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J&K aims to...

over Rs 70,000 crore in the next six months, Sinha said.

The 34-member delegation includes top businessmen from real estate, hospitality, telecom, import-export, and other sectors. A member of the ruling family in Sharjah is also part of the delegation.

"The delegates are looking for avenues where investment can be made in Jammu and Kashmir, Sinha told reporters on the sidelines of a function here.

About the four-day programme, Sinha said, "I am hopeful that its good results will be witnessed by the people of Jammu and Kashmir."

Asked about the sectors that are expected to attract investment, he said a clear picture will emerge tomorrow. "The investment is going to take place in both regions of Jammu and Kashmir in different areas and sectors," he said.

According to the officials, the Union Territory is aiming to attract new investment in industries and tourism by highlighting key opportunities and growth sectors to the delegation.

The officials said the delegation will also visit the famous hill resort of Pahalgam in south and Gulmarg in north Kashmir to explore investment opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sector.

They said there will be pitch presentations by several importers, exporters and start-ups in J&K along with an overview of the cottage and silk industries, product displays and artisan meets.

The programme is in line with the initiatives taken by the government towards creating favourable infrastructure for export promotion and an entrepreneurial-friendly environment, the officials added.

‘6,603 smart meter...

controlling theft and reducing wasteful consumption," the Lt Governor added.

The move will enable consumers to monitor their power consumption behavior and regulate it accordingly. The Pre-paid feature, to be enabled in the coming days, will provide desired flexibility in the consumption of electricity to the consumers, said the Lt Governor.

Similar arrangements are being emulated in Kashmir as well, he added.

For the last seven decades, no credible efforts were made to increase neither the power capacity nor the transmission & distribution capacity was strengthened, the Lt Governor said.

The present government, for the last one and half year, is making sustained efforts to ensure reliable power supply to consumers, besides reducing transmission losses and improving distribution efficiency, he further added.

Centre mulls COVID...

dose after the Union Health Ministry removed the co-morbidity clause recently.

The prioritisation and sequencing of the dose is based on completion of nine months, or 39 weeks, from the date of administration of the second dose.

"The government is considering a booster dose of Covid vaccine for all those above 18 years in view of a surge in infections in parts of the world and to ease difficulties faced during international travel," a source said.

Amid a growing chorus for booster doses by several states, Shiv Sena MP Priyanka Chaturvedi also raised the issue in the Rajya Sabha and asked the government to come out with clear guidelines for boosters for those under 60 years, noting that several countries are imposing strict conditions for foreign travellers.

Chaturvedi said several countries want that the second shot of the Covid vaccine should have been taken within a certain time frame, failing which the vaccination certificate will not be considered valid.

In many European countries, she said, vaccines are considered valid only for 270 days. If travellers got their last vaccine shot in April 2021, they cannot enter many EU countries without a valid Covid test.

"Hence, Indians finally looking forward to travelling abroad are now left in a lurch due to the absence of clear guidelines regarding the need for the third additional dose to travel abroad. The present situation regarding the travel and vaccination causes of perplexing situation for Indians," she said during Zero Hour.

India now has a surplus of vaccines yet there is no clear guideline to vaccinate people below 60 years for those who are seeking a booster dose for travel purposes or for safety purposes, the Rajya Sabha MP added.

White House Chief Medical Advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci, meanwhile, said that vaccines and booster shots remain the best means to prevent serious illness from the virus.

Fauci also warned that a highly contagious sub-variant of Omicron variant of COVID-19, known as BA.2, could soon lead to another uptick in coronavirus cases in the US.

The US' top infectious disease expert said the sub-variant is estimated to account for around 30 per cent of all new cases in the US, and is also the most dominant variant in the country.

Fauci said BA.2 is about 60 per cent more transmissible than Omicron, but it does not appear to be more severe.

It does have an increased transmission capability, Fauci said on Sunday on ABC's This Week.

However, when you look at the cases, they do not appear to be any more severe and they do not appear to evade immune responses either from vaccines or prior infections, he explained.

The variant has already caused a surge in cases in China and parts of Europe.

India began administering precaution doses of the Covid vaccine to healthcare and frontline workers and those aged 60 and above with co-morbidities from January 10 this year.

Since January 10, more than 2.17 crore precaution doses have been administered to the identified categories of beneficiaries so far.

COVID-19 vaccination for children in the age group of 12-14 years began on March 16 this year.

The countrywide vaccination drive was rolled out on January 16, 2021, with healthcare workers getting inoculated in the first phase. Vaccination of frontline workers started from February 2 last year.

The next phase of COVID-19 vaccination commenced on March 1 last year for people over 60 years of age and those aged 45 and above with specified co-morbid conditions.

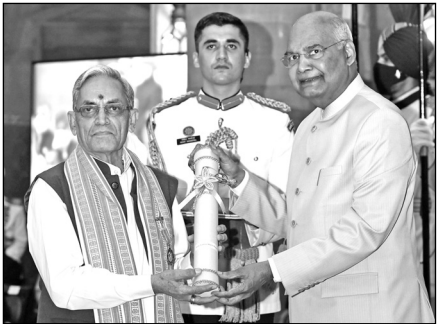
India launched vaccination for all people aged more than 45 years from April 1, 2021.

The government then decided to expand its vaccination drive by allowing everyone above 18 years of age to be inoculated against the viral disease from May 1, 2021. The next phase of Covid vaccination commenced from January 3 this year for adolescents in the age group of 15-18 years.

Prez confers Padma...



President Ram Nath Kovind presenting Padma Shri to 125-year-old Yoga Guru Swami Sivananda.



President Ram Nath Kovind presenting Padma Shri to Prof. Vishwa Murti Shastri for contributions in Literature and Education.

power for the first time. Among the dignitaries present on the occasion were Vice President Venkaiah Naidu and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

'Padma Vibhushan' is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; 'Padma Bhushan' for distinguished service of high order and 'Padma Shri' for distinguished service in any field.

The awards are announced on the eve of Republic Day every year and are conferred by the President at ceremonial functions which are held at Rashtrapati Bhawan.

This year a total of 128 Padma awards are being conferred, including two duo cases (in a duo case, the award is counted as one). The list of awardees comprises four Padma Vibhushan, 17 Padma Bhushan and 107 Padma Shri awards.

As many as 34 of the awardees are women and the list also includes 10 persons from the category of Foreigners, NRI, PIO, OCI and 13 posthumous awardees. The second civil investiture ceremony is scheduled to be held on March 28.

Former West Bengal chief minister and CPI-M leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, who was among the Padma Bhushan awardees, had refused to accept the honour.

Ukraine rejects Russian...

In the capital, Kyiv, a shopping center in the densely populated Podil district near the city center was a smoldering, flattened ruin Monday after being hit the day before by shelling that killed eight people, according to emergency officials. The

force of the explosion shattered every window in a neighboring high-rise. Artillery boomed in the distance as firefighters picked their way through the destruction.

Ukrainian authorities also said Russia shelled a chemical plant in northeastern Ukraine, sending toxic ammonia leaking into the air, and hit a military training base in the west with cruise missiles.

The encircled southern city of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov has seen some of the worst horrors of the war, under Russian pounding for more than three weeks, in a brutal assault that Ukrainian and Western officials have called a war crime.

Strikes hit an art school sheltering some 400 people only hours before Russia's offer to open corridors out of the city in return for the capitulation of its defenders, according to Ukrainian officials.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said it was not clear how many casualties there were.

They are under the rubble, and we don't know how many of them have survived, he said in a video address, vowing that Ukraine would shoot down the pilot who dropped that bomb.

Russian Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev had offered two corridors one heading east toward Russia and the other west to other parts of Ukraine in return for Mariupol's surrender. He did not say what Russia planned if the offer was rejected.

The Russian Ministry of Defense said authorities in Mariupol could face a military tribunal if they sided with what it described as bandits, the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

Ukrainian officials rejected the proposal even before Russia's deadline of 5:00 AM Moscow time (0200GMT) for a response came and went.

There can be no talk of any surrender; laying down of arms," Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Irina Vereshchuk told the news outlet Ukrainian Pravda. "We have already informed the Russian side about this.

Mariupol Mayor Piotr Andryushchenko also quickly dismissed the offer, saying in a Facebook post he didn't need to wait until the morning deadline to respond and cursing at the Russians, according to the news agency Interfax Ukraine.

The strike on the art school was the second time in less than a week that officials reported an attack on a public building where Mariupol residents had taken shelter. On Wednesday, a bomb hit a theater where more than 1,000 people were believed to be sheltering. At least 130 people were reported rescued Friday, but there has been no update since then.

Mariupol officials said at least 2,300 people have died in the siege, with some buried in mass graves.

City officials and aid groups say Russian bombardment has cut off Mariupol's electricity, water and food supplies and severed its communications with the outside world, plunging the remaining residents into a chaotic fight for survival.

What's happening in Mariupol is a massive war crime," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Monday.

Multiple attempts to evacuate residents from Mariupol and other Ukrainian cities have failed or only partly succeeded, with bombardments continuing as civilians tried to flee.

Some who were able to escape Mariupol tearfully hugged relatives as they arrived by train Sunday in Lviv in western Ukraine.

Battles took place over every street. Every house became a target, said Olga Nikitina, who was embraced by her brother as she got off the train. Gunfire blew out the windows. The apartment was below freezing.

Mariupol is a key Russian target because its fall would allow Russian forces in southern and eastern Ukraine to unite. But Western military analysts say that even if the city is taken, the troops battling a block at a time for control there may be too depleted to help secure Russian breakthroughs on other fronts.

More than three weeks into the invasion, the two sides now seem to be trying to wear each other down, experts say, with bogged-down Russian forces launching long-range missiles at cities and military bases as Ukrainian forces carry out hit-and-run attacks and seek to sever Russian supply lines.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Ukrainian resistance means Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces on the ground are essentially stalled.

It's had the effect of him moving his forces into a woodchipper, Austin told CBS on Sunday.

Talks between Russia and Ukraine have continued by video conference but failed to bridge the chasm between the two sides, with Russia demanding Ukraine disarm and Ukraine saying Russian forces must withdraw from the whole country.

Zelenskyy has said he would be prepared to meet Putin in person, but Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday that more progress must be made first. He said that so far significant movement has not been achieved in the talks.

Shri Amarnathji Shrine...

Advisor (Strategic Projects) of DRDO is undoubtedly one of the greatest civil engineers of his time. He is credited with planning, designing and execution of specialized projects of all 50 establishments/labs. A giant intellectual, KN Rai had also served in the Indian Army (Corps of Engineers) from 1969 to 1988 before joining the DRDO, India's premier defence research organization.

K.N.Shrivastava, a career bureaucrat dedicated his life in service to the nation. Much before he was appointment as a Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Shrivastava, IAS officer of 1978 batch Karnataka cadre, he was instrumental in starting Bangalore Metro Rail Project as its first Managing Director. He is the rare career bureaucrat who was selected for all 4 prestigious services- IFS, IIRS, IPS and IAS. After his retirement in 2013, Shrivastava served as administrative member of Central Administrative Tribunal.

Another member of reconstituted SASB is Dr. Shailesh Raina, Director and HoD Urology and Renal Transplantation at Jaslok Hospital, Mumbai. Dr. Raina, deeply rooted in the finest spiritual and cultural traditions of Jammu & Kashmir, has been mentoring budding Urologists from the Union Territory and has contributed immensely to raise J&K's prestige in national health services. As son of the soil, Dr. Raina is also starting a Renal Transplant programme at GMC Jammu and Srinagar.

Kailash Mehra Sadhu, disciple of Pandit Swaroop Nath Saproo and Pandit Shambho Nath Sopori is the well-known classical singer of J&K. Sadhu has earlier served as senior instructor of Music in Academy of Art Culture and Languages and presently serving as a Professor of Music at MAM College, Jammu. DC Raina, another member of re-constituted board served as advocate general of J&K. A much-admired public figure, DC Raina had a few parallels in law.

Former Chief Vigilance Commissioner and IGP Jammu zone, Pitambar Lal Gupta, retired IPS officer, during his service, was known to be a fearless, dedicated and tough police officer at the same time fair and humane, who contributed immensely to improve J&K's internal security machinery.

Apart from the better management of the Shri Amarnathji Yatra, up-gradation of facilities for holy pilgrims and efficient management, maintenance of the administration of holy Shrine, the board is also responsible to carrying out works for the benefit of worshippers and pilgrims.

Cong planning to ...

The group is also reported to be seeking the ouster of some Rahul Gandhi loyalists from key AICC positions and top on their target are AICC general secretary Organisation K C Venugopal, chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala and general secretary Ajay Maken. Sources said one or more may be shifted in order to placate the dissident group.

After the renewed demands by the 'Group of 23' calling for collective leadership and strengthening the party, the sources said the Congress top brass is working on a resolution plan with these leaders.

Party sources said during Jawaharlal Nehru's time, the Parliamentary Board was an important body of the Congress party and used to take key policy decisions.

The G-23 leaders have also called for talks with like-minded parties to take on the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Parleys are on with some of the G-23 leaders to work out an amicable solution and agree to some of their demands. While Sonia Gandhi has met Ghulam Nabi Azad and discussed their demands, Rahul Gandhi has also met former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

Sources said the Gandhis have also deputed some negotiators to talk to the G-23 leaders and work out a solution amicably. Some more rounds of talks are likely in the next few days in this regard.

"While Hooda may be asked to lead the party's charge in Haryana which goes to polls in 2024, some other leaders may be accommodated in the CWC or a new Parliamentary Board," a source said.

Deliberations are already underway to hold another CWC meeting followed by a Chintan Shivir after the Budget session of Parliament, the sources said.

Organisational polls are already underway in the party to elect the new president and PCC chiefs.

Peace in Ladakh...

held a virtual summit on Monday covering a wide range of issues relating to bilateral cooperation, regional security, developments in the Indo-Pacific and crisis in Ukraine.

At the 14th India-Japan summit on Saturday, New Delhi conveyed to Tokyo also that its ties with Beijing cannot be business as usual until peace is restored in the eastern Ladakh region.

At a media briefing on Monday, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said both Modi and Morrison exchanged their perspectives on China.

"The prime minister did refer to the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh; the inci-

dents of the previous year and he emphasised that peace and tranquillity in the border areas was an essential prerequisite for normalisation of relations with China," he said.

He said PM Morrison also gave a fairly detailed perspective of how he saw China and its actions in the region.

Shringla said Morrison spoke especially about the situation in the South China Sea region.

India and China have been engaged in talks to resolve the festering row in eastern Ladakh.

On March 11, the two countries held the 15th round of high-level military dialogue to resolve the pending issues in the eastern Ladakh region but it did not produce any tangible outcome.

The eastern Ladakh border standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong lake areas.

Both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two sides completed the disengagement process last year in the north and south banks of the Pangong lake and the Gogra area.

Each side currently has around 50,000 to 60,000 troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the sensitive sector.

On the South China Sea, India has also been pitching for the resolution of pending disputes under the framework of international law.

China claims sovereignty over all of the South China Sea, a huge source of hydrocarbons.

However, several ASEAN member countries, including Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei, have counterclaims.

Situation along LoC...

borders are "adequately poised to respond to any challenge posed by adversary across the entire conflict".

Referring to the international border (IB) with Pakistan, Bhatt said there are indications of an "emerging narco-terror nexus sponsored by inimical elements across the border".

"The situation along Line of Control (LoC) remains stable post the Directorate General of Military Operations (DGMOs) understanding of February 2021," Bhatt said.

The minister said both armies have exercised restraint in the interest of maintaining peace along the LoC.

"However, the situation is being closely monitored and Indian Army remains prepared to thwart any threat from inimical elements as also to respond in case of any escalation along the Line of Control," he said.

Bhatt said the security situation along western borders (IB sector) remains largely stable.

"However, there are indications of an emerging narco-terror nexus sponsored by inimical elements across the border aimed at causing instability, especially along the border areas," he said.

"Our forces along Western borders are adequately poised to respond to any challenge posed by adversary across entire conflict spectrum," he added.

To a separate question, Bhatt said a total of 91 officers have retired in lower rank (Wing Commander) despite having served in the higher rank of Group Captain in the Indian Air Force. He, however, did not give the reason.

J&K reports 12...

Kashmir Division.

According to the daily Media Bulletin out of 453562 positive cases, 111 are Active Positive (40 in Jammu Division and 71 in Kashmir Division), 448701 have recovered and 4750 have died; 2327 in Jammu division and 2423 in Kashmir division.

The Bulletin further said that out of 24078789 test results available, 453562 samples have tested positive and 23625227 samples have been tested as negative till date. Besides, 26047 COVID tests have been conducted in last 24 hours.

Till date 6274556 persons have been enlisted for observation which included 31310 persons in home quarantine including facilities operated by government, 111 in isolation and 464469 in home surveillance. Besides, 5773916 persons have completed their surveillance period.

Providing district-wise breakup, the Bulletin said that Srinagar reported five fresh cases while the Jammu district recorded six new cases followed by one in the Doda district. No case was, however, reported from any other district of the Union Territory.

Meanwhile, Ladakh has reported three fresh COVID-19 cases, taking the overall virus tally to 28,205, officials said. Ten patients recovered from the disease, taking the overall recoveries to 27,944, they said. According to the officials, no Covid-related death was reported in the region, which has so far recorded 228 fatalities. Of the total fatalities, Leh district recorded the highest 168 deaths followed by 60 in Kargil, they said. Leh, at present, has 22,930 cases and Kargil 5,275 cases. Three new cases were recorded in Leh, taking the number of active cases in the district to 31. Kargil has two active case.

J&K Govt committed to ecologically sustainable development: LG

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday reiterated commitment of the J&K government commitment towards ensuring ecologically sustainable development, saying the biggest challenge is to create a fine balance between man and nature.

"The wisdom and the experience of local communities must be utilized to preserve our forests and natural habitats", he said while speaking at a function held to celebrate the International Day of Forests here at Convention Centre.

The event under the theme "Forests and Sustainable Production and Consumption" aims to raise awareness on combating climate change, environmental conservation, efficient use of forests for prosperity and well-being of current and future generations.

The Lt Governor termed the initiative as a significant effort to raise awareness among people for the protection of invaluable forests and making them realize their responsibilities to save Forests.

The Lt Governor observed that Sustainable Forest Management and efficient use of its resources is the key to combat climate change and ensure a prosperous ecosystem for future generations.

Highlighting the important role of forests in climate change mitigation, the Lt Governor called for involvement of PRIs, and other non-government institutions working at gross root level in forest protection and conservation efforts. 'This will prove to be an important step towards participatory governance in natural resource management, he remarked.

The Lt Governor also stressed on the need to modernize the Forest and Wildlife management system and involving the forest dwellers in the social movement for the conservation of the environment.

He further advised the Forest department to encourage and recognize the contribution of women in forestry and wildlife conservation.

Earlier, the Lt Governor conferred UT level awards to front line staff of Forest and Wildlife Department for their outstanding contribution in protection of forests and wildlife, afforestation, and plantation works.

"I congratulate all the UT level awardees for their exceptional service in Forest and Wildlife Conservation. The Forest Department's endeavours towards the growth of sustainable forest economy and support to stakeholders dependent on forests, creating livelihood opportunities, especially for women SHGs are also appreciable", the Lt Governor said.

During the event, the Lt Governor released report on City Biodiversity Index of Jammu and Srinagar cities, Wildlife Atlas of J&K and launched an Android App 'Haryali' developed by the Social Forestry Department to facilitate the plant distribution schemes of Social Forestry Department. He lauded the efforts of the J&K Biodiversity Council for development of city Bio-diversity Index of Jammu and Srinagar smart cities.

Sanjeev Verma, Commissioner/Secretary to the Government, Department of Forest, Ecology and Environment highlighted the role of community participation in forest conservation. Involvement of people on a massive scale on convergence mode shall be attempted to dovetail the various opportunities and fund flow available in Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes, district sector and UT CAPEX.

Dr Mohit Gera, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (HoFF), J&K Forest Department expressed his gratitude to the UT Government for instituting UT level Forestry and Wildlife Awards for recognizing outstanding contribution of frontline staff to promote forest and wildlife protection and conservation.

J&K Forest Department will achieve a very important milestone of planting 130 Lakhs of plants as earmarked for this year. The activities initiated under 'Har Gaon Hariyali', 'One Beat Guard and One village program', forest protection through demarcation, digitization, and promotion of wood-based industries will be provided dedicated attention and result oriented programs such as "Van se Jal, Jal se Jeevan", "Forests for livelihood" will also be scaled up, he added. Nitishwar Kumar, Principal Secretary to Lt Governor; S.K Gupta, Chief Wildlife Warden; Sarvesh Rai, Add. PCCF & CEO CAMPA J&K; HoDs, representatives from Panchayat Raj institutions, members of Biodiversity Management Committees, Self Help Groups and NGOs were present on the occasion.

