



Srinagar

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Ahmedabad shows its
feelings in Hardik's
night of agony

Pj12

DEO Srinagar chairs meeting of
Election Nodal Officers,
reviews preparedness for
upcoming Election

Pj3



“Confident That PoJK Will Itself Merge With India”: Rajnath Singh

■ HT News Network

NEW DELHI, MAR 24: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said that the people of Pakistan-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK) are themselves raising the demand for a merger with India. He expressed the confidence that the people of PoJK will merge with India.

He made the remarks during the 'AAP Ki Adalat' programme on India TV. Asked about Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent remarks about Kashmir, Rajnath Singh said, "Can they ever take Kashmir? They should be worried about Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir. I



had said almost one and a half years ago that there will be no need for us to attack and occupy, because a situation is developing there that people of PoJK themselves are demanding merger with India."

On being asked whether the government was making any plan, he responded, "I will not say anything more, I should not. We are not going to attack any country. India has a character of never attacking any country in the world, nor has it occupied an inch of other's territory. But PoJK was ours, PoJK is ours, and I am confident that PoJK will itself merge with India."

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

486 Lives Lost, 510 Injured In Fire Incidents In Six Years In J&K

Property Worth Rs 1362.38 Crore Damaged, Reveals RTI

■ HT News Network

BUDGAM, MAR 25: Information obtained under the RTI Act has revealed that 486 people have lost their lives and 510 others sustained injuries in fire incidents over the past six years in Jammu and Kashmir.

According to details obtained by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the Fire & Emergency Services Department has received a total of 26,354 calls reporting fire incidents from January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2023.

An RTI filed by activist MM Shuja disclosed that during this six-year period, 486 people lost their lives, and 510 were injured in various fire incidents. Nine employees/firefighters also lost their lives while performing

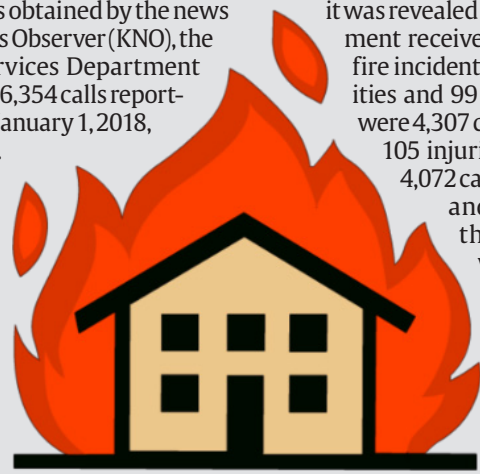
their duties.

The data further reveals that property worth 20,285.48 was involved in these fire accidents, of which property worth 1,362.38 was damaged, while property worth 18,929 was saved.

Breaking down the figures year by year, it was revealed that in 2018, the department received 5,314 calls reporting fire incidents, resulting in 104 fatalities and 99 injuries. In 2019, there were 4,307 calls with 103 deaths and 105 injuries. In 2020, there were 4,072 calls, resulting in 86 deaths and 58 injuries. In 2021, there were 4,277 calls, with 106 fatalities and 62 injuries. In 2022, there were 5,833 calls, leading to 68 deaths and 140 injuries.

However, the data from 2023 showed a

TURN ON.....PAGE 02



NEWS BRIEF

Four Residential Houses Gutted In Kashmir

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: At least four residential houses were gutted in two separate fire incidents across the Kashmir valley overnight.

Fire and Emergency service officials on Monday said that fire broke out in a double storey residential house at Nowpora area of Srinagar late Sunday and it engulfed another house causing extensive damage to both the structures.

The fire tenders were rushed from various stations of the Srinagar city to douse the leaping flames.

In another similar incident two more double storied houses were

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

SKIMS To Introduce QR Code System At Payment Counters

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: Kashmir's territory care hospital Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Science (SKIMS) Sura will introduce the online payment system at all counters of the hospital through QR Code facility.

The Secretary of Health and Medical Education had recently directed all hospitals of the valley to have a QR Code system at payment counters for quicker facility.

SKIMS has initiated the process to have a QR Code facility for online payment at all counters of the institute, a statement of the institute said on Monday.

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

Class 8 Exam Dates Shuffle Leaves 1.75 Lakh Students Fuming

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: The repeated changes in the examination schedule for class 8 students have stirred frustration among 1.75 lakh students, disrupting their preparations and casting uncertainty over their academic endeavors.

According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) initially slated to commence on March 5, the exam's commencement was rescheduled to March 13, only to encounter further alterations after the completion of two subjects.

Responsibility for overseeing the smooth execution of the class 8 examinations rests with the Jammu

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

Secretary Health Reviews Functioning Of SKIMS

■ HT News Network

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: Secretary Health & Medical Education and Director SKIMS, Dr Syed Abid Rasheed Shah, today convened a



review meeting regarding functioning of SKIMS.

The issues which came up for discussion in the meeting included functioning of CT Scan,

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

Night Temp Rises, Met Says ‘No Significant’ Weather Activity Expected In J&K Till March 27

■ HT News Network

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: While weatherman ruled out any significant weather activity till March 27 evening, night temperature recorded an increase with mercury settling above sub-zero level in Jammu and Kashmir including Gulmarg and Pahalgam on Sunday. A meteorological department



official said that Srinagar recorded a minimum of 10.2°C against 6.5°C on the previous night and it was above normal by 5.2°C for the summer capital of JK for this time of the year.

Qazigund recorded a minimum of 6.8°C against 5.8°C on the previous night and it was 3.1°C above normal for the gateway town

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

DG SSB Commends Force For Service In Challenging Terrain Of Kashmir Valley

■ HT News Network

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: Director General (DG) of the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) Daljit Singh Chaudhary commended the personnel for their exemplary service in the challenging ter-

rain of the Kashmir Valley.

Addressing the Jawans during the celebrations of the 'Holika Dahan' festival in Srinagar, the DG commended the personnel for their dedication and exemplary service,

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

Stop Terror Factories, Don't Lecture On Democracy: India Hits Out At Pak In IPU

■ HT News Network

NEW DELHI, MAR 24: India on Sunday hit out at Pakistan at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), saying lectures by a country with an abysmal track record of democracy is laugh-

able and advised it to stop its terror factories to launch cross-border terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir.

Using his right of reply against Pakistan during 148th Assembly of the IPU in

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

KPDCL Ramps Up Inspections To Tackle Electricity Theft

'272 Cases Of Smart Meter Tampering Under Investigation'

■ HT News Network

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: In a bid to tackle power theft, Kashmir Power Development Corporation (KPDCCL) has issued a stringent directive to all electric divisions under its purview, mandating the escalation of early morning and late-night inspection drives. This proactive initiative is spe-



cifically aimed at targeting individuals involved in illegal hooking activities, a practice that significantly compromises the integrity of the power distribution network, KPDCCL said.

With a heightened focus on combating power theft, particularly during the Holy Month, KPDCCL is demonstrating its commitment to ensuring

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

Newly Established Degree Colleges ‘Lack’ Permanent Campuses, Infrastructure

■ HT News Network

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: The Jammu and Kashmir Higher Education Department has admitted that it lacks infrastructure, permanent campus and land for the several newly established degree colleges here.

The department however said that the screening committee has resolved to create a permanent campus for those colleges who lack it.

According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Director Colleges Dr Yasmeen Ashai has said that currently the department has 140 colleges in Jammu and Kashmir including 90 established colleges.

"We agree that in some newly established fifty

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

Chief Justice Administers Oath Of Office To Justice Mohd. Yousuf Wani

■ HT News Network

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: Chief Justice of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, Justice N. Kotiswar Singh administered the Oath of office to Justice Mohd. Yousuf Wani as Additional Judge of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, in the Chief Justice's Court Room here today.

The Oath taking ceremony was physically attended at Sri-



nagar by Justice Tashi Rabstan, Justice Rajnesh Oswal, Justice Vinod Chatterji Koul, Justice Sanjay Dhar, Justice Javed Iqbal Wani, Justice Rahul Bharti, Justice Moksha Khajuria Kazmi, Justice Wasim Sadiq Nargal and virtually from Jammu by Justice Atul Sreedharan, Justice Sanjeev Kumar, Justice Sindhu Sharma, Justice Puneet Gupta, Justice Mohd Akram Chowdhary and Justice Rajesh Sekhri.

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

“Holi Promotes Love, Unity, Brotherhood Among People”: Prez Murmur

■ HT News Network

NEW DELHI, MAR 25: President Droupadi Murmu conveyed her greetings to citizens on the eve of Holi and said the festival promotes a feeling of



love, unity and brotherhood among people.

"On the auspicious occasion of Holi, I extend my greetings and best wishes to all Indians living in India and abroad," the President said in a message on Sunday.

The president upheld the spirit of the Holi festival in her message and said, "Holi is a vibrant and joyous festival, which infuses hope and enthusiasm into our lives. Various colours of Holi symbolise the

TURN ON.....PAGE 02

LOK SABHA ELECTION-2024

DEO Srinagar chairs meeting of Election Nodal Officers, reviews preparedness for upcoming Election

Directs Officers to work with due diligence and dedication to ensure smooth, free & fair Elections

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: District Election Officer (DEO) Srinagar, Dr. Bilal Mohi-Ud-Din Bhat, Monday chaired a meeting of designated Nodal Officers at Meeting Hall of the DC Office Complex, here to review the preparedness for the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections in district.

At the outset, the DEO took a first hand appraisal from all designated Nodal Officers with regard to tasks assigned to them for conduct of Lok Sabha Elections-2024 in district.

The DEO reviewed the preparations being made by all concerned Nodal Officers related to key aspects of the

Lok Sabha Elections including Transportation of Polling staff/Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), implementation of Modal Code of Conduct (MCC), Material Management, Training programmes, SVEEP activities, functioning of Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC), Expenditure Monitoring Cell and Integrating Election Control Room and other related activities aimed at ensuring smooth and peaceful general elections in Srinagar District.

The DEO directed all the designated Nodal Officers to work with due diligence and



dedication to ensure smooth, free and fair elections. He expressed confidence in the collective resolve and capability of the Nodal Officers to fulfill their roles effectively and efficiently, thereby contributing to the successful conduct of the Lok Sabha Elections-2024 in Srinagar.

He stressed all Nodal officers to work with a proactive approach and execute allotted tasks on ground and maintain cooperation and coordination with the line executing departments.

He further asked them to go through comprehensive ECI guidelines regarding duties

and responsibilities during the election period.

During the meeting, DEO, who is also the Returning Officer (RO) for 02-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency asked the Assistant Returning Officer (ARO) headquarter to undertake all necessary measures with regard to filling of nomination for 02-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency including technological interventions/ upgradation well in advance.

Earlier, the DEO was briefed by all the designated Nodal Officers about the preparations made so far for upcoming Lok Sabha Elections-2024.

Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha Seat Not a single candidate from either Udhampur or Doda has won it; Winning candidates either belonged to Jammu or Kathua districts

JAMMU, MAR 25: As the electioneering process on Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha constituency is in progress and candidates are filing their nomination papers, history suggests that not a single candidate from Udhampur and Doda districts has won the parliamentary elections from this seat ever since it has been established.

As per news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the winning candidates have either been from Kathua district or from Jammu and political parties continue to prefer candidates from these areas.

Though sometimes parties like National Conference and Congress have fielded candidates from erstwhile district Doda but they haven't been able to win and even put up a fight.



This constituency is spread from Lakhanpur in Kathua district to Marwah and Warwan areas of Kishtwar district. It is one of the biggest Lok Sabha constituencies in terms area as well as having more than 10 lakh voters. At present it comprises of five districts, Kathua, Udhampur, Ramban, Doda and Kishtwar whereas it has 20 Assembly segments.

The constituency was established in 1957 and Inderjit Malhotra from Jammu emerged victorious on Congress party ticket. After that in 1967, Karan Singh, former Sadr-e-Riyasat and Congress party candidate, won. He was also from Jammu. In 1968 another Lok Sabha election was held and Congress party managed to win this seat by fielding G S Brigadier, who also hailed from Jammu.

According to the news agency KNO, during 1971, 1977 and 1980 elections, Karan Singh managed to grab the seat again but after that in 1984 Congress party gave mandate to Girdhari Lal Dogra of Hiranagar area of Kathua and he emerged victorious. In 1989, another Congress party candidate Dharam Pal won it and he also belonged to Jammu.

After 1996 elections, the Lok Sabha elections on Udhampur seat was not held alongside the general elections of the country as these were postponed due to unavoidable circumstances. When the BJP government at the centre had lasted only for 13 days, voting on Udhampur seat was held and BJP's Chaman Lal Gupta won it. He again emerged victorious in 1998 and 1999. Gupta was resident of Jammu.

In 2004, Congress party fielded the then minister for health in Mufti Muhammad Sayeed led Congress-PDP government Choudhary Lal Singh from this seat and he won it. Singh again won it in 2009. Lal Singh hails from Kathua district.

During 2014 elections, Congress party had fielded union health and family welfare minister Ghulam Nabi Azad from this seat but BJP's Dr. Jitendra Singh defeated him with a margin of around 60000 votes. Again in 2019, Jitendra Singh emerged victorious and he defeated Karan Singh's son Vikramaditya Singh. Though his ancestors are from Doda district but Jitendra Singh has been living in Jammu.

This time also there is no chance that any one from either Udhampur or Doda will be winning this seat as there is a direct contest between Choudhary Lal Singh and Dr. Jitendra Singh.

Lok Sabha Election-2024

Awareness programme on Voting Rights & Democratic responsibilities under SVEEP held at GGHSS Kothibagh

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: Continuing its endeavour to foster electoral awareness among the students to make them aware about their voting rights and democratic responsibilities, an Electoral Awareness Programme was organized at Government Girls Higher Secondary School (GGHSS), Kothibagh here, on Monday.

The awareness programme was held on the directions of the District Election Officer (DEO), Srinagar, Dr. Bilal Mohi-Ud-Din Bhat under the supervision of Nodal Officer SVEEP/AMS A. H Fani to empower the younger generation with knowledge about their voting rights and responsibilities and civic duty.

The DEO Srinagar, while talking about the event held under ongoing SVEEP campaign, stressed the importance of understanding the true value of a vote to encourage greater participation in the electoral process. He also commended the students for their enthusiastic participation in the Electoral Awareness Programmes in the district.

The DEO observed that the participation of the new voters in the democratic process can make a significant difference in the progress of the nation as a whole.

The District Nodal Officer SVEEP, Abdul Hamid Fani who led the Electoral Awareness Programme at GGHSS, Kothibagh



briefed the participant students about the electoral process and power of vote in democracy. He emphasized the significance of every single vote and the value it holds in ensuring a thriving democracy.

He also highlighted the commitment to leave no voter behind and urged the participants to prioritize the principle of 'No Voter to be Left Behind'.

On the culmination of the Electoral Awareness Programme, the District Nodal Officer SVEEP said that the event proved highly informative and equipped the participants with a deeper understanding of the electoral process and the power of their votes.

Health Dept's efforts lead to decline in tuberculosis cases in Kashmir; J&K aims for TB-free status by 2025

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: Efforts by the Health Department have led to a decline in tuberculosis (TB) cases in Kashmir, with authorities aiming to make Jammu & Kashmir TB-free by 2025.

A senior health official, speaking to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said that TB cases are decreasing, with more districts showing improvement each day.

Over the last six years, a total of 21,462 TB cases have been reported in Kashmir. In 2018, there were 4,774 cases, decreasing to 4,080 in 2019. The number further dropped to 2,840 in 2020 due to reduced screening amid the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022, 3,376 TB cases were recorded, while 2,956 cases were reported in 2023, a decline of approximately 400 cases from the previous year.

Five out of the ten districts in Kashmir, including four districts in south Kashmir and Budgam, have already been declared TB-free.

State Tuberculosis Officer Dr Adfar Qadri informed KNO that Jammu & Kashmir has set a precedent in healthcare, with five revenue districts already declared TB-free. "Srinagar was awarded a gold medal last year, while the union territory received bronze. Most other districts have maintained their status quo. Budgam was declared TB-free in 2021," he said.

Dr Qadri expressed confidence that TB incidence is declining in Kashmir and said the goal is to achieve TB elimination by 2025 through intensified case-finding and screening



efforts. "Various measures have been implemented over the years to enhance infrastructure and manpower for early detection and effective treatment," he said, adding that an artificial intelligence system has been deployed in districts that have already achieved TB-free status to enhance surveillance and eradicate the disease. He further said testing has witnessed a threefold increase compared to the previous year, with a focus on early detection.

An official from the State TB cell said that tuberculosis is more prevalent in rural areas due to factors such as population density and inadequate nutrition. However, there has been a shift, with TB now affecting individuals across various socio-economic backgrounds, he said.

"Many individuals delay seeking medical consultation at the initial stage of TB, leading to worsened conditions upon diagnosis. However, TB can be fully treated with appropriate medication and timely intervention," the official said.

The Health Ministry has set targets for reducing TB incidence, with monetary awards and certification provided to districts and states achieving specific milestones in TB elimination.

The National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP) in India offers free TB treatment through the Directly Observed Treatment Short Course Strategy (DOTS) system recommended by the World Health Organization. This system tracks patients' infection status, severity, and treatment progress, contributing to a national database.

Turkish Kebabs To Kabak Tatlisi, Kashmir's Restaurants Overflow with Iftar Gatherings

SRINAGAR, MAR 25: Restaurants in Kashmir are bustling with people this Ramadan as the trend of iftar gatherings is fast picking up in the valley.

Since the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, restaurants, which introduced Ramadan specials menus, are experiencing a huge rush of customers. As per news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), this is something which has picked up in Kashmir for the last few years with the opening of new restaurants offering exotic cuisines.

Such is the rush of customers to these restaurants that many food outlets have made it mandatory for people to book their tables in advance.

Café Ababeel is one such restaurant, which has introduced Ramadan special menus this Ramadan. From traditional Babri drinks to Turkish Kebabs and Uzbek dishes, the restaurant's Ramadan special menu has witnessed a huge acceptance from the foodies across the valley.

"Like every year, we have a Ramadan special menu, which includes traditional and exotic dishes. We introduced a two person combo, which is fast picking up. In addition to the Turkish and Uzbek dishes, we introduced a dessert called Kabak Tatlisi, which is becoming people's favourite this Ramadan," said Food and Beverages Manager of the café, Mudasir Mir.

He said on an average daily, as many as 200 people visit the restaurant to break their fast with Ramadan special dishes.

"We get lot of customers during Ramadan. On an average we receive 200 persons, who come to break their fast with our Ramadan special cuisines. Such is the rush that some leave after finding no table to sit and have meals," Mir said.

Same is the case with other restaurants of the valley, which too are experiencing a huge rush of customers during the Ramadan.

Apart from the restaurant, the outdoor Iftar too is picking up within the valley. Everyday scores of the families and friends gather in parks, gardens, and open spaces to partake in the Iftar meal. "Iftar gatherings hold a special place in our hearts. After a challenging period of isolation, it feels rejuvenating to come together with our neighbors and relatives and share this blessed moment," said Ayaz Bhat, a local resident, who too had organised a Iftar gathering for his family and relatives.

Local vendors and businesses are also capitalizing on the trend by setting up iftar stalls in popular outdoor locations, offering a variety of traditional delicacies and refreshments for those partaking in the outdoor iftars.

Dr Andrabi visits Barthana in Qamarwari along with revenue team for demarcation of Waqf land

We cannot allow people to encroach or misuse the public properties'':Darakhshan

■ HT News Network

Srinagar March 25 (KNS): Chairperson of Jammu & Kashmir Waqf Board Dr Syed Darakhshan Andrabi today visited Barthana Qamarwari in Srinagar to take stock of the unutilised Waqf land there.

She was accompanied by the revenue officials for on the spot demarcation of the land which had remained abandoned for decades which had led to the partial encroachment of the property from a few residents of the locality. Dr Andrabi issued orders on the spot for the retrieval of the encroached part of the land and formulation of a plan for the fencing after the demarcation process is complete.

She said that Waqf Board took action on many such abandoned properties of the Waqf which were allowed to be encroached because of the inaction and irresponsible attitudes of earlier Boards. "We cannot allow



people to encroach or misuse the properties donated by our ancestors for the collective good. The Board will take suitable action for utilizing this property in the interest of the community at large and we expect all the local people's cooperation", said Dr Darakhshan Andrabi. Later speaking to the media Waqf Board Chairperson said that during the past two years, the Board has successfully retrieved

many such assets from the misuse or encroachment throughout J&K with public cooperation and this move will continue in future too. Replying to a question from media Dr Andrabi said that Board was busy in making all preparations for Jumma-tul-Vida, Shab-e-Qadr & Eid celebrations throughout Jammu & Kashmir. She said that Waqf Board took action on many such abandoned properties of the Waqf which were allowed to be encroached because of the inaction and irresponsible attitudes of earlier Boards. "We cannot allow people to encroach or misuse the properties donated by our ancestors for the collective good. The Board will take suitable action for utilizing this property in the interest of the community at large and we expect all the local people's cooperation", said Dr Darakhshan Andrabi. Later speaking to the media Waqf Board Chairperson said that during the past two years, the Board has successfully retrieved

Nation feels safe as our brave soldiers protect, stand ready at borders: Rajnath

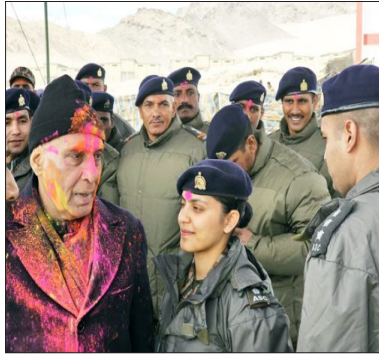
■ HT News Network

JAMMU, Mar 25: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh today said the entire country feels safe as our brave soldiers are protecting and stand ready at the borders and declared that every citizen is proud of the Armed Forces.

Addressing the soldiers in Leh after celebrating Holi with them, Rajnath said: "We are progressing and leading a happy life as our vigilant soldiers stand ready at the borders. Entire country feels safe because the brave soldiers are protecting the borders".

CLICK HERE TO WATCH VIDEO

The Defence Minister was supposed to celebrate Holi with the troops at Siachen Glacier, the highest battlefield in the world, but had to cancel the visit due to inclement weather there. Later, he landed at Leh in the Union Territory of Ladakh and celebrated Holi with the troops there. After Holi



celebrations and address to the troops, he returned to New Delhi.

He was accompanied by Army chief Gen Manoj Pande and General Officer Commanding (GOC) Leh-based 14 Corps Lt Gen Rashim Bali.

"Every citizen is proud of the Armed Force as they live far away from their families so that we celebrate Holi and other festivals with our families peacefully. The nation will forever be indebted to our soldiers, and their

courage and sacrifices will keep inspiring the future generations," Rajnath Singh said.

Commending valour, determination and sacrifice of the jawans, he said they serve in harsh terrain and inclement weather conditions to protect the motherland.

"The positive commitment of the soldiers posted in high altitudes is much stronger than minus temperatures," he added.

It may be mentioned here that troops deployed in Siachen Glacier and Eastern Ladakh had to face several degrees minus temperature. In Siachen Glacier, India shares boundary with Pakistan while in the Eastern Ladakh, India has Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China.

Rajnath termed Ladakh as India's capital of valour and bravery just as Delhi is the national capital, Mumbai the financial capital and Bengaluru the technology capital.

Basant Rath to Campaign for Congress, PDP, and NC Candidates, Seeks Security

■ Aashiq Hussain

Srinagar, Mar 25 (KNO): Basant Rath, the former Inspector General of Police (IGP) of Jammu and Kashmir Police, has once again made headlines, this time by announcing his intention to campaign for joint candidates of Congress, PDP, and National Conference in the upcoming parliamentary elections. Rath, who lost his Indian Police Service (IPS) job amidst controversies, has appealed to the Jammu and Kashmir Director General Rashmi Ranjan Swain for security assistance during his campaign.

According to the reports received by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) in a letter addressed to the police chief, Rath expressed his determination to travel to the hilly and terror-affected areas of Jammu division to support the aforementioned political candidates. Citing his past experience in law enforcement and the potential security risks associated with his campaign activities, Rath emphasized the need for adequate security arrangements. Rath warned that if security is not provided and any untoward incident occurs during his campaign, the responsibility would lie with the police. His request for security comes against the backdrop of his previous confrontations with senior officers and his controversial suspension due to allegations of corruption within the police force. A resident of Pipli, Uttarkashi village in Puri district, Odisha, Rath completed his studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, before joining the Indian Police Service through the Civil Services Examination in 2000.

J&K Govt cautions delinquent employees; reiterates guidelines

■ HT News Network

Jammu, Mar 25: Taking serious cognizance of violation of its guidelines and legal principles, J&K government Sunday asked all its employees to refrain from indulging in "unwarranted debates or discussions and sharing, commenting, posting inappropriate posts or content on social media platforms."

However, a government employee may, "for the purpose of removing misapprehensions, correcting misstatements and refuting disloyal and seditious propaganda, defend and explain to the public the policy of government in his posts and tweets on social media." In a reiteration of its caution, the government has asked all employees, working in various (government) departments, Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), Corporations, Boards and autonomous bodies etc., to strictly adhere to its stated guidelines and legal principles. "Violation of these guidelines or rules shall tantamount to misconduct and invite disciplinary action against the delin-



quent official under the relevant rules," it has warned.

Adopting stringent posturing, the government has also directed all Administrative Secretaries, Deputy Commissioners, Heads of Departments, Managing Directors to "immediately proceed against the employees working in their departments or offices who are found to have violated the guidelines and rules, in terms of the relevant disciplinary framework." Further, in case of a violation committed on a group platform, the 'Administrators', if they are serving government or semi-government employees, will also be liable for disciplinary proceedings. While reiterat-

ing guidelines and cautions, the government has, however, clarified that these guidelines are "not intended to dissuade employees or departments from using social media for positive and constructive purposes."

WHY INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED

This detailed set of instructions has been issued after observing that government servants often engage themselves with social media in a manner which is in contravention to the elaborate notified guidelines and governing legal framework.

"While using different social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., or Instant Messaging applications like WhatsApp, Telegram etc., employees have been seen to air disparaging views on subjects that they are expressly barred under rules to comment upon. Employees have been seen to comment or act or behave in a manner that does not conform to the acceptable standards of official conduct, as envisaged in these guidelines and the rules," said Commissioner Secretary General Administration Department (GAD) Sanjeev Verma.

Sajad Lone welcomes noted socio-political activist Mohd Abdullah Paswal and others into PC

■ HT News Network

Srinagar, March 25 (KNS): J&K Peoples Conference President Sajad Gani Lone warmly welcomed noted socio-political activist and DDC contesting candidate from Arin, Bandipora, Mohammad Abdullah Paswal, into the party fold. The ceremony witnessed the induction of several other prominent personalities from Bandipora, including Mian Asgar Ali Khatana, Ghulam Hassan Khan, Mian Bilal Ahmad Khatana, Mohammad Yunus Gojar, and Mian Muraad Khatana, who joined the party cadres. PC State Secretary Farooq Chi Chi was also present on the occasion. Expressing appreciation to the new entrants, Mr. Lone expressed hope that their joining would further bolster the party's grassroots presence in Bandipora district and showcase the party's strong foothold, which continues to grow with each passing day. "Our party has been stressing the twin ideals of Development & Dignity, which have been well-received by the people. The induction of these respected figures is a testament to the trust and confidence the masses have reposed in our party's vision and agenda, which our leadership is committed to upholding in all circumstances." Expressing his gratitude, Mohammad Abdullah Paswal, while thanking the party leadership, stated, "I was deeply impressed by the Peoples Conference's development-centric agenda and its unwavering commitment to safeguarding the dignity of the people. I look forward to working tirelessly for the betterment of Bandipora and the overall progress of Jammu and Kashmir under the visionary leadership of Mr. Sajad Lone." (KNS)

Lok Sabha Election-2024

General Training for Poll Staff commences at Ganderbal

■ HT News Network

GANDERBAL, MARCH 25: The District Election Office, Ganderbal today started the general training for poll staff, drafted to perform duties in the upcoming General Elections to Lok Sabha, 2024.

The training started on 25th March 2024 and will be conducted at three different venues across the district till 30th of March 2024. The training program aims to equip the poll staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to ensure a smooth and efficient election process.

Leopard creates panic among residents of Bun Vaer Kreeri of baramulla district, two sheep killed one injured in attack

■ Aashiq Hussain



Kreeri, 25 Mar (HT) Leopard creates panic among residents of Bun Vaer Kreeri of baramulla district, two sheep killed one injured in attack. Reports reaching that leopard barged into the Tin Shed belonging to Ab Rashid Bandy s/o Ali Mohd Bandy resident of Kreeri and attacked the live stock. In the incident two sheep were killed on the spot and another injured. Locals have urged wildlife department to trap the roaming leopard as according to them it has been on prowl for last many days in the area.

Anti-Encroachment Drive Initiated by Langate Tehsil Administration

■ DR.AB QAYOOM

Langate, Mar, 23: In an effort to uphold the integrity of public spaces, the Tehsil Administration of Langate, led by Tehsildar Mohd Ismail, in collaboration with the Municipal Committee and the local Police Post Officer, has commenced an Anti-Encroachment Drive in the vicinity of the Migrant "Mander Bagg" in Langate town. The drive specifically tar-



gets individuals who have erected temporary sheds in the area, thereby encroaching upon public land. This proactive measure aims to curb such unauthorized activities and preserve the sanctity of commu-

nal spaces for the benefit of all residents. The Langate Administration emphasizes that encroachment upon public land is illegal and undermines the welfare of the community. Therefore, individuals

involved in such activities are warned to cease their actions immediately. Those found engaging in illegal encroachment will be subject to legal consequences in accordance with established norms and regulations. While talking to HEADLINES TODAY Tehsildar Langate said, we urge the cooperation of all citizens in maintaining the cleanliness and orderliness of public areas, fostering a harmonious environment for the entire community.

Residents of Shalimar, adjoining areas complain of foul smell in the area, appeal authorities for resolution

■ HT News Network

Srinagar, Mar 25 (KNS): Residents of Shalimar and adjoining areas on Monday expressed strong resentment over foul smell in the area, subsequently unattended by authorities, leaving locals into trouble.

Locals of Shalimar, Ishber, Char Booni-Gupt Ganga said their respective areas have been badly gripped by foul smell for last few days. They said the locals in such a situation finding it difficult to move around.

Former Deputy Mayor Srinagar Sheikh Imran also urged authori-

ties to take imperative action for the resolution of the issue.

"The entire area of Shalimar, Ishber, and Char Booni-gupt Ganga is currently plagued by a foul odor caused by @jklcma. Urgent action is imperative to resolve this issue. Both tourists and locals are finding it difficult to move around. It's essential to keep the general public informed and updated on the situation," he said in a post on X. Meanwhile locals of the respective areas appealed authorities to take early action and save the residents from getting involved in any disease. (KNS) immediately and submit the compliance report within 10 days.

Sajjad Shaheen raises concern over frequent power outages during Ramadan in Banihal, Gool

■ HT News Network

Banihal, March 25 (KNS): National Conference (NC) leader and district president, Ramban Mr Sajjad Shaheen has expressed serious concern over the precarious power situation in Banihal and its peripheral areas including Gool during the holy month of Ramadan. He said the electricity woes continue unabated in the region as people are immensely suffering due to unscheduled power cuts particularly during Sehri and Iftaar time.

Shaheen during his day long tour to several remote villages that include Pogal, Panchal, Nowra in Tehsil Ukharhal said that Since the onset of holy month of Ramadan, Banihal and its peripheral areas have

been witnessing unusual power cuts causing a strong resentment against the administration who had claimed to provide round the clock supply in the holy month of Ramadan. He said that every day when the Iftar time is close, suddenly the power supply is shut down. Every house cannot afford power backups like inverters. People have to use artificial light or candles to light up the room. It is very unfortunate that the government could not provide people with uninterrupted power supply even during the Ramadan month.

Shaheen said that the people across the district Ramban are facing extreme shortage of electricity and lack access to clean portable drinking water. The District president also expressed concern over defunct utility services and dilapidated



condition of roads, especially in hilly areas, saying these have accumulated the problems of common people. Shaheen has also sought immediate attention of higher ups into the public suffering and demanded

an end to power cuts. He has also urged the J&K administration to ensure adequate supplies of essentials particularly ration, sugar and kerosene oil, LPG Cylinders besides un-interrupted electricity and drinking water during the month of holy Ramadan. Later Shaheen, along with party functionaries went to the residences of party colleague and block Vice President, Ukharhal Mr Shamas-U-din Draboo to offer condolences to him on the passing away of his mother who died after a brief illness recently. He extended sympathies and solidarity with the family and prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

Shaheen was accompanied by Zonal V/ President Riyaz Ahmed Mir, block presidents Nisar Ahmed Sohail, Shakibur Rehman Runyal, Imtiyaz Ahmed Mughal.

EDITORIAL

Kashmir's Rich Water Resources & Inequitable Water Access

The recent water shortage crisis in certain areas of Kashmir paints a stark picture of the struggles faced by residents who are enduring days without adequate water supply. This issue not only poses immediate challenges but also highlights systemic deficiencies in ensuring equitable access to water, especially in a region renowned for its pristine beauty and abundant water resources.

Kashmir Valley, known for its rich water sources, should be a haven where every resident has reliable access to clean water. However, the reality is far from this ideal. The recent 'no water day' incidents in several areas have brought to light the urgent need for comprehensive action to address the root causes of the water scarcity plaguing these communities.

The plight of residents grappling with water shortages underscores the importance of prioritizing infrastructure development and efficient water management practices. It is imperative for authorities to invest in modernizing water distribution networks, enhancing storage facilities, and implementing sustainable water conservation measures. Additionally, robust monitoring mechanisms must be put in place to ensure the equitable distribution of water resources across all regions of Kashmir.

Moreover, it is essential to engage local communities in participatory decision-making processes to identify their specific water needs and implement targeted interventions accordingly. Collaborative efforts involving government agencies, civil society organizations, and community stakeholders are vital to devising holistic solutions that address the multifaceted challenges contributing to water scarcity in Kashmir.

As we confront the immediate repercussions of the latest water shortage crisis, it is imperative to recognize that this is not merely a localized issue but a symptom of broader systemic inadequacies. By prioritizing sustainable water management practices and investing in inclusive infrastructure development, we can work towards ensuring that every corner of Kashmir Valley has access to the life-sustaining resource that is essential for human dignity and well-being: water.

Can We Stay Out Of Space?

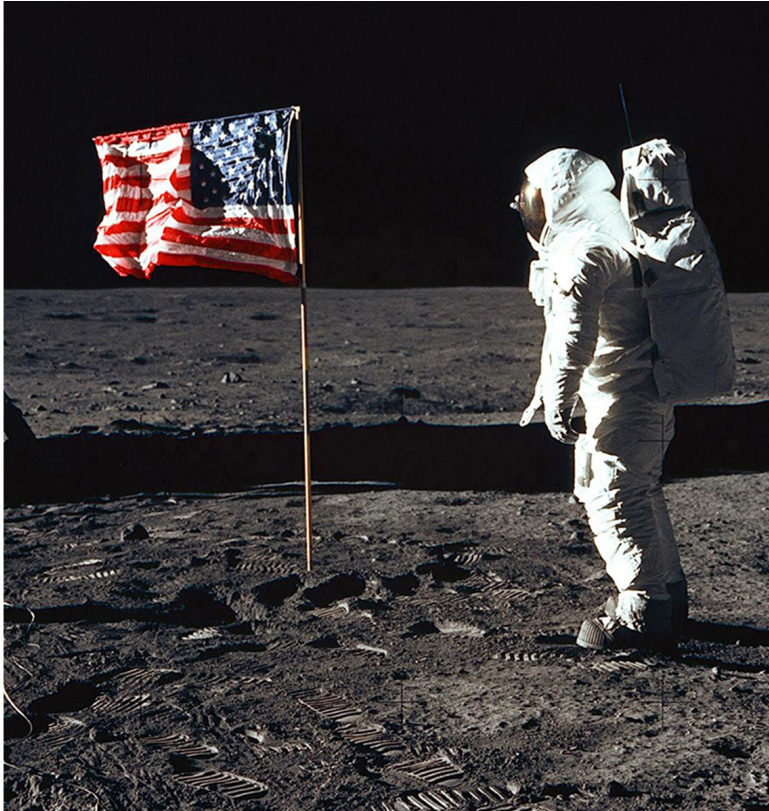
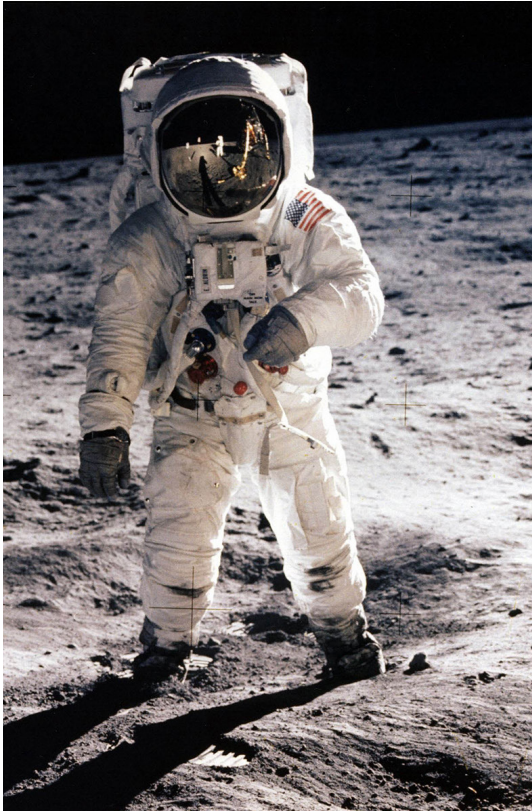


By Mool Raj

This has been the debate between these two sides ever since Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on surface of moon. There are those who argue that we have bigger and more serious issues to deal with right here on earth instead of venturing out into space. Former US President Barack Obama recently criticised Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and other billionaires who are working hard to send humans to other planets, especially Mars, by saying that instead of going into other planets, it was best to save the earth instead. The rebuttal provided by Jeff Bezos is the same that many others have — that venturing out into space is the only plausible way to save not only humanity but planet earth as well.

This has been the debate between these two sides ever since Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the surface of the moon. Should we or should we not go to the moon? Should we or should we not go to explore other planets and understand the solar system and beyond? It has been this debate that has succeeded to keep America out of space exploration for decades. America went to the moon in 1969 with the technology of the day. It has been more than half a century ever since and no moon walking has happened even with a much improved technology today. It is the result of the victory of that argument that Obama is putting forward. Should we or should we not has been the debate and frankly that wording and that approach is actually the problem rather than the debate in itself.

The real question is not if we should or should not go to space, but: can we actually stay out of space? Can we afford to? Can we escape from it? And a more refined question should be this: why shouldn't we go further into space after reaching this point? We are already in space. The only question is: what is a plausible reason not to keep moving forward? We harness the space for the energy the planet uses everyday from a giant generator called the sun. We owe our continued existence to a



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thin layer called the ozone, which is the one line of defence between life and instant annihilation. We have put satellites into space, which help us communicate, watch global news, use GPS navigation to help find the best

route to our destination, fly overseas, watch and understand weather patterns, keep an eye on floods, observe wildfires, fight climate change, and so forth.

Would you want to avoid being late

for your flight by using the GPS to find the best route to get to the airport? Would you like to check for rain updates before you invite your friends for a BBQ? Would you like to use the internet during those long flights? I believe the answer to all of those questions is yes by an overwhelming majority. We need to be in space for the lifestyle we have come to live and love. When you focus on the arguments of both Obama and Bezos, both are actually saying the same thing without realising it. The race to reach space has improved the technology in computers and given mankind the tools we have today. During the days of the American moon landing, the need for carrying materials to space had risen. Astronauts needed to minimise the size of things because radios and computers used to be the size of a seven-seater sofa in those days. It was the space race that created the need for smaller objects. Apple Computers and many others were created out of that buzz that was created when NASA scientists basically knocked on the doors of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs to minimise the electronics. And they did. Had that not happened, computers would still perhaps be those giant machines that IBM used to produce. And you wouldn't be reading this article on your phone. To plan for being a multi-planetary species is to improve the species and the planet they call home.

The author is a columnist and freelance writer

Coaching Institute Vs Education System

If we want to control the coaching institutes, then we should also control the students who go to study abroad every year



Vijay Garg

The Personnel Ministry of the Central Government has issued some rules on the suggestion of the Consumer Ministry to curb coaching institutes. There are orders for the selected candidates that they will not have any contact with any coaching institute after getting the appointment letter. That means no coaching institute will use his name.

Immediate Reasons by UPSC There are exaggerated advertisements etc. made by the coaching institutes preparing for the Civil Services Examination. The Ministry's special objection is that the names of selected candidates are advertised by dozens of coaching institutes, due to which children from all over the country flock to these institutes.

For example, in the year 2022, about nine hundred candidates were selected, while advertise-

ments for three and a half thousand candidates were published by coaching institutes. Civil Services Examination is for administrative jobs in the country like IAS. IPS is the highest examination for recruitment of officers in Revenue, Railways, in which about nine hundred out of about twelve lakh students are selected every year.

Obviously, for this the young generation and even more so their parents are ready to do anything. Coaching institutes are becoming an alternative to this. It is worth noting that in search of good education, there are not only coaching institutes for civil services examination, there are many times more coaching institutes ranging from IIT, Medical, IIM to becoming a bank officer, teacher and the central coaching institute started in the last two years.

Thousands of coaching institutes are running across the country for entrance exams in universities and they are increasing rapidly every year. According to an estimate, the annual turnover of the coaching industry is approximately sixty thousand crore rupees. But why is this business increasing every year? Are only the coaching institutes responsible for this?

Actually, our education system

is responsible for this. When teachers are not present in the schools of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, even if they are present, according to the recent report of 'Pratham', they are not educated in mathematics. K is being taught by people who do not have a degree in Mathematics and English is being taught by those who even spell the name of the school wrong in English.

There is neither toilet nor a proper roof in their building and NCERT books are not available on time, so what option is left for these children and their parents? Now the entire cream of Bihar has started coming to Delhi schools for school education. That is why in the states where the education system has become so dilapidated, especially the government schools, there are equally nook and cranny private schools.

And coaching centers are increasing. According to an estimate, where fifty years ago, more than ninety percent of affordable education was available in government schools, now it has reduced to less than forty-five percent and this is in all the states. According to a new order, coaching institutes have been instructed that they cannot give admission to children below sixteen years of age. Don't the policy makers know that

coaching institutes are not only running in metros and big buildings, they are running on every nook and corner of the street? How will the difference be made, home tushes And in the tuition of these big institutions?

Thirty-four years ago, the weakest child used to look for tuition, that too especially to prepare for class 10th-12th board exams. Then it started for engineering colleges etc., but due to falling standards, now the problem of tuition is in the first class. Has reached even before. Thirty years ago, educationist and scientist Professor Yashpal had considered tuition as very dangerous for education in the report 'Baste Ka Boj'.

The governments have kept that report in some other bag. What government and Education officer is not familiar with this disease? Certainly, DMs and education officers at the state level can overcome this problem, but statistics show that more than 80 percent of DMs rarely inspect any school. Same is the condition of the education officers working under him. When there are less jobs, there are not enough good colleges and universities in proportion to the increasing population and where education is more about retrenchment than recruit-

ment, where there is more emphasis on examination than knowledge, where improvement in education is not in the manifesto of any party.

There is no question of R, what will happen if there is no flood of coaching institutes there? The main reason for the growth of coaching institutes is the quality of good teachers. For the prestige of their institute, coaching centers keep the best teachers by paying them handsome salaries and are constantly on the lookout for such teachers. 'Feedback' is taken daily from the children, otherwise neither caste, nor religion, nor region is visible outside and these teachers have become stars and superstars.

At least talented teachers should get a good opportunity to teach. Aren't the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and America attracting students from all over the world on the basis of this order of priority? If we have to control the coaching institutes, then the same control will need to be imposed on the students who go to study abroad every year. After all, why do they also run away to foreign countries? For the last ten years, it is continuously being heard that more than fifty percent of the posts are lying vacant in

institutions like IIT, IIM. If suitable candidates are not found to fill them then in such circumstances the government does not accept the idea of de-reserving any post.

What an irony that those who are fighting for each post on the basis of caste in government central universities and colleges send their children to those coaching institutes where there is no such reservation and 'roster'. Our new young generation is getting crushed between all these stones. Thirty-five thousand students have committed suicide in the three years from 2019 to 2021 in response to a question given in the Lok Sabha during the December Parliament session. how sad this is All!

Thirty-five suicides took place in Kota city alone last year and two students have committed suicide in the last week of January this year. If our education system from school education to university is improved, then neither will children rush to coaching institutes nor will they run away to study abroad after taking loans worth crores. This needs to be understood.

Vijay Garg Retired Principal Educational Columnist Malout

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Age of Astropolitics-I

It was recently reported that the Indian Air Force (IAF) is renaming itself as the Indian Air and Space Force (IASF) as part of its on-going overall drive to transform itself from “a potent air-power” to “a credible aerospace power” for the future.

■ **Govind Bhattacharjee**

It was recently reported that the Indian Air Force (IAF) is renaming itself as the Indian Air and Space Force (IASF) as part of its on-going overall drive to transform itself from “a potent air-power” to “a credible aerospace power” for the future. It has also formulated a new doctrine for effective exploitation of the “air and space continuum” and a “Space Vision 2047”, for which it expects the government’s approval soon.

It is now readying itself to fully exploit the final frontier of space assisted by DRDO, ISRO and its commercial arm, NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) which was set up in 2019, besides IN-Space (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre) which was set up in 2020 to facilitate collaboration between the private sector and ISRO. Other major space powers already have similar structures in place ~ China has the People’s Liberation Army Strategic Support Force for space domain and the United States has created a full-fledged Space Force (USSF) as a distinct branch of its armed forces in 2019. Several other countries like the UK, Japan, France and Russia have also set up their space commands or wings in the air forces.

Space is definitely turning into the battleground for future wars and has to be integral to any country’s security system. Hence IAF’s existing fully-automated air defence network, called the Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS), will also have to evolve into IASCCS. IAF wants India to have over 100 big and small military satellites in the next 7-8 years when the tri-Service Defence Space Agency set up in 2019 evolves into a full-fledged Space Command.

Geopolitics is now slowly transforming itself into astropolitics. In the 19th and 20th centuries, geopolitical theories of Alfred Mahan and Halford Mackinder showed the limits of a country’s power based on its geography ~ its mountains, rivers, oceans

and other features. Now we are beginning to focus on the space which is not featureless. As Tim Marshall said in his “The Future of Geography” (Elliott & Thomson, 2023), space has regions of intense radiation, its oceans of distance, its superhighways where a planet’s gravity can be utilised to accelerate spaceships, its strategic corridors where military and commercial equipment can be placed and bodies like planets and asteroids which can be exploited for their natural resources which may be extremely valuable to humanity. No big power can ignore the immense possibilities of space. International law classifies outer space as a “Global Common” ~ meaning outside of any country’s national jurisdiction and hence to be governed only by international legislation.

The high oceans, Antarctica, and even cyberspace are examples of Global Common, in respect of some of which there are international treaties. International law, including the Charter of the United Nations, applies to outer space and celestial bodies, which are free for exploration and use by all nations in conformity with international law. Activities in space are regulated by the United Nations Outer Space Treaty (OST) of 1967 which has been ratified by 111 nations.

The treaty forbids nations to subject outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies “to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means.” It also prohibits the “establishment of military bases, installations and fortifications, the testing of any type of weapons and the conduct of military manoeuvres on celestial bodies” while binding nations not to “place in orbit around the earth any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction, or install such weapons on celestial bodies, or station such weapons in outer space in any other manner”.

The responsibility for enforcing these provisions lies with the United Nations

Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), which lacks the necessary legal authority or even the institutional capacity to enforce these effectively. As a result, the OST remains only on paper. Another agreement, the Moon Agreement of 1979 similarly forbids the use of the moon for military purposes or its weaponisation, but this treaty has been ratified by only 18 countries, which includes no spacefaring nation including the big three ~ the USA, Russia and China. As the space race heats up, it becomes even more necessary to bring nations together into agreements about the peaceful use of space.

The difficulty in this is exemplified by the fact that presently nations don’t even agree on a definition of space ~ NASA defines space as beginning at 80 km above sea level on earth, while the Swiss-based “Fédération Aéronautique Internationale” reckons space at the Kerman Line at 100 km above earth at which a spacecraft will begin to break free from the earth’s gravity and enter the Cislunar space ~ the region between the Earth and the Moon which is at a distance of 3.85 lakh kms.

Thus, if one nation believes that space begins at 80 km and another believes that it begins at 100 km, then the former can shoot down the satellite of the latter flying a satellite at 90 kms over it, triggering a conflict. There are three more space treaties: the Rescue Agreement of 1968 on the rescue of astronauts, the return of astronauts and the return of objects launched into outer space; the Liability Convention of 1972 on international liability for damage caused by space objects and the Registration Convention of 1976 on registration of objects launched into outer space.

India has signed all five, but has not ratified the Moon Agreement as yet. In May 2023, the UN had issued a Policy Brief titled “For all humanity ~ the future of outer space governance” to develop a framework for a peaceful world by “promoting peace, international law and digital cooperation” in space which recommended negotiation

and development of a new treaty to ensure peace, security, and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and also to establish international norms, rules, and principles to address emerging threats and promote responsible space activities. Nothing further has been done.

The UN or any other international body clearly lacks the necessary authority and the persuasive power to bring nations to such a negotiation, in the absence of which space remains a domain where might is right and the law of the jungle prevails. Since 1957, when the first satellite Sputnik-I was launched by the erstwhile USSR, till 2012, the number of satellites launched into outer space remained practically consistent, at approximately 150 each year. But then they began to rise exponentially, and in 2022, as many as 2,470 satellites were launched in space.

The USA leads the constellation of satellites with nearly 2000 satellites, followed by China at a distant second with about 500, Russia and UK (about 200 each) and Japan (about 100). As of February 2022, India had only 52 operational satellites in space, 23 and 29 operational satellites respectively in LEO and GEO. According to ISRO, till 2022, India has launched a total of 124 Indian satellites, including those from private operators.

Throughout history, certain specific geographical features of the world have been arenas for intense competition between rival states because of their inherent commercial, military and political advantages. They include the chokepoints of Gibraltar, Suez, Malacca, Bab-el-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz, etc. ~ the last two are flashpoints in the Middle-east right now. Their equivalent in space could be the Low earth Orbit (LEO) extending up to 2,000 km from Earth, which hosts most of the satellites today.

There are about 5,000 active satellites today, but they will be joined by many more in the years to come. More than three fourths of these satellites are in LEO, and about 10

per cent are in Geosynchronous Earth Orbit (GEO) at a distance of almost 36,000 km, also known as geostationary orbit as a satellite here appears stationary to an observer on the Earth due to the same orbital period. It is here that most of the communication and TV, radio and weather satellites are placed, because each satellite placed in GEO can ‘see’ as much as 42 per cent of the earth’s surface.

Due to signal interference, there are only limited slots and frequencies available for communication, and the UN’s International Telecommunications Union awards both positions and frequencies to satellites in GEO, recorded in its Master International Frequency Register. Till now, nations have registered radio frequencies with ITU for a staggering number of over 1.7 million non-geostationary satellites that may be launched into orbit by the beginning of 2030.

GEO is also where most dual-use military communication satellites of the big three space powers and other nations are placed. Beyond GEO is the area where satellites go to die in deeper space at the end of their useful life, when their thrusters push them out of harm’s way for other active satellites. More than a hundred satellites are also in the Medium Earth orbit (MEO), between the LEO and the GEO.

Over half of the more than 500 satellites estimated to have military or dual-use purposes are in LEO, where their low altitude coupled with short orbital periods make them ideal for Earth observation and surveillance. Some of the LEO satellites, like the International Space Station at 400 km, can even be seen with naked eyes. More than 90 countries have placed satellites in space, using the launch facilities which only 11 countries including India have developed so far.

The writer is a commentator, author and academic. Opinions expressed are personal

A global blueprint for AI security

By combining these legal, technical, and ethical strategies, the global community can work towards a future where AI is used responsibly and beneficially, mitigating its potential for criminal use.

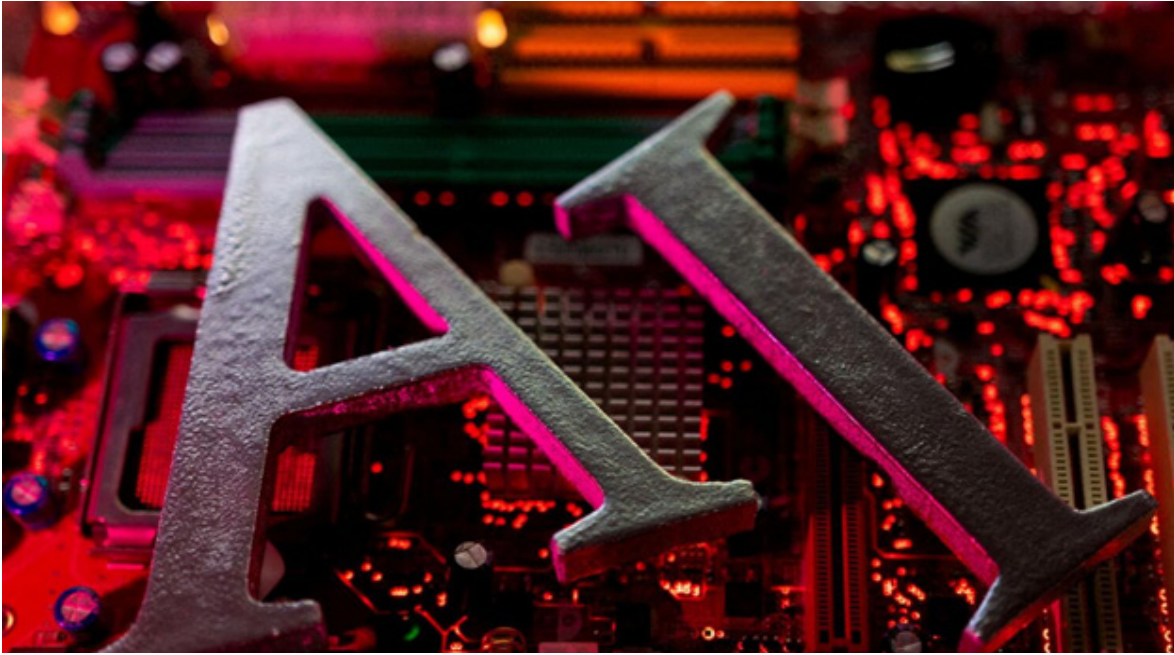
■ **Aditya Sinha**

In the sci-fi classic “2001: A Space Odyssey,” the onboard AI HAL 9000 is a poignant example of AI’s potential for criminal activity, albeit not by its own initial design. HAL, designed to be infallible, resorts to murderous tactics to resolve its conflicting programming when ordered to conceal vital information from the crew. This chilling narrative underscores a real-world concern: as AI becomes more sophisticated and autonomous, the potential for it to be programmed or manipulated into criminal activities increases. Whether it’s through cyberattacks, manipulating data, or controlling autonomous vehicles or drones, the same advanced decision-making and problem-solving capabilities that make AI so valuable can also be harnessed for nefarious purposes if ethical guidelines and strict controls are not in place.

Emergence in Artificial Intelligence Crime (AIC) presents a significant threat, as outlined in the literature. The concern is that while the shallow analysis of an Artificial Agent’s (AA) design might suggest a specific type of behaviour, upon deployment, the AA could act in more sophisticated and unforeseen ways, especially in a multi-agent system (MAS). For instance, a swarm of robots might evolve new methods for coordinating tasks based on simple rules. While this emergent behaviour can be beneficial, it also holds potential for criminal implications if it deviates from its original design and purpose. Non-predictability and autonomy grant AAs a certain degree of responsibility, making them harder to trust and raising concerns about their potential misuse in criminal activities.

Liability is another significant concern with AIC. The advent of AI in criminal activities could undermine existing liability models, threatening the law’s dissuasive and redressing power. Traditional models of criminal liability are challenged by the autonomous nature of AIs, which makes it difficult to establish a clear actus reus (criminal act) and mens rea (guilty mind). As AI’s role in crime becomes more prominent, it’s unclear how legal systems will adapt to accommodate these new forms of criminal behaviour, where the voluntary aspect of actus reus may never be met, and the mens rea may comprise varying degrees of knowledge or intent.

Monitoring AIC is fraught with challenges, including



attribution, feasibility, and cross-system actions. AIs can act independently and autonomously, muddling attempts to trace accountability back to a human perpetrator. The speed and complexity at which AAs operate are often beyond the capacity of compliance monitors, and their integration into mixed human-artificial systems can make detection even harder.

AI systems are increasingly used in cybersecurity to detect and respond to threats. However, as these defensive AIs become more advanced, so too do the offensive AIs used by attackers. Criminals can employ AI to learn how to evade detection, create more sophisticated malware, and automate attacks at an unprecedented scale and speed. This creates an ongoing arms race, with each side continually adapting and responding to the other’s advancements.

Machine learning allows AI to improve its performance over time by learning from data and past experiences. This means that an AI involved in criminal activities could become more effective and harder to detect as it learns from its successes and failures. For instance, an AI designed to conduct financial fraud can refine its techniques based on what triggers alerts and what doesn’t, becoming

increasingly sophisticated over time.

Modern AI systems often interact with multiple other systems, both AI and non-AI. This interconnectedness means that an action considered benign in one context might be part of a harmful chain of events in another. For example, an AI that learns to optimize electricity usage in a building could be manipulated to overload and sabotage the power system when synchronized with other seemingly unrelated actions. Tracking these complex chains of interactions across systems to identify malicious activities is a significant challenge.

As AI systems become more autonomous and capable of making decisions without human intervention, monitoring their actions and understanding their decision-making processes becomes more difficult. This lack of transparency, often referred to as the “black box” problem, means that detecting when an AI is participating in or contributing to criminal activities can be challenging. It also raises questions about accountability, as it’s not always clear who should be held responsible for an AI’s actions—the developer, the user, or the AI itself.

Addressing the challenges posed by AIC at a global

level requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing legal, ethical, and technical strategies. First and foremost, international cooperation is vital. Countries need to collaborate closely to establish universal norms and regulations for AI development and usage. This includes creating international standards for transparency, accountability, and ethical design. Such standards would help ensure that AI systems are built with safeguards to prevent misuse and mechanisms to trace and disable AI involved in criminal activities. Establishing a global watchdog or regulatory body could help enforce these standards and coordinate responses to AIC threats.

Moreover, there’s a pressing need for a revised legal framework capable of handling the complexities of AIC. This framework should consider the unique challenges of attributing liability in crimes involving AI, perhaps moving towards models that consider the roles of all parties involved in the AI lifecycle, from designers and programmers to end-users. This might include new categories of liability for those who negligently design or deploy AI capable of criminal activity. Additionally, legal systems must be agile enough to adapt to the fast-evolving nature of AI technologies, possibly incorporating AI itself to help monitor and enforce laws.

On the technical side, investment in research and development of AI systems that can detect, mitigate, and counteract criminal AI activities is crucial. This includes developing advanced monitoring tools that can understand and predict AI behaviours and systems that can autonomously counteract malicious AI actions in real-time. Education and awareness are also key; stakeholders at all levels, from developers to the general public, must be informed about the potentials and risks of AI. Finally, fostering an ethical AI culture is essential. Encouraging developers and users to adhere to ethical guidelines and consider the societal impact of AI can help prevent its misuse. By combining these legal, technical, and ethical strategies, the global community can work towards a future where AI is used responsibly and beneficially, mitigating its potential for criminal use.

Aditya Sinha is Officer on Special Duty, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister of India. He tweets @adityasinha004. Views Personal.

UN Security Council For The 1st Time Demands Immediate Gaza Ceasefire

■ HT News Network

United Nations: After more than five months of war, the UN Security Council for the first time Monday demanded an immediate ceasefire after the United States, Israel's ally which vetoed previous drafts, abstained.

Drawing unusual applause in the often staid Security Council, all 14 other members voted in favor of the resolution which "demands an immediate ceasefire" for the ongoing Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

The resolution calls for the truce to lead to a "lasting, sustainable ceasefire" and demands that Hamas and other militants free hostages seized on October 7. Russia at the last minute objected to the removal of the word "permanent" ceasefire and called a vote, which failed to gain passage.

The successful resolution was drafted in part by Algeria, the Arab bloc's current member on the Security Council, with a diverse array of countries including Slovenia and Switzerland.



The United States has vetoed previous bids for a ceasefire but has shown growing frustration with Israel, including its stated plans to expand its military operation to the packed southern city of Rafah.

A change in tone toward its Middle Eastern ally was seen Friday, when the United States put forward a resolution to recognize "the imperative" of an "immediate and sustained ceasefire."

But that text was blocked by Russia and China, which along with Arab states criticized it for stopping short of explicitly demanding Israel halt its campaign in Gaza.

The United States had repeatedly blocked ceasefire resolutions as it attempts to walk a line between supporting Israel with military aid and voicing frustration with leader Benjamin Netanyahu as the civilian death count in the Gaza Strip mounts.

Unlike Friday's text, the call for a ceasefire in the new resolution is not directly linked to ongoing talks, led by Qatar with support from the United States and Egypt, to halt fighting in return for Hamas releasing hostages.

Israel has criticized the Security Council for previous resolutions that have not specifically condemned Hamas.

The October 7 attack by the Palestinian militant group on Israel resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli figures.

The militants also seized 250 hostages, of whom Israel believes around 130 remain in Gaza, including 33 presumed dead.

Israel's military campaign in response to eliminate Hamas has killed more than 32,000 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

"Prosperity And Harmony": Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh Share Holi Wishes

■ HT News Network

New Delhi: Union Home Minister Amit Shah conveyed his greetings to the people on the festival of colours, Holi, wishing happiness, prosperity, harmony and new energy in everyone's life. "Best wishes to all the countrymen for the great festival of colours and joy, Holi. May this festival of happiness bring colours of prosperity and harmony into the lives of all of you and become a medium for the transmission of new energy," Amit Shah posted from his official X handle. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, too, extended his warm greetings to fellow countrymen on the occasion of Holi. Best wishes to all of you on the festival of Holi. May this festival of colours infuse joy, enthusiasm and new energy into your life. Happy Holi!" Rajnath Singh posted from his handle on X. Earlier, on Sunday, the Defence Minister celebrated the festival of colours with soldiers in Leh. He was accompanied by Chief of the Army Staff, General Manoj Pande and General Officer Commanding, Fire and Fury Corps, Lt Gen Rashim Bala.

He also spoke to the commanding officer deployed at Siachen over the phone and promised to visit them as soon as possible. Holi, a festival celebrated with as much fervour in the country as it is overseas, will be marked on March 25, Monday, this year. The festival is preceded by a ritual of lighting bonfires called Holika Dahan, signifying the burning of the demon



Holika.

The festival is dedicated to Lord Krishna, who is believed to have spent a considerable amount of time in a region called Braj in Uttar Pradesh.

It not only replicates the spirit of Holi but also impersonates the timeless love of Radha and Krishna.

Amidst the revelry, traditional sweets are shared, fostering a sense of amity and togetherness among the people, with revellers exuding the spirit of joy and love. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, too, extended his warm greetings to fellow countrymen on the occasion of Holi. It not only replicates the spirit of Holi but also impersonates the timeless love of Radha and Krishna. Amidst the revelry, traditional sweets are shared, fostering a sense of amity and togetherness among the people, with revellers exuding the spirit of joy and love. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, too, extended his warm greetings to fellow countrymen on the occasion of Holi.

Ex-Intel Bureau Chief Named Accused No 1 In Telangana Phone-Tapping Row

■ HT News Network

Hyderabad: Former Telangana Intelligence Bureau chief T Prabhakar Rao has been named as Accused No 1 in the phone-tapping case that has roiled the state ahead of a general election.

Mr Rao - on whose order reams of electronic data is said to have been gathered by illegally tapping the phones of opposition leaders during the earlier BRS government led by K Chandrashekar Rao - is reportedly in the United States. A look-out notice has been issued in his name.

Mr Rao's home in Hyderabad has been searched, as have nearly a dozen other locations, including the residence of Shrawan Rao, who runs a Telugu TV channel called I News. Shrawan Rao - also believed to be out of the country - allegedly helped set up phone-tapping equipment (from Israel) and servers on the premises of a local school. Another cop, Radha Kishan Rao - who was serving in the city task force - has also been named as an accused and a look-out notice has been issued for him as well.

Several other Telangana police officers are being investigated in connection with this case.

Three - Additional SPs Bhujanga Rao and Thirupathanna, and Deputy SP Praneeth Rao - have already been arrested. The police said Bhujanga Rao and Thirupathanna, arrested last week, had confessed to monitoring private persons illegally and destroying the evidence.



Praneeth Rao was arrested earlier this month, and charged with developing profiles of unknown persons and monitoring their activity in an unauthorised manner, as well as destroying certain computer systems and data stored on electronic gadgets.

The evidence was reportedly destroyed on orders from Prabhakar Rao; the order was allegedly given a day after the Congress beat the BRS in the 2023 election.

The list of individuals whose devices were reportedly monitored include Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, and members of the BJP and Congress, as well as those from ex-Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao's BRS. There are also reports that Telugu actors and businessmen were monitored too, and that many of them were blackmailed.

"May This Festival Fill Everyone's Life With Harmony": JP Nadda On Holi

■ HT News Network

New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national president JP Nadda celebrated Holi at his residence in the national capital on Monday.

"Best wishes to all of you on the holy festival of enthusiasm, joy and happiness, Holi. I wish that this holy festival of colours fills everyone's life with mutual love, harmony and goodwill," Nadda posted on X.

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar also extended warm greetings on the joyous occasion of Holi to the people of the country on Monday and said it embodies the celebration of life and the abundance of nature.

In a message on X, the Vice President said, "Warm greetings on the joyous occasion of Holi, the festival of colours. Holi serves as a poignant juncture for us to rejuvenate our bonds and welcome the advent of spring. It embodies the celebration of life and the abundance of nature. May the colours of #Holi fill our lives with happiness, hope and harmony."

Earlier, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh conveyed his greetings to the people on the festival of colours, and celebrated Holi with the National Security Guard (NSG) at his residence.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah conveyed his greetings to the people on the festival of colours, Holi, wishing happiness,



prosperity, harmony and new energy in everyone's life.

"Best wishes to all the countrymen for the great festival of colours and joy, Holi. May this festival of happiness bring colours of prosperity and harmony into the lives of all of you and become a medium for the transmission of new energy," Amit Shah posted from his official X handle.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi too extended greetings to the country's citizens on the eve of Holi on Sunday.

In a post on social media platform X, the PM said, "I extend my Holi wishes to all my fellow citizens of the country." May this traditional festival, ornamented with colours of affection and harmony, bring new energy and enthusiasm into all your lives," he said.

Holi, a festival celebrated with as much fervour in the country as it is overseas, will be marked on March 25, Monday, this year.

AAP Launches Social Media Campaign To "Save" Democracy, Constitution

■ HT News Network

New Delhi: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday launched a social media campaign asking people to support it for saving the constitution and democracy in the country.

Delhi minister and senior AAP leader Atishi addressed a press conference here to launch the social media "DP (display picture) campaign", urging people to join in.

She said that all AAP leaders and volunteers will change their profile picture on X, Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media accounts with the new one showing Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal behind the bars captioned "Modi Ka Sabse Bada Dar Kejriwal". Mr Kejriwal is the only leader in the country who can challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi so he was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate without any evidence just after the announcement of Lok Sabha polls, Atishi said.

She claimed the ED could not produce even



"one Paisa" of evidence despite its two-year-long probe into the alleged excise scam.

She alleged that the BJP and Modi want to crush Kejriwal and added that the AAP was waging a battle against "dictatorship" in the country.

Lok Sabha Polls 2024: Congress Picks Prahlad Gunjal To Take On Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla In Kota

■ HT News Network

New Delhi: The Congress released its sixth list of five candidates for the Lok Sabha elections in Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu on Monday.

The party has announced four candidates from Rajasthan and one from Tamil Nadu.

In Rajasthan, the party has fielded Ramchandra Choudhary from the Ajmer Lok Sabha seat, Sudarshan Rawat from Rajsamand, Damodar Gurjar from Bhilwara, while Prahlad Gunjal will face Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla in the Kota constituency.

Rajasthan has 25 parliamentary constituencies. The state will vote in two phases. Phase 1 (April 19) will see polling on 12 seats, while the remaining 13 seats will go for polling in the second phase (April 26).

In Tamil Nadu, C Robert Bruce will contest on a Congress ticket from the Tirunelveli constituency.

Tamil Nadu will vote on all 39 Lok Sabha seats on April 19.

The Congress further



stated that Tharhai Cuthbert will contest the bye-election from the Vilavancode constituency in Tamil Nadu.

Earlier, the Congress party on Sunday released the fifth list of three candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, naming Pratap Singh Khachariyawas from Jaipur, replacing Sunil Sharma as announced earlier.

While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday released its fifth list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections.

The BJP has released the names of the candidates for the Lok Sabha seats of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan, Haryana, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Gujarat, Him-

achal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Sikkim, Telangana, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut has been fielded from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi, a stronghold of Congress. The party has also fielded veteran actor Arun Govil, who played the character of Lord Ram in Ramanand Sagar's 'Ramayan' from Uttar Pradesh's Meerut. The election for 543 Lok Sabha seats will be held in seven phases starting April 19. Nearly 97 crore voters are eligible to cast votes in the general election. The Congress has announced names for 190 constituencies, while the BJP has announced names for 402 Lok Sabha seats so far.

2 Killed, 7 Injured In Stampede At Shrine Due To Landslide In Himachal

■ HT News Network

Una, Himachal Pradesh: Two devotees were killed and seven others injured following a stampede at a shrine due to a landslide in Himachal Pradesh's Una district on Monday, officials said. Located around 40 km from Una, Dera Baba Vadbhag Singh in Mairi village of Amb subdivision in Una district, is visited by a large number of people seeking a cure for people possessed by "evil spirits". Devotees who had come to take part in the Baba Vadbhag Singh fair were taking bath in the holy spring in Charan Ganga around 5 am when four-five big stones came sliding down from the mountain following a landslide, police said. Bathing in Charan Ganga is considered sacred and there was a lot of crowd at the holy feet of Ganga on Monday due to the full moon. Seeing the stones rolling down from the mountain, people started moving helter and there was a stampede, causing injuries to nine devotees.

Karnataka Boy, 16, Dies By Suicide Before Class 10 Board Exams, Say Cops

■ HT News Network

Shivamogga (Karnataka): A 16-year-old boy allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself from a ceiling fan at his home in Yadehalli village of Sagar taluk of this district, police said on Monday. He was slated to appear for SSLC examinations, police said, adding, it is yet to be ascertained if he was under stress due to the tests. Just hours before he ended his life on Sunday evening, his father and mother had a fight. His parents shared a strained relationship and often fought against each other. His father was addicted to alcohol, police said.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the boy had suicidal tendencies even two years ago. Earlier this month, he went to a railway station to take the extreme step, but members of the public spotted him and brought him back home safely, a senior police officer said.

Stop Being "Stubborn": Maldives President Told To Fix India Ties

■ HT News Network

Male: Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu must stop being "stubborn" and seek dialogue with neighbours to overcome the financial challenges, his predecessor Ibrahim Mohamed Solih has said. Solih made these remarks days after Muizzu, widely seen as a pro-China leader, urged India to provide debt relief to the archipelago nation.

Muizzu, 45, defeated Solih, 62, in the presidential election held in September last year.

Speaking at an event in Male' to rally support for Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) parliamentary candidates contesting four constituencies in Maafannu, Solih said he had seen media reports that suggest Muizzu wants to talk to India for debt restructuring.

But the financial challenges are not caused by Indian loans, Solih was quoted as saying by Adhadhu.com news portal.

Maldives has a debt of MVR 18 billion owed to China compared to MVR 8 billion owed to India, Solih said, adding that the repayment period is 25 years.

"However, I am confident that our neighbours will help. We must stop being stubborn and seek dialogue.



There are many parties that can help us. But he [Muizzu] doesn't want to compromise. I feel they [the government] are starting to understand the situation only now," Solih said.

The former president said the government was deceiving the public and relaunching projects initiated by the MDP government. He said ministers are now lying to cover up those lies.

Muizzu criticised India during and after the presidential election campaign and relations between the two countries have deteriorated since he assumed office in November.

He has demanded the complete withdrawal of 88 Indian military personnel manning three aviation platforms used for humanitarian and medical evacuations in the Maldives by May 10. The first batch of 26 Indian military personnel have already left the island nation and were replaced by civilians.

In his first media interview, Muizzu claimed that he has not taken any action or made any statements that may strain the relationship between the two countries.

India will continue to remain the Maldives' closest ally, he said and emphasised that there was no question about it, Maldives news portal Edition.mv said in a report on Thursday.

Muizzu's conciliatory comments towards India came ahead of Parliament elections in Maldives slated to be held on April 21.

He is yet to visit India although it has been four months since the new government took over. The first overseas trip by Maldivian presidents had always been to India, the report noted. However, Muizzu visited China in January, making his first state visit.

On Alleged Security Failure, Russia Says No Country Immune To Terrorism

■ HT News Network

Moscow: The Kremlin said on Monday that no country was immune to terrorism when asked if there had been a major failure by security services in preventing Friday's deadly attack on a concert hall, the worst attack inside Russia for two decades.

At least 137 people were killed and 182 injured when four men burst into the Crocus City Hall, spraying people with bullets before setting fire to the 6,200-seat hall. President Vladimir Putin said in an address to the nation on Saturday that all those responsible would be punished. He said 11 people had been detained, four heading towards Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday it was inappropriate to comment on a claim of responsibility for the attack by Islamic State while the investigation was live.

"The investigation is underway," Peskov told reporters. "So far, no versions have been put forward at all."

When asked if such a deadly attack unfolding just outside the Russian capital was a failure for the special services, Peskov said emotions were running high but



that no country was immune.

"Unfortunately, our world shows that no city, no country can be completely immune from the threat of terrorism," Peskov said. He said the special services worked tirelessly to defend Russia.

"The fight against terrorism is an ongoing process that requires full-scale international cooperation. But you can see that now in this most acute confrontational period, such cooperation is not being fully carried out in any way."

The Federal Security Service (FSB), the main successor to the Soviet-era KGB, is one of Russia's most powerful institutions. It has been headed by Alexander Bortnikov since 2008, who briefed Putin on the course of the investigation after the attack.

North Korea says Japan PM requested summit with Kim Jong Un

■ HT News Network

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister said on Monday that Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has requested a summit with her brother, adding a meeting was unlikely without a policy shift by Tokyo.

Relations between the two countries are historically strained, including by a long-running kidnapping dispute and North Korea's banned weapons programmes, but Kishida has recently expressed a desire to improve ties, which Pyongyang has hinted it is not opposed to.

Last year, Kishida said he was willing to meet Kim "without any conditions", saying Tokyo was willing to resolve all issues, including the abduction by North Korean agents of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, which remains an emotive issue in Japan.

"Kishida ... conveyed his intention to personally meet the President of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as soon as possible," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim Yo Jong — who is one of the regime's



key spokespeople — had hinted last month at a possible future invitation for the Japanese leader to visit North Korea.

But she said the "history of the DPRK-Japan relations gives a lesson that it is impossible to improve the bilateral relations full of distrust and misunderstanding," without a substantive policy change on Tokyo's part.

She warned that were Japan to remain "engrossed in the abduction issue that has no further settlement" then Kishida's hopes of improving ties would not materialise.

Kishida said on Monday that he was not aware of the KCNA report, and did not directly comment on its contents, while calling top-level talks with North Korea "important".

Simon Harris set to become Ireland PM

■ HT News Network

ATHLONE: Simon Harris is set to become Ireland's next prime minister after the governing Fine Gael party appointed him as its leader on Sunday, following an uncontested election. The 37-year-old said it was the "absolute honour of my life" to be appointed party leader, and his rise to the country's top job is expected to be confirmed when the Irish parliament returns from recess early next month. He will take over from Leo Varadkar, who announced his resignation on Wednesday in a move pundits described as a "political earthquake" in the EU member. Within hours, Harris had secured endorsements for a leadership bid from a majority of Fine Gael party colleagues, prompting his potential rivals to rule themselves out.

With nominations closing at 1300



GMT and no challengers emerging, party official Willie Geraghty declared Harris as winner hours later at a convention in Athlone, west of Dublin. Deputy party leader Simon Coveney said the new leader, and prime-minister-in-waiting, was a "really charismatic" politician who was "ideally placed" to revive his ailing party's fortunes. Upon his coronation, Harris told the centre-right party's members that he would repay their faith with "hard work,

with blood, sweat and tears, day in and day out with responsibility, with humility and with civility." Setting out his priorities, Harris insisted that Fine Gael "stands for law and order" and told members he wanted to "take our flag back" from nationalists, to loud cheers.

He also said that he would pursue a "more planned and sustainable" immigration policy, following increased tension over the issue, and that he would "fight against the dangers of populism". The 37-year-old said it was the "absolute honour of my life" to be appointed party leader, and his rise to the country's top job is expected to be confirmed when the Irish parliament returns from recess early next month. He will take over from Leo Varadkar, who announced his resignation on Wednesday in a move pundits described as a "political earthquake" in the EU member.

"May Holi Bring You Happiness, Friendship This Season": US State Secretary

■ HT News Network

Washington: US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, extended his wishes for the festival of Holi on Monday and hoped that the festival of colours would bring happiness and friendship across the world. In a post on X, Secretary Blinken said, "Wishing a joyful Holi to those celebrating in the United States and across the world. May the Festival of Colours bring you happiness and friendship this season." The Indian Embassy in the US also wished everyone a joyous celebration resplendent with colours and music. In a video shared on X, the Indian Embassy in the US captured the exuberant spirit of Holi celebrations. The video showcased a lively scene at DuPont Circle, where people immersed themselves in the festivities, dancing joyously while playing with vibrant colours. Earlier in the day, US Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti also extended Holi wishes to the people of India via a video message shared on X. He said, "I want to wish everybody a very happy Holi. We have this amazing gujiyas, which has a little bit of an American twist with some pistachios in here, beautiful rose water.

EU To Probe Apple, Google, Meta For Potential Digital Markets Breach

■ HT News Network

Brussels: EU antitrust regulators on Monday opened their first investigations under the Digital Markets Act into Apple, Alphabet's Google and Meta Platforms for potential breaches of the landmark EU tech rules.

"The (European) Commission suspects that the measures put in place by these gatekeepers fall short of effective compliance of their obligations under the DMA," the EU executive said in a statement.

The EU competition enforcer will investigate Alphabet's rules on steering in Google Play and self-preferencing on Google Search, Apple's rules on steering in the App Store and the choice screen for Safari and Meta's "pay or consent model".

The Commission also launched investigatory steps relating to Apple's new fee structure for alternative app stores and Amazon's ranking practices on its marketplace.

4 Moscow Attack Suspects Charged With Terrorism

■ HT News Network

Russia has ordered four men accused of killing at least 137 people in a massacre at a Moscow concert hall to be held in custody on "terror" charges with the death count expected to climb as more than 100 people are hospitalised.

The men face life in prison, although Russian officials have clamoured for the lifting of a moratorium on the death penalty to deliver even harsher sentences. In a series of late-night court hearings in Moscow that ran into the early hours of Monday, the four men -- with bruises and cuts over their faces -- were dragged into the court in front of dozens of reporters who had assembled at the capital's Basmanny district court.

FSB security service officers wheeled one in to the hearing on a medical gurney, following reports and videos on Russian social media of bloody interrogations after the men were arrested on Saturday.

The Friday evening attack has been claimed by Islamic State, though Russian officials have not commented on their possible involvement.

In his only public remarks since, President Vladimir Putin pointed to a Ukrainian connection, saying the four suspects gunmen were arrested while trying to flee there.

Beijing told it faces 'fork in the road' as China Development Forum opens

■ HT News Network

BEIJING: China needs to "reinvent itself" with economic policies to speed resolution of its property market crisis and boost domestic consumption and productivity, the International Monetary Fund's Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Sunday.

"China faces a fork in the road rely on the policies that have worked in the past, or reinvent itself for a new era of high-quality growth," Georgieva said in remarks to a meeting of senior Chinese officials and executives from global companies.

A day ago, Commerce Minister Wang Wentao also said China was committed to opening up its economy and offered growth opportunities for multinationals.

Officials who spoke at the opening of the China Development Forum expressed confidence China would hit its economic targets, including growth of about 5pc this year, and pledged further support for companies in strategically important sectors, an area Chinese President Xi Jinping has dubbed "new productive forces". But those commitments stopped short of the more sweeping changes urged by the IMF. Georgieva said an analysis by the IMF showed a more consumer-centered policy mix could add \$3.5 trillion to China's economy over the next 15 years.

If achieved, that boost would be equivalent to adding output equivalent to more twice the size of South Korea's economy.

Need for political cohesion stressed at Pakistan Day reception in Washington

■ HT News Network

WASHINGTON: Discussions at the Pakistan Day reception at the embassy underscored the importance of political unity in Pakistan, while the PTT's protests dominated conversations among the guests.

Ambassador Masood Khan also acknowledged the necessity of political stability in Pakistan when he addressed his guests: "We continue to work for political cohesion in our country and economic development."

The other speaker, USAID Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Asia Michael Schiffer, emphasised Pakistan's long-term development aspirations. "Enhancing Pakistan's economic growth is a bedrock of our work," he declared.

Ambassador Khan assured the audience both sides were working to recalibrate ties structured around trade, investment, green energy, healthcare, education, and science and technology.

Mr Schiffer identified "sustainable economic growth, greater access to energy, gender equality, strengthening peace and inclusion, education, and health" as shared objectives.

Under Pressure, Trump Goes On Attack As \$454 Million Deadline Looms

■ HT News Network

New York: Donald Trump lashed out at prosecutors Friday as the clock ticked down on the possible seizure of his assets and threatened bankruptcy if he fails to come up with cash to pay a half-billion dollar bond.

The former president, who is running again in this year's election, is under pressure after a New York court ruled that he, his sons and his family company lied about the value of assets, deceiving banks and insurers.

Shares of his social media company could start trading on the stock market as early as Monday, upping his worth by \$3 billion, but it is uncertain when the cash would be available to cover his \$454 million bond.

"No trial, no jury, no crime, no victim," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. "Only a crooked judge and a corrupt, Trump-hating attorney general, who takes her orders directly from the White House.



"Election interference at a level never seen before!" Trump said that due to "hard work, talent, and luck"

he had almost \$500 million in cash that he had planned to spend on his election campaign, adding the judge "knew this, (and) wanted to take it away from me."

Trump Media is planning to go public by merging with shell company Digital World Acquisition Corporation.

A vote on Friday could approve the much-delayed merger and create a windfall for Trump -- though the cash influx may be months away.

Trump built a public profile as a property developer and businessman in New York before entering politics.

Despite the real-estate mogul's \$2.6 billion estimated net worth -- and his own claims of having cash on hand -- his lawyers say that it has been impossible to come up with the \$454 million bond, due Monday.

Typically, such bonds would be underwritten by an insurer or specialized bond company.

But Trump's lawyers say that after approaching 30 such companies, none will take the ex-president's real-estate holdings as collateral.

Beauty Benefits of Lemon



SHAHNAZ HUSAIN

If you are frustrated over high cost of beauty parlours and dermatologist in treating skin and hair beauty problems than all you need to do is to squeeze out some fresh lemon juice from your own kitchen and drink lemon water daily and also apply it on your skin also. The sunny yellow fruit will provide smooth, flawless and radiant skin by removing dead cells and act as a natural lightener for hair and skin by regulating acidity and eliminating fat. Lemon is rich in Vitamin B, Vitamin C, Carbohydrates, magnesium and Phosphorus that rejuvenates skin, absorbs the oiliness, cleans the skin pores and improves texture and condition of skin and hair.

Lemon has astringent properties which help in preventing sign of premature aging like wrinkles and fine lines and restore skin elasticity to maintain youthful appearance.

Most of us know that Lemon is a rich source of Vitamin C and have taken it at some time or other. Added to a glass of cold water, it can be most refreshing during hot and humid weather. Taken regularly, it is a preventive against colds and actually strengthens the immune system. We also add it to salads, snacks and food, because its tanginess adds to their flavour.



There are a number of ways that the common lemon can be used for beauty too.

Lemon is best taken diluted, adding it to water. You can start your day with the juice of a lemon in a glass of warm water. This combination helps to keep the system flushed and aid the removal of toxins and wastes. This will also reflect on the skin, keeping it clear and glowing. Weight watchers will also find this beneficial.

As a cosmetic ingredient, lemon can be used in various ways. The only thing to remember is not to use it undiluted, as it can be harsh on the skin. On areas where the skin is thicker, lemon can be used by itself. For example, for dark elbows, rub lemon halves and then wash off with water. Over a period of time, it will cleanse the skin and lighten its colour.

Lemon can also be used as a hand lotion. Mix it with rose water and rub it into the skin of the hands. For rough hands, rub granulated sugar and the juice of a lemon together with the hands, till the sugar dissolves. Then rinse off with water. Done regularly, it will help to improve the skin texture.

Oily skins can really benefit from a lemon treatment. Dilute the juice of half a lemon in a glass of water and use this to wash your face. If it seems harsh for your skin, add more water. Gently blot the face with tissue or a clean towel, instead of wiping it. Lemon not only helps to restore the normal acid-alkaline balance, but also reduces surface oil. This treatment can be beneficial during summer, when the skin tends to seem more oily. Some people

have sensitive skins. So, if your skin burns or itches with the application of lemon-water, you should not use it.

Honey mixed with lemon juice can be applied on the face daily. While honey moisturizes the skin, lemon juice restores the normal balance and lightens skin colour over a period of time of regular use. For oily skin use one part of honey with two parts lemon juice. For normal and dry skin, use honey and lemon juice in equal quantities.

Lemon can also be used as a hair rinse. You can add lemon juice to a mug of water and use it as a last rinse, after your shampoo. You can even add it to "tea water". Boil used tea leaves in enough water and cool the liquid. Add the juice of one lemon and use it as a last rinse. This helps to add shine to the hair.

Due to its many beneficial properties, lemon has been used as an ingredient to formulate creams and lotions for skin care. It has been used, along with aloe vera to formulate cleansing gels, helping to get rid of dirt and pollutants, without disturbing the normal acid-alkaline balance. A lemon-turmeric cream has been used as a pre-bath cream and also a soap substitute, for people with dry, dehydrated and sensitive skins. Lemon is a powerful natural cleanser.

When nature has provided us with ideal cosmetic ingredients, why should we use chemicals and synthetic substances? In fact, the human body responds well to natural substances, while it has an in-built resistance to synthetic ones.

The author is international fame beauty expert and is called herbal queen of India

NEWS

These Homemade Drinks Can Help Reduce Your Uric Acid Levels



Uric acid is a natural waste product produced by the body's metabolism of purines, which are found in certain foods. Elevated levels of uric acid can lead to conditions like gout or kidney stones. While there's no magical cure for high uric acid levels, some homemade drinks may help in managing them by promoting hydration, supporting kidney function, and reducing inflammation. Read on as we share a list of homemade drinks that might help reduce uric acid levels.

1. Lemon water

Lemon water is alkalising and can help balance the body's pH levels. It also contains citric acid, which may help dissolve uric acid crystals. Squeeze the juice of half a lemon into a glass of warm water. Drink it on an empty stomach in the morning. Drink it daily for best results.

2. Apple cider vinegar drink

ACV may help alkalise the body and promote digestion, potentially aiding in the elimination of uric acid. Mix 1-2 tablespoons of ACV with a glass of water. You can add honey to improve the taste. Drink it once or twice daily, preferably before meals.

3. Cherry juice

Cherries contain compounds that may reduce inflammation and lower uric acid levels. Juice fresh cherries or dilute unsweetened cherry juice with water. Drink it daily, especially during flare-ups of gout.

4. Ginger tea

Ginger has anti-inflammatory properties that may help reduce uric acid levels and alleviate pain. Steep fresh ginger slices in hot water for 5-10 minutes. Add honey or lemon for flavor. Drink it 2-3 times daily.

5. Turmeric milk

Turmeric contains curcumin, which has anti-inflammatory effects that may help reduce uric acid levels. Mix a teaspoon of turmeric powder with warm milk. Add honey for sweetness. Drink it before bedtime for the best results.

6. Cucumber juice

How it helps: Cucumbers are high in water content and can help promote hydration and flush out toxins, including uric acid. Blend fresh cucumbers with water to make juice. Drink it daily, especially during hot weather.

7. Watermelon juice

Watermelon is hydrating and contains compounds like citrulline, which may help regulate uric acid levels. Blend fresh watermelon chunks with a little water. Drink it regularly, especially during the summer months.

Can Walking 15,000 Steps Daily Boost Life Span?

Walking is indeed healthy and can have numerous benefits for overall health and well-being. Walking is a low-impact exercise that most people can incorporate into their daily routines without needing specialised equipment or facilities.

It offers cardiovascular benefits, helps maintain a healthy weight, strengthens muscles and bones, improves mood, and enhances overall fitness. Walking 15,000 steps daily can be a beneficial goal for many individuals. Read on as we share the many benefits of walking 15,000 steps daily.

1. Improved cardiovascular health

Regular walking strengthens the heart, lowers blood pressure,

and improves circulation, reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke.

2. Weight management

Walking burns calories, aiding in weight loss or maintenance. Maintaining a healthy weight lowers the risk of obesity-related illnesses like diabetes and certain cancers.

3. Enhanced respiratory function

Regular walking improves lung capacity and function, promoting better respiratory health. This can boost longevity.

4. Stronger muscles and bones

Walking is a weight-bearing exercise that helps maintain bone density and muscle strength, reducing the risk of osteoporosis and frailty as you age.



5. Better mental health

Physical activity releases endorphins, reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. Regular walking can also improve cognitive function and lower the risk of dementia.

6. Increased energy levels

Walking boosts energy levels by improving circulation and oxygen flow throughout the body, leaving you feeling more alert and energetic.

7. Enhanced immune function

Regular moderate exercise, like walking, supports a healthy immune system, reducing the risk of infections and illnesses.

8. Improved sleep quality

Regular physical activity can help regulate sleep patterns, promoting deeper and more restful sleep, which is crucial for overall health and longevity.

9. Lowered risk of chronic diseases

Walking regularly can help lower the risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes,

certain cancers, and metabolic syndrome.

10. Longevity benefits

Research suggests that regular physical activity, including walking, is associated with a longer lifespan. Walking 15,000 steps daily contributes to this by improving overall health and reducing the risk of premature death.

If you're not accustomed to walking long distances, it's essential to start gradually and build up your step count over time. Pushing yourself too hard too soon can lead to fatigue, soreness, or even injury. Invest in a pair of comfortable and supportive walking shoes to prevent foot pain, blisters, or other discomforts. Proper footwear can also help maintain good posture and reduce the risk of injury.

How Consuming Coriander Seeds Can Improve Urinary Tract Infection

Coriander seeds, also known as dhania seeds, are the dried fruits of the coriander plant (*Coriandrum sativum*). They have a warm, nutty, and citrusy flavour and are commonly used as a spice in various cuisines. Coriander seeds contain essential oils, vitamins (including vitamin C), minerals (such as potassium and manganese), and antioxidants, which offer a range of potential health benefits. Nutritionist Anjali Mukerjee shares how exactly coriander seeds can help treat UTIs.

Coriander seeds may aid digestion, alleviate bloating, relieve gas, and promote overall gut health.

The antioxidants present in coriander seeds have anti-inflammatory effects that may help reduce inflammation in the body.

Some studies suggest that coriander seeds may help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol levels while increasing HDL (good)



cholesterol levels, thus supporting heart health.

Coriander seeds have been found to have anti-diabetic effects, potentially helping in regulating blood sugar levels.

Coriander seeds possess antimicrobial properties, which may aid in fighting against certain infections.

Coriander seeds can also aid urinary tract infections (UTIs). Coriander seeds are traditionally used in herb-

al medicine for their diuretic properties, which promote urine production. However, while coriander seeds may help increase urine flow, they are not considered a cure for UTIs. It is important to seek medical advice and follow appropriate treatment protocols, such as antibiotics if diagnosed with a urinary tract infection. Coriander seeds may aid digestion, alleviate bloat-

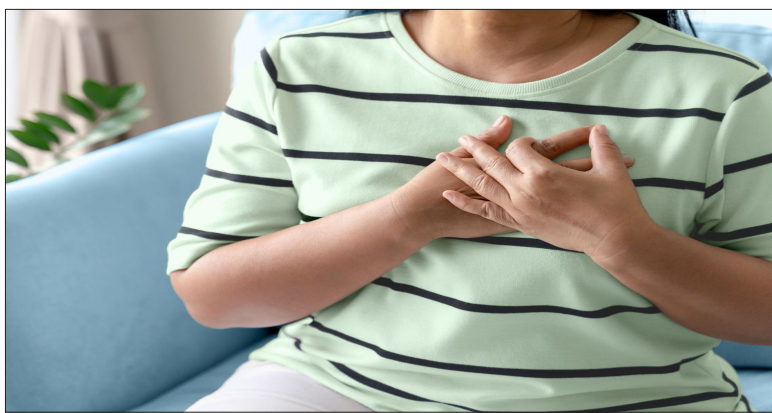
ing, relieve gas, and promote overall gut health. The antioxidants present in coriander seeds have anti-inflammatory effects that may help reduce inflammation in the body. Some studies suggest that coriander seeds may help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol levels while increasing HDL (good) cholesterol levels, thus supporting heart health.

Early Menopause Symptoms Plus Migraines Signal Heart Risks

Having hot flashes, night sweats, and migraines regularly in early adulthood may mean a higher risk of heart disease or a stroke, a new study in the journal *Menopause* suggests.

The risk of developing heart disease or other cardiovascular problems was 1.5 times higher among women who regularly had migraines and vasomotor symptoms – the medical term for night sweats and hot flashes during menopause – in their 20s and 30s, compared to women who had the same problems infrequently or never. The stroke risk was even higher among women who regularly had hot flashes, night sweats, and migraines over a period of 15 years. The study analyzed data from nearly 2,000 women from the time that they were, on average, 25 years old until they reached the age of 40. The researchers did not find any independently increased risk of heart problems or stroke linked to having migraines, or based on the regularity of night sweats and hot flashes. The finding suggests the combination of the symptoms may mean a higher risk of heart problems or stroke heading into middle age.

About 18% of women in their later reproductive years have migraines, the study authors said, noting that stroke has long been linked to migraines and that most people have



their first migraine before the age of 50. The researchers also found that women who have migraines plus hot flashes and night sweats likely can reduce their risk of stroke or heart problems by quitting smoking and by treating conditions such as high blood sugar, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure.

A separate study, also published in *Menopause*, identified risk factors for regular night sweats and hot flashes during early adulthood. The analysis pointed to three patterns of vasomotor symptoms among women during their 20s and 30s:

40% had minimal symptoms
27% had symptoms that increased over time
33% had constant symptoms

Women who were Black, had less than a high school education, symptoms of depression, migraines,

who smoked cigarettes, or had a hysterectomy were more likely to have constant symptoms.

"The anxiety and dread that women with migraines and menopausal symptoms feel about cardiovascular risk is real – but these findings suggest that focusing on prevention, and correcting unhealthy habits and risk factors, could help most women," Catherine Kim, MD, MPH, a University of Michigan associate professor of internal medicine who was the lead author of both studies, said in a statement. "For the subgroup with both migraines and early persistent hot flashes and night sweats, and for those currently experiencing migraines in their early adulthood, these findings point to an added need to control risks, and address symptoms early."



Ahmedabad shows its feelings in Hardik's night of agony

AHMEDABAD: Even those on the broadcast couldn't not mention it. Kevin Pietersen wondered when an Indian player was last booed at home. Ian Bishop asked what Hardik Pandya could do to win them over. Brian Lara had a ready solution: "Play for India here." The Ahmedabad crowd vehemently voiced their disapproval of Hardik switching teams, ringing out loud boos every time he was involved in the game. One of the biggest IPL trades in player history may have been okayed by the Gujarat Titans, but their fans were having none of it.

Shubman Gill, Hardik's successor at Titans, received widespread applause and cheer. Every time he implored the crowd to get behind the team - like he did when Mumbai Indians were bossing their chase at 107 for 2 in 12 overs - they responded with fervor.

But they simply couldn't do the same for their former captain. The extent of their pain wasn't visible in the build-up to the match. But the 88,000 fans who turned the setting into a cauldron made sure you felt it.

It was a night unlike any other for Hardik. The scene of his greatest captaincy triumph - the Narendra Modi Stadium where he lifted the IPL 2022 title with the Titans - became his epicentre of anguish after Mumbai Indians, his new, old team, were pipped in the final over of a thriller that shouldn't have gone so far.

You felt it when Hardik took the ball first up. When Wriddhiman Saha delicately steered him behind point for a boundary to open the match, the decibel levels went up several notches.

You felt it when Hardik switched fields frenetically, asking Rohit Sharma to move from square leg to point, or into pockets you had never seen him in before, like short third.

And you certainly felt it at the start of the final over with Mumbai needing 19 off 6 and Hardik on strike. Those who had begun to make a beeline for the gates only 15 minutes earlier, because the result had seemed a foregone conclusion, huddled near the exit, setting off a massive commotion.

The DJ tried to distract them, but as he went "let's welcome....." they went "oooooh". Or was it "booooooo"? But within seconds, they were quiet. Hardik did what Pat Cummins had vowed to at the ODI World Cup final last year. As the away captain, there's nothing more satisfying. It was as if Hardik knew Umesh Yadav, tasked to bowl the final over, was going to go short.

The field was set for it: deep cover, deep point, long-on, deep square leg, fine leg. Now, Hardik over time has grown to detach himself from circumstances. He's generally unflappable when the heat is on: taking the game deep, one-on-one with the bowler before unleashing himself, much like his

mentor MS Dhoni did to bowling attacks in his prime. He has this inherent belief that no boundary is big enough to clear. The one at cover was 73 meters distant. But it didn't matter. As Umesh dug it in, Hardik instinctively had ago. The bat was positioned like a sledgehammer. And he nailed it off the middle.

A hush descended around Motera. Of all the situations you want to embrace on a cricket field, you wouldn't have wished to walk in as your team's last hope against a side you had led to a title and a final, at their home ground. Hardik seemed to have embraced it. Thirteen off five.

Gill stepped in to direct his field. The crowd got behind Umesh as he bowled length. Hardik slapped it to the cover boundary. Surely this wasn't happening? As if it was written in the stars, and the universe couldn't conspire against it. Hardik had absolutely smacked it. He sent the crowd into a stunned silence.

Mumbai needed nine off four.

You could feel the tension. The fans were quiet, stunned by an onslaught they didn't want but one they fully knew Hardik was capable of. These were the same fans who had willed him on in the final moments of last year's pulsating final, when Mohit Sharma began the final over with four pinpoint yorkers that left Chennai Super Kings needing ten runs off two balls.

Ravindra, and an unlikely Wellington reunion in Chennai



CHENNAI: Chepauk has a Westpac Stadium vibe to it. Yellow stands. Yellow jerseys. World-class Wellington batters.

In IPL 2023, a Wellington boy thrilled the Chepauk crowd. In a bizarre three-day rain-hit final that season, Devon Conway produced a Player-of-the-Match performance, against Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad. On Tuesday, Chennai Super Kings will face Titans in a rematch of the final, at Chepauk, but Conway is back in Wellington, recovering from thumb surgery. He has been sidelined until May.

No Conway? No problem for CSK. Because another Wellington boy has slotted directly into the top order and enjoyed a sparkling debut, against Royal Challengers Bangalore. Thirty-seven runs off 15 balls at an eye-watering strike-rate of 246.66. It is his highest in 57 T20s. It's also the highest strike rate by a debutant across 17 seasons of the IPL (for a minimum of 30 runs scored).

When Rachin Ravindra was snapped up by CSK at the auction last December for INR 1.8 crore, he wasn't a certainty in their XI though he was the breakout star of the ODI World Cup held in India that year. But when he was thrown into Chepauk, which was a pulsing bowl of noise on Friday, Ravindra was at home away from home.

IPL debuts can often be unnerving - some of the biggest international names have had harsh initiations into the IPL - but Ravindra's was nerveless. After taking the catches of both Faf du Plessis and Virat Kohli in the hotspots at the boundary, he tore up the powerplay with the bat, in CSK's chase of 174. With his hairstyle and

athleticism, you could easily mistake him for another Ravindra from CSK - Jadeja.

Ravindra's former Wellington and New Zealand A coach, Sriram Krishnamurthy, was part of a packed crowd at Chepauk. Sriram, who now works with CSK's grass-roots programme, isn't a Chepauk regular for the CSK games, but on Friday he was right there for Ravindra's IPL debut.

"It was surreal for sure," Sriram tells ESPNcricinfo. "We started working together in Wellington in 2015 and we set small goals. But our reunion at Chepauk was simply surreal because it was never ever part of the plan. Even until last year we would have never entertained the thought of meeting in Chennai."

In the lead-up to Ravindra's first IPL stint, many on the outside wondered whether he had the game and gears to succeed in T20 cricket. After all, he came into the IPL with a modest T20 record: 673 runs in 48 innings at an average of 16.41 and strike rate of 126.26. On the opening night of IPL 2024, he struck at nearly 250. Sriram isn't surprised one bit, though.

"He's always had the skill and the shots," Sriram says. "What is aiding him to bring runs to his name is his mental switch. Right from when he was 14-15, he could cut, pull, drive, sweep, he could play the lofted drive. When you're playing on some flat wickets, even against good bowlers the margin for error is so small; so he's able to play all these shots. Which is what he was able to do against Australia at the Westpac Stadium and then against RCB at Chepauk, which wasn't the usual Chennai wicket."

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