

TIME AND US

DAILY

SRINAGAR, KASHMIR

WEDNESDAY

● JANUARY, 03, 2018
 ● 15 RABI-AL-SANI 1439 AH
 ● ISSUE: 02
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 ● PAGES: 08

WEATHER TEMPERATURE		
STATION	MAX TEMPERATURE	MIN TEMPERATURE
	ACT	ACT
SRINAGAR	10.2	-4.3
JAMMU	19.8	6.0
LEH	0.6	-14.7
KARGIL	-2.0	-6.1

SUNSET WEDNESDAY: 05:35 PM
 SUNRISE THURSDAY: 07:38 AM

LOCAL FORECAST OF SRINAGAR
 Generally Cloudy sky... Maximum & Minimum temperatures will be around 11°C & -4°C respectively.

RNI NO: JKENG/2015/62397 • PRICE RS.3/- (AIR SURCHARGE FOR DELHI, JAMMU & LADAKH 50/- PAISA)

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COMMITTED TO PROVIDING HASSLE-FREE HELICOPTER SERVICE TO SNOW-BOUND

COAL SCAM: DELHI HIGH COURT STAYS THREE-YEAR JAIL TERM OF MADHU KODA

BULK OF NPAS AROSE OUT BANK LOANS BEFORE APRIL 2014: ARUN JAITLEY

KLAVAN LATE SHOW LIFTS LIVERPOOL; STRUGGLING STOKE LOSE AGAIN

Mehbooba pays glowing tributes to former lawmakers

Suggests working out mechanism for supporting kin of former lawmakers

Jammu, Jan 2: Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti today paid rich tributes to former law makers for their contribution in the political and public life of the State besides their respective fields and specialities.

Speaking on the Obituary Reference in the Lower House on the first day of the Budget session today, the Chief Minister described the former legislators as men of impeccable record and honesty who all along worked tirelessly for the welfare of masses. She said these former lawmakers have left us with many lessons to follow for selfless service to masses. She suggested the House to think of way and means to be explored to help the wards and kin of former legislators for their rehabilitation and sustenance.

The Chief Minister described late M L Fotedar as a very intelligent politician who rose through to a very high position of Union Minister by dint of hard work. She said the late leader worked closely with former Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and would long be remembered by the people of the State for his work



for the upliftment of the masses.

Mehbooba Mufti described former Ministers, late Sheikh Mohammad Maqbool and Sofi Mohi ud Din as very honest politicians and leaders whose lives are examples to emulate and who played key role in strengthening democratic traditions in the State. She said both the leaders possessed simple outlooks to life yet played very important roles in the lives of people of their areas which would be remem-

bered for times to come. She also paid tributes to former Deputy Speaker, Moulvi Abdul Rashid who, she said, worked tirelessly for the people of far flung areas of Banihal constituency till his last days.

The Chief Minister also paid rich tributes to former Member Parliament, Shabir Salaria describing him as an ace lawyer and political activist whose contribution to legal profession and parliamentary discussions would long be remembered.

Mehbooba Mufti described late O P Saraf as a leading voice in the journalistic fraternity and public life of the State. She said late Dr. Syed Naseer Ahmad Shah made an excellent contribution in the extension of medical services in the State which people would remember for long. She also paid rich tributes to late S. K. Abrol.

The Chief Minister also paid glowing tributes to late Kaushak Bakula and described him as the architect of modern Ladakh who played a key role in the development of the region.

▶ See **Mehbooba...** Pg 02

NC SUBMITS MEMORANDUM TO GUV, SEEKS POLITICAL DIALOGUE

JAMMU: The National Conference today submitted a memorandum to Governor N N Vohra here, seeking a political dialogue to resolve the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

The memorandum's release coincided with the start of the Budget session. It claimed that under the BJP-PDP Government the identity of Jammu and Kashmir and its constitutional status was under threat.

The NC expressed concern over the "worsening situation" and the continued political vacuum in the state which adversely affected the human rights situation, economy and growth.

▶ See **NC...** Pg 02

Volatile Start to JK Assembly Budget Session

Jammu, Jan 02: Pandemonium was witnessed during Jammu and Kashmir Governor N.N. Vohra's opening address to a joint session of the assembly here at Jammu as the opposition raised slogans against the "failure on all fronts" of the PDP-BJP state government and staged a walkout.

As Vohra started his address to begin the Budget session, members of the National Conference and Congress stood up shouting slogans against the Peoples Democratic Party-Bharatiya Janata Party coalition government.

Meanwhile, Independent MLA Engineer Rashid tried to disrupt the speech of Governor N N Vohra raising the issue of human rights violations carried by the government forces in Kashmir.

Prior to that, MLA Rashid staged a forceful sit-in protest outside the legislative complex against continued human rights abuses.

As a matter of fact, opposition parties are expected to corner the PDP-BJP coalition government on law and order situation in Valley, "Power crisis, announcement of panchayat polls and developmental issues.

At the first day of the 40-day Budget Session one saw many hard allegations as the opposition Congress and National Conference accused the state government under Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti of "murdering

▶ See **Budget...** Pg 02



PDP NOMINATES PARTY FUNCTIONARIES; RAFI MIR IS CHIEF SPOKESMAN

Srinagar: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) President Mehbooba Mufti on Tuesday nominated the party functionaries.

"Mehbooba Mufti, President J&K Peoples Democratic Party (JKPDP) has nominated Mohammad Dilawar Mir, Ved Mahajan, Mehboob Iqbal and Peerzada Mansoor Hussain as General Secretaries of JKPDP," said a party statement today. Rafi Ahmad Mir has been appointed as the chief spokesman of the party.

▶ See **Mir...** Pg 02

Negative Impacts of Social Media

▶ Sadaf Khursheed.

Srinagar, Jan 02: Sitting is new smoking, warn health experts apparently for the reason that it's the root cause of many health issues nowadays. And sitting may be linked to using Social media for some hours or may be hours together without realizing the ill effects on an individual or the society.

According to Childmind.org (United states based organization that deals with the mental problems of children) "teenagers are constantly engaging in cell phone use



throughout the day, users are even texting, sharing, trolling and scrolling while studying or completing homework or even eating. It also states that teens are now spending more time participating in cyber communications rather than

sharing and experiencing in person interactions with others".

While many people may argue that social media has helped us to get closer to everyone including our next

▶ See **Social...** Pg 02

Ten youth shunned path of violence so far: DGP

Terms it success for people, says Pakistan creating violence here

Srinagar, Jan 02: Director General of Police (DGP) S P Vaid on Tuesday said that at least ten youth shunned the path of violence so far and has joined their families back.

Talking to KNS over phone, DGP termed the return of youth as the 'big success for the people'.

He said that seven youth had shunned the path of violence earlier and now three more youth joined their families today.



"It is good that the youth are joining their families again as it is Pakistan who is creating the violence here," he said,

adding that the returning of the youth is not the success for the Police but for the people here.

Earlier, DGP in his tweet said that in response of the call of their families, another three young boys came back their homes. "Another young boys in valley came back home in response to the call of their families. God bless them," DGP tweeted.

Pertinently, Jammu and ▶ See **DGP...** Pg 02

J&K WAKF BOARD FAILS TO INSPIRE

▶ Malik Sameed

Srinagar, Jan 02: The valley of Kashmir with the inception of Islam did undergo many changes at all levels and strata of society. Islam in Kashmir was result by the great efforts and toil of Sufi Saints. The imprints which Islam left on Kashmiris have been rightly observed by the noted historian Prem Nath Bazaz "Politics had dehumanized the Kashmiris; Islam made them men again. Just as the Muslim rule was established in Kashmir without much bloodshed, so was Islam spread throughout the length and breadth of the valley by peaceful preaching and lucid persuasions of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani (RA) and hundreds of the Sayyid Missionaries who came from Hamadan and

▶ See **Wakf...** Pg 02

FAKE JOB RACKET BUSTED IN CENTRAL KASHMIR'S GANDERBAL: POLICE

Ganderbal, Jan 2: Police on Tuesday claimed to have busted a fake job racket in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district by arresting three people who allegedly duped people on the pretext of providing jobs.

An official said that police station Safapora received a complaint from two girls (name withheld) that two persons, Reyaz Ahmad Bhat of

▶ See **Police...** Pg 02

Rasheed 'confronts' Governor

Says no compromise on Right to Self Determination

Jammu, Jan 2: After staging a peaceful sit-in on the stairs of Jammu Kashmir Assembly seeking right to self determination, legislator Engineer Rasheed "confronted" State Governor NN Vohra word by word with strong arguments over various issues during his address to the joint session of state legislature in Jammu on Tuesday.

As per a statement issued by Rasheed led party AIP, shortly after NC, congress and others boycotted Governor's address Engineer Rasheed single handedly took the charge and countered Governors every claim and argument with full force.

Er. Rasheed said that: "we will continue to seek right to self determination on both the sides of LoC and never compromise our



huge sacrifices and nobody will be allowed to sell the blood of martyrs. He reminded Governor of his constitutional authority, erosions in the constitution of J&K made by New Delhi from time to time, NIA raids on

▶ See **Rasheed...** Pg 02

MASSIVE BLAZE GUTS 12 SHOPS, RESTAURANT IN SOPORE

Locals, traders appeal admin to compensate fire victims

Sopore, Jan 02: At least one dozen shops and a restaurant were gutted in a massive fire incident that broke out in Sopore town of north Kashmir's Baramulla district.

According to the reports mysterious massive fire engulfed and damaged one

▶ See **Shops...** Pg 02

Doctors Association seeks transparent procedure for appointing director health

Srinagar, Jan 02: Doctors Association Kashmir (DAK) on Tuesday has sought a transparent procedure for the appointment of director health services Kashmir.

"That would open doors for deserving and meritorious candidates," said DAK President Dr Nisar ul Hassan.

"The process of selection should include advertising of the post that would bring transparency and openness in the selection process. A team of experts in the field should assess the eligible candidates and choose the best," he said.

"But, that is not happening," DAK President said.

He said instead, the whole selection pro-



cess is kept hidden and secret, which is unfair, non-transparent and thus manipulative. This paves the way for picking up a favorite blocking opportunities of aspirants who are not even considered for the post. The person who

▶ See **Doctors...** Pg 02

Protest: BANK CUSTOMERS ACCUSE MANAGER OF RESORTING TO CORRUPT PRACTICES

Srinagar, Jan 2: Account holders from Jammu Kashmir Bank Branch Khag in Central Kashmir's Budgam district Tuesday staged a protest here in Press Enclave Srinagar accusing Branch Manager of resorting to corrupt practices.

The customers told reporters that Manager of the Khag Bank Branch not only misbehaves with the customers but also demand bribe both in cash and kind to get any work done.

"This Branch Manager demands trout fish, walnuts

▶ See **Bank...** Pg 02

Cong questions Govt's Pak policy, slams it over Pulwama strike

NEW DELHI: Questioning the government's Pakistan policy, Congress today accused it of failing to protect military installations from cross-border terror strikes and wondered why Prime Minister Narendra Modi was silent even after five soldiers were killed in Sunday's Pulwama attack.

Raising the issue, Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia also slammed the government over National Security Ad-



viser Ajit Doval's meeting his Pakistani counterpart in

Bangkok last week, notwithstanding Pakistani authorities ill-treating the family of Indian death row prisoner Kulbhushan Jadhav in Islamabad.

"What is the government's Pakistan policy? The NSA met the Pakistani NSA in Bangkok after the family of Kulbhushan Jadhav was ill treated by Pakistan. On the other hand, cross-border attacks are going on," Scindia said during Zero Hour.

▶ See **Cong...** Pg 02

OVER 200 THROMBOLYSIS PERFORMED BY DHSK TILL DATE

Srinagar, Jan 02: Directorate of Health Services, Kashmir (DHSK) in an effort to handle cardiac emergencies at peripheral hospitals have performed thrombolysis on routine basis across Kashmir Division since 2016.

Thrombolysis is the breakdown of blood clots formed in blood vessels, using medication. It is used in ST elevation myocardial infarction, stroke, and very large pulmonary embolisms.

The department under its gap analysis initiative has been working on capacity & skill development programmes under which establishment of Kashmir Skills & Simulation Centre, Orientation of Doctors by conducting routine trainings on medical emergencies & establishment of Emergency Rooms (ERs) was possible.

▶ See **DHSK...** Pg 02

VEERI REVIEWS FUNCTIONING OF HAJ & AUQAF DEPARTMENT

Calls for protection, proper utilization of Auqaf land

JAMMU, JANUARY 02 - Minister for Revenue, Haj & Auqaf and Parliamentary Affairs Abdul Rehman Veeri, today asked the Auqaf authorities to properly utilize the Auqaf land and said that there is a need to take innovative steps to further improve the financial health of this important body.

The Minister gave these directions while reviewing the functioning of Auqaf Department in Jammu division, here today. He also reviewed the working of State Haj Committee with regard to Haj Pilgrimage-2018.

The meeting was attended by Commissioner Secretary Revenue, Shahid Inayatullah, JMC Commissioner Ramesh Kumar, Deputy Commissioner Jammu Kumar Rajeev Ranjan, CEO SWC Raj Mohammad, EO JKSHC Syed Qamar Sajjad, Administrators of Auqaf Islamia and officials from State Haj Committee.

During the meeting, the Minister took overview of working of Auqaf Islamia and sought details from the Auqaf Administrators about income and expenditure. He also discussed future action plan for creating infrastructure on Auqaf land to further generate revenue for the organization.

Chief Executive Officer, State Wakf Council gave detailed presentation of activities being carried out by Auqaf Islamia and the details of revenue generated from the infrastructure created on their land.

The meeting was also informed about the issues confronting Auqaf Islamia especially land encroachments which is directly affecting the performance of the organization. Various issues relating JMC and district administration were discussed with JMC Commissioner and DC Jammu in detail who assured that

all the issues raised would be looked into and accordingly resolved at the earliest. "The projects initiated by Auqaf department for the betterment of people should be completed in given time and if there are any bottlenecks, they should be removed at the earliest", the Minister said adding that there should be a close coordination between Auqaf, district administration and other agencies involved in the process.

Veeri directed the Auqaf authorities to take proper possession of the Auqaf land and other assets which have been notified under Wakf Property Act to avoid encroachment of these prime properties. He called upon the concerned functionaries to adopt pro-active approach to protect the Auqaf assets across the State.

The Minister asked the concerned to prepare proper inventory of assets including land so that can be effective-



ly monitored and managed. He also asked them to submit the details of land being utilized by various government departments and other agencies.

Veeri asked Commissioner Secretary Revenue to take up the issue at concerned quarter for its early redressal.

While directing for taking steps to improve financial position of the organisation, the Minister called for regular

assessment of the Auqaf property to ensure proper revenue realization as per the market rates. He also emphasized to ensure complete transparency in the functioning of the organization.

Veeri asked the Auqaf Administrators to submit the proposals for creating public utilities in their respective jurisdiction so that people can be benefitted.

While reviewing the functioning of

State Haj Committee, the Executive Officer JKSHC briefed the meeting about the features of new Haj Policy and preparations for the Haj Pilgrimage -2018.

The meeting was informed that notification for Haj Pilgrimage for the year has been already issued and process of registration is under process.

Veeri sought details of quota issued to the state by Haj Committee of India for this year Hajj Pilgrimage, provision of embarkation points and other related arrangements to be put in place by State Haj Committee for smooth pilgrimage.

The Minister stressed upon the officers of SHC to ensure sensitization of pilgrims and to ensure all necessary arrangements during their pilgrimage.

EO JKSHC also raised other issues during the meeting pertaining to up gradation of infrastructure at Haj House in Srinagar.

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MEHBOOBA

Earlier, Deputy Chief Minister, Dr. Nirmal Singh; legislators, M Y Tarigami; Muhammad Shafi, Hakim Mohammad Yasin, Nawang Rigzin Jora, Sat Sharma, Er. Rasheed and Bashir Ahmad Dar also spoke on the reference and paid rich tributes to these late leaders.

Later the House stood up for two minutes as a mark of respect to these leaders.

NC

It said the issue in Jammu and Kashmir is that of a "political nature" and deserves a sustained, holistic and comprehensive political engagement.

"There is a growing disillusionment in all regions of the state which is a matter of great concern. Therefore, we reiterate our stand seeking a meaningful and result-oriented political dialogue," it said.

The NC expressed disappointment at the State Government's alleged failure to prevent the loss of civilian lives despite repeated assurances of restraint and accountability. "Recent killings of two young mothers in Kashmir during counter-insurgency operations is one such glaring example. Not only has the state government failed to prevent atrocities, it has also failed to deliver justice in such cases," it claimed.

The party claimed the State Government had little to offer apart from "rhetoric".

The NC expressed concern over the mass crackdowns and search operations where "entire villages were ransacked and civilians subjected to harassment and humiliation. These add to the alienation and anguish and need to be stopped".

It claimed the tourism industry was in crisis due to the alleged failure of the state government to ensure peace and stability.

"The state government seems solely invested in working with a specific coterie of businessmen in the state... We demand immediate and effective steps to restore the industry without further delay," it alleged.

The NC described unemployment and un-employability as "major challenges" before the state and claimed the government had failed on both counts which led to discontent among the youth which can have dangerous consequences.

It also highlighted issues of power crisis, unemployment and alleged misgovernance. The NC took a dig at the government for its alleged failure to ensure the availability of essential commodities and rations to the people.

BUDGET

democracy

The highlighting feature of the long Assembly session would be when State Finance Minister Haseeb Drabu would present the budget on January 11. Interestingly it would be Drabu's 4th consecutive budget and the first after the implementation of GST regime in the State and country last year.

Meanwhile, Legislative Assembly speaker Kavinder Gupta has sought the cooperation of political parties for smooth conduct of budget session, which would end on February 10.

MIR

"Mehboob Iqbal in addition to his responsibility will hold the charge of District President Doda till further orders," said the party vice president Sartaj Madni, in a statement. "Peer-zada Mansoor Hussain shall be in charge central Kashmir."

SOCIAL

door neighbor to our college friend living at North Pole, get the latest news even from Mars however this is little good than the more harm Social Media is doing to our society.

It may appear that social media brings people together across continents but in reality it's creating more isolation among the users. In a study published in 2016 by Swansea University (Public Research University at Wales, UK) "people experienced the psychological symptoms of withdrawal when removed from social media.

As people spend increasing amounts of time on social media, they experience less face to face interaction which makes them more dependent on devices". And it can lead to physical, mental, psychological problems like depression, anxiety, somatic complaints and many others.

Besides isolation people get caught in the delusion that social media will help them to cope up and fight their problems which is not although true. And even after that they keep coming back to social media taking as a remedy to their issues.

"Many patients who come with various psychological problems have agreed using more apps than others to chat with people and make social media friends which doesn't even help them a bit instead makes their problems more aggravated", said Dr Asif Iqbal.

Many more negative effects of social media may be:

- Encouraging poor grammar and spelling.
- Allowing the spread of misinformation: fake news.
- Online predators.
- Cyber bullying.

- Decreasing productivity at office places as workers keep on checking their accounts.

- Can lead to jealousy as people sometimes post the stories of their success and achievements.

- People start comparing their lives with others.

It's the responsibility of the individuals to use social media carefully and the duty of parents to monitor their children.

DGP

Kashmir Police and other security forces have been appealing the local militants to "surrender and join back mainstream".

The videos of the families of local militants also went viral on the social networking sites, appealing their dear ones to join them again.

The Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti had also asked the police personnel to ensure the surrender of more militants. She had also announced doubling the reward money for those who get militants to surrender.

WAKF

other parts of Persia.

Muslim Wakf Board, which has the unique distinction of being second largest asset rich body in Jammu and Kashmir after the State government, and is the custodian of these 47 holy shrines in the Kashmir Valley. WAKF Board gets tremendous income from the Nazar o Niyaz (Donations) made by the devotees visiting these sacred shrines with unflinching faith.

Sane voices are grieved over the fact that despite generating great income one fails to witness any inspiring work done by the WAKF Board.

Neither there are any quality hospitals build by WAKF and to add to woes educational institutes under it fail to impress. Even the fire controlling mechanism of the WAKF with reference to managing of revered shrines are not in healthy shape as revealed by past unfortunate incidents.

Ghulam Muhammad Bhat, a Devotee states - "The organizations like WAKF Board have not performed upto expectations and have thus failed to achieve the desired results .WAKF Board has failed to contribute impressively in any of the sectors be it health or education sector. Despite possessing impressive wealth and resources the contributions of WAKF have not been that many .The state govt should try to improve the working of WAKF .In quiet opposite to the contributions made by the WAKF, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board has made significant contributions.

POLICE

Shopian and Aamir Ahmad of Safapora Ganderbal, have duped them by providing fake certificates and had also promised them government jobs.

"The police registered an FIR 42/2017 U/S 420, 468, 471 and subsequently started investigations into the case," he said.

During the course of investigation, both Bhat and Ahmad were arrested. "A third person involved in the racket, identified as Aashiq Ahmad Jugoo of Srinagar was also apprehended," said the official.

He said the investigation was on to arrest more people involved in the case.

SHOPS

dozen shops at General Bus Stand (GBS) Sopore in the wee hours of this morning.

According to the KNS correspondent, Iqbal Amin, the reports said that the fire broke out from the poultry shop of Manzoor Ahmad Khan and spread to the nearby shops at about 5.30 am today, resulting in damage to one restaurant and one dozen shops worth lakhs.

However, the fire tenders rushed to the spot and doused the flames.

The officials said that the cause of fire is said to be an electric shot circuit.

The shops damaged in mysterious blaze belonged to Abdul Rashid Khan, Manzoor Ahmad Khan, Abdul Satar Dent-hoo, Mansoor Ahmad Sheikh, Mushtaq Ahmad Lara, Ghulam Hassan Ganaie, Khursheed Ahmad Lone, Mohd Akbar Ganaie, Waseem Ahmad Gazi, Bashir Ahmad Khan, Mohd Amin Moon, and Mohd Altaf Tara and choice point restaurant of Liyaqat Khan.

The locals as well as the traders of Sopore have appealed the district administration to provide compensation to the fire affected businessmen.

DOCTORS

is favored instead of focusing on his/her job remains at the beck and call of those who have favored him/her.

Dr Nisar said the practice of favoritism has ruined the health department which is in a sorry state of affairs. It has been plagued by lobbyism and indiscipline. There is no work culture and patient care is a forgotten entity.

He said the peripheral health care is in complete mess due to "mismanagement" and patients suffer the consequenc-

es. Patients end up going to tertiary care hospitals even for basic health needs.

"While in other parts, primary health care has reduced sickness and fatalities, but in Kashmir it has failed to deliver and meet patients' needs," said Dr Nisar

He said we still have outbreaks of infective diseases like typhoid, cholera and hepatitis due to disorganized peripheral health system. The deliveries in peripheries are conducted in extremely unhygienic conditions which is responsible for high maternal and infant mortality. There is epidemic of hypertension, diabetes and cancer because of non-implementation of concept of population-centric primary care.

BANK

and almonds, apple boxes, pulses from the customers. For a subsidy case, he demands 10% share and 10 kg walnuts," the protesting customers alleged.

The protesters said that the said Branch Manager is devoid of ethics and lack manners. "He doesn't know how to treat customers," they said.

"We appeal Jammu Kashmir Bank authorities to take cognizance of the matter and get the said Branch Manager transferred from Khag Budgam," they told news agency CNS.

Some of the account holders who were part of the protest include Ghulam Hasan Sofi, Javaid Ahmed Bhat, Ajaz Ahmed Sofi and Abdul Hamid Shiekh. "We are not scared. Please mention our names in the news report. We are witness to his shoddy deals," they said.

CONG

A Pakistani national security division official was quoted by Dawn newspaper as saying that a meeting between Pakistan NSA (Retd) Lt Gen Nasser Khan Janjua and India's Ajit Doval took place on December 27 in Thailand.

On the Pulwama attack, Scindia accused the government of failing to put in place security measures to protect sensitive defence installations even though there were similar terror strikes on military bases in the recent past including in Uri, Udhampur and Pathankot.

"When people were celebrating (the new year), Pakistan-sponsored terrorist attacked a CRPF camp in Pulwama. Five soldiers laid down their lives. The soldiers are sacrificing their lives protecting the country but the government does not look serious in protecting them," Scindia said.

He also wondered why the Prime Minister was maintaining "total silence" over it.

"There have been a series of terror attacks on our military installations in the last couple of year. A committee by Lt Gen (retd) Philip Campose had suggested measures to strengthen security at defence installations. But the government is in deep slumber," said Scindia.

In a pre-dawn strike, five CRPF men were killed and three others injured when heavily-armed terrorists stormed the camp of the paramilitary force at Lethpora in Pulwama district on December 31. The attack was claimed by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Scindia also attacked BJP MP Nepal Singh for his reported comments that army jawans should expect death because of the profession they are in.

Singh, who represents Rampur constituency in Uttar Pradesh, had reportedly said "these things happen" replying to a question about deaths of security personnel in the attack.

Rebutting Scindia's charges, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ananth Kumar accused the Congress of trying to play politics over a sensitive issue.

"We had carried out the surgical strikes. We killed around 200 terrorists in the last three years. The Congress should not play politics over a sensitive issue," Kumar said.

Scindia also asked why the government failed to prevent the attack when there was intelligence input about it.

Making a statement, Minister of State for Home Hansraj Ahir said the whole country is mourning the death of five CRPF personnel and the Government was taking serious steps to prevent such attacks. (AGENCIES)

DHSK

Timely thrombolysis in case of STEMI (Heart Attack) patients is of utmost significance and DHSK till now have performed 200 thrombolysis in various Emergency Rooms of peripheral hospitals which includes 115 at District Hospital Anantnag, 43 at District Hospital Pulwama, 25 at District Hospital Baramulla & 12 at District Hospital Leh under the supervision of well-trained ER staff.

In order to extend the level of cardiac emergency care to remote areas DHSK has launched "Save Heart Initiative" which aims to minimise loss of time in STEMI patients and encourage timely thrombolysis even at the distant area and at Sub District Hospital(SDH) levels so that myocardium is saved and post MI(Heart Attack) complications and deaths are reduced.

The initiative has started imparted training, sensitising and confidence building of medical officers so that they can handle cardiac emergencies without delays, hence saving

precious lives. This initiative has linked via network most of the specialists in Health Services and Cardiac Experts of tertiary care centres who are accessible for opinions and advise in complicated scenarios 24x7. In addition the department under this initiative is helping to treat many fatal cardiac disorders and arrhythmias in all districts and remote hospitals.

The directorate under this initiative has started performing thrombolysis at SDH level also which in itself is a big achievement. Since its launch, thrombolysis have now been performed at DH Bandipora, DH Handwara, DH Shopian, SDH Pampore, SDH Sopore and will include all major & select SDH institutes in Phase 1 of initiative.

It is pertinent to mention that Kashmir Skills and Simulation Centre (KSSC)-Trauma and Emergency management program was adjudged as one of the best practice nationally at 4th National Summit on Good, Replicable and Innovative Practices in Public Healthcare System in India, Indore, MP dated July 07/2017 and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India(MoHFW,GoI). MoHFW has already directed various states to visit Kashmir so to inculcate this Trauma/Cardiac Emergency Programme in their peripheral & rural hospitals.

RASHEED

Huriyat leaders and businessmen, continuous detention of Masrat Alam, Qasim Faktoo and others, fake Judicial and magisterial probes, undermining the authority of state at the hands of centre, talks between five militant commanders and the centre, UN resolutions, Shimla, Tashkand and Lahore agreements, mass uprisings from time to time, brutal use of force at the hands of security forces, the communal agenda of current Government in state and centre, discrimination with majority community in various recruitments, the illogical border recruitment in police, migration of Jamat-i-Islami workers during militancy, recent killings of Mysara, Ruby Jan and Asif, becoming of sixteen year youth a fidayeen, nepotism and corruption by bureaucrats and ministers, state oppression and terrorism at the hands of security agencies and all other failures of the state and central Govt. at political and developmental fronts.

Er. Rasheed reminded Governor of the fact that New Delhi is using all tactics to stop people from telling truth but said that there should be no confusion that the ongoing resistance in J&K is neither creation of Pakistani agencies nor a struggle of an individual or an amalgam but people on both the sides of LOC want implementation of UN resolutions.

Er. Rasheed accused New Delhi of communalizing, criminalizing and commercializing Kashmir issue and said that it should be a matter of shame for the state where people get perks, privileges and promotions in the name of killing militants.

He accused Mehbooba Mufti of being like a rubber stamp and said that National Conference has always acted as collaborator and is mother of all evils. Er. Rasheed asked Governor to explain that if New Delhi voted in favour of Palestinians at UN but doesn't implement UN resolutions on Kashmir, shouldn't it be enough to understand New Delhi's dual face.

Er. Rasheed confronted Governor N. N. Vohra and said that he has no authority to give sermons on peace for the reason that New Delhi has failed to do justice with people of J&K by avoiding resolution to dispute and killing Kashmiris mercilessly.

Er. Rasheed asked Governor to explain why Kashmiri Pandits should be given huge job packages and rest of the unemployed youth forced to suffer in the name of SRO 202 and other draconian laws. He said that Kashmiris are not India's enemies but it is New Delhi forcing to give every small or big issue a communal twist, so that world community gets misled.

Er. Rasheed questioned Governor about operation All Out and said that if sixteen year old kids are forced to become militants, one can understand better that how security agencies are operating.

Er. Rasheed while confronting governor reminded him of the fact that while Govt. leaves no stone unturned to provide all facilities to Amarnath Yatries but has been using curbs and restrictions on the religious freedom of majority community. He said that if Govt. truly believes people are with the main stream parties then resistance leaders including Geelani Sahab, Mirwaiz, Yaseen Malik and others should be allowed to visit every nook and corner of the state.

Er. Rasheed also sought immediate release of those booked by NIA and said that NIA is being used as a tool to suppress the voice of Kashmiris.

Rasheed accused New Delhi of making Kashmir a battle field and a graveyard of innocents and said that the heaven on earth has been made a hub of conspiracies. He reminded Governor of the fact that state used to have its own president and Prime Minister and New Delhi should understand that protecting Article 35-A, Article 370 and other related articles are not any favour to Kashmiris but the constitutional guarantees given to them at the time of temporary instrument of accession.

Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi inaugurates online portal 'NARI' for women empowerment

New Delhi, January 02: In a path breaking initiative to empower women, the Minister of Women & Child Development, Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi inaugurated an online portal NARI in New Delhi today. Developed by the Ministry of Women & Child Development, the portal will provide women citizens with easy access to information on government schemes and initiatives for women. Further to provide a platform for NGOs and Civil Societies to interact with the Ministry of Women & Child Development, e-Samvad portal has also been developed which was inaugurated by the WCD Minister today. The Minister of State for Women & Child Development, Dr. Virendra Kumar was also present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi said that for the first time ever since Independence, women of the country will be able to access information about benefits being provided to them by the Government. The portal contains information

about schemes being run by both Central as well as the States Governments. The WCD Minister also gave an overview of the agenda of the WCD Ministry in the current year 2018. The Minister said that the new National Nutrition Mission will be launched in January, 2018 and will be operationalized in 315 districts across the country. About 50.7 lakhs women will be given Conditional Cash Transfer under maternity benefit scheme Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) this year, the Minister explained. The bill on Trafficking, which has been referred to the GOM, will be finalised and presented in the Parliament in the Budget Session. Smt. Maneka Sanjay Gandhi said that the deadline mandated by the Supreme Court for registration of Child Care Institutions expired on 31.12.2017. There will be very sharp focus on linking of the Child Care Institutions to the adoption system in 2018.

Giving details about the panic button scheme for women in distress,

Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi said that the user trials of panic button, backed with a full real time emergency response system, will begin in Uttar Pradesh from 26th January this year. The Childline will be expanded to 500 Cities (currently in 412 cities) and Railway Childline will be expanded to 88 Railway stations (currently in 33) by March, 2018. 150 new One Stop Centres will be added in 2018 beyond 165 centres which are operating. The inter-ministerial authority on issues related to NRI marriages has already been constituted. The Law Ministry is already examining legislative amendments pertaining to this issue which will be taken up in 2018, WCD Minister explained.

The Government – both Central and State – has implemented a number of schemes & legislations for women to provide them equal rights, economic opportunities, social support, legal aid, housing etc. However, there is often a lack of awareness of these provisions and difficulties

in accessing their benefits. For example, many are unaware that One Stop Centres are available in 168 districts for women in difficult circumstances, PM Awas Yojana gives priority to registration of homes in the name of women and many State Governments offer financial support for the education of girl children. However, information related to women centric schemes/legislations are all scattered on different websites/portals.

In order to make this information more easily accessible in one place, the NARI portal summarizes over 350 government schemes and other important information for the benefit of women, with more being added every day. It provides links to the Ministries, Departments and autonomous bodies offering these schemes as well as easy access to online applications and grievance redressal.

NARI will provide information to women on issues affecting their lives. There are tips on good nutrition, suggestions for health check

ups, information on major diseases, tips for job search and interview, investment and savings advice, information on crimes and against women and reporting procedures, contacts of legal aid cells, simplified adoption procedures and much more. It will endow women with the power of information to build their life skills and facilitates them in taking full advantage of the services provided by the Government for them.

Through e-Samvad portal, NGOs and civil society can provide their feedback, suggestions, put up grievances, share best practices etc. Senior Officers within MWCD will be able to view the inputs/suggestions received for their concerned subject areas and appropriately respond to NGOs. This will help in formulation of effective policies and measures for welfare of women and children.

Empowerment and welfare of women and children is top priority of the government, NARI and e-Samvad portals are initiatives in this direction.

Introduction of Complaint Tracker in Postinfo Mobile App of India Post & issue of revised Citizens' Charter

New Delhi, January 02: With 1.5 lakh Post Offices, the Department of Posts has the most widely distributed postal network in the world. India Post had launched a Postinfo Mobile App on 11.05.2015, which is updated from time to time. Postinfo – the Citizens' centric android Mobile application of Department of Posts was developed by the Centre for Excellence in Postal Technology. This app has a number of features like tracking consignments, Post Office search, postage calculator, insurance premium calculator and interest calculator. This App of India Post can be downloaded in Android and Windows mobile phones. Five lakh customers have already downloaded the Postinfo App.

The feature of tracking of complaints registered by the customers online on Computerised Customer Care Centres has been introduced in the Postinfo App of India Post last month. This aims at facilitating the complainants to track their complaints on their mobile phones.

In addition to the above, the Department of Posts has reviewed and revised its Citizens' Charter in December 2017, which is a tool for facilitating the delivery of services to citizens with specified standards, quality and time frame etc. with commitment from the organisation to its customers. The short version of the Citizens' Charter is displayed in the post offices and the detailed version is available on the website of the Department of Posts i.e. www.indiapost.gov.in.

Profiles of 6000 artistes recorded in the database of cultural mapping of India project: Dr. Mahesh Sharma

New Delhi, January 02: The Government has launched a scheme namely 'National Mission on Cultural Mapping and Roadmap' on 29th March, 2017 with the main objectives of talent hunt as well as collection of database of artists, artisans and various art forms across the country by organizing various activities envisaged under its components. The total amount of funds allocated for its implementation is Rs. 469.404 Crores spread over a period of three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

Till date, profiles of about 6000 artistes have been recorded in the database of Cultural Mapping of India Project. Apart from the said database of Cultural Mapping of India, various programmes under the aforesaid Mission have been successfully conducted on pilot basis in five blocks viz. Govardhan & Chauri Chaura: Uttar Pradesh, Seraikella: Jharkhand, Thanesar: Haryana, and Shimoga: Karnataka whereby around 944, 654, 1208, 1315 and 2404 artistes respectively have been registered for recording in the said database of Cultural Mapping of India Project.

Raksha Mantri clears two procurement proposals

New Delhi, January 02: Raksha Mantri Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman cleared two procurement proposals here today.

The first proposal is related to procurement of 240 bombs, at a cost of Rs. 1254 cr. from M/s JSC Rosonboron Exports, Russia. These bombs, which fall under the category of Precision Guided Munitions, are used by Indian Air Force (IAF). This procurement will address the deficiency of Precision Guided Munitions in the IAF arsenal, besides enhancing the offensive capabilities of the IAF.

The second proposal pertained to procurement of 131 Barak Missiles and associated equipment, under option clause from M/s Rafael Advance Defence Systems Ltd., Israel, at a cost of Rs. 460 cr. These missiles are surface to air missiles designed to be used as a ship-borne anti-missile defence system against anti-ship missiles.

National Health Policy, 2017

New Delhi, January 02: The process of the National Health Policy, 2017 entailed wide consultations with multiple stakeholders, regional consultations, approval of Central Council of Health & Family Welfare and Group of Ministers. The Policy envisages raising public health expenditure progressively to 2.5% of the GDP by 2025. The State Governments, have also been requested to increase their budget outlay for Health. A draft implementation framework has also been devised to implement the National Health Policy, 2017. The Government has also requested all the concerned authorities for implementation of the health policy. In order to provide better health services and treatment facility to the people of the country, the Government of India has taken several steps which inter-alia include:

- Implementation of National Health Mission Free Drugs and Free Diagnostic initiative to provide essential drugs and diagnostics free of cost in public health facilities.
- Implementation of Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK), Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakaram (RBSK), Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakaram (RKS) and implementation of other National programmes like Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP), National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP), National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) etc. where free treatment is provided to patients of Tuberculosis (TB), HIV/AIDS, Vector Borne, Leprosy diseases etc.
- Decision to transform Sub-Health Centres/PHCs to Health and Wellness Centres to provide comprehensive primary care, to undertake promotive and health promotion activities.
- Screening and Management of 5 common NCDs of hypertension, diabetes, and cancers of oral, cervix and breast.
- Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme for free dialysis services to the poor in district hospitals.
- Making available tertiary health care services in the public sector through strengthening of hospitals, establishment of AIIMS institutions in the States and up-gradation of existing Government medical colleges across the country.
- Making available quality generic medicines at affordable prices to all, under 'Jan Aushadhi Scheme', in collaboration with the State Governments.
- Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) which provides for smart card based cashless health coverage on family floater basis. The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare), Smt Anupriya Patel stated this in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha.

Funds for Awareness Campaign on Mental Health

New Delhi, January 02: The Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities are an integral part of the NMHP to generate awareness among masses towards mental illness. During the year 2017-18 an amount of Rs. 75 lakhs has been allocated for various Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities under the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP). At the District level, funds upto Rs. 4 lakh are provided to each District under the District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) under the Non-communicable Diseases Flexible-pool of National Health Mission for IEC and awareness generation activities in the community, schools, workplaces with community involvement Under the DMHP various IEC activities such as awareness messages in local newspapers and radio, street plays, wall paintings etc. are undertaken by the States/UTs.

The Government has not mandated colleges/schools and educational institutions to provide Psychological Counsellors. However, to address the burden of mental disorders, the Government of India is implementing the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) since 1982. The Government is supporting implementation of the DMHP under NMHP in 517 districts of the country for detection, management and treatment of mental disorders/illness, the services include additional components like suicide prevention services, work place stress management, life skills training, counselling in schools and colleges and IEC activities for generation of awareness and removal of stigma associated with Mental Illness.

The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare), Smt Anupriya Patel stated this in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha here today.

National Policy on Domestic Workers

New Delhi, January 02: The Ministry of Labour & Employment is considering to formulate a National Policy on Domestic Workers. However, there is no time frame.

No such committee is required as a number of stakeholders workshops/meetings have been conducted.

The Ministry of Labour & Employment has invited the comments of general public on the draft National Policy on Domestic workers by putting up the salient features of the policy on the web site of the Ministry of Labour & Employment on 10/10/2017.

This information was given by Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar Union Minister of State (I/C) for Labour and Employment in written reply to a question in Lok Sabha today.

Schemes For Children Born With Low Birth Weight

New Delhi, January 02: Malnutrition including anaemia is a multifaceted, multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral problem. Malnutrition in pregnant women is one of the underlying causes of low birth weight (LBW) babies. As per Rapid Survey on Children (RSOC), 2013-14; 18.6% new-born had weight less than 2.5 Kg (out of those weighed).

Ministry of Women & Child Development is implementing Anganwadi Services under the Umbrella ICDS Scheme. Under the Scheme, supplementary nutrition is provided to Pregnant Women and

Lactating Mothers in order to bridge the nutritional gap in the intake as against the Recommended Dietary Allowances for Indians prescribed by the Indian Council for Medical Research.

Under the National Health Mission (NHM) and within its umbrella the Reproductive & Child Health Programme, following interventions are provided to the pregnant mothers for addressing malnutrition:

1. Universal screening of pregnant women for anaemia and Iron Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation.
2. Calcium Supplementation in Pregnancy.
3. Deworming in pregnancy.
4. Weight gain monitoring.
5. Counselling on nutrition, family planning and prevention of diseases.
6. Under Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK), Government of India is providing food to pregnant women during their stay at public health facility for delivery.
7. Under the National Iron plus Initiative (NIPI), iron-folic supplementation for prevention and treatment

of anaemia in a life cycle approach is provided to children, adolescents, women of reproductive age groups, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

8. Health and nutrition education through IEC & BCC to promote dietary diversification, inclusion of iron folate rich food as well as food items that promotes iron absorption.

The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare), Sh Ashwini Kumar Choubey stated this in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha here today.

SRINAGAR, JANUARY 02: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Baseer Ahmad Khan today asked the respective district administrations to reach out to the people living in far-flung and snow-bound areas of the division for addressing their problems at their doorsteps.

The Div Com said this while charging a meeting to review helicopter services being operated by Pawan Hans Limited in various areas including Leh, Kargil, Kupwara and Bandipora districts to ensure hassle-free journey of locals from snow-bound and cut-off areas.

Deputy Commissioners of Bandipora, Kupwara, Leh and Kargil participated in the meeting via video conferencing. They informed that the work on civilian helipads at Leh and Bandipora is in the final stages and is expected to be completed shortly and the administration is prepared to tackle any emergency situations and inconvenience faced by the people during winters.

Baseer Khan directed for expediting



Committed to providing hassle-free helicopter service to snow-bound areas: Div Com

Reviews functioning of Pawan Hans helicopter services in Bandipora, Kupwara, Leh, Kargil districts

the pending works, besides taking measures for creating the proper infrastructure for the convenience of passengers as well as for the safety of helicopters operating in these areas.

He also asked the concerned to work out an appropriate flight schedule, besides utilizing all available communication sources to make the operations hassle-free and to tackle emergency situations in far-flung and snow-bound areas which



Central Government Pensioners welfare association members at Community Medicine Department, GMC Sgr. Today the CGPWA Sgr. attended a medical camp at the Community Medicine Department, GMC, for getting necessary medical check up at hands of experienced doctors under the supervision of Dr. Mohammad Saleem Khan HOD community medicine. The members were attended to by experienced doctors and had an exhaustive session of interaction with the experts. This was the first step taken by the department to address to the issues of senior citizens of Kashmir in context of their health concerns.

DAILY Editorial
Time and Us
SRINAGAR J&K

IN-CHARGE CULTURE

The phrase in-charge sounds bizarre but it is a reality. The Government has adopted the in-charge culture whenever and wherever it suits it. It means putting a blue-eye person of a lower rank and seniority in charge of a higher position or rank as "temporary arrangement". However, as the saying goes, nothing is more permanent than what is temporary. Actually, it is a ploy to shower favour on chosen functionaries who are at a lower rung of the cadre. Since it becomes legally and technically difficult to show them any favour out of the way, the interested authorities have devised the short cut to success in making them in-charge of a higher post even if they are not either qualified or entitled to that.

A case in this context has been filed before the Division Bench of the State High Court. Government's order of appointing three in charge Chief Engineers has been quashed on grounds of impropriety of not promoting the qualified and deserving senior Superintending Engineers as Chief Engineers and putting the juniors in that charge. The Government's contention that placing in charge does not mean either promotion or any other benefit but is a matter of exigency is not tenable. The court decreed that this was impropriety and the Government should fill the vacant senior posts by taking recourse to the Service Rules and not indulge in the game of putting juniors in charge of higher posts.

This is a landmark decision and should become the guiding star in cases of in-charge culture. It is not only the PWD where such misuse of authority has been witnessed. In-charge culture has become pervasive in our State and is also one of the main causes of bad governance. The Government should apply the court verdict in all cases of in-charge and thus get the administration rid of dead wood. That will be a positive step towards enforcing good governance.

PLIGHT OF KASHMIRI PANDITS

► Prof. A.N.Sadhu

Even its participation into the political process is stifled owing to cumbersome procedures resulting into the negligible participation of the community in political process of the state.

Nineteenth January, 1990 will go down in the golden history of Kashmir, as the darkest day of the 20th century when the entire community of Kashmiri Pandits (the ab-origins of the valley) were forced to leave their homes and hearth and flee to destinations unknown to them. It was a march in the wilderness and a desperate struggle for survival. Exoduses of Kashmiri Pandits have been recorded in the past, as well, but the one that took place in 1990 was different. Earlier exoduses were forced by tyrant invaders who resorted to inhuman atrocities against the inhospitable populations to entrench themselves firmly in the alien lands. Part of their atrocious rule was religious bigotry but mostly they were looters and barbarians of medieval times pouncing on soft targets as wild animals. Much water had flown down the Ganges since then and a significant evolution of human society had taken place and hardly would the earth's planet expect such an upheaval in a land known as abode of saints and sufis and recognized as paradise on earth, the world over. Then why did it happen is a trouble-some question. Some stark realities can, however, not be ignored. The exodus was forced under a design being formulated outside the country but with the connivance of some sections of local population who submitted to evil designs either out of ignorance or out of a consideration, whatsoever it might have been. The entire community of KP's was under a shock and the country was clue-less. Everything seemed to have come to standstill. The frozen turbulence needed an iron hand to break the ice and let the water of humanity flow back into the river Jhellum. The challenge was formidable but it had to be faced. That the exiled community has still not been able to return shows how formidable and complex the challenge is, may be, it also is a pointer towards a willful design or weak will power or even a bankruptcy of ideas to deal with such challenges. The fact remains that the displaced community is still waiting to be repatriated to their homeland.

That three decades in wilderness have passed and no signs of reprieve are visible compels one to examine the plight of this beleaguered community who has had a distinguished past in the history of Kashmir. The plight of Kashmiri Pandits needs to be examined from different angles (viz.) economic, political, social and psychological. The economic plight of the displaced community is a mixed lot with abject deprivation, on the one hand, and a bout of affluence, on the other. The exodus besides casting vast sections of population in wilderness has also provided a vast exposure to the youth of the community and those who had the means, material and mental, both, benefitted from the exposure and reaped significant benefits from their merit and diligence. In fact a sizeable number of KP youth are the global leaders in several fields ranging from management professionals to outstanding technologists. The less privileged mostly hailing from remote areas and not having a strong educational back up from their ancestry, are still struggling to adjust to the new environs and in the process missing the bus to new economic destinations. Intellectual differentials is a natural phenomenon among humans and in this world of



competition, less intelligent miss the race and have to settle down for lesser opportunities at the local level. Unfortunately the powers, that be, did not care for these less privileged ones leaving them to become over aged for government jobs and since the non government jobs are limited, these young men and women are hard pressed to eke out a living. The absolute in-difference, casual approach and callous attitude of the government has been making their plight miserable as a result of which it has caused multiple damage to the displaced community. Economic deprivation has serious consequences on the future of the society or a part thereof. It needs immediate attention. Depriving a useful human stock of opportunities to contribute to the humanity is harsh on that human stock, of course, but is of greater disadvantage to the society as a whole.

The community that contributed significantly to the emergence of new political order in the state, stands completely marginalized on the political front. Even its participation into the political process is stifled owing to cumbersome procedures resulting into the negligible participation of the community in political process of the state. Not only is it an utter disregard to democratic system; it is equally in violation of the fundamental rights of the eligible voters whose participation in elections is stalled because of official apathy and the systemic indifference. Socially, the exodus has caused irreparable loss on several counts. The huge dispersal of the young boys and girls have shaken the age old family traditions and distanced relations and friends to the extent that even their addresses are hard to trace out. The community is losing its collective character which is important for the maintenance of identity and its distinct qualities as an ethnic group. Identity of different communities, ethnicities and other diverse sections of population is very important for the humanity on the local as well as global level. Even when Kashmiri Pandits have shown resilience and forte to fight the odds of a very serious nature, it could not escape the adverse impacts of displacement. Living in inhospitable environment under very harsh conditions impoverishes the people physically, psychologically and even emotionally. The Kashmiri Pandits will return to their zenith, some in a shorter time and some in a longer time but their collective survival with all the heritage antecedents is very essential so that the community remains glued to their rich historical past.

The Kashmiri Pandits now comprise of Sub-nuclear family units which is not good as it deprives the offspring of the elderly love and

affection as also the education based on long experiences of the family elders. Kashmiri Pandits have also to give some thought to evolve ways and means of living together at one place insulated against the external incursions relating to economic, political and security concerns.

The Kashmiri Pandits besides showing their courage should also show their understanding about the importance of staying united and forging forward collectively. Every KP is doing good work, every KP is concerned about the welfare of the community and every KP is playing a leadership role to steer his people through the difficult times. What is however, required that they should give a public expression of their united concern of strengthening and serving their people. One should not live for himself alone but for the society as well.

Communities strengthen their edifice by building economic temples and we need to do it as well. We should build a sound and stable future for ourselves and for that, may be individually or collectively we should channelize our creative entrepreneurial energies towards building the economic temples which will broaden the opportunities for gainful economic engagement of our youth. Hope and confidence, courage and judgement and a resolve to move forward is the graceful way ahead.

Marching along the time-path, is a long journey of experiences marked by ups and downs. There are lessons to be learned from the oscillating pendulum of fortunes and misfortunes as these lessons come handy in handling the peaks and troughs of life; be it at the individual level or at the collective level. In the fast changing world, the quick response to situations is warranted but not without proper thought. Materialism has its own advantages but it has to be tied to the values of human life.

The greatest scientists of the world had the last word to the humanity of nourishing and preserving the richness of spiritualism besides maintaining the family and social ethos which distinguishes mankind from the animal planet. Hard times are also testing times, and the one who emerge triumphant are the lasting assets for the human society. While in turbulence, KP's have to pass these tests. The way that KP's have lived for these years with stoicism and equanimity is commendable. Their silent voices will not go unheard nor will their deep sighs go unmet because they "also serve who only stand and wait" and stand they will.

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For a pro-people economy in 2018

► Dr Bharat Jhunjhunwala

The challenge in the New Year is to secure the welfare of our farmers. The agricultural production has increased multiple times since Independence but our farmers continue to commit suicides. Reason is that increased production has come along with a decline in prices. Oftentimes farmers are not able to even recover the cost of harvesting their produce. Last year, for example, farmers of Palanpur in Gujarat dumped potatoes on the roads because they were not able to get remunerative prices. This happens recurrently every second year with one crop or the other. Our Government is concerned about the plight of the farmers. But it is moving in the same direction that has failed over the yesteryears. Thus, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has assured that every field will get water. Assumption is that increased irrigation and consequent increased production will beget higher incomes for the farmers and secure their welfare. But that is not happening because increased production is coming along with lower prices and lower incomes for the farmers.

This strategy of increasing irrigation is also creating a host of environmental problems. Our rivers are dying because of the heavy abstraction of water. Almost all the water of the Yamuna is withdrawn at Hathnikund Barrage, all the water of the Ganga is removed at the Narora Barrage, and all the water of the Narmada is removed at Sardar Sarovar Dam for supplying water to the farmers. Almost no water of the Krishna, Godavari and Cauvery Rivers is reaching the sea. Our rivers are dead. They are no longer supporting fisheries. Lakhs of fishermen have lost their livelihoods and taken to other vocation. The rivers are not carrying sediments to the coasts. These sediments build and protect our coasts. As a result our shorelines at the mouths of the Krishna, Narmada and Ganga Rivers are receding. We are "eating" our land in the form of irrigation. The increased irrigation from canals is not leading to a corresponding increase in food grain production, however. Farmers are wasting much of the canal water. Charges for canal irrigation are collected on the basis of the area irrigated irrespective of the number of irrigations used. This leads to the farmers using

excessive irrigation as they do not have to pay additional monies for the same.

The second environmental problem created by irrigation is that of depletion of groundwater. The State Governments are providing electricity to the farmers virtually free. This encourages the farmers to make excessive use of irrigation. That is depleting our groundwater aquifers to depths as much as 2000 feet at some places. Farmers are using increasing amounts of electricity to pump out the same amount of water.

The twin problems facing our agricultural sector, therefore, are decline in prices and overuse of irrigation. Optimal use of irrigation requires that farmers be charged for water on volumetric basis—both for tube well and canal irrigation. But that will lead to increase in the cost of cultivation. Therefore, the Minimum Support Price (MSP) will have to be suitably enhanced. These two steps will ensure the welfare of the farmers and also save our rivers and conserve our groundwater.

The difficulty in increasing the MSP is that the price of food grains in the market will increase and that will hit the urban rich and poor alike who live

off food bought from the markets. An alternative would be to provide area-based direct subsidy to the farmers. The United States and many developed countries provide such subsidies to their farmers. Every farmer can be given a direct transfer in cash. The Union Government provided a subsidy of Rs 124,419 crores to the Food Corporation of India in 2015-16. At present this would be approximately 150,000 crores. I reckon the subsidies given on electricity and canal irrigation by the Union and State Governments together would be around Rs 200,000 crores per year. This amount of Rs 350,000 crores can be distributed to the approximately 10 crore farmers @ Rs 35,000 per farmer per year. Then it would be possible to charge the farmers for water used on volumetric basis because the minimum income of the farmer would be assured. We need a radical solution to the farmers' problem. Repeated loan waivers are not a solution.

The second challenge of 2018 is to deal with the dislocation created by the Goods and Service Tax (GST). The problems associated with implementation are being fast dealt with. But the struc-

tural problem of small versus large businesses remains unattended. The GST makes it possible for large businesses to sell their goods across the country with ease. A potato chip manufacturer of Nagpur can now supply his goods seamlessly across the country. The smaller snack maker of Haridwar can no longer survive this onslaught. Secondly, the cost of compliance—filling monthly or quarterly returns—is high for the small businesses. The large businessmen I have spoken with have found no difficulty in transiting to the GST because they have a team of in-house accountants and computer operators. The small businesses however find it troublesome to comply with the regulations. This disadvantage to the small businesses is shifting the manufacturing activity from the labour-intensive informal sector to the capital-intensive organized sector. In the result the incomes of the informal sector are falling and the economy is growing at a slow rate. However, the share markets are booming because big companies are having a free run in the economy. Thus a report of the State Bank of India rightly said that the slow growth

rate of the economy was due to structural problems, and not due to problems of implementation of GST.

The challenge of 2018 is to revive the income and demand from the ground. It is clear that the reliefs granted to the small businesses in the present GST framework—such as the composition scheme—have not proven adequate to protect the informal sector. The solution is to reinstate the reservations for small industries. The Government could require all Departments and Public Sector Undertakings to buy selected items only from the small industries. The Composition Scheme in GST puts the small industries at a disadvantage because they cannot seek refund or pass on the GST paid on the inputs to their customers. The street corner tea stall cannot pass on the GST paid on rail travel to the purchaser of his goods. It is necessary to allow the small businesses to take refunds of GST paid on the inputs used by them.

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Sushma Swaraj to visit Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore

As India marks 25 years of its partnership with Asean and in keeping with its Act East Policy, external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj will visit Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore from January 4-8, it was announced on Tuesday.

According to a statement issued by the external affairs ministry, Sushma Swaraj will visit Thailand on January 4-5 during the course of which she will hold a meeting with Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs Don Pramudwinai.

"All aspects of bilateral relations with Thailand will be discussed with particular focus on political, defence and economic ties and on further enhancing India's engagement with Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries," the statement said, adding that Thailand would assume the role of coordinator country for India-Asean relations in the middle of this year.

During her Indonesia visit from January 5-6, Sushma Swaraj will co-chair the fifth meeting of the India-Indonesia Joint Commission with her Indonesian counterpart Retno Marsudi.

The Ministers will also inaugurate the second meeting of the Asean-



India Network of Think Tanks. She will also call on Indonesian President Joko Widodo and have other official engagements, including an interaction with representatives of the Indian community.

The Indian Minister also meet the new Secretary General of Asean Lim Jock Hoi, the statement said, adding:

"As the biggest country in the Asean region with the largest economy, Indonesia is an important partner for India including in trade and strategic matters. In recent times, there has been intensive engagement between the two countries bilaterally, as well

as plurilaterally."

It said the Joint Commission meeting and other engagements of Sushma Swaraj would enable the two countries to chart out the course of partnership during the year 2018.

She will visit Singapore from January 6-8 during which she will inaugurate the Regional Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) of Asean countries on January 7. The theme of this year's event is "Ancient Route, New Journey: Diaspora in the Dynamic Asean-India Partnership".

Sushma Swaraj will have bilateral meetings with the leaders in

Singapore and also interact with PIO delegations from Asean countries, who will be participating in the PBD.

According to the statement, the Regional PBD is a large scale event covering a wide range of sectors including political relations, economic ties and investment, tourism and culture, connectivity, start-ups and science and technology.

"PIO delegations from all Asean countries, including ministers, eminent personalities, business and socio-political leaders are participating in the event," the statement said.

On all three legs of her visit, Sushma Swaraj will share with her interlocutors relevant information about the forthcoming Asean-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi on January 25 which marks 25 years of the establishment of Dialogue Partnership between India and the 10-nation regional bloc.

A series of events has been organized by the External Affairs Ministry over the last year to celebrate this jubilee in different Indian cities and also Asean countries, which will culminate with the Summit in New Delhi. India has also invited the leaders of the Asean countries for the Republic Day parade this year.

Hindu Mahasabha calls for bandh in Rajasthan town over disputed site

More than 40 protesters were arrested and 600 were rounded up after violence unleashed in Bundi town of Rajasthan by right wing activists over a disputed site, police said on Tuesday, even as the Hindu Mahasabha has called for a bandh there.

Meanwhile, Kota Range IG Vishal Bansal was in Bundi on Tuesday to monitor the situation. Bansal reached Bundi after the situation worsened.

Internet services in the town remained suspended on Tuesday in the wake of violence which erupted in the town on Monday. Section 144 is also being maintained in the town till further orders.

The Hindu Mahasabha has called for a bandh in the town on Tuesday to protest "police atrocities" on its members.

Speaking to IANS, a senior police officer informed that 41 protesters have been arrested so far while around 600 protesters have been rounded up since Monday over the violence.

MP OM Birla also visited the location to monitor the situation and said that peace should be maintained in the town.



Hindu organisations have called for a pooja on a disputed site in Mandhata situated chhatri on Tiger Hills. They had decided to take out a religious procession in the town on Monday. However, the district administration, to maintain peace and avert any untoward incident, clamped section 144 in the town.

Flouting section 144, thousands of members of Hindu Mahasabha marched to the disputed site, forcing police to resort to lathicharge which left many people, including BJP workers, injured.

Chander Prakash Kaushik, president, Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, speaking to IANS, criticised the lathicharge by police and accused the BJP government of "working with vote bank interest".

Doctors call off strike after govt sends medical bill to standing committee

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Tuesday called off its 12-hour shutdown of outpatient department services at all private hospitals across the country after the government agreed to send the National Medical Commission Bill, 2017, to a standing committee of Parliament amid protests by doctors.

Facilities at hospitals across the country were partially hit on Tuesday as thousands of doctors went on a strike to protest the bill seeking to replace the Medical Council of India with a new body. The bill called "anti-people and anti-patient" seeks to replace the statutory body for medical education besides allowing practitioners of alternative medicines, such as homoeopathy and Ayurveda, to practice allopathy after completing a bridge course. It was tabled in the Lok Sabha on Friday.

"We have called off the 12-hour strike as we have just been informed that the government has agreed to our



demands and has sent the bill to a standing committee," KK Aggarwal, former president of IMA, told IANS.

While private hospitals in other states followed the IMA's call to keep OPDs shut for 12 hours, the national capital saw a mixed response. Several big corporate hospitals, including Apollo, BLK Super Speciality and Sir Ganga Ram among dozen others, preferred to keep their OPDs operational.

Doctors at Kerala's state-run medical colleges kept away from the outpatient department (OPD) for an hour from 8-9am and from 9am to 10am

at state-run hospitals but emergency services were not affected.

HN Ravindra, the president of the IMA's Karnataka chapter, said there was a good response to the strike call from private hospitals in the state but a few corporate hospitals in Bengaluru like Apollo, Fortis and Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) were functioning normally.

The strike did not disrupt operations at Mumbai's private hospitals. While some hospitals asked doctors to attend to patients with existing appointments, at other hospitals,

only a few chose to remain absent from the OPDs. The emergency services went as scheduled.

Parliamentary affairs minister Ananth Kumar informed the Lok Sabha that the bill was sent to a standing committee of Parliament on Tuesday after a request from several opposition parties.

He also urged the Speaker to instruct the committee to give its report before the budget session of Parliament.

Speaker Sumitra Mahajan said that while a parliamentary panel gets at least three months to look into a bill since this bill was being sent to a panel for the second time, the report can come before the budget session.

The IMA had said that the bill will "cripple" the functioning of medical professionals by making them completely answerable to the bureaucracy and non-medical administrators.

The bill sought to replace the MCI with a National Medical Commission.

India cherishes partnership with Lesotho: President Kovind

Asserting India's commitment for Lesotho's development, President Ram Nath Kovind on Tuesday thanked the country for its support at multilateral bodies, including Justice Dalveer Bhandari re-election to the International Court of Justice, according to an official statement.

Welcoming King Letsie III and Her Majesty Queen Masenate Mohato Seeiso of Lesotho at Rashtrapati Bhavan, Kovind said India and Lesotho share close and cordial ties.

"India cherishes its partnership with Lesotho. India is strongly committed to its developmental partnership with Lesotho. We have established an IT centre in Lesotho and look forward to its success in training and skilling youth," he said.

The president appreciated Lesotho for its continuous support to India's candidature in multilateral bodies.

He specially thanked



Lesotho for its support to Neeru Chadha at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), Judge Dalveer Bhandari at the ICJ and for India's re-election to the executive board of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO),

the statement issued by Rashtrapati Bhavan said. Judge Bhandari was re-elected to the world court in November last year.

The president said India has extended a Line of Credit for setting up a vocational training centre at Maseru to train Lesotho's women

and youth. He noted that India's capacity building partnership with Lesotho under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programmes and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarship scheme is progressing well.

Coal scam: Delhi high court stays three-year jail term of Madhu Koda

The Delhi High Court stayed on Tuesday a trial court order awarding three-year jail term to former Jharkhand chief minister Madhu Koda in a coal scam case till January 22, by when it has also sought response of the CBI on his appeal challenging the conviction and sentence.

Justice Anu Malhotra also stayed the order imposing a fine of Rs 25 lakh on Koda, who was present in the court, and granted him interim bail till the next date of hearing this month with a direction that he will not leave the country.

The order came on Koda's plea seeking suspension of sentence and regular bail till pendency of his appeal before the high court.

Koda, who was held guilty of corruption and conspiracy in allocation of a Jharkhand-based coal block to Kolkata-based company Vini Iron and Steel Udyog Ltd (VISUL), also challenged the December 13 and 16, 2017 orders of conviction and sentence respectively, which was admitted by the high court.

The former chief minister was granted bail by a trial court till January 18.

In his appeal, Koda said the trial court order holding him guilty was bad in law.

The appeal and stay on the fine was opposed by CBI counsel Taranum Cheema. The agency, however,



did not oppose interim bail granted to Koda till January 22.

The high court had on December 22, 2017 stayed a trial court order imposing a fine of Rs 50 lakh on VISUL in the case till the next date of hearing.

The high court on December 20 had sought response of the CBI on an appeal by Koda's close aide Vijay Joshi against the trial court's order awarding him three years jail term in the coal scam case.

All the pleas filed so far in connection with this matter will be heard on January 22. Koda, ex-coal secretary HC Gupta, AK Basu, former Jharkhand chief secretary, and Joshi were award-

ed jail terms of three years for indulging in corrupt practices and hatching a criminal conspiracy in the allocation of Rajhara North coal block in Jharkhand to the Kolkata-based company.

While sentencing the convicts, the special court had said "white collar crimes" were more "dangerous" to the society than ordinary crimes.

It had imposed fines of Rs 50 lakh, Rs 25 lakh and Rs 1 lakh on VISUL, Koda and Gupta respectively in the UPA-era coal scam. Rs one lakh fine was also imposed on Basu.

The convicts were granted statutory bail for a period of two months

to enable them to file appeals in the Delhi High Court.

So far, four out of 30 coal block allocation scam cases have been decided by the special court, including this order, and 12 people and four companies have been held guilty.

The convicts were tried for offences under sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy) read with 420 (cheating) and 409 (criminal breach of trust by public servants) of the IPC and under provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

While the offence of cheating carries a maximum punishment of seven years jail term, criminal breach of trust by public servants entails a maximum punishment of life imprisonment.

The CBI had said that the firm had applied for allocation of Rajhara North coal block on January 8, 2007. It had said that although the Jharkhand government and the steel ministry did not recommend VISUL's case for coal block allocation, the 36th Screening Committee recommended the block to the accused firm.

The CBI had said Gupta, who was chairman of the screening committee, had concealed facts from former prime minister Manmohan Singh, who at that time headed the coal ministry too, that Jharkhand had not recommended VISUL for allocation of a coal block.

Rajya Sabha creates record, completes entire Zero Hour agenda

The Rajya Sabha made a record on Tuesday of sorts as it took up all the Zero Hour issues and special mentions listed in the agenda for that period, chairman M Venkaiah Naidu said.

"The Rajya Sabha today made a history. For the first time, all Zero Hour submissions, all Special Mentions were fully completed," said Naidu amid thumping of desks by members in the House of Elders.

Naidu said this record depended on the cooperation of the members.

"Your cooperation is good, so my operation was very smooth...that's why the House was able to set this record," he said.

The Chairman expressed hope that in future too, the members would not waste time and stick to the schedule.

Before taking up the Question Hour, he also suggested that the ministers concerned should go through the Zero Hour submissions and Special Mentions and reply to the members at the earliest as it would enhance productivity of the House.

Uproarious scenes and adjournments have been witnessed on several occasions in the past two weeks due to various reasons during the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament.

In all, the House took up all the 10 listed and one additional Zero Hour submissions today.

The members also paid obituary reference to a former member of the House, R Margabandu.

In his Zero Hour mention, Naresh Agrawal (SP) highlighted the "plight" of mediaper-



sons, particularly those working at the district level.

He said there was a trend to hire correspondents on contractual basis and there was no provision for pension or provident fund for them. Those working at the district level were paid according to the number of stories approved.

Agrawal said media supports the government and if a correspondent writes facts, pressure is built to get them removed.

The SP member also said nine prominent journalists, including Gauri Lankesh and Naveen Gupta, were killed.

He also alleged that mediapersons who were injured in the violence while covering court proceedings relating to self-styled preacher Ram Rahim in Panchkula were not paid for their hospital treatment.

Senior Congress member T Subbarami Reddy highlighted "frequent" close shave at various airports involving aircraft.

In his Special Mention, Motilal Vora (Congress) raised the issue of infant deaths in hospitals of Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat among others.



Get a good night's rest:

Poor sleep may put you at high risk of Alzheimer's disease

Chronic poor sleep may contribute to cognitive decline, according to a study that shows wakeful brain produces more of the Alzheimer's protein amyloid beta than its waste-disposal system can handle.

Levels of the protein rise, potentially setting off a sequence of changes to the brain that can end with dementia, researchers said.

"This study is the clearest demonstration in humans that sleep disruption leads to an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease through an amyloid beta mechanism," said Randall Bateman, from the Washington

University School of Medicine, St Louis in the US. "The study showed that it was due to overproduction of amyloid beta during sleep deprivation," Bateman said.

For the research published in the journal *Annals of Neurology*, the scientists studied eight people aged between 30 to 60 years with no sleep or cognitive problems. The participants were assigned randomly to one of three scenarios: having a normal night's sleep without any sleep aids; staying up all night; or sleeping after treatment with sodium oxybate, a prescription medication for sleep disorders.

Sodium oxybate increases slow-wave sleep – the deep, dreamless phase of sleep that people need to wake up feeling refreshed. Each scenario occurred during 36 hours of monitoring, starting in the morning and continuing through the afternoon of the following day. The researchers took samples of the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord every two hours to monitor how amyloid beta levels change with time of day and tiredness.

All eight participants returned four to six months later to undertake a second scenario, and four people completed all three. Studying the same

people under different conditions provides the statistical power to detect changes in amyloid beta levels. Amyloid beta levels in sleep-deprived people were 25 to 30% higher than in those who had slept the night through.

After a sleepless night, amyloid beta levels were on par with the levels seen in people genetically predisposed to develop Alzheimer's at a young age. "This information could help us figure out how to reduce amyloid beta deposition over time in people whose sleep is chronically disrupted," said Brendan Lucey, from the Washington University School of Medicine.

Trying to lose weight? This skin patch may help reduce body fat

Researchers have developed a new type of skin patch that may reduce body fat and obesity by turning energy-storing white fat into energy-burning brown fat. According to the researchers, brown fats are found in babies and they help to keep the baby warm by burning energy. As humans grow older, the amount of brown fat lessens and is replaced with visceral white fat.

"What we aim to develop is a painless patch that everyone could use easily, is unobtrusive, and yet affordable. Most importantly, our solution aims to use a person's own body fat to burn more energy, which is a natural process in babies," said Chen Peng, professor at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

The new type of skin patch contains hundreds of micro-needles which are loaded with the drug Beta-3 adrenergic receptor agonist or another drug called thyroid hormone T3 triiodothyronine. When the patch is pressed into the skin for about two minutes, these micro-needles become embedded in the skin and

detach from the patch, which can then be removed. As the needles degrade, the drug molecules then slowly diffuse to the energy-storing white fat underneath the skin layer, turning them into energy-burning brown fats.

Published in the journal *Small Methods*, this approach could help to address the worldwide obesity problem without resorting to surgical operations or oral medications. In laboratory experiments conducted by the researchers, it was shown that the patch could suppress weight gain in mice that were fed a high-fat diet and reduce their fat mass by over 30%, over a period of four weeks.

"With the embedded micro-needles in the skin of the mice, the surrounding fats started browning in five days, which helped to increase the energy expenditure of the mice, leading to a reduction in body fat gain," said Xu Chenjie, assistant professor at NTU. The treated mice also had significantly lower blood cholesterol and fatty acids levels compared to the untreated mice.



This unusual use of blueberry extract in boosting cancer therapy will surprise you

Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the cervix - the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina. Researchers from the University Of Missouri-Columbia, United States explained that one of the most common treatments for cervical cancer is radiation therapy and that it not only destroys the cancer cells, but also the nearby healthy cells, which proves to be a hazard.

"For some cancers, such as late-stage cervical cancer, radiation is a good treatment option. However, collateral damage to healthy cells always occurs. Based on previous research, we studied blueberry extract to verify it could be used as a radiosensitiser," Fang said. Radiosensitisers are non-toxic chemicals that make cancer cells more responsive to radiation therapy. Previously, the team showed that resveratrol, a compound in red grapes, could be used as a radiosensitiser for treating prostate cancer. Blueberries



also contain resveratrol.

In addition to resveratrol, the blueberries also contain flavonoids - chemicals that may have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties, they explained. The team used human cervical cancer cell lines to mimic clinical treatment. The cell lines were divided into four groups - a control group, a group that received only ra-

diation, a group that received only blueberry extract and a group that received both radiation and the extract.

The results indicated that radiation therapy decreased cancer cells by approximately 20 per cent; the cell group that received only blueberry extract had a 25 per cent decrease in cancer and the biggest decline in cancer cells occurred in the radiation and

extract group, with a decrease of about 70 per cent. Fang explained that the mechanism that makes blueberry extract a radiosensitiser also reduces the abnormal explosion of cell growth. Blueberries are readily accessible and inexpensive and can be used as a natural treatment option for boosting the effectiveness of existing therapies, the researchers noted.

Addicted to cigarettes? The latest research on smoking will shock you into quitting

That smoking is damaging to your health is a fact that most of us are aware of. And yet, despite our best intentions, many are not able to kick the habit. It's not for a lack of effort though. In fact, some people repeatedly manage to break free of the habit but end up returning to the dreaded "cancer stick" after a few days or months. Here is what the latest research on quitting smoking has to say:

* Peer influence doubles smoking risk among teens.

If you want your child to not smoke or quit smoking, check their peer group. New research has found that having peers who smoke doubles the risk that non-smoking teenagers will also pick up the habit. Led by Jiaying Liu, PhD, a recent graduate from the University of Pennsylvania, the meta-analysis included 75 smoking studies covering data from 16 different countries. The team found that having friends who smoke doubles the risk that children aged 10 to 19 will start to smoke, and continue smoking.

* Increase in cigarette prices may reduce habit in elderly.

Raising cigarette prices by a dollar (INR 64) can increase the possibility of older



people quitting smoking by 20%, researchers say. "Older smokers have been smoking for a long time and tend to have lower rates of smoking cessation compared to younger populations, suggesting deeply entrenched behaviour that is difficult to change," said lead author Stephanie Mayne, a doctoral student at the Northwestern University at Evanston, Illinois.

* Smoking mild or light cigarettes puts you at greater risk of lung cancer. If you are a smoker using the so-called "light" cigarettes, for their lower levels of tar or nicotine, think twice. According to a study, you may be at an increased risk of develop-

ing a certain form of lung cancer that occurs deep in the lungs. Cigarettes labelled as lights, milds, or low-tar - also known as high-ventilation (light) cigarettes - are generally considered to have a lighter, less pronounced flavour, lower levels of tar, nicotine, or other chemicals than regular cigarettes. They are thus marketed by the tobacco industry as a "healthier" option. On the contrary, these cigarettes may have actually contributed to the rise of lung adenocarcinoma - the most common type of lung cancer, say researchers.

* Vaping may actually increase risk of cigarette smoking in youth. Vaping - touted as a tool to help smokers kick the butt - may in fact act as a gateway for young people to start smoking traditional tobacco cigarettes, a study warns. E-cigarettes may harm public health and ultimately increase the burden of cancer if their use contributes to more cigarette smoking among youth. The study led by Samir Soneji.



Moms-to-be, taking this epilepsy drug during pregnancy increases risk of oral cleft in baby

Women taking a common anti-epileptic drug during early pregnancy may have a greater chance of giving birth to a baby with an oral cleft, warns a new study. "Our results suggest that the increased risk of oral clefts is most pronounced in women taking higher doses of topiramate to treat epilepsy," said study co-author Elisabetta Paterno of Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, US. Previous research had said that women with epilepsy should plan their pregnancy and manage it properly for healthier babies.

The study, published in the journal *Neurology*, said the risk is particularly high when the drug is used in high doses. "Low doses of topiramate may also increase the risk of oral clefts but to a lesser extent," Paterno said. "We hope that this work gives important information to women and their clinicians as they determine the best course of treatment and options available to individuals," Paterno added. The findings are based on data on more than one million live births over a period of 10 years in the US.

The team examined the risk of oral clefts - including cleft palate or cleft lip - among three groups - infants born to women who had taken topiramate in their first trimester; infants born to women who had taken the drug lamotrigine (an unrelated drug used to treat bipolar disorder and epilepsy); and infants who had not been exposed to anti-epileptic medications in utero. The researchers found that the risk of oral clefts was approximately three times higher for the topiramate group than for either the lamotrigine or the unexposed group.

"Our results suggest that women with epilepsy on topiramate have the highest relative risk of giving birth to a baby with cleft lip or cleft palate, likely due to higher doses of topiramate when used for controlling seizures," said corresponding author Sonia Hernandez-Diaz of the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health.

"The best course may be to avoid prescribing high doses of topiramate to women of childbearing age unless the benefits clearly outweigh the risks," she added.

Bulk of NPAs arose out bank loans before April 2014: Arun Jaitley

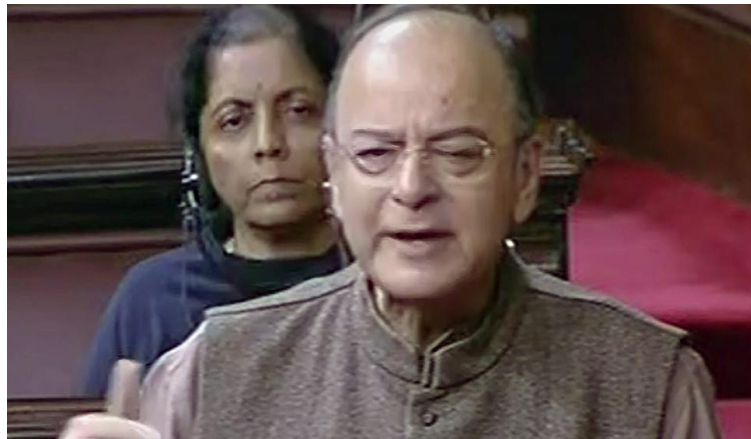
New Delhi: Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Tuesday said the bulk of non-performing assets of public sector banks have arisen out of loans disbursed before 2014, before the BJP came to power at the centre. He also attributed the rise in the quantum of the NPAs to bringing on record the losses that were not being shown by the banks in their account books.

Jaitley's statement came in response to a poser during the Question Hour in Rajya Sabha by Congress leader and former finance minister P Chidambaram, wanting to know how many loans given to banks after May, 1, 2014 have become NPAs.

"It is absolutely clear that the bulk of the NPAs today have arisen out of loans which were given prior to 1.4.2014," Jaitley said, listing aggressive lending practice and lack of risk assessment as causes for the losses.

Earlier, Samajwadi party MP, Neeraj Shekhar sought the government's reply on why the NPAs that were termed as a "scam" during the UPA's tenure had risen from Rs 2 lakh crore to Rs 9 lakh crore.

Jaitley informed the upper house that the rise in the quantum was on



account of an exercise carried out by the government while examining the NPAs and found out that several banks had extended their loans. "RBI found out that in the books these were loans, but were assets that were non-performing. Since these are not hidden anymore, the number has gone up," Jaitley said.

On the action being taken by the government to fix responsibility, Jaitley said the government is taking the necessary steps by fixing criminal cases and initiating recovery processes.

Again, in response to Shekhar's query on why the government does not waive off loans for farmers as it has done for corporate houses, Jaitley said the government has not waived off loans to corporate houses.

"Only when a loan remains non-performing after four years, and the bank feels that the chances of its recovery are slim, it changes the category of the loan. But the debtor's responsibility is to pay back remains. The bank does this provisioning to get relief in the Income Tax," he said.

The finance minister said that in

the asset quality review undertaken by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in 2015, it found that in the non-performing loans there were cases where the banks did aggressive lending, or did not do proper risk assessment and there were also cases of wilful default.

Jaitley on cryptocurrencies The finance minister also informed the Rajya Sabha that bitcoins and other forms of cryptocurrencies are not legal tender in the country and this has been the government's stated position since 2013. The government has as late as December 29 cautioned investors to be wary of virtual currencies he said.

"These (currencies) operate online and are of various kind, there are 785 virtual currencies identified world wide and 11 such in India. It functions with anonymity and within a virtual community," Jaitley said.

On the actions being taken by the government to crackdown on the use of cryptocurrencies he said, an inter-departmental committee has been set up under the chairmanship of the secretary, department of economic affairs, the report of which is awaited.

Govt can't prevent misuse of Bitcoin by terrorists: Jaitley

There is no mechanism to prevent the misuse of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin by terror groups and other anti-national elements, the government said on Tuesday, adding it was awaiting the report of an expert group on the subject.



"One of the features of cryptocurrency is that there is lack of dependence on the state. It functions with a degree of anonymity. It operates within a virtual community which is created and enjoys the trust of that virtual community," finance minister Arun Jaitley told the Rajya Sabha.

"The government is examining the matter. A Committee under the chairmanship of the Economic Affairs Department Secretary is deliberating over all issues related to cryptocurrencies to propose specific actions to be taken... Instead of taking any knee-jerk action, let's wait for the report of this committee."

He said there were 785 different types of cryptocurrencies operating worldwide.

Jaitley also clarified that there were no legal safeguards for people dealing in cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin as it was not a "lawful legal tender".

"Since December 2013, the RBI and the government have consistently maintained that this (Bitcoin) is not a lawful legal tender in India. Therefore, no legal protection for the person dealing in it is available," Jaitley said.

India's factory activity expands at fastest pace in 5 years in December: PMI

India's factory activity expanded at the fastest pace in five years in December, a private sector survey showed on Tuesday, buoyed by a rise in output and new orders, which allowed firms to raise prices.

Tuesday's data firms up views that business in Asia's third-largest economy continues to recover but also highlights risks that rising price pressures will keep the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) from slashing interest rates further.

The Nikkei Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, compiled by IHS Markit, rose to 54.7 in December from November's 52.6, marking its fifth straight month above the 50 level that separates expansion from contraction.

"India's goods-producing economy advanced on its recovery path, with operating conditions improving at the



strongest pace since December 2012," said Aashna Doshia, an economist at IHS Markit.

"Strong business performance was underpinned by the fastest expansions in output and new orders since December 2012 and October 2016, respectively. Anecdotal evidence pointed to stronger market demand from home and international markets."

The country's manufacturing sector witnessed higher

payroll figures in December while the rate of job creation rose to its highest since August 2012. The latest survey showed the new orders sub-index, a proxy for domestic demand, also rose to 56.8 in December, the highest since October 2016.

Foreign demand also expanded at its quickest pace since June.

"Challenges remain as the economy adjusts to recent shocks, but the overall upturn was robust compared to the

trend observed for the survey history. This outlook was shared by the manufacturing community as sentiment picked up to the strongest in three months amid expected improvements in market conditions over the next 12 months," Doshia added.

At the same time, stronger demand allowed firms to raise prices at the fastest pace in 10 months to make up for rising input costs, suggesting overall inflation could remain above the central bank's medium-term target of 4% in the coming month.

India's retail inflation in November breached the central bank's medium-term target of 4%, which could put pressure on it to raise policy rates in the coming months.

Minutes from the RBI's December meeting show bank members are becoming increasingly concerned about inflation.

Oil posts strongest year opening since 2014; Iran unrest pushes up crude

Oil prices posted their strongest opening to a year since 2014 on Tuesday, with crude rising to mid-2015 highs amid large anti-government rallies in Iran and ongoing supply cuts led by OPEC and Russia.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$60.61 a barrel at 0423 GMT, up 19 cents, or 0.3 percent, after hitting \$60.73 earlier in the day, their highest since June 2015.

Brent crude futures, the international benchmark, were at \$67.12 a barrel, up 25 cents, or 0.4 percent, after hitting a May 2015 high of \$67.27 a barrel earlier in the day.

It was the first time since January 2014 that the two crude oil benchmarks opened the year above \$60 per barrel. "Growing unrest in Iran set the table for a bullish start to 2018," the US-based Schork Report said in a note to clients on Tuesday.

Anti-government protesters demonstrated in Iran on



Sunday in defiance of a warning by authorities of a crackdown, extending for a fourth day one of the most audacious challenges to the clerical leadership since pro-reform unrest in 2009.

Even without the unrest in Iran, which is a major oil exporter, market sentiment was bullish.

"Falling inventories globally and strong economic growth offset the restart of the Forties pipeline and the resumption of production following a pipeline outage

in Libya," said Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at futures brokerage Oanda in Singapore.

The 450,000 barrels per day (bpd) capacity Forties pipeline system in the North Sea returned to full operations on Dec. 30 after an unplanned shutdown.

Oil markets have been supported by a year of production cuts led by the Middle East-dominated Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia. The cuts started in January

2017 and are scheduled to cover all of 2018.

U.S. commercial crude oil inventories have fallen by almost 20 percent from their historic highs last March, to 431.9 million barrels.

Strong demand growth, especially from China, has also been supporting crude.

"We would not be surprised to see a further (oil price) rise," said Sukrit Vijayakar, director of energy consultancy Trifecta.

Only rising US production, which is on the verge of breaking through 10 million bpd, is somewhat hampering the outlook into 2018.

"The higher prices are expected to stoke US shale output," O'Loughlin said.

US oil production has risen by almost 16% since mid-2016, to 9.75 million bpd at the end of last year.

However, consultancy Rystad Energy said "US crude oil production capacity has reached 10 million barrels per day."

Tax-free no more: Saudi, UAE introduce VAT in a first for the Gulf

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates introduced value-added tax from Monday, a first for the Gulf which has long prided itself on its tax-free, cradle-to-grave welfare system.

Saudi Arabia compounded the New Year blow for motorists with an unannounced hike of up to 127% in petrol prices with immediate effect from midnight.

They are the latest in a series of measures introduced by Gulf oil producers over the past two years to boost revenues and cut spending as a persistent slump in world prices has led to ballooning budget deficits.

The 5% sales tax applies to most goods and services and analysts project that the two governments could raise as much as \$21 billion in 2018, equivalent to 2% percent of GDP.

But it marks a major change for two super-rich countries where the mall is king. Dubai has long held an

annual shopping festival to draw bargain hunters from around the world to its glitzy retail palaces.

Saudi Arabia has deposited billions of dollars in special accounts to help needy citizens face the resulting rise in retail prices.

The other four Gulf states -- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar -- are also committed to introducing VAT but have delayed the move until early 2019.

None of the Gulf states levy any personal income tax and none have any plans to do so.

The International Monetary Fund has repeatedly urged Gulf states to diversify their revenues away from oil, which accounts for more than 90% of the Saudi budget and 80% in the UAE.

Both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi asked all companies with earnings of \$100,000 or more a year to register in the VAT system.

The UAE finance ministry said that VAT returns will be used "for



infrastructure development ... (to) upgrade public services ... and boost UAE economy competitiveness."

The hike in fuel duty in Saudi Arabia was the second in two years.

But it still leaves petrol prices as some of the lowest in the world. High-grade petrol rose 127% from 24 cents a litre (\$1.09 a gallon) to 54 (\$2.46), while low-grade petrol rose 83% from 20 cents a litre (91 cents a gallon) to 36.5 (\$1.66).

Duty on diesel and kerosene remained unchanged.

The introduction of VAT coupled with the increase in fuel duty is expected to bring an abrupt end to a year of negative inflation in Saudi Arabia.

Riyadh-based Jadwa Investment predicted that inflation could reach as much as five percent after the new measures.

Saudis reacted sarcastically on

social media to the new sales tax.

"They are even taking taxes on car parking. I am afraid they will next tax the air," wrote Ahmed bin Fatima.

Saudi Arabia, whose economy contracted by 0.5% last year for the first time since 2009, has introduced a raft of measures to raise revenue and cut spending as it bids to balance its books.

Last month, it cut the government subsidy on electricity supply for the second time in two years, leading to a sharp rise in bills.

Riyadh posted budget deficits totalling \$260 billion over the past four fiscal years and does not expect to balance its books before 2023.

To finance its mounting public debt, the kingdom has withdrawn around \$250 billion from its reserves over the past four years, reducing them to \$490 billion.

It has also borrowed around \$100 billion from the international and domestic markets.

Sensex ends flat in cautious trade ahead of earnings season

Reversing its initial gains, the BSE Sensex on Tuesday ended flat as caution prevailed ahead of corporate results amid soaring global crude prices and a subdued trend in European markets.

After a higher opening at 33,913.55, the Sensex advanced to hit the day's high of 33,964.14. But profit-booking towards the middle of the session erased gains completely dragging the index to a low of 33,703.37.

The 30-share barometer closed at 33,812.26, down by just 0.49 points. The gauge had lost 244.08 points in the first trading session of 2017 on Monday.

The NSE Nifty, however, ended a shade higher by 6.65 points or 0.06% at 10,442.20 after moving between 10,495.20 and 10,404.65.

The upcoming corporate result season, beginning later this week and the approaching Union Budget kept investors on their toes, who indulged in selling activity, brokers said.

Stocks failed to hold onto gains after positive core industry data. Infra sector grew at the fastest pace in more than a year at 6.8% in November 2017 on the back of robust performance in segments like refinery, steel and cement.

Also, the Nikkei India PMI data showed that Indian manufacturing activity improved at the strongest rate in five years in December driven by significant increase in new orders.

Stocks of oil marketing companies came under pressure after crude prices strengthened in global market. Brent crude futures, the international benchmark, hit \$67.27 a barrel, amid large anti-government rallies in Iran and ongoing supply cuts led by OPEC and Russia.



ONGC makes significant oil, gas discovery in Arabian Sea

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) has made a significant oil and gas discovery to the west of its prime Mumbai High fields in the Arabian Sea, oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Monday. In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sab-

ha, he said the discovery was made in the well WO-24-3 (WO-24-C) drilled west of Mumbai High fields. Though a holiday was declared for Parliament, replies to questions were posted on the Lok Sabha website.

"Based on the data gener-

ated during drilling, 9 objects/zones were identified and on testing all the objects flowed oil/gas," he said. The discovery has indicated potential in-place reserves of about 29.74 million tonnes of oil and oil equivalent gas, he said.

"The 9th object on testing

flowed oil at the rate of 3,310 barrels per day and gas at the rate of 17,071 cubic meter per day," the minister said. "This multi-layered oil and gas accumulation in this well opened up new area for exploration/development." Mumbai High, India's biggest oil field, cur-

rently produces 205,000 barrels of oil per day (just over 10 million tonnes per annum) and the new find would add to that production in less than two years' time.

ONGC is carrying out a further appraisal of the discovery and has intimated

upstream regulator the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH). The new find, which comes almost 50 years after ONGC began production in Mumbai High, will help the company maintain production levels from the basin for a longer time.

Klavan late show lifts Liverpool; struggling Stoke lose again

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool scored a goal in the fourth minute of injury time to beat Burnley 2-1 away in the Premier League, while Mark Hughes' job as Stoke City manager was looking increasingly fragile after the team's loss at home to Newcastle United on Monday.

Ragnar Klavan headed home the winning goal at Turf Moor as Liverpool earned a hard-fought victory without three of their "Fab 4" attack, with Roberto Firmino demoted to the bench and both Philippe Coutinho and Mohamed Salah declared injured.

Sadio Mane was the only survivor and he scored Liverpool's opening goal, spinning and shooting high into the net in the 61st minute.

Burnley equalised with just three minutes left as Sam Vokes flicked on and Johann Gudmundsson pounced to slot home.

But Liverpool's Dejan Lovren headed on a free-kick four minutes into stoppage-time and Estonia defender Klavan poked home from close-range.

The win lifted Liverpool provisionally level on points with third-placed

Manchester United, who were playing at Everton in the late game Monday.

Salah was missing because of a groin problem while Liverpool said Coutinho had a thigh injury, a day after Nike's website advertised Barcelona shirts with the Brazil midfielder's name on the back to intensify speculation that he might be heading to the Spanish club.

Hughes rested many of his front-line players in the 5-0 loss at Chelsea on Saturday, in an attempt to keep them fresh for the game against Newcastle. It backfired with Stoke losing 1-0.

Newcastle took a deserved lead in the 73rd minute when Ayoze Perez stabbed past Stoke goalkeeper Jack Butland from close-range.

That triggered chants for Hughes' dismissal from Stoke fans, with a 'Hughes out' banner held aloft in the stands.

Stoke have won once in their last six games and sit two points above the relegation zone.

SILVA ARRIVES AT LAST
Algeria duo Riyad Mahrez and Islam Slimani inspired Leicester City's 3-0 win over Huddersfield Town.



Claude Puel's side took the lead through Mahrez in the 53rd minute, the winger meeting Marc Albrighton's cross with a well-taken volley for his eighth goal of the season.

With Leicester striker Jamie Vardy sidelined by a groin injury, Slimani who marked only his second league start this season with his first league goal since

April — a chipped finish in the 60th minute.

Leicester's Adrien Silva came on late in the second half for his long-awaited first appearance.

FIFA rejected the 28-year-old's move from Sporting Lisbon in August when the paperwork arrived 14 seconds too late.

The Portugal midfielder finally completed his move on Monday and was cheered to the rafters when he made his first appearance at the King Power Stadium.

Albrighton's 90th minute goal capped a good afternoon for Leicester, who ended a four-match winless run, while Huddersfield were beaten for the first time in five games.

Callum Wilson's second goal in three games earned Bournemouth a 2-2 draw at south coast rivals Brighton & Hove Albion. Anthony Knockaert put Brighton ahead in the fifth minute before Steve Cook's looping header had the visitors level in the 33rd minute.

Glenn Murray restored Brighton's lead three minutes into the second half.

But Wilson rescued Bournemouth in the 79th minute with his fifth league goal of the campaign and Eddie Howe's side are now unbeaten in their last three games.

WENGER OVERTAKES FERGUSON
In the late kickoff on Sunday, Arsenal played out a frustrating 1-1 draw with West Bromwich Albion at a wet

Hawthorns to climb to fifth in the table.

The match was Arsene Wenger's 811th in charge — moving him ahead of United legend Alex Ferguson, who was at the helm for 810 matches in the Premier League era.

Arsenal looked to have sealed all three points when an Alexis Sanchez curled in a free kick from the edge of the box that deflected off the leg of James McClean, who turned his back in the defensive wall, and ricocheted in after 83 minutes. The goal was ruled to be a McClean own goal.

But a last-gasp penalty from Jay Rodriguez levelled the match at 1-1 after Calum Chambers was deemed to have handled the ball, sparking frustration on the Arsenal bench.

A furious Wenger said the awarding of the penalty was "difficult to accept," and complained about the standard of refereeing.

He also criticised the scheduling of matches over Christmas that left Arsenal with games against Crystal Palace and West Brom in a span of less than 72 hours.

Melbourne pitch rated poor by ICC after Ashes Boxing Day Test ends in draw

The Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), which hosted the Boxing Day Test between Australia and England, has officially been rated 'poor' by the International Cricket Council. The ICC's ratings have come following a report from chief match referee Ranjan Madugalle. The track drew criticism from both competing teams after Australia scored 327 and 263-4 declared in their two innings while England scored 491 in their only innings.

"The bounce of the MCG pitch was medium, but slow in pace and got slower as the match progressed," match referee Ranjan Madugalle said in his report to the ICC, reflecting the concerns of the match officials over the performance of the pitch.

"The nature of the pitch did not change over the five days and there was no natural deterioration. As such, the pitch did not allow an even contest between the bat and the ball as it neither favoured the bowlers sufficient opportunity to take wickets."

Cricket Australia (CA) has two weeks to respond to the report, the sport's governing body said in a statement. CA Chief Executive James Sutherland said CA will strive to avoid a repeat and discuss the matter with the administrators of the ground. "Such a rating is extremely disappointing for all involved," Sutherland said. "We work closely with all our venues to encourage the best possible interna-



tional cricket playing environment. We'll be taking on board advice from the ICC, players and relevant experts to work with the Melbourne Cricket

Club to ensure this rating is not repeated."

The Boxing Day Test was the last to be rated under the ICC's pitch and outfield mon-

itoring process, with a revision of the process set to come into effect from Thursday. Under the new process, if a pitch or outfield is rated as being sub-

standard, that venue will be allocated a number of demerit points, which will be active for a five-year period.

"One demerit point will be awarded to venues whose pitches are rated by the match referees as below average, while three and five demerit points will be awarded to venues whose pitches are marked as poor and unfit, respectively," the ICC said. "When a venue accumulates five demerit points, it will be suspended from hosting any international cricket for a period of 12 months, while a venue will be suspended from staging any international cricket for 24 months when it reaches the threshold of 10 demerit points." The fifth Ashes Test begins in Sydney on Thursday.

Gary Kirsten, Ashish Nehra signings by RCB signal intent for major IPL title push

In the build-up to the 2018 Indian Premier League auction, there is speculation regarding franchises and players. The question of which player will be snapped up by franchises is on everybody's mind. Royal Challengers Bangalore, captained by Indian cricket team skipper Virat Kohli, has already gotten off to a blazing start with Gary Kirsten and Ashish Nehra being appointed batting and bowling coaches, respectively.

The addition of Gary Kirsten, who helped India win the 2011 World Cup and Nehra, who played South Africa but recently retired after an 18-year India career, is great for a franchise which has all the star power but have remained the eternal bridesmaid of the IPL.

Royal Challengers Bangalore's heartbreak in the IPL is well documented. With names like Virat Kohli, Chris Gayle, AB de Villiers, KL Rahul and Yuzvendra Chahal, one would have expected domination. Instead, they lost in three finals in 2009, 2011 and 2016 and bowed out in the knock-out stages in 2010, 2015. They 'choked' in crucial league games which hurt them.

Gary Kirsten and Ashish Nehra's inclusion is a step in covering all the bases in batting, pace and spin.

Kirsten has tremendous coaching pedigree. In addition to helping India to World Cup glory, he took South Africa to the top of the Test rankings in 2012. Kirsten is well-loved by players and fans. His equation with Virat Kohli has been wonderful, having described him as an "inspirational leader" and a "rare talent."

Kirsten, however, is yet to prove himself in IPL. His stint with Delhi Daredevils did not produce the results one expected. In T20 cricket, a coach's reputation can take beating but his pedigree can't be denied.

Nehra, the bowling coach, is class personified when it comes to death bowling in Twenty20s. He was the fourth-highest wicket-taker in the 2015 IPL with 22 wickets for Chennai Super Kings.

The left-armed has demonstrated tremendous mental toughness, a key factor for death overs bowling during his stint with India and several franchises. These traits are exactly what RCB need if they have to bolster their weak bowling.

Royal Challengers Bangalore has endured a turbulent couple of seasons, both on and off the field. On the field, the frustration of not winning the title continues to haunt them while off it, the issue concerning Vijay Mallya, chief mentor has led to distractions.

Mallya, who fled India allegedly with outstanding debts of Rs 9,000 crore unpaid to a consortium of banks, led by SBI and is currently in London, is no longer directly associated with the team after he resigned from multiple posts in 2016.

Having touched rock bottom in 2017, one hopes Kirsten and Nehra help RCB shed the 'chokers' tag and finally break the jinx in 2018.

Andy Murray out of Brisbane tournament due to injury, Australian Open in doubt

Former world number one Andy Murray withdrew from the Brisbane International with a hip problem on Tuesday, further putting in doubt the Briton's prospects of being fit in time for the Australian Open later this month.

Murray has not played a competitive match since a Wimbledon quarter-final loss last July due to the complaint and despite coming through a one-set encounter in Abu Dhabi last week, he was unable to train on Tuesday and announced his withdrawal.

The world number 16 and second seed had been due to play his first tournament match of the season on Thursday with a second-round encounter against American Ryan Harrison at Pat Rafter Arena.

Murray had said on Sunday he felt in great shape at the start of the new season and said he was confident he would play in Brisbane. However, on Tuesday he announced he had withdrawn from the tournament. Murray joins top seed and world number one Rafael Nadal, who withdrew from the tournament late last week, on the sidelines.

England withdraw Stokes from ODI squad

LONDON: Suspended England all-rounder Ben Stokes has been withdrawn from the squad for this month's five-match One-day International series against Australia and was replaced by batsman Dawid Malan, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Monday.

Stokes, who was provisionally named in England's squad, is awaiting a decision on whether he will be charged by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for his involvement in an altercation outside a Bristol nightclub in September.

The ECB said he would not travel with the group of players leaving for Australia on Tuesday and his availability will depend on CPS advice.

"Should ECB receive formal confirmation that he has either, a) been charged or, b) will face no charges, the ECB board would convene within 48 hours to make a decision on his availability to represent England at that stage," ECB said in a statement on their website.

The first ODI between Australia and England will be played at the Melbourne



Cricket Ground on Jan. 14, followed by further fixtures in Brisbane (Jan 19), Sydney (Jan 21), Adelaide (Jan 26) and Perth (Jan 28).

The ECB, meanwhile, said the 26-year-old Stokes has been cleared to participate in the player draft for the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament.

Stokes was recently granted a 'no objection certificate' to play for Canterbury in New Zealand, the land of his birth, though he cut short his stay there

for 'family reasons'. And ECB chief executive Tom Harrison conceded it would be 'difficult' to prevent him playing in the IPL.

Stokes is looking at a lucrative contract in the IPL.

Last year he was signed for a record fee of £1.7 million (\$2.3 million) by the Rising Pune Supergiants.

He repaid their investment handsomely by being the player of the tournament.

Nadal to make return in exhibition event

MELBOURNE: World number one Rafa Nadal, who is struggling to get any match practice before the Australian Open, will play an exhibition event at Melbourne Park in the week leading up to the season opening Grand Slam, organisers said on Monday.

The 31-year-old Spaniard has not played since he withdrew from the season-ending World Tour Finals in London in November with a knee injury.

He had already withdrawn from an exhibition tournament in Abu Dhabi, this week's Brisbane International and another event in Sydney, citing a lack of time to properly prepare.



However, the 16-time Grand Slam winner will be part of the winner-takes all Tie Break Tens event at Melbourne Park on Jan. 10, five

days before the Australian Open begins.

"Tie Break Tens is a great concept and we will see and play some exciting matches,"

Nadal said in a statement. "The field is fantastic and I expect some tough competition which will be great for the Aussie fans."

The eight-man field includes Novak Djokovic, three-time Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka, Australia's Nick Kyrgios, and former world number one Lleyton Hewitt.

Each match is comprised solely of super tie breaks to 10 points. The knockout tournament provides a winner take-all purse of \$250,000.

"It really will be an intriguing contest," Australian Open Tournament Director Craig Tiley said.

"These guys are all coming in at different stages of their preparation, but once their competitive instincts kick in, which will be almost instant in this format, there will be some absorbing contests."

BCB revokes Sabbir's contract

DHAKA: Bangladesh batsman Sabbir Rahman has had his central contract revoked by the national board for assaulting a young cricket fan who taunted him during a match last month.

The 26-year-old was also slapped with a six-month ban from the domestic game and a fine of two million taka (\$24,000) over the incident, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan said.

The national contract for Bangladeshi players was due to go into effect on January 1, 2018.

The decision came after he was found to have assaulted a young fan, believed to be aged 12, who had taunted him during a first-class National Cricket League match in Sabbir's



home town of Rajshahi on Dec 21. During an innings break, the middle-order batsman went behind the sightscreen and beat the boy. He was also under fire for arguing with the match referee when he was called for a hearing.