Village in Chhattisgarh grapples with spate of kidney ailments

RAIPUR, JUNE 17 /--/ Residents of a small village in Chhattisgarh's Gariaband district are battling kidney-related ailments, which has claimed 64 lives in the last one decade. The government authorities were yet to find the exact cause of these ailments, though residents of the Supebeda village said the contaminated drinking water was taking a toll on their health. The village, deep inside a forest with barely any proper road to reach there, is located nearly 12 km from the Deobhog town in the Naxal-hit Gariaband district and around 220 km away from the state capital. Supebeda has a population of around 1,500, comprising mostly scheduled caste (SC) and tribal people. Ironically, while the Deobhog area is known for diamond deposits, its natives say they have no access to basic amenities like clean drinking water and health facilities. As per the state health department records, 64 people died due to kidney related ailments since 2009 in the village. Tarun Kumar Sinha, 30, who is suffering from a kidney disease, said all his family's savings have been spent and land sold for his treatment."Now we have nothing left to continue my treatment," the distraught man told PTI. Sinha, who has a daughter and a son, said last year he came to know about his illness which gradually started affecting both his kidneys.

Another villager Premshila, 28, said her husband died of a renal ailment last month. "We suddenly found out that my husband was having a kidney-related illness after we took him to doctor for the swelling in his legs. He collapsed last month while working," she said. She claimed that her father-in-law had also died due to a similar illness in 2011. The woman said she was now left alone to fend for herself and her three children. Supebeda's sarpanch (head) Sunita Nayak claimed the villagers were suffering from kidney-related diseases due to the contaminated drinking water. A preliminary investigation conducted earlier by government authorities revealed that the water used from a borewell in the village had excessive heavy metal content following which it was shut, Nayak said. An alternative arrangement was made from a borewell of the nearby Nisthiguda village but it was yet to be ascertained if the water being supplied from there was clean, she said. Another villager Trilochan Sonwani said some villagers were availing treatment in Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) after selling their lands. The state government had promised to give an aid of Rs 50,000 each to the affected villagers but it was yet to be provided, he claimed.

The district administration, meanwhile, said water did not seem to be the only cause of these diseases. "It seems like it is not only the problem of drinking water and therefore, multiple tests are being conducted to ascertain the exact cause of the diseases. Samples of soil from the village are also being examined," Gariaband Collector Shyam Dhawde said. The administration was taking steps to tackle the problem. A water filter plant was installed in the village and arrangements were made for providing potable water, he said. Gariaband's former chief medical officer Arun Kumar Ratre said he had visited Supebeda during his tenure as CMO, and found that not only the drinking water but consumption of locally made liquor was also the cause of kidney problems among villagers. Though an excessive content of fluoride and arsenic was reported in the village water, residents also consumed liquor, brewed in villages of the neighbouring Odisha state, which has harmful effects, he said. Ninad Bodhankar, the professor of geology at the Pt Ravishankar Shukla University in Raipur, said the high heavy metal content in the underground water used for drinking purpose could be the cause behind these diseases. "The concentration of fluoride and other metals was high in the village ground water because of the nature of rocks found there. Its consumption might have caused the diseases," he said.

Water from alternative sources like river or pond can be a better option for the village. However, an examination was still underway to check the quality of water and nothing could be concluded till it was completed, he added. (PTI)

Members of Adivashi Jan Parishad shouting slogans during the Jharkhand Bandh called by all opposition parties against the CNT (Chotanagpur Tenancy Act) and SPT (Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act) Land Acquisition bill in Ranchi

Clash during procession in Guj; police lob teargas shells

VADODARA, JUNE 17 /--/ Police lobbed teargas shells and resorted to baton charge to disperse members of two communities who clashed during a procession to mark the birth anniversary of Rajput warrior Maharana Pratap in the Wadi area here last night, an official said today. Some people were injured in the violence, the police official said, but did not specify the number. No arrest has been made so far, he said. The members of the two communities hurled stones at each other, damaging a window of a religious place and some vehicles parked there, the official said. The police lobbed seven teargas shells and baton charged the mob that engaged in stone-pelting when the procession was passing through Dudhwala Mohalla in the Wadi locality, Joint Commissioner of Police (Crime) K G Bhati said. He said the procession was taken out by the Karni Sena -- an organisation of the Rajput community.

According to an FIR lodged by a local resident at the Wadi police station, the members of the procession allegedly shouted slogans against a particular community. They also allegedly attacked a shrine and damaged its glass window as well as some cars and two-wheelers parked there, an official at the Wadi police station said quoting the FIR. The other community members retaliated, leading to a clash, he said. The FIR stated that people in the procession, some armed with sharp weapons, allegedly shouted slogans to "incite members of the other community and spread hatred", he said. An investigation is on into the incident, the official said. A case of rioting, unlawful assembly, mischief, voluntarily causing hurt and criminal conspiracy under the Indian Penal Code has been registered against nearly 200 people belonging to both the communities, he added. (PTI)

Panic as snake found in VIP lounge at Puducherry airport

PUDUCHERRY, JUNE 17 / --/ A highly venomous snake was discovered in the VIP lounge of the airport here causing flutter among staff members and officials. Top officials including Airport Authority of India, Chairman,Guruprasad Mohapatra had in the middle of a meeting yesterday spotted the 6-feet long reptile moving beneath a couch and immediately rushed out of the lounge, police said. A woman staff present at the spot tried to drive out the snake using a mop. However, a police constable managed to catch the snake that had wandered in from nearby thicket and handed it over to forest department personnel, they said. The reptile was identified as Viper, a species considered to be very poisonous. The constable D Thiagou, attached to the India Reserve Battalion (IRBn) of Puducherry was presented a cash award and commendation certificate for his act of bravery. Director General of Police S K Gautam presented the cash award and commendation certificate to the constable and appreciated his brave act. (PTI)

Diabetes has become epidemic in India, needs urgent attention: health expert

HYDERABAD, JUNE 17 / --/ Diabetes has become an epidemic in the country which requires urgent attention, but good news is that the Centre as well as state governments are committed to address the situation, a public health expert has said. "In India, (there are) 75 million estimated diabetics. Another 70 million are called pre-diabetics. They would go into diabetes very soon. So, you are looking at 150 million people in our country who are at risk of diabetes," Director of Indian Institute of Public Health (IIPH), Hyderabad, GVS Murthy told PTI. The problem is "half of them do not know that they have diabetes" and the condition is noticed only when they have a complication, he said. "These are the three big challenges why diabetes is important," he said. IIPH works under the aegis of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). The PHFI had recently launched a Helpline for Diabetes here last week.

Murthy observed that diabetes is the underlying cause of 50 per cent of all deaths in any part of the world today. "Stroke, diabetes is the commonest underlying factor. Heart attack, diabetes is the commonest underlying factor. That's why, it is so important. It is an epidemic. Unless we act today, we will fail tomorrow," he said. At present, USD 700 billion is the cost on care for diabetes globally, he said. He put the cost in India at nearly USD 10 billion out of the USD 700 billion.

'Sadhus' protest against extortion call to brethren in UP

MUZAFFARNAGAR, JUNE 17 /--/ A group of people has staged a protest demanding action against miscreants for allegedly trying to extort money from a 'sadhvi' at Shukratal area here. An FIR was registered on Friday against unidentified persons for allegedly trying to extort Rs 50 lakh from 'sadhvi' Rajandeshwari of Balaji Yog Dham research centre, police said. According to her complaint, she received a threat letter on Thursday demanding Rs 50 lakh and land. A group of 'sadhus' last evening staged the protest demanding action against miscreants. (PTI)

Bihar govt claims improvement in land acquisition scenario

PATNA, JUNE 17 /--/ Acquisition of land for road projects in Bihar had slowed down in the wake of a new law coming into force four years ago, but things have looked up since then, the state government claimed on Saturday. A release issued by the state Road Construction department said "as a result of a new land acquisition law coming into force in 2014, guidelines and procedures underwent lots of changes. This had resulted in delays in acquiring land. But now clarity has been achieved and acquisition of land has picked up speed". The state government's submission comes close on the heels of a statement by Union surface transport minister Nitin Gadkari who had claimed that projects worth Rs two lakh crore were stalled because of problems in land acquisition. A section of the media had, however, claimed that the Union minister's remarks were a snub to chief minister and JD-U national president Nitish Kumar since the BJP was miffed over his recent statements on de-monetisation and assertions by his party that it was the "big brother" in the NDA in Bihar. Notably, the road construction portfolio in the state Cabinet is held by a senior BJP leader Nand Kishore Yadav. Although the release made no mention of the observations by Gadkari, it began with the remark "the Centre is providing laudable assistance in strengthening and development of infrastructure like roads and bridges in the state of Bihar".

BJP, Sena to clash again in Maha Legislative Council polls

MUMBAI, JUNE 17 /--/ The ruling alliance partners in Maharashtra, the BJP and the Shiv Sena, are set for a clash again in the biennial elections to the Legislative Council, after a bitter face-off in the Palghar Lok Sabha bypoll. Elections will be held on June 25 for the Mumbai Graduates', Mumbai Teachers', Konkan Graduates' and Nashik Teachers' constituencies for the Legislature's Upper House. The terms of sitting members - Deepak Sawant (of Shiv Sena - Mumbai Graduates), Kapil Patil (of Lok Bharati party - Mumbai Teachers), Niranjan Davkhare (who switched over from NCP to BJP - Konkan Graduates) and Apoorva Hire (an independent - Nashik Teachers) - are expiring on July 7. The elections have assumed significance as the Shiv Sena has denied ticket to Deepak Sawant, the state health minister, from the Mumbai Graduates' constituency which he represented for two consecutive terms.

Besides, the election in the Konkan Graduates' seat is also going to be keenly watched as sitting MLC Niranjan Davkhare last month quit the NCP to join the BJP. Total 71 candidates are in fray for the four seats. The ruling allies will clash in the Konkan and the Mumbai Graduates' constituencies. Davkhare of the BJP will take on Sena's Sanjay More in the Konkan Graduates' seat. The NCP has fielded Najeeb Mulla, who has support of the Congress and other like-minded parties. In the Mumbai Graduates' seat, Vilas Potnis of the Shiv Sena is pitted against BJP's Amit Mehta. The Congress and the NCP have lent support to independent Rajendra Korde.

In the Mumbai Teachers' seat, Shiv Sena's Shivaji Shendge will clash with sitting MLC Kapil Patil (Lok Bharati). Patil has the support of the Congress and the NCP while the BJP is backing independent nominee Anil Deshmukh.

When asked about the ruling allies pitted against each other in two of the four Council seats going to polls, BJP spokesman Keshav Upadhyay said his party is in favour of an alliance. "If the alliance materialises in future, we will contest together," he added.

Maharashtra Congress president Ashok Chavan said his party had never contested the teachers' and graduates' constituencies in the Legislative Council but supported independents and like-minded parties. A graduates' constituency is one in which only graduates from any recognised Indian university, or having an equivalent qualification, can vote. In a teachers' constituency, only a full-time teacher in at least a secondary school or higher is eligible to vote. In the 78-member Maharashtra Legislative Council, 31 MLCs are elected by the state Assembly members, 21 by local authorities, 12 are nominated by the governor and seven each (total 14) are elected by graduates and teachers. The constituencies, seven each for teachers and graduates, are (division wise) - Mumbai, Pune, Konkan, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Nashik, and Amravati. (PTI)

Greenpeace India urges Environment Ministry to speed up rolling out National Clean Air Plan

NEW DELHI, JUNE 17 /--/ With a massive haze of dust enveloping Delhi and the pollution levels dropping to "severe" category, a green body has urged the Environment Ministry to speed up rolling out its National Clean Air Programme, which proposes multiple strategies to combat air pollution. Greenpeace India said air pollution is a "silent and invisible killer" and a national health emergency, asserting that big polluters must be held accountable for the menace. The air pollution situation in Delhi remained "severe" for fifth day on Saturday, but authorities expressed hope that the air quality would improve after pollutants begin to disperse. The pollution level had dipped to "severe plus" category at on one point on Saturday but the situation was gradually improving, the Centre-run System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research institute (SAFAR) said. "Air pollution is prevalent all year round and throughout the country and not just limited to Delhi. The environment ministry must speed up its pace on rolling out the National Clean Air Programme," Sunil Dahiya, senior campaigner, climate and energy, Greenpeace India, told PTI. "Air pollution is a national public health emergency and the big polluters must be held accountable for the menace," he said. The environment ministry has prepared the draft NCAP with an overall objective of a comprehensive management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution, and augment the air quality monitoring network across the country. Various green groups have submitted their recommendations to the ministry on the draft. The PM10 level (presence of particles with diameter less than 10 mm) had climbed to 778 in Delhi-NCR and 824 in Delhi on Wednesday, demonstrating that severe air pollution is a "summer-time problem" too. Delhi L-G Anil Baijal has ordered stoppage of all civil construction activities till Sunday. Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan has ordered civic agencies to be on "maximum" alert and ensure necessary measures are taken to contain the spread of dust particles. (PTI)

Piece of history lost in the folds of time

NAINITAL, JUNE 17 /--/ Now a bustling tourist hotspot, Nainital seems to have forgotten all about the British woman who took the first steps towards developing it as a tourist destination 130 years ago. Mary Jane Corbett, better known as the mother of hunter-turned environmentalist Jim Corbett, was virtually the mother of tourism activities in the hill town as she set up its first lodging facility for visitors. This piece of history, however, seems to have been buried under the layers of time as the picturesque hill town gets busier each year with the crowd of tourists. Mary Jane was a woman who lived in the hills of Massoorie and Nainital and died in Nainital. Her final resting place is also located in the lap of this town but stands neglected by the locals and tourists alike despite having the potential to become a tourist attraction.

Mary Jane was the first person to provide a lodging facility in the town and in her own little way she sowed here the seeds of tourism culture, which gradually became one of the main occupations of the people here and now shapes its economy, says Reverend Sundar Lal, who presides over the Church of St. John-in-the-wilderness where Mary Jane Corbett's grave stands. Despite the town harvesting a fortune out of tourism activities, the mother of tourism lies neglected and forgotten, he rues. People from various countries still come to Nainital to visit the graves of their ancestors who were buried here during the colonial era. "It's unfortunate that the grave of the person who devoted her life to developing tourism remains deserted," says Reverend Sundar Lal.

"It also shows the apathy of those responsible for tourism development. If not for emotional reasons, this site should have been well preserved, propagated and publicized at least for promoting tourism. The remains of this grave are the parts of the history of this town. The site is worth a visit also for witnessing the peaceful environment and the natural beauty that encompasses the area," he says. Ever since its discovery, Nainital had been a summer retreat to many.

Professor Anil Joshi of Kumaun University's History department here says, "The first European style residential building set up in the town was for the benefit of Lushington, who served as the fourth Commissioner of the Kumaon region. "It soon became the summer capital for the governor of the United Province (later known as Uttar Pradesh) and to this day the town is graced by the presence of the Uttarakhand governor during summer. The Britons were responsible for not only settlement and development of Nainital but can also be credited for the inception of the idea of tourism here.

Vijay Mohan Singh Khati, a tourism expert, says, "This initiative can largely be attributed to Mary Jane, more popularly recognized as the mother of Jim Corbett, the legendary hunter-turned-environmentalist and writer of Kumaon after whom Corbett National Park was renamed." "Amidst the hot and sultry weather of India, the discovery of Nainital was like a boon to the Britons. Homesick for their motherland's cool temperatures, they found solace in Nainital's weather," says Anup Sah, a noted photographer.

As the town's population began to grow, its economy too began taking shape. In 1862, Father of Jim Corbett, Christopher William who was also a veteran of the First Afghan wars, the Sikh wars of 1840's and the mutiny, was recruited as postmaster at Nainital.

Snippets from Jim Corbett's books reveal that when the Corbetts moved to Nainital, they built a double storey house along with a cottage in the area opposite the China hill. Here Mary Jane managed her family of 15 children while also running a lodging house for the visitors.

"With the active participation and management of Eugene Mary Doyle, Mary Jane's first daughter, she was able to provide the family with the much-needed financial support. However, after a landslide in 1880 and her husband's death in 1881, Mary Jane sold the house. She then moved to the region of Ayarpata and constructed well known building of the town, Gurney house. The house was constructed out of the material of the dismantled cottage of the old home thus gaining its name Gurney, meaning a wheeled cot of stretcher, referring to the house built through the remains of the cottage wheeled over to the new location. "While Christopher William passed away on 21st April 1881, Mary Jane joined her husband in his heavenly abode on May 16, 1924. They were both laid to rest in the cemetery of the Church of St. John-in-the-wilderness," Prof Joshi said. (PTI)

Ajit Jogi seen likely to return to Congress

BY RAHIL NORA CHOPRA

Speculation is rife again that Ajit Jogi may return to the Congress after Rahul Gandhi called up Jogi's wife Renu, who is a Congress MLA, to enquire about his health earlier this week. Jogi is suffering from pneumonia and was shifted to a private hospital near Delhi. With Assembly elections just a few months month away in Chattisgarh, Congress leaders claim they have got feelers from Jogi, who had walked out of the party two years ago.

RAJASTHAN CONGRESS FIGHT OVER PARTY TICKETS

Rajasthan Congress party chief Sachin Pilot has launched the Mera Booth Mera Gaurav campaign In which a large number of party workers are participating in every Assembly constituency. The stepped up activity has also seen an increase in inighting between Congerss faction leaders, with workers coming out on the street to protest. The infighting led to unruly scenes in front of Congress secretary in-charge Avinash Pandey as rival factions staked claim for party tickets. On the other hand, the BJP camp is still in a sleeping mood as the party is stuck with the selection of a new chief of the state unit.

UTTARAKHAND BJP WIN HELPED BY CONGRESS INFIGHTING

The infighting in Uttarakhand Congress is believed to have played a major role in BJP winning the by-election in the state. Former chief minister Harish Rawat is opposed to state party president Pritam Singh while former president Kishore Upadhyay is working against Rawat because when the latter was chief minister he named Ganga to Ganga Nahar from Har ki Pauri in Haridwar while Ganga Nahar actually started from Kan Kahal. According to Kishore Upadhyay, this was done only to give benefit to builders. The pandas

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of Haridwar, whose livelihood depends on the Ganga, had also opposed Harish Rawat's decision.

MAMATA'S TACTICAL MOVES EYE DARJEELING

After the winning the panchayat elections and the Assembly by-elections Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is now concentrating on the hill region of the state. She launched several projects in Kalimpong during her recent visit there. She has already created Development Board for Lepcha and Bhutia sub-castes of the Darjeeling region and this decision is likely to weaken the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha led by Bimal Gurung, who is underground now a days. She also made Kalimpong a district, which was hitherto a sub-division of Darjeeling. Gorkha Janmukti Morcha had strongly opposed the formation of Kalimpong district. Mamata has also announced the setting up of a university in Darjeeling. All these moves are said to be with an eye on the Darjeeling parliamentary seat, which is now represented by BJP's SS Ahluwalia.

HARYANA CONGRESS GETS INTO ACTION MODE

On the advice of Congress president Rahul Gandhi, the Haryana Congress leaders have started organising meetings of party workers and public to expose the misdeeds of the BJP Government. Former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda recently held a rally at Samalkha town of Panipat while launching the second leg of his Jankranti Yatra. Randeep Singh Surjewala, who is the MLA from Kaithal, addressed a Jan Aakrosh Rally at Nissing and accused the BJP led government at the Centre and in Haryana of betraying farmers, youth and poor sections by failing to honouri the pre-poll promises. Rajya Sabha MP Selja Kumari addressed meetings in Karnal, Kurukshetra and Ambala as part of Haryana Bachao Rally. State Congress president Ashok Tanwar has similarly launched the second phase of 'Haryana Bachao-Parivartan Laao' cycle yatra from Chautala village of Sirsa district. (IPA)