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Post Art 370...

fall in abductions by terrorists.

Also, there has been a 33 per cent decline in the number of police and security personnel martyred in 2021 over the previous year.

Further, she said there was no incident of weapon snatching in 2021 and in 2022 so far.

Sitharaman also referred to the number of terrorists killed, saying 180 (148 locals and 32 foreigners, including 44 top commanders) were eliminated in 2021.

"With these kinds of containments very clearly happening, the environment for normalcy and also for attracting investments are happening," the Finance Minister asserted.

She informed that 100 per cent COVID-19 vaccination of the eligible population has been achieved in J&K.

She also rebutted the Opposition's charge that the BJP cannot absolve itself of the responsibility for the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990 as it was supporting the then V P Singh-led government at the Centre.

The minister said that terror killings were carried out in Kashmir when the National Conference was in power in J-K in alliance with the Congress and recalled the then governor Jagmohan's warning about dark clouds of terror overpowering the Valley.

She listed out "seven major events" or killings of Hindus by terrorists in 1989 along with the related FIR numbers.

During the discussion, the Congress party had targeted the BJP, saying it had supported the V P Singh-led government at the Centre in 1990 when Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave the Valley after they were targeted by terrorists.

"I just want to put the facts on record. The National Conference government with the support of the Indian National Congress was in power in J&K from November 1986 to January 1990.

And Governor Jagmohan reached J&K (on January 20, 1990) after the resignation of the then Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah....20th January 1990 is when the Governor reaches Srinagar," the minister said.

"...whatever happened in 1990, we all know we listed out and we are all seeing it also. But what happened in 1989 when this (Farooq Abdullah) government was still in place, November 1986 onwards till 18 January 1990. I will take just the example of 1989 when that government of National Conference and Indian National Congress was still there," Sitharaman said.

She listed out "seven major events" or killings of Hindus by terrorists in 1989 along with the related FIR numbers.

The Finance Minister also told the opposition that Governor Jagmohan (in his first tenure) in July 1989 had warned the then state government regarding the danger of terrorism.

"Is it not true that even Jagmohan Ji, in his first phase of being Governor when he was asked to leave in July 1989, didn't he warn authorities at that time itself that the dark cloud of terrorists are really overpowering J&K, and necessary steps have to be taken by the state government," the minister said.

While she was referring to the killings of 1989, certain opposition members asked her to focus her reply on the Budget.

To this Sitharaman said even the speeches of opposition members were focused on 'Kashmir File' (movie) and not on the Budget, therefore, she has every right to reply on all issues.

Sitharaman said, "It was our first PM Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru ji who internationalised the Kashmir issue. He took it to the United Nations in December 1947. Why? This issue shouldn't have gone to a global forum. It's an Indian issue. We could've handled it."

Alleging that there was a "mess" in the state earlier resulting in injustice to people, she said, "After the abrogation of Article 370, you see justice, democracy, economic development, rights reaching everybody".

She said that people are benefiting after the implementation of 890 central laws in the UT. Also, people, who did not have any rights there earlier, can now get government jobs and purchase properties.

Besides, she added, 250 "unjust and discriminatory" state laws have been removed, and 137 modified.

She told the members that the de-weeding and dredging of Srinagar's famous Dal Lake will be taken up in the next financial year.

Parliament approves Rs...

four-hour-long discussion on the budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said after the abrogation of the Article 370, "you see justice reaching, democracy reaching, economic development reaching" to the residents of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Kashmiriyat most effective...

youth should be channelled into constructive & creative works and in building a new J&K, sustained peace, prosperity having ample avenues of growth and development.

The Lt Governor called upon the present generation, especially the community elders, religious heads and women folks to work together so that the message of peaceful co-existence should be passed on to the new generation.

Noting that most of the youth have chosen the right path, despite continuous efforts of many anti-national elements and foreign terror groups, the Lt Governor said efforts are still being made to incite our youth by the handlers in neighboring country which is biggest exporter of terror and radicalization.

The Lt Governor said that the family members of the youth who is seen as vulnerable to radicalization should take timely steps to prevent the worst from happening. They must keep a watch if there is any change in the behaviour of a child and take the help of community elders to save their child from entangling in wrong influences and environment.

On the occasion, the Lt Governor also highlighted the strides made the Power, Education, road connectivity and other sectors.

Regarding expansion of road network, the Lt Governor said that now road are being built at twice the length at which it was built earlier and road macadamisation is being done at three times the previous pace.

Saying that Government is aware of increasing developmental aspirations and needs of the people, the Lt Governor said that 947 villages remained without road connectivity until last year. UT Government is working to connect 186 villages and though the central scheme under which these roads were to be built, is ending this March, PM has assured that all the remaining villages of the UT would be connected with proper roads at any cost, he added.

The Lt Governor also mentioned about the 5900 houses of Srinagar where 100% smart metering has been done, will receive 24 x7 reliable and quality power from three feeders. The number of houses would increase in future, he added.

Comparing the recent budget of J&K UT with the per capita spending for people of POJK, the Lt Governor said that \$950 will be spent in terms of per capita share in J&K Budget 2022 which is much higher than \$78.55 being spent per capita in POJK.

The Lt Governor said that youth of J&K is immensely talented which is evident from the laurels brought by J&K youth in national and international platforms in the academic, sports and other fields.

Recalling his visit to convocation of Islamic University, the Lt Governor said that most of the gold medalists were girl students. J&K Youth have become role models, he added.

The Lt Governor also spoke on the NEP. He said that NEP will contribute to the holistic growth and development of youth, and will lead to creation of a self-reliant J&K and the nation. NEP will be implemented in its letter and spirit by the next session.

The Lt Governor said that the appointment of Vice-Chancellors of J&K Universities has been done purely on the basis of academic and research achievements, result of which would be visible in the coming days.

It is high time the Youth of J&K came to the fore to take the UT to new heights of development and prosperity. The Lt Governor also mentioned about the recent visit of CEOs of UAE and GCC countries who visited J&K to explore investment opportunities and increase the export potential of J&K.

Speaking on menace of Drug Abuse the Lt Governor said it is the second biggest threat which is affecting the youth. Drugs abuse deprive the youth of making the best of their lives, destroying their present and future capabilities. He stressed the need of systematic community efforts against drugs abuse to destroy this social evil completely.

He further said that Youth of J&K have immense potential and talent so they have to play pivotal role in development and progress of J&K.

Earlier, speakers highlighted the teachings of the different religions and unanimously said that all religions teach peace, love, amity and communal harmony implying violence has no place in any religion and civilized society, and peaceful co-existence is what takes us forward as a society creating a safe and bright future for our next generations.

The day-long National symposium witnessed huge participation of Islamic Scholars, women, civil society members and was attended by religious leaders, public representatives, a large number of youth and senior citizens from different parts of the valley.

Grenade-throwing module...

under arrest and a case under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) registered against him, the spokesperson said.

During questioning, the accused revealed that he had received the grenade from another OGW (also called a terrorist-associate), Shamin Ahmed Chiloo, a resident of the Tankipora area of Shaheed Gunj here, the spokesperson said.

Chiloo was also arrested and during questioning, he told the interrogators that he had

received a consignment of four hand grenades and handed over a grenade each to Sheikh, Amir Rehman Dar, a resident of Tengpura Bypass, and Shahid Ahmed Mir, a resident of Dangerpora Nowgam, the spokesperson added.

Subsequently, raids were conducted and the two other OGWs -- Dar and Mir -- were also arrested.

On their instances, three more hand grenades were recovered, the police spokesperson said.

During the course of the investigation, it came to light that the accused were working on directions of the LeT. The first arrested accused was on his way to launch a grenade attack but his plan was thwarted, the spokesperson said.

Time to open....

asymptomatic and mild cases, and asked to continue specific monitoring of high-risk cases.

Bhushan said gatherings and congregations -- social, sports, entertainment, academic, cultural, religious, festival-related and others -- may be resumed, provided that Covid Appropriate Behaviour is duly adhered to.

Offline classes can be resumed in academic institutions without any restrictions. However, the academic institutions may also leverage a hybrid model of education, he said.

Bhushan further said marriages and last rites may be allowed and all shopping complexes, cinema halls, restaurants and bars, sports complexes, gyms, spas, swimming pools, and religious places may be allowed to operate at full capacity.

Public transport (railways, metros, buses, cabs) can operate without any capacity restrictions. Also, there shall be no restrictions on inter-state and intra-state movement, including transportation of essential goods.

Further, all offices -- government and private -- may function without any capacity restrictions, and all industrial and scientific establishments may be allowed, he stated in the letter.

While allowing all such activities, it is imperative that the adherence to Covid Appropriate Behaviour, including use of mask and physical distancing, shall be followed in all public places, Bhushan said, adding such decisions by the states and union territories must be linked to the local epidemiological situation based on a sustained critical level of testing and monitoring.

He also asked states to ensure 100 per cent vaccination of all eligible age-groups with a particular focus on covering the left-out beneficiaries.

Administration of precaution doses and vaccination amongst young adolescents (12 years and above) should also be taken up for all eligible people. Services should be resumed while promoting 100 per cent vaccination of the eligible staff members, he said.

Taking into account the sustained and steep decline in the COVID-19 cases across the country, the states and union territories have been undertaking various measures to reopen economic and social activities. There is a need to follow a risk assessment-based approach on the opening of economic and social activities without losing the gains made so far in the fight against the pandemic, Bhushan said.

At the district level, there should be a constant review of emerging data of new cases based on a sustained and critical level of testing to facilitate evidence-based decision for restrictions and relaxation, he said.

States need to watch the trajectory of cases in particular geographies to ensure that the areas reporting positivity rate above 10 per cent and bed occupancy more than 40 per cent on either oxygen supported or ICU beds should undertake required enforcement, containment, and restriction measures," his letter read.

As the case trajectory may vary from state to state and there would be variation in the spread of infection within states, too, there is a need to take decisions with respect to containment and restriction measures primarily at the local/sub national level by the state and the district administration concerned, he said.

Bhushan also stressed on adequate testing and monitoring of Influenza-like illness and severe acute respiratory infections in all health facilities on a regular basis for early warning signals.

He also underlined the need for a continued focus on genomic sequencing of pre-sampled samples of international passengers, collection of samples from sentinel sites (identified health facilities) and local clusters of cases, duly following the guidelines laid by the ministry to capture early warning signals on variants.

Kashmir's Tulip Garden...

tourist arrival to the region and we are optimistic of an incredible tourism boom this year also.

He said that the improved road and air connectivity in the UT will greatly enhance the influx of domestic and foreign tourists thus generating income for the local populace. He said that condition of Jammu-Srinagar National Highway has improved a lot and it takes very less time to travel than earlier, besides air traffic has also improved significantly.

Chief Secretary said that tourism is reviving fast post COVID and the necessary steps are being taken up by the administration to make the stay of tourists more comfortable. He said that government under a comprehensive policy has explored and developed hidden and virgin tourist destinations and tourists will have more places to visit beyond Gulmarg, Pahalgam and other places. He said that the government has added 75 new virgin destinations, 75 new adventure treks, 75 heritage sites, and 75 religious sites.

Later, Chief Secretary also inaugurated J&K Bank enabled e-ticketing facility for the visitors becoming the first visitor to generate E-ticket. He said that queuing up for long time was cumbersome for the visitors, so E-ticketing was introduced to make the visit of tourists hassle free.

Commending J&K Bank for its people friendly initiatives, Dr A K Mehta said the Bank is doing yeoman services and I compliment the management for coming up with online portal well within timeline as expected.

The E-booking provision has been made available on the website of Floriculture Department from the day one to enable the tourists and visitors to plan their visit comfortably online.

Chief Secretary also directed the Floriculture department to take feedback from the tourists for making their stay more comfortable.

Dr Mehta appealed the people to visit Jammu and Kashmir and experience the serene splendor of tourist destinations like Tulip Garden.

Regarding tulip garden, it was informed that more than 1.5 million tulips in 60 varieties and colors will bloom this year. Besides, extra plants like daffodils, hyacinths, narcissus and other ornamental plants are being planted here to ornate the area making the tulip garden one of the main attractions for tourists from different parts of the country and world.

J&K Bank MD and CEO, Baldev Prakash, said the launch of this e-ticketing platform is very much in line with the government's focus on public convenience and comfort of tourists. He added that for public convenience, we will integrate more such utility services into our digitalization drive to widen the ecosystem of online payments thereby increasing overall efficiency of the region's financial system.

Principal Secretary, Housing and Urban Development Department, Dheeraj Gupta; Principal Secretary, Industries and Commerce, Ranjan Prakash Thakur; Commissioner, Secretary, Forests, Ecology and Environment, Sanjeev Verma; Commissioner Secretary, Floriculture, Parks and Gardens, Sheikh Riaz; Secretary Tourism, Sarmad Hafeez; Deputy Commissioner Srinagar; Commissioner SMC, Director Handicrafts and Handloom, Director Floriculture and other officers were also present on the occasion.

This year the garden houses 1.5 million flowers of tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and narcissi.

The flowers include 68 varieties of tulips, In-charge of Tulip Garden Imam Rehman Sofi said.

He said the visitors will be able to see six new varieties of tulips.

Sofi said last year, 2.25 lakh people visited the garden and this year we expect more.

Most of the visitors (today) were from outside the UT, which is a good signal. The garden pre-pares our tourist season and I think this is a good omen for this year's tourist season, Sofi said.

This year, the department has made provisions for online ticket sales as well to avoid the rush at the ticket counter.

The average lifespan of tulip flowers is three to four weeks, but heavy rains or too much heat can destroy them.

The Floriculture Department plants tulip bulbs in a phased manner so that the flowers remain in the garden for a month or more.

It feels so good to be here. We are seeing unbelievable flowers, the beauty of Kashmir, a tourist from Gujarat, Nehal Mehta, said.

Another tourist, Viranshi, also from Gujarat, said, I had seen flowers in bouquets only so far. This is the first time I am seeing such a vast variety of flowers in a garden, in so many colours. This is beautiful and mesmerising.

We have had so many wonderful moments in Kashmir like a Shikara ride and playing in snow, which is a dream come true. But, this Tulip garden is a cherry on top, she added.

Petrol, diesel prices...

In Kolkata, rates increased to Rs 106.34 from Rs 105.51.

The diesel price hike in Mumbai was 85 paise per litre.

Rates differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes.

A record 137-day hiatus in rate revision ended on March 22 with an 80 paise per litre increase in rates.

Prices had been on a freeze since November 4 ahead of the assembly elections in states like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab -- a period during which the cost of raw material (crude oil) soared by USD 30 per barrel.

The rate revision was expected soon after assembly elections ended on March 10 but it was put off.

Oil companies are now recouping the losses.

They "will need to raise diesel prices by Rs 13.1-24.9 per litre and Rs 10.6-22.3 a litre on gasoline (petrol) at an underlying crude price of USD 100-120 per barrel," Kotak Institutional Equities said in a note.

If crude sustains around levels of USD 120, oil marketing companies will find it difficult to be able to return to a normative marketing margin without any support from the central government in the form of excise duty cuts, it said.

"Oil marketing companies holding back on retail price hikes following the conclusion of the elections was disappointing given the impact on margins, however, price hikes should provide some marginal respite if the trend sustains over the coming days," it added.

India is 85 per cent dependent on imports to meet its oil needs.

Dipti Deshpande, Principal Economist at CRISIL Ltd, said retail fuel prices of petrol and diesel have been kept unchanged since November 2021, whereas global crude oil prices rose by close to USD 30 per barrel during this period. "The pass through of rising crude oil prices to domestic