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Highest daily spike in COVID cases this year

increased to 2,34,406 which now comprises 2.05 per cent of the total infections, while the recovery rate has further dropped to 96.56 per cent, the data stated.

As many as 30,254 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours on December 13.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,10,45,284, while the case fatality rate has dropped to 1.39 per cent, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August

23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16.It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-core mark on December 19.

According to the ICMR, 22,92,49,784 samples have been tested up to March 16 with 9,69,021 samples being tested on Tuesday.

The 188 new fatalities include 87 from Maharashtra, 38 from Punjab, 15 from Kerala and 12 from Chhattisgarh. (PTI)

Atlanta shootings leave 8 dead

miles (50 km) north of Atlanta, Cherokee County Sheriff's Office spokesman Capt. Jay Baker said. Two people died at the scene, and three were taken to a hospital where two died, Baker said.

About an hour later, police responding to a call about a robbery found three women dead from apparent gunshot wounds at Gold Spa in Atlanta's

Buckhead neighbourhood, which is home to many tattoo parlours and strip clubs.

While there, the officers learned of a call reporting shots fired at another spa across the street, Aromatherapy Spa, and found a woman who appeared to have been shot dead.

"It appears that they may be Asian," Atlanta Police Chief Rodney Bryant said. (AP)

3800 Kashmiri migrants return to take up jobs under PM's package

Kashmir. However, the incidents of shelling from across the border have increased during the past three years," he said.

Reddy said the terror incidents in Jammu and Kashmir have come down from 614 in 2018 to 244 in 2020.

He said killings of civilians have come down from 39 in 2018 to 37 in 2020 and deaths of security personnel from 91 in 2018 to 62 in 2020.

However, the Minister said, instances of shelling from Pakistan increased from 2,140 in 2018 to 5,133 in 2020.

Reddy said some instances of supply of weapons through drones from Pakistan have come to light and security agencies were taking action on it.

He said this in Rajya Sabha, while responding to a question on

whether the central government is aware that Pakistan has started supplying weapons to infiltrators via drones.

"Certain instances of supply of weapons via drones from across the Pakistan border have come to the notice of security and law enforcement agencies," he said in his written reply.

Reddy said the Government has been taking various steps to meet such challenges, which include round the clock effective surveillance, streamlining the intelligence set up, capacity building of forces, patrolling on the borders along with sensitization of local population in border areas, establishment of observation posts, border fencing, flood lighting, deployment and use of modern and hi-tech surveillance equipments, etc. (PTI)

Parliamentary Panel recommends immediate glaciological studies in UTs of J&K, Ladakh

the MHA to place adequate early warning mechanism in every district so that vulnerable communities can be alerted on the wake of any disaster in future", the Parliamentary Panel has further recommended.

The Committee has noted that monitoring of Glacial Lake Outbursts Flows (GLOFs) requires a network of meteorological and hydrological stations, early warning system comprising remote Automatic Water Level Recorder (AWLR) or Monitoring Stations and Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) with the ability to communicate and transmit data from remote stations to the control room etc for operation and monitoring in real-time data on air temperature, precipitation and river discharge through telemetry (V-SAT).

The Parliamentary Panel has observed that excessive cutting of trees and use of dynamites on hills/mountains of the Himalayan region for roads, tunnels, dams and other developmental/infrastructural projects is significantly weakening the surrounding hills and may cause avalanche, landslides, flash floods and other catastrophes in future.

"The Committee understands

that the Himalayas are fragile mountains and geologically and environmentally sensitive. Therefore, the developmental projects taking place in the region should be considered from the environmental and ecological point of view", the report said.

Accordingly, the Committee has recommended that Ministry of Home Affairs may coordinate with the concerned agencies including National Disaster Management Authority and Ministry of Road, Transport & Highways to immediately ban the use of dynamites for developmental projects in the Himalayan region and make judicious use of technology particularly in high altitude Himalayan region to minimize the damage to ecology and environment.

The Committee has further recommended exploring technological solutions including use of cutting-edge technology and best practices followed by the other countries for cutting of hills/mountains for various developmental projects in J&K and Ladakh Union Territories.

All these recommendations have been made by the Parliamentary Panel despite the Ministry of Home Affairs submitted that Government of India has a good system of monitoring avalanche movement etc and various agencies are working in avalanche forecasting, artificial triggering and structural controls in snow-bound mountainous areas.

WEATHER

JAMMU:

Partly cloudy

TEMPERATURE

Max: 30.0 Degree C

Min: 14.8 Degree C

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

RH-I (Morning): 62.0 per cent

RH-II (Evening): 42.0 per cent

Sunset on Thursday: 06.42 p.m.

Sunrise on Friday: 06.37 a.m.

SRINAGAR:

Possibility of light rain/thundershowers

TEMPERATURE

Max: 18.4 Degree C

Min: 6.2 Degree C

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

RH-I (Morning): 81.0 per cent

RH-II (Evening): 44.0 per cent

LEH:

TEMPERATURE

Max: 13.3 Degree C

Min: -1.7 Degree C

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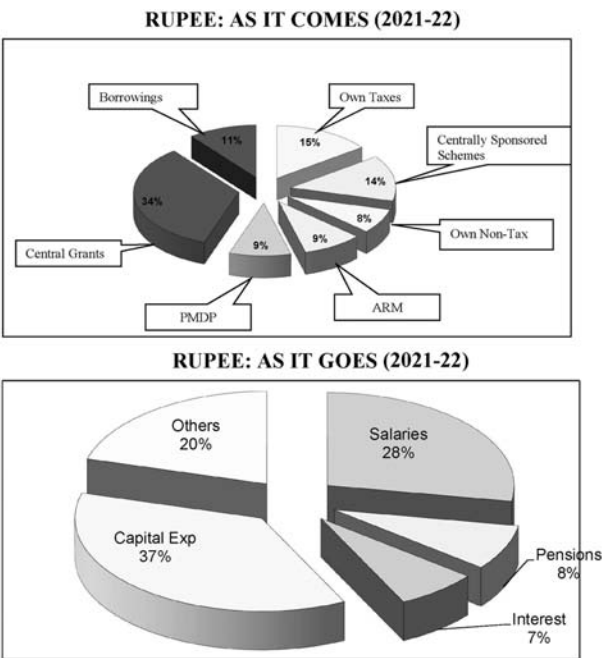
FM tables Rs 1.08 lakh cr budget in Parl; Rs 200 cr for 20 DDCs, Rs 71.25 cr for 285 BDCs

- HIGHLIGHTS
- Enhanced UT share earmarked for PMAY (G) scheme with a provision of Rs 301 cr.
 - Parking places to be established along Highway in areas prone to jams to prevent parking on roads.
 - Rs 5212 crore for Jal Jeevan Mission'. All districts to be covered under "Har Ghar Nal Se Jal", Pani Samiti.
 - Third party Inspection system within Finance Department.
 - SHGs to be established for encouraging Filigiri Art.
 - Solid Waste Management facility in all the towns and Service Level Benchmarking system to be introduced. Rs 250 crore have been earmarked for SWM/sewerage treatment.
 - Rs 40 crore as ex-gratia relief for COVID warriors.
 - Rs 50 crore for establishing agriculture processing zones (Food Cluster Parks).
 - Special focus for Online teaching systems in Schools/Colleges, other facilities.
 - Rs 50 crore for Transformer Cut-Outs and Rs 20 crore for installation of smart meters.
 - Rs 1313 crore for PRIs/ULBs for rural and urban infrastructure.
 - Additional Rs 200 crore as UT matching share under MGNREGA.
 - Rs 3 crore for procurement of Prosthetic Aids/Motorized Tricycles for disabled persons.
 - Rs 80 crore for PRI Security.
 - Rs 50 crore for construction of Police Housing Colony and Rs 10 crore for Relief and Rehabilitation.
 - Additional funds of Rs 50 crore for construction of Bunkers in border areas.
 - Rs 50 crore for two Medicities, Rs 10 crore for Drug-Deaddiction/rehabilitation centres and Rs 50 crore for technology in Health Care.
 - Rs 20 crore for improving Quality in Schools, Rs 10 crore for School Infrastructure, Rs 5 crore for Career Counselling and Rs 20 crore for introduction of additional Streams in Schools.
 - Rs 100 crore for introduction of additional Streams in Colleges.
 - Rs 25 crore for newly created Registration Department and Rs 3 crore for digitization of land records.
 - Rs 20 crore for Sports Leagues/Coaching.
 - Rs 150 crore for Dal Development and conservation.
 - Rs 200 crore for Metro Corporations.
 - Rs 100 crore as City Grants for Jammu and Srinagar cities.
 - Rs 5 crore for establishment of Disaster Relief Centre at Srinagar and Rs 2 crore at Jammu.
 - Rs 100 crore for procurement of Buses/Trucks by JKRTC.
 - Rs 200 crore as UT matching share for Smart City projects.
 - Rs 200 crore for procurement of Machinery and Equipments and Rs 400 crore set procurement of drugs and instruments in Health sector.
 - Rs 50 crore for construction of Tribal Hostels/Milk Villages/ Nomad Shelters/Libraries for Gujars and Bakerwals.
 - Rs 25 crore for Insurance of Passenger vehicles to Transporters as a part of business revival package.
 - Rs 25 crore as subsidy for replacement of old and condemned vehicles to Transporters as a part of business revival package.
 - Rs 2 crore as UT matching share for "Devika Project".
 - Rs 20 crore for Youth startup/Job fairs/revival of Overseas Employment Corporation.
 - Rs 200 crore @ Rs10 crore each earmarked as 'Development Fund' for 20 DDCs and Rs 71.25 crore @ Rs 25 lakh each as 'Development Fund' for 285 BDCs.

BUDGET AT A GLANCE

Items	2019-20 (Pre-Actuals)	2020-21 (BE)	2020-21 RE	2021-22 (BE)
Revenue Receipts	\$2618	91100	75903	97141
Revenue Expenditure	\$2964	62664	62486	68804
Revenue Surplus (A-B)	-346	28436	13417	28337
Capital Receipts	12411	10328	16438	11480
Capital Expenditure	12065	38764	29855	39817
Capital A/C Deficit (C-D)	346	-28436	-13417	-28337
Total Expenditure	65029	101428	92341	108621
Total Receipts	65029	101428	92341	108621
Fiscal Deficit	10679	10240	15710	10647
Unfunded/Additional resources required	0	0	0	0

^..sign indicates deficit



which is within FRBM limits. GDP growth for 2021-22 has been projected at Rs 2,01,054 crore which shows a growth of 7.5 percent, the budget data revealed.

The overall expenditure excludes Ways and Means advance of Rs 22211 crore in Revised Estimates 2020-21 and Balance Expenditure 2021-22.

Sitharaman also gave slight political touch to her budget speech saying the creation of UT of J&K has ushered an era of hope and positivity.

"The people of J&K today look forward to a future free of corruption and separatism. We now have one nation, one Constitution and one law. All 890 Central Laws have now become applicable to J&K," she said.

She added that taking forward all initiatives, the Government expects Jammu and Kashmir to achieve GDP growth of 7.5 percent in 2021-22 which, however, is conservative estimate given the pandemic situation.

Tourism, which is mainstay of Jammu and Kashmir economy among other Sectors, also found special mention in the speech of the Finance Minister.

"Revival of tourism sector post COVID-19 pandemic is our utmost priority. The Government shall make every effort for promotion of tourism by vibrant campaigning and holding of national and international events. New tourism destinations will be explored through public and private investment. Water based tourism activities will be encouraged in adventure tourism. Gold tourism will be taken at higher scale by holding national and international events. World class wayside amenities and facilities will be provided besides tourism related assets at all places will be renovated and upgraded to increase and attract high-end tourists.

"We will provide special attention for smooth conduct of Shri Amarnath Ji yatra commencing in June/July this year to enable pilgrims to pay obeisance at the holy cave with due facilities. We are also focusing on preservation and conservation of heritage site. Last year, I had announced development of three religious circuits including one Sufi circuit which are being developed by the Jammu and Kashmir Government," the Finance Minister said.

On Kashmiri migrants relief and rehabilitation measures, Sitharaman said out of 6000 posts created for Kashmiri migrants under Prime Minister's Package, 3841 posts stand filled up and for the remaining vacancies recruitment is being conducted. Other components of the PM package like housing, employment, waiver on loans, cash assistance and free ration will continue in 2021-22.

"Under PM package, out of 6000 units, 1025 units of transit accommodation have already been completed. Work on 1488 units of transit accommodation is being undertaken in 2021-22. Land has also been identified for another 2444 units," the budget speech said. The other components of the PM package like housing, employment, waiver on loans, cash assistance and free ration will continue in 2021-22, it added.

Asserting that Jammu and Kashmir is rich in water resources, she said the Government targets 100 percent piped water connections to each and every rural household of Jammu and Kashmir by September 2022 under Jal Jeevan Mission. She added that two districts including Srinagar and Ganderbal have already been covered while nine districts are to be covered by March 2022 and remaining seven districts by September 2022. Under this programme, 3.83 lakh water connections will be provided during 2021-22 covering 19.65 lakh populations. In addition, all uncovered schools and Anganwadi centre of the UT will be provided water connections.

The Finance Minister said Rs 200 crore have been earmarked in 2021-22 for rejuvenation and restoration of nine identified polluted river stretches by CPCB on the directions of National Green Tribunal. Hull based bio-digesters will be installed in houseboats while aerators will be installed and de-weeding machines will be procured.

"Under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), 25000 houses are likely to be completed in 2021-22. To identify genuine beneficiaries get real benefits of the scheme, 50,000 beneficiary houses will be Geo-tagged," she added.

Sitharaman announced that 456 investment proposals/Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) have been received by Jammu and Kashmir's Industries and Commerce Department involving an investment of Rs 23,000 crore in various sectors in the Union Territory where investors have shown keen interest for investments.

In Social Security Sector, Cluster Tribal villages will be developed with establishment of milk villages and libraries for Gujjars/Bakerwals while hostel facilities for Gujjar, Bakarwal and ST students will be created. Ekalavya Model Residential Schools will be set up for ST students.

The Finance Minister also presented Supplementary Demands for Grants for current Financial Year of 2020-21 including 10 Grants and one Appropriation.



Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha chairing the Administrative Council meeting in Jammu on Wednesday.

RHPC to develop 850 MW Ratle HEP

and enable effective use of western rivers under the Indus Water Treaty, an official hand-out said.

Vaccine wastage 6.5 pc, Centre for optimal utilization of shots

being reported. By March 15, the number increased to average 1338. The positivity rate has doubled and RT-PCR share is 89 per cent, he said.

In Chandigarh on March 1, an average of 49 new cases were being reported. By March 15, the number increased to average 111. The positivity rate has increased from 3.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent and RT-PCR share is 40 per cent.

"We would want a distinct increasing trend of tests in which RT-PCR share is substantially higher than the current 40 per cent share," he said.

In Chhattisgarh on March 1, an average of 239 new cases were being reported. By March 15, the number increased to average 430. The positivity rate increased from 1.4 per cent to 2.4 per cent and RT-PCR share is 34 per cent. So, again, we would want the RT-PCR tests to increase to up to 70 per cent and also an overall increase in testing.

In Gujarat on March 1, an average of 398 new cases were being reported. By March 15, the number increased to average 689. The positivity rate increased from 2.4 per cent to 4 per cent and RT-PCR share is 50 per cent.

In Karnataka, on March 1, an

average of 443 new cases were being reported. By March 15, the number increased to average 751. The positivity rate increased from 0.8 per cent to 1.3 per cent and RT-PCR share is 93 per cent.

To handle the increasing cases especially in 12 states, states have been advised to ensure strict adherence to mask wearing, physical distancing and hand hygiene along with greater vigilance and monitoring at the highest levels for all potential events where crowds gather.

They have asked to ensure clinical management in districts reporting higher deaths and efficient implementation of 'test, track and treat' strategy.

There should be significantly increased testing in all districts and an increase in the proportion of RT PCR tests to a minimum of 70 per cent.

"We are advising the States to ensure all close contacts of any positive person are traced, isolated and tested in 72 hours. They have asked to identify clusters, focus on surveillance and stringent implementation of containment zone approach and undertake priority vaccination of identified groups in districts reporting higher cases," he said. (PTI)

Capt dies in MiG accident

"A MiG-21 Bison aircraft of IAF was involved in a fatal accident this morning, while taking

off for a combat training mission at an airbase in central India," the IAF said. (PTI)

Muzaffar Beigh joins People's Conference

political career.

The Party spokesman further quoted Beigh as saying, "it gave me immense pleasure to be a part of the party, which I joined as a youth and was groomed by party founder Abdul Gani Lone. Today, I has the opportunity to yet again groom leaders like Sajad Lone and many others to take up leadership role in the future times to come."

"Beigh told that in his entire public life, he had causes for being happy and many causes where he was disappointed. He expressed his desire to contribute by grooming youngsters and building their capacity. Beigh felt that apart from many problems plaguing J&K, one of the biggest problems is the quality of leadership," the PC spokesman revealed.

It is pertinent to mention here that Muzaffar Hussain Beigh, a founder member of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) with Late Mufti Mohd Sayeed, was sidelined over the past few years, especially after the party joined hands with the BJP for Government formation in the wake of 2014 Assembly elections. He had nearly parted ways with PDP in November 2020 over its seat sharing arrangement with National Conference in DDC elections.

Senior party leaders Abdul Gani Vakil, Bashir Ahmed Dar, Abid Ansari, Irfan Panditpori, Raja Aijaz, and Adnan Ashraf' also accompanied Sajad Lone.

Party vice president Abdul Gani Vakil when contacted said they reached the residence of Muzaffar Hussain Beigh at around 4 pm today and stayed there for about one and half hours. They had good discussion with Beigh and requested him for his 'home

coming' and guide the cadre under such crucial circumstances with his vast political experience, capabilities and wisdom." Beigh Sahib agreed and expressed his pleasure to be part of People's Conference once again, the party from where he had commenced his political career," Vakil added.

Meanwhile, senior PDP leader from Jammu region and former MLC, Surinder Choudhary today resigned from the post of general secretary and as Member Political Affairs Committee (PAC).

In a letter flashed to the PDP president and former J&K Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti, Choudhary stated," Being a simple and grass-root level worker of PDP, I will not be able to shoulder such important responsibilities of the party. So, I am resigning from both the posts namely- as general secretary and the member of PAC, the highest decision making panel of the party. I will serve the party as a simple worker," he added.

Though Surinder Choudhary, a strong voice of the PDP from Pir Panjal belt and Jammu region as whole, has not cited clear reason to resign from the posts he was holding, yet the party sources said that Choudhary is leaving the party along with some office bearers and he will declare it at a press conference within couple of days.

Sources further revealed that Choudhary was annoyed over the attitude of the party leadership as he being senior leader and strong voice from Jammu region, was not taken into confidence while inducting new office bearers by the party recently. He is likely to join a new party shortly, the sources revealed.

India's engagement with China complex: Govt in Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI, Mar 17:

"The two sides have also agreed to manage their differences and not allow differences on any issue to become disputes," Muraleedharan added.

On the border row, the minister said the two sides have maintained communication through both diplomatic and military channels to ensure complete disengagement from all friction points and full restoration of peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

"The two sides were able to reach an agreement on disengagement in the North and South Bank of the Pangong Lake, which has been completed. There are however still some outstanding issues with regard to deployment and patrolling at some other points along the LAC in eastern Ladakh," he said.

The border standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries erupted on May 5 last following a violent clash in the Pangong lake areas and 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 withdrawal of troops and weapons from the North and South banks of Pangong lake in line with the agreement on disengagement last month.

"Government will continue discussions with the Chinese side to resolve the remaining issues along the LAC in eastern Ladakh and achieve the objective of disengagement from all friction points and restoration of peace and tranquillity in the India-China border areas at an early date," the Minister said. (PTI)

India today said its engagement with China is "complex" and the two countries agreed that the future direction of ties should be built upon respecting each other's sensitivities, concerns and aspirations.

Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan also said in the Lok Sabha that India will continue discussions with China to resolve the remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh to achieve the objective of disengagement from all friction points.

His written response came when asked whether India-China relations are being affected due to violation of negotiations made in the past by China and "unfruitful efforts" to cross the LAC again and again.

Referring to the eastern Ladakh row, Muraleedharan said the Chinese side, since April/May last year, undertook several attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo along the LAC in the region and India's armed forces responded to them appropriately.

"It has been made clear to the Chinese side that such unilateral attempts are unacceptable. These actions have seriously disturbed the peace and tranquillity along the LAC in the western sector," he said.

The Government often refers to eastern Ladakh as western sector.

"India's engagement with China is complex. The two sides agree that the future direction of India China relations should be built upon respecting each other's sensitivities, concerns and aspirations," he said on the overall ties.