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### Despite all its...

stand with the security forces.

"You have suffered a lot due to Pakistani shelling and firing over the past three decades. This is your third generation who are born and brought up under the roaring guns. Your fields remained uncultivated after mines were laid to stop infiltration (of terrorists) from Pakistan."

"You lost many lives, houses and livelihood to Pak shelling and firing. But I want to tell you that despite all its efforts, Pakistan cannot take even an inch of our land," the Congress leader said.

He said it is India's greatness that whichever party comes to power, its priority remains the defense of the borders.

"Want to remind Pakistan of its defeat in 1971 when our forces under the leadership of then prime minister Indira Gandhi separated Bangladesh. If you make any misadventure, we will teach you a lesson," he said.

Talking to reporters, Azad said the decision to begin any dialogue with Pakistan should be left to the government.

"I am nobody because I do not have to talk and I also do not know what the gravity of the situation is. It is not for the first time (we are not talking with Pakistan). Even in the past, we have discontinued talks during our government," he said, adding when things improve between the two countries and atmosphere is conducive, the talks can be held.

"So I think it is the government of India at the moment who shall have to decide," he said, responding to a question on persistent demands by the National Conference and the PDP for dialogue to restore peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

Assuring the border residents that whole of the country is behind them, Azad said he wants to tell Pakistan that India is united and nobody can harm it.

He said Pakistan-sponsored terrorism has ruined Kashmir but its attempt to disrupt peace in Jammu region was frustrated by the people who stood united against the enemies of the country and their conspiracies.

Cautioning people against attempts to polarise the situation in the region ahead of assembly elections, Azad said politics is meant to bring people closer to each other but "there are some national and regional parties who are out to divide people on the name of religion, region, caste and creed."

We are fighting Pak sponsored terrorism for the last 31 years. We cannot afford internal fighting. If we have to move forward, we have to stand united and not fall to mischievous propaganda, the Congress leader said, adding we have to bring down the walls of hatred and become one for our nation and its progress and prosperity.

He said the Congress never played politics on the basis of region or religion. We will continue to work for the betterment of the people, their prosperity and ensure no discrimination.

Targeting the BJP, he said the country is witness to wrong politics which is not based on justice.

"The government is equal for every citizen and does justice whether someone has voted for it or not. Everyone should be given his or her right but the situation today is that only those close to the ruling party are getting contracts while others are being sidelined," he said.

Referring to the August 5, 2019 development when the special status of J&K under Article 370 was abrogated and the erstwhile state was divided into two Union Territories, he said, Our struggle is based on justice as our state was snatched along with our rights over land and jobs.

"We have never imagined that the largest Dogra state will be downgraded. This has happened for the first time in our country and no other government can think of such a flawed decision, he said, adding I regret the thought which led to the suffering of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Azad alleged that the continuation of closure of schools in Jammu and Kashmir smells of a conspiracy as the government jobs have been opened for the youth of the rest of the country. When our students are out of their schools for so long, how come they compete with their counterparts from other places?

He said while the rest of India is moving ahead, the people in Jammu and Kashmir are headed towards poverty.

"We need a change which is possible when you support us. You have seen the rule of National Conference, PDP, Congress and BJP and now it is easy for you to decide whom to vote for," he said, appealing to the people to reject the parties dividing them.

### "I am 24..."

the outskirts of Jammu, Azad, however, said reforms are a dynamic process and imperative for every party, society and the country as a whole for the benefit of people.

"Yes, I am a Congressman. Who told you I am not? 24 'Carat' Congressman. How does it matter if 18 Carats are challenging 24 carat?" Azad said, responding to questions about the speculations of his possible exit from the party like former Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh.

Azad, who was among the 23 Congress leaders who had sought an organisational overhaul last year, said he is not displeased with the party.

"Those dividing parties only see divisions. We are the ones who are linking people. We are forging unity (in the party ranks) as we are for unification," he said.

Asked about his call for reforms, he said reforms are needed in every party, every society and country.

"Reforms are an ongoing process and necessary in every party the legislature is also a sort of reform. Many evils of the past are not there in the society today because of reforms," he said, adding the communalism and casteism prevalent in society today also need to be reformed.

Azad said reforms are an ongoing process, a dynamic process which continues throughout the world.

About his views on "white colour terrorism" highlighted by a Srinagar-based Army officer, he said he did not know what does he meant by it.

"I have already said that the politicians should have done the right things for the welfare of the people but sometimes they did the work of Satan by dividing the people. We should desist from it," he said.

On a question about the prospects of Congress in the next assembly elections likely to be held after the delimitation exercise, Azad said people are the masters in a democratic set-up and defeat and win of any party is in their hands.

However, he said people across Jammu and Kashmir are "fed up" with the BJP because of rising inflation and growing unemployment.

## Individual alertness, discipline 'big strength' of country in fight against new COVID variant: PM

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Amid rising Covid cases linked to Omicron, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said individual alertness and discipline are a big strength of the country in the fight against the new variant of coronavirus.

In his Mann Ki Baat radio broadcast, Modi said India has done an "unprecedented" work in its inoculation drive if its vaccination numbers are compared with global figures. He, however, also asked people to maintain caution against the new variant of the virus.

"This new Omicron variant is being constantly reviewed by our scientists. Every day they are getting new data and steps are being taken based on their suggestions," Modi said.

Individual alertness and discipline are a "big strength" of the country in the fight against the new variant of coronavirus, he said.

Our experience of the last two years is that our own effort as a citizen is very important to defeat this global pandemic, he added.

"It is our collective strength

which will defeat corona. We have to enter 2022 with this sense of responsibility," the prime minister said.

"Crossing the 140 million vaccine doses is an achievement of each and every Indian. This shows the trust of every Indian in the system; shows trust in science and in scientists; and is also a testament to the willpower of we Indians who are fulfilling our responsibilities towards the society," he added.

Modi on Saturday had announced that vaccination against COVID-19 for children between 15 and 18 years will start from January 3, while "precaution dose" for healthcare and frontline workers would be administered from January 10.

He had also said the precaution dose will also be available for citizens above 60 years of age and those with comorbidities on the advice of their doctor from January 10 next year.

In the address, Modi also talked about Group Captain Varun Singh, who succumbed to injuries at a military hospital in Bengaluru last week after sustaining

serious injuries in the chopper crash near Coonoor that killed CDS Gen Bipin Rawat, his wife and 11 armed forces personnel.

Group Captain Singh was the lone survivor of the December 8 crash.

The prime minister talked about the air warrior's inspiring letter to his school weeks after he was decorated with the Shaurya Chakra award for displaying exemplary composure and skill.

Modi said, "After reading this letter, the first thought that came to my mind was that even after reaching the pinnacle of success, he did not forget to nurture his roots. Second, when he had time to celebrate, he showed concern for the generations to come. He wanted that the lives of the students of the school that he studied in should also be a celebration."

The Air Force officer had written if he could inspire even a single student, it would mean a lot, Modi noted, saying that he has in fact inspired the whole country.

The prime minister also said he is planning to interact with students like every

## Grassroot democracy strengthened...

long vented causeways at Stoora and Badala and span type steel bridges at Mashka and Ghatti. He also distributed cheques to the beneficiaries under the Ladli Beti Scheme and State Marriage Assistance Scheme.

Besides BDC, DDC members, Sarpanches and Panchs of district Kathua, the convention was attended by DDC chairperson, Kathua Col. Mahan Singh, DDC Vice-chairperson, Raghunandan Singh Bablu and Deputy Commissioner Kathua Rahul Yadav.

### Farooq hints at...

and the Peoples Movement. It seeks the restoration of the special status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir which was revoked by the Centre in August 2019.

"What is created is a combination of all parties to fight for the rights and identity of our people the Dogras, the Kashmiris and others. We recently had a meeting and we all condemned what the delimitation commission has done (based on its preliminary report which recommended six seats for Jammu and one in Kashmir besides reserving nine seats for Scheduled Tribes and seven for Scheduled Castes)," Abdullah said.

Outrightly rejecting the recommendations, he also asked how the government would deal with groups like Kashmiri Pandits and Sikhs who are also demanding political reservation.

"How will people from all sections be there? Who does not take these things into consideration? That is why we had an Upper House where the people who could not come into assembly were brought so that their voices could be heard," the NC leader said.

Today, every Muslim, whether he belongs to Kashmir or the rest of India, has to "continuously prove" that he is a nationalist despite his community having shed blood for the country, said Abdullah, who was picked by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to be a member of his team to represent India at the United Nations.

"I think the tragedy is that every Muslim, whether he belongs to Kashmir or the rest of India, has to continuously prove that he is a nationalist, that he is an Indian. Why? Why can't it be done for the others? Why can't they ask the Hindus, 'Are you Indians?' Why only Muslims who have given blood for this nation and are continuously giving blood for this nation, defending this nation at every place," he asked.

Abdullah said the problem is that people have lost faith. The young feel that they have no place in modern India which has been communalised to the maximum. "They find they have no jobs, we have no industry, the promise of 50,000 jobs, what happened to them," he asked.

In JK Bank, they got people from Haryana and Punjab. What about our people from J-K, where will they go? Highly educated population, they see this, they see the arrests made on small flimsy grounds, and they are put under such draconian laws, no one is there to listen, and corruption along with inflation rising sky-high," Abdullah said.

On the way ahead, the NC leader said, "We can only come out of this if the present government realises that India is a secular nation, follows the Preamble to the Constitution which says everyone is equal, and stops this division of communities India is more important, and we have to unite communities rather than dividing them if you want to go forward and shine above the rest of the world."

The former chief minister was also highly critical of the J-K administration's decision to stop the 'Darbar Move', an age-old practice under which the civil secretariat the seat of the government used to shift its base every six months between the twin capitals of Srinagar and Jammu.

On his recent tour of Jammu region, considered a strong base of the BJP, he said this idea that everything is BJP is "wrong" and it is just a media hype.

"As I said before, people see the sufferings they are going through and the promises that they have made. They realised it is not Lord Ram who is in danger and so the Muslims also realised that Allah is not in danger as well.

"Indeed, it is the people who are in danger. They are suffering and they are living hand-to-mouth in some places," he said.

Reiterating his demand for early assembly elections to restore a popular government in Jammu and Kashmir, Abdullah said in a democratic setup, people can go and question the MLA as the legislator is always available near them.

"And how dare he not respond! He knows in five years he will disappear if he fails the public," he added.

### Amid fears of...

para-medical staff, ambulance drivers, ASHA, Anganwari workers, sanitation and other front line workers courageously fought against two waves of COVID pandemic and continue to do so. I salute their spirit of selfless service", said the Lt Governor.

The Lt Governor observed that the last seven and half years have witnessed a revolution in the health sector of J&K which was never seen in the last 7 decades. The increased funding for the health sector of the UT has resulted in substantial improvement in J&K's health ranking, he added.

The Lt Governor emphasized the role of civil society members in the vaccination drive for 15 to 18 years age group commencing January 03, 2022, and booster dose for health care workers from January 10, 2022 as announced by Prime Minister in his address to the nation.

The Lt Governor also urged the NGOs and volunteers engaged in community service to come forward and complement the government's efforts in the fight against the drug menace.

Earlier, the Lt Governor took a round of various wards of the hospital and also interacted with the children.

Vivek Bhardwaj, Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Medical Education Department, while speaking on the occasion appreciated the Sparkle Women Club for their noble endeavours and underlined the importance of community participation in public welfare initiatives for the betterment of society.

Dr. Shashi Sudhan Sharma, Principal & Dean GMC & AIHs Jammu informed about the upcoming health care facilities catering to the patients.

Poonam Sethi, Chairperson, and Sarika Sethi, Co-founder of the Sparkle Women Club thanked the Hospital Administration and the Medical fraternity for rendering their support to the organization.

Benu Lakra, Project Head, Sparkle Women Club, briefed about the various initiatives undertaken by the organization for the welfare of the people.

Chander Mohan Gupta, Mayor JMC; Dr Raghav Langer, Divisional Commissioner Jammu; Anshul Garg, DC Jammu; Dr Dara Singh, Medical

## COVID: J&K records 124 new cases, 2 deaths

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday recorded 124 fresh coronavirus cases, raising the tally to 3,40,722, officials said.

The union territory also reported two more deaths due to the virus, they added.

Of the fresh cases, 31 were reported from the Jammu division and 93 from the Kashmir division, the officials said.

They said Srinagar district recorded the highest of 42 cases, followed by 17 cases in Jammu district.

There are 1,350 active cases in the union territory, the officials said.

The death toll due to the pandemic reached 4,523 as two more fatalities were reported in the past 24 hours, they said.

The number of recovered Covid patients was 3,34,849, the officials said.

They said there were 50 confirmed cases of mucormycosis (black fungus) in the union territory and no fresh case was reported since Saturday evening.

Meanwhile, Ladakh's coronavirus caseload increased to 22,083 during the past 24 hours, as 24 more people tested positive for the infection, offi-

cials said. Superintendent; faculty members, Dr GS Saini, Dr Sanjeev Digras; members of Sparkle Women Club, Doctors, nursing staff and people were present on the occasion.

### Citizens to get...

Mutation and Mussavi online without visiting a Patwari or any revenue office free of cost. Bidhuri appealed citizens to make best use of this initiative as updated jambans and other revenue records are regularly being hosted on the portal and grievances thereof settled and every landholder must visit the site and check the status of their revenue record to their convenience.

He also appealed citizens to voluntarily share and provide mobile number and Aadhaar to the revenue department for linking the same with their land records for achieving real time land transaction communication system, wherein the landholders will get information of any transaction, change, updation or verification of their Revenue records on real time basis.

"This will also increase transparency and efficiency in the system with truthfulness to the record, and shall act as a check to any unwarranted change in revenue record or concealment thereof. Nobody will be able to enter into any arrangement without the actual consent of the landowner, he said.

### Major fire breaks...

The blaze was reported in the market, with mostly make-shift shops made of wood and tin. "The firefighting operation was on till the reports last received and further details are awaited," he said, adding more fire tenders are being rushed to the scene to control the blaze. The officials said all shops were damaged and there was no report of any casualty. The cause of the fire was not known immediately, they said. Meanwhile, the Police has registered a case and investigations are being conducted to ascertain the cause of fire. The family members of shop-owners have demanded compensation from the administration.

### ISJK terrorist involved...

In the ensuing gunfight, a terrorist was killed during the night, the official said.

Inspector General of Police, Kashmir, Vijay Kumar identified the slain terrorist as Faheem Bhat, resident of Kadipora Anantnag.

"He had recently joined #terror outfit ISJK and was involved in killing of Martyr ASI Mohd Ashraf, who was posted at PS Bijbehara," the IGP Kashmir said in a tweet. ASI Ashraf was martyred by terrorists outside Bijbehara hospital on Wednesday evening.

Pertinently, in the last 48 hours, joint teams of police and security forces have neutralized six terrorists in four successful anti-terrorist operations without any collateral damage. Police have registered case under relevant sections of law and investigation has been initiated, a police spokesperson said, adding that the people were requested to cooperate till the area at encounter site was completely sanitized and cleared of all the explosive materials, if any.

### Delimitation Row: Dec...