation of the devotees this year.

The Jammu and Kashmir administration has planned this annual pilgrimage on a grand scale with many new initiatives such as setting up of Tent Township on the line of Kumbh Mela and a huge and fool-proof security apparatus will be created with the help of Jammu and Kashmir Police, Central Armed Police Forces and the Indian Army. (IANS)

Gaurav Arora...

I mean it's great to be playing Saahir.

"I always wanted to do an intense love story but it's not just that there's lot and lots of twist and turns that will keep you hooked till the very end and it is based on two timelines 10 years ago and the present so there's this huge a big arc to the character I mean there's a range of emotions that he portrays."

The actor who started his journey with modelling and made a debut in films with Vikram Bhatt's film 'Love Games', shares about his character in the web show.

"My character Saahir is very charismatic. I have tried to add a lot of mystery to it so as to build a lot of interest when you watch the show. He is a painter and he also does a lot of shayari and poetry. He is very intense and throughout the series what keeps you hooked is Saahir's next move."

He shot at minus 3 degrees temperature in Kashmir. How challenging it was and he replies: "I shot in minus 3 degrees in Kashmir. It was minus 10 degrees the moment we went to Gulmarg. It was freezing and it was snowing every single day so basically there's the local term called Chillai Kalan, 40-day period of harsh winter in Kashmir. I had to give shots in ganjis and we had to roll in the snow. It was very difficult from the very beginning. Director Nandita Maam said that 'you know it's gonna be a tough ride please be prepared'. But as an actor it's part of my job."

On his experience of sharing the screen space with Aamna Shariff and Kunal Roy Kapoor, he shares: "It's been an amazing journey. We went to Dehradun, Mussoorie, Ri-

shikesh, Srinagar and Gulmarg then back to Srinagar. When I first met Aamna, it was very cordial but as soon as we got it into workshops, reading sessions we realized the expectations that the makers had from us and we really worked hard on it. She is very hardworking and dedicated."

"Kunal is a wonderful person. He is very soft spoken and humble. He has been associated with good people. He has done really nice work though we don't have many scenes together but behind the camera we shared a great friendship."

"Asur 2 is also coming and he is happy to share the screen with Arshad Warsi again."

"Asur 2 is shot on a massive scale. It looks grand. I haven't seen the final product but yet I hope everything in terms of storytelling, screenplay, direction and performances fall in place and we have a much bigger and better show that we had last time and sharing screen space with Arshad was phenomenal."

"He is such a powerhouse of talent but when you're shooting with him on location and the director says action and it's just two of you in the frame that is when you actually get to see the real craft of that genius and it was a great learning experience," he concludes.

'Aadha Ishq' is streaming on Voot.

LeT terror...

ferrying of terrorists from Bandipora to Nowgam, Pantha Chowk and Srinagar was also seized.

Moreover, three two-wheelers, which were being used for doing recce of police, security establishments, monitor movement of security forces, and ferry terrorists in Bandipora area, were also seized. Similarly, a Maruti-800 Car and a Pulsar bike were also seized.

Cases under the relevant sections of law have been registered and further investigation is going on. (IANS)

Finland...

President Niinisto described the day as historical as a new era is opening, Xinhua news agency reported.

He said the Finnish security is not "a zero-sum game", not directed against anyone.

Also hailing the day as historic, Marin said following the parliamentary approval, the cabinet will suggest to President Niinisto that the application be sent to NATO.

In a phone call initiated by Helsinki on Saturday, the Finnish President informed Russian President Vladimir Putin of Finland's decision to seek NATO membership in the next few days.

The Kremlin said in a statement that "Putin stressed that abandoning the traditional policy of military neutrality would be a mistake, since there are no threats to Finland's security".

Russian Minister...

this area. It is a pity that common sense is being sacrificed to some phantom ideas about what should be done in the current situation," Ryabkov was quoted as saying.

The Deputy Foreign Minister called the decision to expand the military alliance another grave mistake with "far-reaching consequences".

"What should I do? This is the level of those who make political decisions today in the respective countries."

Ryabkov's remarks came after Finnish President Sauli Niinisto and the government's foreign policy committee on Sunday took an official decision to start the process of the country's application to become a NATO member.

In a phone call initiated by Helsinki the previous day, Niinisto informed Russian President Vladimir Putin of Finland's decision to seek NATO membership in the next few days.

In response, Putin "stressed that abandoning the traditional policy of military neutrality would be a mistake, since there are no threats to Finland's security", adding that it may also have a negative impact on Moscow-Helsinki relations.

Finland shares a 1,300 km border with Russia. Sweden has also indicated its intention to join the military alliance in the wake of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, the BBC reported.

Russian to...

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In response, Putin "stressed that abandoning the traditional policy of military neutrality would be a mistake, since there are no threats to Finland's security", adding that it may also have a negative impact on Moscow-Helsinki relations. (IANS)

Covid-19...

total number of confirmed cases remains 51 across J&K.

On COVID vaccination, the bulletin informs that 7,270 doses of COVID vaccine have been administered in the last 24 hours bringing the cumulative number of doses administered across J&K to 2,29,09,989.

According to the daily Media Bulletin on novel Corona virus (Covid-19), out of 45148 positive cases, 51are Active Positive (39in Jammu Division and 12in Kashmir Division), 449345 have recovered and 4752 have died; 2328 in Jammu division and 2424in Kashmir division.

The Bulletin further said that out of 25252661 test results available, 45148 samples have tested positive and 24798513 samples have been tested as negative till date. Besides, 15,751 COVID tests have been conducted in last 24 hours.

Till date 6506288 persons have been enlisted for observation which included 27267persons in home quarantine including facilities operated by government, 51 in isolation and 509210 in home surveillance. Besides, 5965008 persons have completed their surveillance period.

Providing district-wise breakup for positive cases for today, the Bulletin informs that Jammu and Srinagar reported 01 case each while as no other district across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir reported any fresh case.

The bulletin informs that in case of any help, the general public can call J&K UT Centralised Health Helpline- Toll Free No. 104. In case of emergency, people can avail free ambulance services 24x7 by calling toll free number 108 while as pregnant women and sick infants can avail free services by dialling toll free number 102, the bulletin reads.

It also informs that the public can reach national helpline by dialling 1075.

Further the bulletin also informs the public that for any kind of COVID-19 query, logon to www.covidrelief.jk.gov.in

The readers can also reach us on the official Twitter account of DIPR-J&K @diprjk; website: <http://www.jkdirinf.in>; Webportal: jkinfonews.com and Facebook: @dipr.jammu.kashmir.

Govt...

and far from reality. All we want is to have reservation for Paharis without disturbing the share that has been given to the Gujjars previously."

Recalling the assurance held out by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that if the State Government recommends, the Centre would grant the ST status to these communities, He said the then State Government led by Dr Farooq Abdullah sent a strong recommendation for the grant of ST status to Pahari speaking people as also the Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir. "Subsequently, the issue was raised by Dr Farooq Abdullah and myself in our capacities as Chief Ministers with the successive Prime Minister's Rajiv Gandhi, V P Singh, Chander Shekhar, I K Gujral, Deve Gowda, P V Narsimha Rao, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Dr Manmohan Singh. The issue has been taken up with the present dispensation as well. The present dispensation's attitude to the issue is no different, they have been offering only hollow promises," he said.

He said that the National Conference is of the view that the interests of any community are not harmed and it was with this intent the recommendation had been made for the grant of ST status to Pahari speaking people in a way that it does not clash with the interests of other segments of society already brought under the reserved categories of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe. (GNS)

DGCA says IndiGo staff handled child boarding incident inappropriately

New Delhi, May 16: Aviation regulator DGCA Monday said it has issued a show-cause notice to IndiGo after a fact-finding committee found the airline staff prima facie violated regulations in denying boarding to a specially-abled child at the Ranchi airport on May 7.

The airline had on May 9 said the boy was denied boarding as he was "visibly in panic".

As the boy was prohibited from boarding the Ranchi-Hyderabad flight, his parents - who were accompanying him - also decided not to enter the plane.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation had constituted a fact-finding committee to probe the matter.

"The committee has submitted its report," the DGCA said in a statement on Monday.

The proceedings of the committee were partly held in the open and partly in-camera as per the request of the affected family, it said.

"The findings of the committee prima facie indicate inappropriate handling of passengers by the IndiGo staff thereby resulting in certain non-conformances with the applicable regulations," it mentioned.

In view of this, it has been decided to issue a show-cause notice to the airline through its authorised representative to explain as to why suitable enforcement action should not be taken against them for the non-conformances, it said.

"To meet the ends of justice, the airline has been provided an opportunity for personal hearing as well as for making written submissions in next ten days from today i.e. till May 26, 2022. After hearing their submissions, appropriate action as per law would be taken," it added.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had last week formed a three-member team to conduct a "fact-finding enquiry" into IndiGo recently barring



a specially-abled child from boarding a flight at the Ranchi airport as he was in a "state of panic".

IndiGo CEO Ronojoy Dutta had expressed regret over the incident and offered to buy an electric wheelchair for the specially-abled child.

Dutta said the airline staff took the best possible decision under difficult circumstances.

Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Twitter that no human being should have to go through this and he himself is investigating the Ranchi inci-

dent. The incident came to light after other passengers highlighted it on social media.

In a statement, Dutta said, "We recognise too well that parents who dedicate their lives to the caring of physically-challenged persons are the true heroes of our society."

"We offer our sincere regrets to the affected family for the unfortunate experience and as a small token of our appreciation of their lifelong dedication, would like to offer to purchase an electric wheelchair for their son." As

the boy was prohibited from boarding the airline's Ranchi-Hyderabad flight on Saturday, his parents - who were accompanying him - also decided not to enter the plane.

Dutta said, "Having reviewed all aspects of this incident, we as an organisation are of the view that we made the best possible decision under difficult circumstances." "Throughout the check-in and boarding process, our intent of course was to carry the family. However, at the boarding area, the teenager was visibly in panic," he added.

Vodafone Idea soars 15% on heavy volumes in sharpest intra-day gain of 2022

Mumbai, May 16: Shares of Vodafone Idea (Vi) moved 15 per cent higher to Rs 9.57 on the BSE in Monday's intra-day trade on the back of heavy volumes. With this, the stock of the telecom services operator recorded its sharpest intra-day rally during calendar year 2022.

On December 31, 2021, Vi had gained 13 per cent in intra-day trade on the BSE.

At 01:45 pm, the stock was trading 14 per cent higher at Rs 9.50, as compared to a 0.54 per cent rise in the S&P BSE Sensex. In the past two trading days, Vi surged 17 per cent. A combined 256 million equity shares have changed hands on the NSE and BSE.

For January-March quarter (Q4FY22), Vi's losses narrowed 6.5 per cent to Rs 6,563 crore on a year-on-year (YoY) basis on the back of revenue growth. Earnings before interest depreciation tax and amortization (ebitda) grew 5.4 per cent YoY to Rs 4,649 crore.

On a quarter on quarter (QoQ) ebitda increased sharply by 21.8 per cent, owing to a sharp 20.5 per cent sequential decline in network and operating costs partly benefitting from lower energy costs, lower number of days and due to one of benefits of Rs 150 crore. Adjusted margins were up 466 bps QoQ to 43.9 per cent.

The company's average revenue per user (ARPU) improved to Rs 124, up 7.5 per cent QoQ vs Rs 115 in Q3FY22, aided by tariff hikes in November 2021. Though, the company lost 3.4 million subscribers sequentially and its



user base stood at 243.8 million. But, it added one million 4G customers and that count stood at 118.1 million.

Meanwhile, the debt-ridden telecom operator expects the government to complete conversion of around Rs 16,100 crore dues into 33 per cent stake in the company in the coming weeks, news agency PTI reported last week quoting a top official of the firm.

Vi CEO Ravinder Takkar believes the government's reform package and related developments, return of the bulk of bank guarantees and industry wide tariff hikes and recent fund infusion by the promoters are significant catalysts for the company.

As part of the reforms package, the Department of Telecom (DoT) has returned bank guarantees of about Rs 16,000 crore to the company. On March 31, 2022, the company allocated equity shares worth Rs 4,500 crore to the promoters - Vodafone Group and Aditya Birla Group - against their Birla Group - Rs 3,375 crore and Rs 1,125 crore, respectively in the company. The board of the company has additionally approved raising of Rs 10,000 crore to support the firm's business.

Sensex snaps 6-day losing run, ends 180 pts up; DMart rallies 10%, ACC 4%

New Delhi, May 16: Equity markets ended a choppy day in the positive zone on Monday, rising for the first time in seven days, as global markets supported the trading sentiment. The benchmark S&P BSE Sensex gyrated in a range of 796 points before ending 180 points, or 0.34 per cent, higher at 52,974. The NSE Nifty, on the other hand, shut shop at 15,842, up 60 points or 0.38 per cent.

NTPC, Bajaj Finance, Maruti Suzuki, SBI, HDFC, Kotak Bank, M&M, and IndusInd Bank were the top gainers on the Sensex index today, up between 1.6 per cent and 2.9 per cent. On the downside, Ultratech Cement, Asian Paints, ITC, TCS, HCL Tech, Nestle, and Dr Reddy's Labs were the top laggards, down in the range of 1-2.8 per cent.

LIC may list at a discount to issue price if grey market is an indicator



Mumbai, May 16: Shares of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) are seen slipping below their issue price of Rs 949 per share during their stock market debut on Tuesday.

The stock could list anywhere between Rs 900-Rs 940, said market player citing grey market activity and weak institutional investor demand during LIC's Rs 20,577-crore maiden share sale.

The country's largest-ever initial public offering (IPO) saw 2.9 times more demand than shares on offer, generating bids worth over Rs 43,000 crore. However, bulk of the demand came from individual investors. Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) bid for shares worth just Rs 2,300

crore in the IPO.

"Small investors have managed to shore up the demand in the IPO. However, for the stock to do well, you will need follow up demand post-listing. Given the lukewarm response from FPIs in the IPO and their sustained pullback from the secondary market, it looks unlikely that they will be there to support the prices," said an investment banker asking not to be quoted.

LIC's weak listing can weigh on the sentiment of investors.

The IPO saw the highest-ever participation of over 7 million small investors. However, given the discount offered by the government, they could still make nominal gains. The IPO price of LIC has been set at Rs 949 per share—the upper end of the price band.

Retail investors have been allotted shares at Rs 905 apiece and policyholders at Rs 889 per share. At the IPO price, LIC will have a market capitalisation of Rs 6 trillion, making it India's fifth-most valuable company after Infosys, which is currently valued at Rs 6.26 trillion.

Paytm not to acquire Raheja QBE; to apply for new general insurance licence

New Delhi, May 16: Paytm Insuretech - an associate company of One97 Communications - and Prism Johnson Ltd, who had entered into an agreement, wherein the former would have bought 51 per cent stake of the latter in Raheja QBE General Insurance, have decided to terminate the agreement as the share sale and purchase transaction was not consummated within the time period envisaged by the parties under the agreement.

In exchange notifications, both the companies said, "As the share sale and purchase transaction has not been consummated within the time period envisaged by the parties



under the said agreement, the agreement has automatically terminated".

One97 Communications, which is the parent company of Paytm, said, they remain bullish on their roadmap for general insurance and intend to seek requisite approvals for a new general insurance licence,

wherein they hold a 74 per cent majority shareholding upfront.

On the other hand, Prism Johnson will continue to evaluate the future prospects of their investment in Raheja QBE general insurance from time to time.

In 2020, Paytm, along with Vijay Shekhar Sharma, had entered into an agreement, wherein they were supposed to acquire Prism Johnson's 51 per cent stake in Raheja QBE General Insurance for Rs 289.68 crore. Prism Johnson has 51 per cent stake in the general insurance company and the rest is owned by QBE Australia. Paytm was supposed to acquire Prism Johnson's 51 per cent and QBE Australia's 49 per cent.

Global wheat prices soar in risk to inflation as India restricts exports



floods and heat waves threaten crops in most major producers. "If this ban occurred in a normal year the impact would be minimal, but the loss of Ukraine volumes exacerbates the issues," said Andrew Whitelaw, a grains analyst at Melbourne-based Thomas Elder Markets.

India's decision to halt wheat exports came after a record-breaking heat wave parched the crop during a crucial period, spurring estimates of slumping yields. The output risk created a dilemma for India, which has tried to fill the gap as the shortfall in Ukraine's exports push buyers toward alternative origins.

India prioritized the domestic market, even as the move risks tarnishing its international image as a reliable supplier. Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces frustration on home soil about surging inflation, an issue that brought down the previous government and paved the way for his ascension to power.

India will approve exports to countries that require wheat for food security needs and based on the requests of their governments. It will also allow shipments for which irrevocable letters of credit have been issued. Its supplies usually go to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia.

An official in Egypt, which only recently approved India as an origin of wheat imports, said Sunday said it has agreed to buy 500,000 tons, with its government purchases exempt from the ban.

"Directing the wheat exports through government channels would not only ensure fulfilling the genuine needs of our neighbors and food-deficit countries, but also control inflationary expectations," India's food ministry said in a statement.

Jet Airways conducts first set of three proving flights

New Delhi, May 16: Jet Airways on Sunday conducted the first set of three proving flights with 18 people, including officials of the aviation regulator DGCA, on board the aircraft, sources said.

The second set of two proving flights will be operated by Jet Airways on Tuesday, they said.

Proving flights is the last step for the airline to obtain the air operator certificate (AOC).

The first of the three proving flights was conducted on the Delhi-Mumbai route, sources said.

The second flight was scheduled to return to Delhi, but after it departed from Mumbai, officials of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) asked the pilots to divert it to Ahmedabad, they said.

The DGCA diverts aircraft during proving flights to test the readiness of a new airline in handling such situations, they said.

The second flight safely landed in Ahmedabad, and sometime after that, the third flight was conducted on the Ahmedabad-Delhi route, they mentioned.

The aircraft used for these three proving flights was a Boeing 737 plane with registration number VT-SXE of Jet Airways, they said.

There were 18 people - four cabin crew members, two pilots, and 12 others, including DGCA officials and senior executives of Jet Airways - on board the plane during these three proving flights, sources said.

A total of five landings (five flights) have to be done by the aircraft to successfully complete its proving flights, they said.

Three landings were conducted on Sunday, and therefore, the remaining two will be conducted on Tuesday, they said.

Jet Airways did not respond to PTT's request for a statement on the matter of its proving flights.

Jet Airways had on May 5 conducted its test flight to and from Hyderabad in a step towards obtaining the AOC.

The airline in its old avatar was owned by Nareesh Goyal and had operated its last flight on April 17, 2019. The Jalan-Kalrock Consortium is currently the promoter of Jet Airways.

The airline plans to restart commercial flight operations in July-September quarter this year.

Bandhan Bank surges 8% on improvement in asset quality in March quarter

Mumbai, May 16: Shares of Bandhan Bank surged 8 per cent to Rs 342.70 on the BSE in Monday's intra-day trade, on improvement in asset quality in the March quarter (Q4FY22), with gross non-performing asset (NPA) and net NPA ratios declining 435 bps and 135 bps to 6.46 per cent and 3.01 per cent, respectively, on a quarter on quarter (QoQ) basis.

At 11:29 am, the stock of the private sector lender was trading 6 per cent higher at Rs 336.90, as compared to a 0.72 per cent rise in the S&P BSE Sensex. It had hit a 52-week high of Rs 354.10 on June 28, 2021.

In Q4, Bandhan Bank reported healthy improvement in its operating performance with net interest income (NII) growing 44.6 per cent year on year (YoY) and 19.5 per cent QoQ to Rs 2,540 crore.

The bank's net profit soared to Rs 1,902 crore compared to Rs 103 crore in the same period a year ago, aided by low provisions and higher net interest income (NII). In the previous quarter, it had posted a net profit of Rs 859 crore.

Net interest margin (NIM), a measure of profitability, increased to 8.7 per cent in the current quarter from 7.8 per cent in the preceding quarter. Provisions were mere at Rs 4.7 crore vs. Rs 805 crore QoQ and Rs 828 crore YoY due to sharp recovery in asset quality.

However, in the past three years, Bandhan Bank has underperformed the market by falling 40 per cent, as compared to a 42 per

cent rally in the Sensex.

Underperformance in the stock price over the past year was on account of uncertainties over asset quality. Although, analysts at ICICI Securities believe that a substantial improvement in asset quality along with better outlook should reflect positively.

Healthy loan growth guidance with target of improving proportion of secured book remains positive. Sharp improvement in asset quality to benefit all other parameters; materialisation of estimated recoveries of around Rs 5,000 crore remains key. Benefits of rate hike in Emerging Entrepreneurs Business (EEB) to be fully witnessed from this year onwards. Hence, NIMs could see some improvement and, thus, boost income, the brokerage said in its result update.

"Bandhan Bank has reported a strong all-round performance, with an improvement in collection efficiency aiding a sharp improvement in asset quality, while business growth has gathered pace. The management has guided at a continued improvement in asset quality and steady trends in loan growth. We raise our FY23/FY24 earnings sharply by 23 per cent/17 per cent, factoring in lower credit cost and a recovery in growth," said Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

The brokerage has maintained its neutral rating on the stock with an increased target price of Rs 350 per share (based on 2.2x FY24E BV).

Sri Lanka's new PM wins support for 'economic war cabinet'

Colombo: Sri Lanka's new prime minister won crucial support from two main opposition parties on Monday, easing the pressure on the ruling Rajapaksa clan in the face of the island's worsening economic crisis.

The main opposition SJB party appeared to drop its demands that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa should step down before backing a coalition to manage the crumbling economy.

The SJB, or Samagi Jana Balawegaya, declined to join a unity government led by new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, but said it would "unconditionally support the posi-

tion efforts to revive the economy".

"It is important to save the country from the grave economic crisis," it said in a brief statement.

And the second-largest opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), said it would join the cabinet.

Even so, thousands of protesters remained camped outside the sea-front office of 73-year-old President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose brother Mahinda quit as premier last week, demanding his resignation in turn.

Shortages of food, fuel and medicines, along



with record inflation and lengthy blackouts, have brought severe hardships to the country's 22 million people, in the worst financial crisis

since independence from Britain in 1948.

Wickremesinghe's appointment last week - his sixth turn as prime minister - has so far failed to quell public anger at the government for bringing Sri Lanka to the brink of economic collapse.

Troops patrolled the streets as consumers queued up for scarce supplies and the government announced that a six-hour night curfew will be reimposed from Monday after a 24-hour break.

The curfew was relaxed on Sunday, the first day of a two-day holiday for Vesak, the anniversary of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death.

- Dollar shortage - Wickremesinghe has struggled to form a "unity government" and a cabinet swearing-in scheduled for Monday afternoon was pushed back as talks continued on sharing portfolios.

Over 600 families in Sri Lanka affected by floods, landslides

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's Disaster Management Centre (DMC) announced that over 600 families have been affected by floods and landslides as heavy rain prevails in the island nation.

A total of 2,290 people from 585 families were affected in the southern district of Ratnapura, while 62 from 16 families were affected in the Kalutara district in Western Province, Xinhua news agency quoted the DMC as saying.

Eighty-two houses were partially damaged due to floods and winds, the DMC added, warning those living near rivers and mountains have to be vigilant of possible floods and landslides.

Heavy rains have been reported in some parts of the country in the last few days, the DMC said.

US in mourning, outrage after 'racist' mass shooting

BUFFALO: Grieving Buffalo residents held vigils Sunday after a white gunman who officials have branded "pure evil" shot dead 10 people at a grocery store in a "racist" rampage.

The police commissioner for the US city in western New York, Joseph Gramaglia, told reporters the 18-year-old suspect did "reconnaissance" on the predominantly Black area surrounding Tops Friendly Market and drove there from his hometown of Conklin, more than 200 miles (322 kilometers) away.

Wearing heavy body armor and wielding an AR-15 assault rifle, the shooter killed 10 people and wounded three others - almost all of them Black - before threatening to turn the gun on himself. Police said officers talked the gunman down before arresting him.

The suspect, identified as Payton Gendron, was arraigned late Saturday on a single count of first-degree murder and held without bail, the Erie County district attorney's office said. He pleaded not guilty.

"The evidence that we have uncovered so far makes no mistake that this is an absolute racist hate crime," Gramaglia said on Sunday, adding Gendron had a rifle and shotgun in his car.

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown was unequivocal about the shooter's motivations: "This individual came here with the express purpose of taking as many Black lives as he possibly could."

Gramaglia said the gunman had last year made "generalized threats" at his high school, after which state police referred him to a hospital for a mental health evaluation that lasted approximately one day and a half.

He was then released. Earlier on Sunday, residents held a vigil outside the store as New York Governor Kathy Hochul and state Attorney General Letitia James addressed a church service.

Hochul, a Buffalo native, described the shooting as a "military-style execution" and said racist messaging was "spreading like wildfire," especially online.

In angry and mournful tones, speakers decried easy access to powerful guns and the latest eruption of racist violence, in what has become tragically routine brutality in the United States.

Just hours later, in California, a shooting at a church southeast of Los Angeles left one person dead and four others "critically wounded," according to the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

In Washington, President Joe Biden - whom the White House said would visit Buffalo on Tuesday - condemned the racist extremism and "hate that remains a stain on the soul of America."

The attack evoked memories of recent US history's most devastating attacks, including a white man's 2015 massacre of nine worshippers in a predominantly Black South Carolina church, and the 2019 attack by a white man in Texas that claimed 23 lives, most of them Latino.

Attorney General James, who is Black, described Saturday's murderous assault as "domestic terrorism, plain and simple."

She paid tribute to the victims, who included shoppers and store workers, describing an elderly woman who planted trees on her block, and a woman who was food shopping after visiting her husband at the nursing home.

"I held in my arms a young lady who worked at Tops, who was so afraid that she was about to die, who witnessed the bloodshed, who shook and quivered in my arms," James said.

Covid-19: Most of Shanghai has ended virus spread, 1 million left in lockdown

Beijing: Most of Shanghai has stopped the spread of the coronavirus in the community and fewer than 1 million people remain under strict lockdown, authorities said Monday, as the city moves toward reopening and economic data showed the gloomy impact of China's "zero-Covid" policy.

Vice Mayor Zong Ming said 15 out of Shanghai's 16 districts had eliminated virus transmission among those not already in quarantine.

"The epidemic in our city is under effective control. Prevention measures have achieved incremental success," Zong said at a news briefing.

Supermarkets, malls and restaurants were allowed to reopen Monday with limits on the numbers of people and mandated "no contact" transactions. But restrictions on movement remain in place and the subway train system remains closed for now.

Even as case numbers fall, city and national authorities have sent mixed messages about the state of Shanghai's outbreak and when life can return to normal in the city of 25 million, where many residents have been confined to their homes, compounds and neighborhoods for more than 50 days. A prospective date of June 1 has been given for a full re-opening.

Zong said that authorities "remain sober" about the possibility of the outbreak rebounding, particularly as reports of new infections continue to come in from centralized isolation centers and older, rundown neighborhoods.

"Citywide, our prevention efforts are still not firmly enough established and it requires all of our continuing hard work and the cooperation of the broad masses of citizens and friends ... to restore the normal running of the city in an orderly fashion," Zong said.

Shanghai's ruthless and frequently chaotic implementation of virus restrictions has sparked protests over the lack of food, medical care, freedom of movement and already highly limited pri-

vacy rights.

Despite that, China has rejected all criticisms "zero-COVID," including from the World Health Organization. The ruling Communist Party says it is committed to "resolutely fighting any attempts to distort, question or dismiss China's anti-COVID policy."

China reported 1,159 cases of infection Monday, the vast majority in Shanghai. Almost all were infections without symptoms.

In Beijing, where a much smaller outbreak has led to mass testing and a lockdown imposed building by building, 54 cases were reported. Authorities have ordered people to work from home, moved schools online and limited restaurants to take-out only in the capital.

China's strict lockdowns have played havoc with employment, supply chains and the economy in general, and data released Monday showed factory and consumer activity was even weaker than expected in April.

Retail sales plunged 11.1%, while manufacturing output sank 2.9% after factories closed and those that kept operating with employees living at their workplace were forced to reduce output due to disruption in supplies of components.

About half of the 9,000 biggest industrial enterprises in Shanghai are back at work after controls that shut down most of the city starting in late March eased, said Fu Linghui, director of statistics for the National Bureau of Statistics.

Private sector economists have China's economic growth forecasts for this year to as low as 2%, well below the ruling party target of 5.5% and last year's 8.1% expansion.

Despite such news, politics continues to drive the ruling party's response to the pandemic. Looking ahead to a key conclave later this year, party leaders said after a May 5 meeting that containing outbreaks would take priority over the economy.



Uyghur county in China has highest prison rate in the world

Beijing: Nearly one in 25 people in a county in the Uyghur heartland of China has been sentenced to prison on terrorism-related charges, in what is the highest known imprisonment rate in the world, an Associated Press review of leaked data shows.

A list obtained and partially verified by the AP cites the names of more than 10,000 Uyghurs sent to prison in just Konasheher county alone, one of dozens in southern Xinjiang. In recent years, China has waged a brutal crackdown on the Uyghurs, a largely Muslim minority, which it has described as a war on terror.

The list is by far the biggest to emerge to date with the names of imprisoned Uyghurs, reflecting the sheer size of a Chinese government campaign that swept an estimated million or more people into internment camps and prisons. It also confirms what families and rights groups have said for years: China is relying on a system of long-term incarceration to keep the Uyghurs in check, wielding the law as a weapon of repression.

Under searing international criticism, Chinese officials announced the closure in 2019 of short-term, extrajudicial internment camps where Uyghurs were thrown in without charges. However, although attention focused on the camps, thousands of Uyghurs still languish for years or even decades in prison on what experts say are trumped-up charges of terrorism.

Uyghur farmer Rozikari Tohti was known as a soft-spoken, family-loving man with three children and not the slightest interest in religion. So his cousin, Mhriqul Musa, was shocked to discover Tohti had been thrown into prison for five years for "religious extremism."

"Never did I think he would be arrested," said Musa, who now lives in exile in Norway. "If you saw him, you would feel the same way. He is so earnest."

From the list, Musa found out Tohti's younger brother Ablilik Tohti also was sentenced to seven years on charges of "gathering the public to disturb social order." Tohti's next-door neighbour, a farmer called

Nurmemet Dawut, was sentenced to 11 years on the same charges as well as "picking quarrels and provoking troubles."

Konasheher county is typical of rural southern Xinjiang, and more than 267,000 people live there. The prison sentences across the county were for two to 25 years, with an average of nine years, the list shows. While the people on the list were mostly arrested in 2017, according to Uyghurs in exile, their sentences are so long that the vast majority would still be in prison.

Those swept up came from all walks of life, and included men, women, young people and the elderly. They had only one thing in common: They were all Uyghurs.

Experts say it clearly shows people were targeted simply for being Uyghur - a conclusion vehemently denied by Chinese authorities. Xinjiang spokesman Elijan Anayat said sentences were carried out in accordance with the law.

"We will never specifically target specific regions, ethnic groups,

religions, much less the Uyghurs," Anayat said. "We will never wrong the good, nor release the bad."

The list was obtained by Xinjiang scholar Gene Bunin from an anonymous source who described themselves as a member of China's Han Chinese majority "opposed to the Chinese government's policies in Xinjiang." It was passed to the AP by Abduweli Ayup, an exiled Uyghur linguist in Norway.

The AP authenticated it through interviews with eight Uyghurs who recognised 194 people on the list, as well as legal notices, recordings of phone calls with Chinese officials and checks of address, birthdays and identity numbers.

The list does not include people with typical criminal charges such as homicide or theft. Rather, it focuses on offenses related to terrorism, religious extremism or vague charges traditionally used against political dissidents, such as "picking quarrels and provoking troubles." This means the true number of people imprisoned is almost certainly higher.

2 dead, 3 hospitalized in Houston market shooting: Sheriff

Houston: Two people were killed and three more were taken to a hospital with injuries after a shooting Sunday at a bustling Houston flea market, authorities said.

The shooting at the open-air market arose from an "altercation" that involved at least two guns and all five of the people, according to Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez. He said no "innocent bystanders" were injured.

Investigators believe one of the people hospitalized was among those who opened fire and two more suspected shooters were detained at the scene, a sheriff's deputy told KTRK-TV.

Thousands of people were shopping at the market 14 miles (22 kilometers) north of Houston's downtown when the shooting began around 1 pm on Sunday, Gonzalez said on Twitter.

The sheriff said multiple shots were fired and that deputies recovered two pistols from the scene. Authorities did not immediately provide further information about what led to the shoot-



ing but said all the people involved were men in their 20s who appeared to know each other.

The shooting in Houston came the day after a white 18-year-old shot and killed 10 people at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket in what officials described as a massacre aimed at killing as many Black people as possible.



HEALTH

Can fiber help gut bacteria fight against antibiotic resistance?

A

Antimicrobial resistance is an ever-growing problem. It happens when microorganisms like bacteria adapt so, antibiotics cannot kill them off. People can have more severe infections and illnesses when antibiotic resistance increases. Experts are working to understand why antibiotic resistance happens and how to reduce it.

A study published in *mBio* examined the impact fiber has on antimicrobial resistance.

Researchers found that a diverse diet with high fiber was associated with lower levels of antimicrobial resistance in gut bacteria.

The importance of dietary fiber

As per the Food and Drug Administration, fiber is a carbohydrate that the body doesn't digest well. However, dietary fiber is essential for a healthy gut. There are two main types of fiber:

Soluble dietary fiber dissolves in water and provides some nutrients to the body.

Insoluble dietary fiber does not provide nutrients but helps the body in other ways.

Fiber provides a variety of health benefits. For example, it helps clean away buildup in the intestines, thus decreasing the risk of colon cancer. All fiber types also help increase feelings of fullness, thus helping people consume appropriate nutrition amounts.

However, fiber's benefits may reach even further than the health benefits experts have already discovered.

Antimicrobial resistance

Antimicrobials are medications doctors use to treat infections caused by microorganisms. One of the most common examples would be antibiotics, which doctors use to treat bacterial infections. Sometimes "antimicrobial" and "antibiotic" may be used interchangeably, according to the CDC.

Antimicrobial resistance happens when bacteria or other microorganisms adapt so that they become resistant to the effects of antibiotics.

The body is home to trillions of microbes or bacteria which are collectively known as the microbiome.

In recent years, the problem of antibiotic resistance has grown, leading to serious illness and even death. Many groups and organizations have drawn attention to the problem, including the Antimicrobial Resistance Fighter Coalition. The group explained in a recent Facebook post:

"A study in *The Lancet* recently found that of the 1.27 million deaths directly attributable to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in 2019, 73% were caused by just six pathogens. This is why it's so important for everyone to be aware of AMR and take steps to understand more about it and prevent it."

However, there are a lot of unknowns about how diet

could impact antimicrobial resistance, and this relationship was something researchers of the current study sought to examine.

Increasing fiber to decrease antibiotic resistance

In the study, researchers looked at the diets of over 250 participants and also at the genes of those participants' gut microbiome. Specifically, they looked for antibiotic resistance genes (ARGs).

The study participants were healthy adults between the ages of 18 and 66 and the majority of participants were white. The researchers saw there was great diversity when it came to the makeup and amount of ARGs among this relatively small population.

Researchers collected data from participants, including diet, physical activity levels, and blood samples. Participants provided stool samples so that researchers could examine the genetic makeup of the participants' gut microbiomes.

The researchers discovered that "individuals who consumed diverse diets that were high in fiber and low in animal protein had fewer antibiotic resistance genes."

Study author Dr. Danielle G. Lemay explained their findings to *Medical News Today*.

"We found that people who consume more diverse diets with more soluble fiber have lower numbers of antimicrobial resistance genes in their gut microbiomes. Therefore, a diverse diet high in soluble fiber potentially reduces the risk of an antibiotic-resistant infection."

— Dr. Danielle G. Lemay

What this means for the future

There are limitations to the current study. Its observational nature means it could not determine a cause and it relied on self-reporting of diet data.

According to Dr. Lemay, more research is needed on the impact of animal proteins on ARG and to assess the impact of participants' use of antibiotics or other treatments that may have contributed to ARGs detected.

Dr. Lemay went on to explain:

"In the study, we examined people at a snapshot in time. What we need to do in the future is a study in which we feed people a diverse diet, high in soluble fiber, to see if we can reduce the antimicrobial resistance of their gut bacteria."

But overall, the results of this study are encouraging because it links simple diet steps with reducing health problems like antimicrobial resistance.

If further research confirms these findings, it could shift dietary recommendations. As people change their diets, we might even see a decrease in antimicrobial resistance.

FIBER IS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF A HEALTHY DIET, AND RESEARCHERS ARE STILL DISCOVERING MORE ABOUT ITS IMPORTANCE.

ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE HAS BECOME A GROWING ISSUE IN RECENT YEARS, INCREASING PEOPLE'S RISKS FOR SEVERE ILLNESS AND LIMITING TREATMENT OPTIONS.

A RECENT STUDY FOUND THAT INCREASING FIBER IN DIET FROM DIVERSE FOOD SOURCES COULD HELP DECREASE ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE IN THE GUT.



French League: PSG star Mbappe wins best player award for 3rd time

Paris, May 16: The Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) striker Kylian Mbappe won the French league's best player award for the third time in his career at the 30th UNFP awards ceremony here on Sunday.

The world champion has just been voted best player of the league again for the 2021-2022 season.

"I am very happy, I thank the whole club, my teammates, all those who work at the club, the staff, and of course the President. They helped me enormously to contribute to this third consecutive title. It is important to leave a mark, to always try to make history, and winning collective and individual titles is what counts for any football player. I have the chance to do it, so I am happy," Mbappe told official website of PSG.

Currently the league's top passer (17 assists) and top scorer (25 goals), he is just one match away from completing this double for the first time in French football history. He would also finish as top scorer in the French championship for the fourth consecutive season.

Gigio Donnarumma was voted best goalkeeper by his peers after his first season in the French top flight. Competing with Walter Benitez, Alban Lafont, Pau Lopez and Matz Sels, the young Italian keeper succeeded his team-mate Keylor Navas.

He had already been awarded the Yashin Trophy at the Ballon d'Or ceremony last November, with journalists celebrating him as the best goalkeeper in the world.

"I'm very happy to receive this trophy, and happy to celebrate with the team. I'm happy to be here in Paris, and I hope that next year we will be even better," the European champion told PSGTV.

Women's World Boxing: Nikhat, Manisha cruise into semis, confirm medals

New Delhi, May 16: Indian boxers Nikhat Zareen and Manisha continued their brilliant forms to secure themselves medals at the 12th edition of the IBA Women's World Boxing Championships after registering contrasting wins in their respective quarter-finals in Istanbul on Monday.

Confirming their first World Championships medals with a place in the semi-finals, Nikhat clinched a dominating 5-0 win against England's Charley-Sian Taylor Davison while Manisha got the better of Mongolia's Namun Monkhor in the hard-fought 57kg quarter-final by a 4-1 margin.

The 25-year-old boxer from Telangana once again showed her technical supremacy to hand the country its first medal at this year's tournament with an impressive victory in the 52kg quarter-final. Nikhat's aggressive intent and the clean attack left no chance for Davison as the Indian looked in complete control throughout the bout.

Nikhat will now take on Caroline De Almeida of Brazil in the semi-finals. De Almeida thrashed the 2018 Commonwealth Games silver Ireland's Carly McNaul of Ireland by unanimous decision.

While Manisha will take on Italy's Irma Testa, who defeated Uzbekistan's Sitora Turdibekova 4-1 in another quarter-final.

On the other hand, another Indian pugilist Nitu fell just short of securing a medal in her debut appearance at the World Championships as she tried her all against the reigning Asian Champion Alua Balkibekova of Kazakhstan but went down fighting in a closely fought 48kg quarter-final.



Rahane to miss England Test: Report

Mumbai, May 16: Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) opening batter Ajinkya Rahane has been ruled out of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2022 with a serious grade three hamstring injury, which will also keep him out of one-off Test against England in July.

Rahane sustained the injury while batting for Kolkata against Sunrisers Hyderabad at MCA Stadium in Pune on May 14 and didn't come out to field after making 28 runs off 24 balls when the two-time IPL Champions restricted Hyderabad to 123/8 to win by 54 runs, keeping themselves alive in the race for the playoffs.

"Rahane is set to exit the Kolkata Knight Riders bubble on Monday evening. Sources within the Board of Control for Cricket in India said he will be reporting at the National Cricket Academy in Bangalore where he may need more than four weeks of rehab," said a report by Cricbuzz.

Rahane, who lost his vice-captaincy in the longest format of the game, was last seen in Test cricket action during India's three-match away series against South Africa in January. He was then left out of the two-match home series against Sri Lanka in March alongside Cheteshwar Pujara as Hanuma Vihari and Shreyas Iyer

were given a go.

In seven matches for Kolkata in IPL 2022 after being picked for INR 1 crores in the Mega Auction, Rahane could make just 133 runs at an average of 19 and strike-rate of 103.90. It was Rahane's commitment to continue batting despite being injured caught the eye of team mentor David Hussey and lauded the senior batter for his efforts to bat on.

"The other learning I'd like to play is Jinks (Ajinkya). Now mate, one lesson you provided for everybody - we are all hurting for you, you have done your hammy (hamstring) or whatever you have done I don't know yet. However, you used all your experience of 80 odd Tests, so many ODIs and T20s for your country," Hussey said in a video posted by the franchise on their social media accounts on Sunday.

"He stayed out there to realize what you need which was just swing and try and get as many runs as you possibly could. Because you knew, you couldn't get back out. Great learning for everybody, if you are injured, don't come back, just start swinging out there and try to get a 20 off 10 and that might win us the game. So, well done to you mate," added Hussey.

1st Test, Day 2: Bangladesh start strongly after Mathews' 199 helps Sri Lanka to 397

Chittagong, May 16: Leading the show, Angelo Mathews missed out on a double hundred by one run as Bangladesh bowled out Sri Lanka for 397 runs on the second day of the first Test here on Monday.

Giving the befitting reply to the touring side, Bangladesh after bowling out Sri Lanka on 397 in the final session of day two, started strong in their first innings as the two openers, Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudul Hasan Joy, are unbeaten at the crease, with the score at 76/0, trailing Sri Lanka by 321 runs.

The two Bangladesh openers, Iqbal and Hasan Joy got off to a strong start in the final session, adding 76 runs for the first wicket. The Sri Lankan bowlers failed to trouble the two batters, with both Tamim (35 not out)



and Hasan Joy (31 not out) staying strong at the crease.

Earlier, Mathews and Dinesh Chandimal carried the momentum forward for the visitors, batting for the major part of the first session on day two. Bangladesh pacers struggled

with the new ball, which they had availed in the final session of day one.

However, Mathews survived a close call on 119 when Khaled Ahmed managed to get an outside edge, only to remain unnotified by both the bowler and the

wicketkeeper. Mathews then collected some boundaries off the pacers and remained unbeaten on 147 in the morning session.

At the other end, Chandimal batted steadily and brought up his 21st Test half-century. Chandimal after the milestone attacked Taijul Islam to collect boundaries but his aggressive approach backfired as he saw himself getting out while reverse sweeping Nayeem. The off-spinner had him lbw on 66 and in the same over dismissed the new batter Niroshan Dickwella on 3.

After a challenging morning session, Bangladesh clawed their way back into the game with two quick wickets shortly before the lunch break, exposing Sri Lanka's tail. New batter Ramesh Mendis and Mathews then took Sri Lanka to lunch on 327/6.

Thomas Cup: I was sure Lakshya will win the first match against Indonesia: Prannoy

Mumbai, May 16: As the Indian men's badminton team geared up for the summit clash with Indonesia in the Thomas Cup in Bangkok on Sunday, there were concerns among fans about how singles player Lakshya Sen was coping with the situation as he had lost three matches in a row.

Lakshya, who started with an easy win over Max Weisskirchen in the 5-0 win over Germany, was rested for the second match before losing to Chin Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei in three games as India lost the tie 3-2 and finished runner-up in Pool C.

In the quarterfinal against Malaysia, the 20-year-old from Al-mora went down to Lee Zii Jie in the first singles, and in the semifinals, he ran into Olympic champion Viktor Axelsen and went down in two games.

But his teammates were con-

fident of Lakshya giving India a good start, said HS Prannoy, who made this possible by winning the fifth match in the quarterfinal and semifinal wins over Malaysia and Denmark respectively.

"Though Lakshya had lost three matches in a row, I was sure that he will win against Indonesia. The day before the final match, we kept reminding each other that this was a great opportunity for us and we have to give it our best."

"When we started from Hyderabad, we had hopes of winning a medal in this Thomas Cup but we were not expecting gold. So, it's an unbelievable experience," said Prannoy.

Lakshya came back from a game down to defeat Anthony Ginting in three games to give India a 1-0 lead and the doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty made it 3-0, saving

four match points in the second game. Kidambi Srikanth then won against Jonathan Christie to seal the victory, making India only the sixth country to win the Thomas Cup title.

He said they did not expect to win 3-0 against 14-time champion Indonesia.

"We never expected to win 3-0 against such a strong team like Indonesia. I was very happy that I did not have to play in the match, so when I ran wildly onto the court after Srikanth won the final point, I was ecstatic that I didn't have to play the fifth rubber as I did against Malaysia and Denmark. I handled that pressure twice and I did not want to handle such pressure again," said Prannoy.

Prannoy will next participate in this week's Thailand Open and will be hoping to continue this form in the Bwf tour event too. (IANS)