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# Unity Key Strength of India Besides Its Military Power: PM Narendra Modi

■ HT News Network/KNO

**AMARAVATI, MAY 02:** After getting full support from NDA allies for his government's response to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack, which left 26 people, mostly tourists dead, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that India's strength today is not just in its weapons but also in its unity.

Addressing a rally in Amaravati, PM Modi, according to the news agency—, said, "Unity is a key strength of India besides its military strength."

Minutes before the Prime Minister's address, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan referred to the Pahalgam terror attack and voiced their open support to the Prime Minister in his



actions against Pakistan and terrorism.

"Today, our strength is not just weapons but also our unity. (Aaj humari taqat humare hathiyaar hi nahi hai... humari ekta bhi hai). Ekta malls are being built throughout the country," said, PM Modi.

"India has tested a new DRDO missile. We are boosting our defence sector by spending more on the defence sector. We laid the foundation stone of DRDO's Missile Test Range at Nagayalanka. The Navdurga Testing Range being built in Nagayalanka will empower the nation's defence power, just like Goddess Durga," he added.

Pertinently, after the Pahalgam terror attack PM Modi led Government has downgraded diplomatic ties with Pakistan. The Indus Water Treaty has been put in abeyance, while Pak nationals and

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## Pahalgam attack will be avenged: LoP Sharma

■ HT News Network/UNI



**SRINAGAR, MAY 02:** Stating that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi April 22 Pahalgam attack will be avenged, Leader of Opposition and senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, Sunil Sharma on Friday said that the perpetrators will be hunted down and taught a lesson. Sharma, according to the news agency—said, "Everyone is aware that PM Modi fulfills his promise. But, we will have to wait for the revenge of the Pahalgam attack. Those responsible will be hunted down."

Sharma also said that the country under the leadership of PM Modi has witnessed a change.

"The time has gone when the other countries would dare to undermine Bharat. It is Modi's Bharat and those responsible will be brought to justice," he said. "Bharat continues to follow

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## Bye-elections in J&K: ECI set to complete voter revision exercise in Budgam, Nagrota seats Electoral roll to be unveiled on Monday

■ HT News Network/UNI

**SRINAGAR, MAY 02:** The authorities are set to complete the special summary revision of electoral rolls in Budgam and Nagrota seats, which are lying vacant in Jammu & Kashmir Assembly for more than six months now.

Official sources told news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that voter revision exercise would be completed



in these segments on May 5 (Monday) with publication of the final electoral roll. "The conclusion of the exercise would set the ball rolling for

the announcement of the schedule for electoral exercise by the Election Commission of India," they said, adding that it will take into account the situation in Jammu and Kashmir following the Pahalgam attack before announcing the schedule for the upcoming polls.

Both these seats fell vacant in October last year. Omar Abdullah vacated the Budgam seat on October 21, while the

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## SC grants interim protection to Srinagar family facing deportation amid Pahalgam fallout

■ HT News Network/UNI

**NEW DELHI, MAY 2 (UNI)** In a significant order, the Supreme Court on Friday granted interim protection to a Srinagar-based family facing the risk of deportation to Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack that occurred on April 22.

A bench comprising justices Surya Kant and NK Singh directed the authorities not to take any coercive action, including deportation, against the family until a decision is made after verifying their claims of Indian nation-



ality. The family, which includes a married couple and their four children, contended that they are Indian citizens and possess valid government identification such as Aadhaar cards, PAN

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## Lightning kills Kulgam man, cloudburst triggers flash flood in Ramban, Jammu-Srinagar Highway closed

■ HT News Network

**SRINAGAR, MAY 02** A man died after a lightning struck him in South Kashmir's Kulgam district, while flash floods triggered by a cloud burst in Ramban District led to the closure of Jammu-Srinagar National Highway yet again, officials and reports said on Friday.

According to the details available with the news agency—a 37-year-old auto driver, Tariq Ahmad Padder, of Gansorgam, Kulgam, died after being struck by lightning

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## Dal Lake boat capsizes near Duck Park; one rescued, one still missing

■ HT News Network

**SRINAGAR, MAY 02:** A boat capsized in Dal Lake near Duck Park on Friday afternoon, after which authorities launched a rescue operation that was halted late in the evening

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## Hope Pakistan cooperates with India to ensure Pahalgam terrorists are hunted down: US VP Vance

■ HT News Network/UNI

**WASHINGTON/NEW DELHI, MAY 2 (UNI)** Backing India's stance that the Pahalgam terrorist attack was overseen by handlers in Pakistan, the US Vice President JD Vance has asked Islamabad to cooperate with New Delhi and ensure that the terrorists are hunted down and dealt with.

Vance also said that the US is in touch with both Pakistan



and India, and expressed hope that New Delhi's response to the April 22 terrorist attack does not lead to a broader regional conflict.

Asked by Fox News if the

Trump administration is worried about the breakout of tensions between India and Pakistan, he said:

"Sure, I am worried about anytime you see a hotspot breaking out, especially between two nuclear powers. "We've obviously been in close contact with our friends in India and Pakistan.

"Our hope is that India responds to this terrorist attack in a way that doesn't

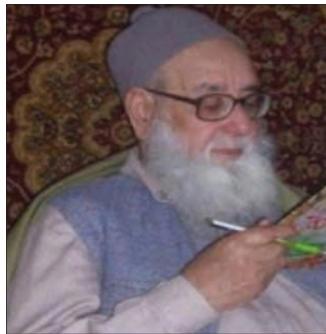
TURN ON.....PAGE 02

## Moulana Mubarki laid to rest in Srinagar hundreds attend funeral prayers

Ayub Mubarak leads Namaaz-e-Janaza at Jama Masjid; Mirwaiz, Grand Mufti, others attend

■ HT News Network

**SRINAGAR, MAY 02:** An outpouring of grief was witnessed in Srinagar on Friday as thousands of people gathered at the historic Jama Masjid Srinagar to attend the funeral of Maulana Mubarak Mubarki, a prominent Islamic scholar, preacher and President of Bazm-e-Tawheed, who passed away on



Friday. The funeral prayers (Namaaz-e-Janaza) were led by his son, Ayub Mubarki, in the Masjid's courtyard, where people from across the Valley, including scholars, students, followers and common citizens offered their last respects.

As per the details available with the news agency—, emotions ran high as people

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## Pak troops resort to cross border shelling for 8th consecutive night, get befitting reply

■ HT News Network

**SRINAGAR, MAY 02:** Pakistani troops continued unprovoked firing in five districts along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir for eight consecutive night on Thursday, officials said.

Jammu based defence spokesman, according to the news agency—said, "During the night of May 1-2, 2025, Pakistani Army posts resorted to unprovoked small arms fire from posts across the LoC opposite Kupwara, Baramulla, Poonch, Naushera, and Akhnoor areas of J&K." "Indian Army

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## RTI clarifies no limit on student half-fare concession on JKRTC, Smart City buses

Students denied benefit asked to lodge complaint directly with corporation

■ HT News Network

**SRINAGAR, MAY 02:** A recent Right To Information (RTI) reply has clarified longstanding confusion regarding the student half-fare concession on Jammu and Kashmir Road Transport Corporation (JKRTC) and Smart City buses across the union territory.

Social activist Shahid Shafi from Chakoor Pulwama had sought clarity after reports, supported by some drivers and district General



Managers, that only five students per bus could avail of the concession.

The RTI response, accessed by the news agency—, from the JKRTC,

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## DC Pulwama felicitates tent-dwelling tribal girl for scoring over 92% in Class 12 exams without coaching 'Meeting IAS officer made me feel I'm one step closer to achieving goal'

■ HT News Network

**PULWAMA, MAY 02:** Deputy Commissioner (DC) Pulwama, Dr Basharat Qayoom, on Friday felicitated Shabnum Sadiq, a tribal girl from the remote Paner area of Tral, for her remarkable academic achievement in the Class 12 examinations. Despite living in a polythene tent amid challenging conditions, Shabnum secured an impressive 463 marks—over 92%—without any coaching or external help.

Hailing from a marginalised tribal

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## Only 9 Out of 32 Students Pass Class 12 Exams at Govt Girls Hr Sec School town Baramulla; Faculty Blames Chronic Absenteeism

■ UMAR RASHID

**BARAMULLA: 2 MAY :** In a concerning development, only 9 out of 32 students managed to pass the Class 12 board examinations at the Government Girls Higher Secondary School in Old Town, Baramulla, reflecting a dismal pass per

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## Srinagar court dismisses obscenity plea against Gulmarg fashion show

■ HT News Network/UNI

**SRINAGAR, MAY 2 (UNI)** A Court in Srinagar has dismissed a complaint alleging that the designer duo Shivan & Narresh, ELLE India's Editor-in-Chief, and unnamed models, committed obscenity during a fashion show held at the famous ski resort of Gulmarg.

The controversy stems from a skiwear fashion show held on March 7 in snowy Gulmarg that triggered massive outrage in Kashmir, with political and religious leaders condemning the event as "obscene" and demanding accountability. The organisers later tendered an unconditional apology for the fashion show.

After the outrage, a complainant was filed in a Srinagar court by Aadil Nazir Khan, a leader of the Awami Ittehad

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## CONTINUE FROM FRONT PAGE.....

### PM

diplomats in India have been sent back. Amid growing indications of tough action against the Pahalgam terror attack perpetrators, PM Modi has given complete operational freedom to the armed forces to decide on the mode, targets and timing of response to Pakistan.

During the past ten days PM Modi has chaired two back to back meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and has passed strict directions to eliminate terror and its supporters—

### LOP

values of humanity even after witnessing the attacks like Uri, Pulwama and Pahalgam. India has never compromised with these values and witnessed the growth. However, some people who are not happy with this growth are trying to destabilize the peace and killing innocents,” he said.

He added that PM Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah have already promised that the Pahalgam terror attack will be avenged. “India stands at the top and follows the values of humanity in letter and spirit,” he said.

Sharma also remembered Adi Shankaracharya and greeted the people on the occasion of Shankaracharya Jayanti—

### SC

cards, voter IDs, and Indian passports. Tensions between India and Pakistan escalated after the Pahalgam attack, prompting the Indian government to suspend visa services for Pakistani nationals and mandate that all Pakistani citizens leave the country by April 27.

Despite this, the petitioner-family family alleged that they were detained unjustly, even though one of them had long surrendered his Pakistani passport and settled in India.

Advocate Nanda Kishore, representing the family, informed the Court that while one family member works in Bangalore, the rest are settled in Srinagar.

The bench emphasized the need for proper verification of the family's documents before any action is taken.

“Besides the human element, there are issues which need to be verified. Since the factual plea requires verification, we dispose of the matter without expressing anything on merits, with a direction to authorities to verify the documents and any other relevant facts brought to their notice.”

The court instructed that an appropriate decision be taken by the authorities at the earliest, while refraining from prescribing a fixed timeline. The bench made it clear that if the family is not satisfied with the outcome, they may approach the Jammu and Kashmir High Court for further relief.

“This order shall not be treated as a precedent as it is in the peculiar facts and circumstances of this case,” the Court added.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Union government, suggested that the family approach the relevant authorities for redress.

However, the petitioner's counsel maintained that the entire family had been arrested despite being Indian citizens.

The court closed the matter, leaving it to the authorities to verify the family's claims. Until such verification is completed and a final decision made, no deportation or other coercive action shall be undertaken against them.

### ECI

Nagrota seat became vacant on October 31 following the demise of BJP MLA Devinder Singh Rana.

As per Section 151A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, a bye-election to fill any vacancy must be conducted within six months from the date the seat was vacated.

However, the poll-body couldn't hold the exercise within the six-month deadline.

As of now, National Conference appears to have a strong position in the Budgam seat, benefiting from a weak and fragmented opposition in Kashmir. On the other hand, the BJP is expected to secure the Nagrota seat without significant obstacles.

In the 2014 and 2024 assembly polls, these seats were respectively won by NC and BJP—

### KULGAM

in his native village. He was rushed to District Hospital Kulgam where doctors declared him “brought dead.”

The Srinagar-Jammu National Highway was once again closed for vehicular movement after a landslide occurred at Chamba Seri in Ramban area. “It occurred soon after the area near the highway was hit by the cloudburst, leading to the flash floods again,” said an official.

The commuters have been advised not to travel until the road is cleared.

“Please check the status of roads before starting your journey,” a traffic official said. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Traffic National Highway (Ramban), Raja Adil Hamid said that restoration work is underway to clear the debris and resume traffic.

He said most of the vehicles have already been cleared, while some stranded ones have been halted at safer locations. “Our priority will be to clear traffic going uphill,” he said.

Pertinently, flashfloods last month had washed away significant portion of Jammu-Srinagar National Highway and the restoration work is on.

#### GUSTY WINDS WREAK HAVOC

Meanwhile, the gusty winds followed by the moderate rainfall wreaked havoc in several areas as the reports about the uprooting of a tree was received from SKICC here, leading to the massive traffic jam along the route.

Moreover, the reports were received that a tree uprooted near SKICC this afternoon amidst the gusty winds, causing huge traffic jam along the route.

Furthermore, two flights were also diverted due to the windstorm today.

According to an official, IndiGo flights 6E896/2305 (Delhi-Srinagar-Delhi) and 6E214 (Mumbai-Srinagar-Ixj) were unable to land at Srinagar International Airport due to windstorms and have been diverted to Chandigarh and Delhi, respectively.

Moreover, as predicted by the local Meteorological department, (MeT), rains lashed several central and southern areas of Kashmir this afternoon.

Director MeT, Dr Mukhtar Ahmad said that there is a possibility of brief spell showers at isolated to scattered places with thunder and gusty winds till May 05—

### DAL

due to poor visibility and fading light.

While one person was rescued earlier in the day, efforts to locate the second individual have so far been unsuccessful. The rescue teams plan to resume their search with the first light on Saturday morning.

Officials told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the incident occurred during gusty winds when two fishermen in the lake were caught off guard. Their boat was overwhelmed by the sudden weather change and capsized near Duck Park.

“The two fishermen jumped into the water in an attempt to save themselves. One of them, identified as Abdul Majeed Khosa, son of Mohammad Sultan Khosa from Rainawari, Srinagar, was rescued immediately. Despite continuous efforts, the second person, Taufeq Ahmad Chopan (24), son of Ghulam Mohammad Chopan, a resident of Chopan Mohalla, Rainawari remains missing,” an official said.

The rescue operation involved teams from the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) along with divers and rescue boats deployed to thoroughly scan the area. However, as darkness set in, the operation was suspended due to limited underwater visibility and poor lighting conditions.

An SDRF official said that despite extensive search efforts using specialised equipment, there were no signs of the missing person.

“The rescue teams will resume the search at first light tomorrow (Saturday) morning to ensure all efforts are exhausted in locating the individual,” the official said—

### US

lead to a broader regional conflict.

“And we hope frankly that Pakistan, to the extent that they are responsible, cooperates with India to make sure that the terrorists, sometimes operating in their territory, are hunted down and dealt with.

“That's how we hope this unfolds; we are obviously in close contact. We'll see what happens.”

The US VP's statement comes after the US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth spoke with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday and reiterated full support of the US government in India's fight against terrorism.

“US stands in solidarity with India and supports India's right to defend itself,” a Defence Ministry statement quoted him as saying.

During the conversation, Rajnath told Pete Hegseth that Pakistan has a history of supporting, training and funding terrorist organisations.

“Pakistan has been exposed as a rogue state, fuelling global terrorism, and destabilising the region. The world can no longer turn a blind eye to terrorism,” Rajnath said.

He added that it is important for the global community to explicitly and unequivocally condemn and call out such heinous acts of terrorism.

Notably, 26 tourists were killed in the terrorist attack in Pahalgam. Following the dastardly act, India took stringent measures against Pakistan, including holding the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, closing the Integrated Check Post Attari, asking all Pakistani nationals to leave India, downsizing the Pakistani HC staff as well as its own in Islamabad. Pakistan has also replied in kind, suspending the 1972 Shimla Agreement, stopping use of its airspace by Indian aircraft, among other measures.

### MUBARKI

thronged the venue to bid farewell to the man they revered as a scholar, guide, and humble servant of faith.

Among those present were prominent Islamic scholars and clergy, including Grand Mufti of Jammu and Kashmir, Nasir-ul-Islam, Allama Sheikh Al-Kindi, Moulana Abdul Majeed Dar, and Moulana Akharni, among others.

Their participation reflected the deep respect Maulana Mubarki commanded in religious circles.

Moreover, Mirwaiz-e-Kashmir Dr. Umar Farooq, Chairman of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Ulema, also attended the funeral and expressed heartfelt condolences.

Recalling his recent visit to the ailing cleric, Mirwaiz said despite his frailty, he recognised him instantly and spoke with affection and clarity.

“His passing is a personal loss to me and a great misfortune for Kashmir's religious landscape,” said Mirwaiz-e-Kashmir.

In the meanwhile, the first part of the funeral was held at 4:00 PM at Jama Masjid, followed by a second prayer and burial at his residence in Sanat Nagar, Srinagar.

Moreover, Maulana Mubarki was known for his profound Islamic knowledge, compassionate preaching, and decades of service as Khateeb of Bazar Masjid Srinagar.

His speeches, rooted in unity, humility, and service to society, left an indelible mark on generations of Kashmiris.

Additionally, condolences and tributes continue to pour in from across the region, with religious bodies, scholars, and members of the public describing his death as an irreparable loss to Kashmir's religious and spiritual traditions—

### PAK

responded in a calibrated and proportionate manner,” he added.

Pertinently, the most recent cross-border shelling along the Line of Control (LoC) began on April 23, 2025, with unprovoked firing from Pakistan reported in the Tattapani sector of Poonch.

This marked the start of a series of ceasefire violations by Pakistani forces, escalating tensions following the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, 2025, which killed 26 people, mostly tourists.

Since then, shelling and small-arms fire have continued intermittently, with notable incidents reported across multiple sectors, including Naushera, Sunderbani, Akhnoor, Kupwara, Baramulla, and the Pargwal sector along the International Border, occurring over several consecutive nights up to last night.

It may be recalled that during a hotline conversation on April 30, 2025, between the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of India and Pakistan, India issued a stern warning to Pakistan, reiterating that such unprovoked actions violate the 2003 ceasefire agreement and will not be tolerated.

The Indian DGMO emphasized the need for Pakistan to adhere to bilateral commitments and cease all hostile activities along the LoC and IB—

### SMART CITY

clearly states that there is no rule limiting the number of students eligible for a half-fare on a single bus. “The only requirement is a valid college or school identity card; no additional paperwork or permissions are necessary,” it said.

Contrary to circulating rumours, students are not assigned reserved or fixed seats. The concession applies universally to any seat, provided the student presents a valid ID, the response added.

Since the scheme's introduction in June 2017, JKRTC has issued directives instructing bus staff and managers to honour the half-fare concession without restrictions.

The department also clarified that students who are denied their benefit can file a complaint directly with the General Manager (Operations) at JKRTC, MA Road, Srinagar.

Interestingly, records show no official grievances in the past three years, which might indicate either a lack of awareness among students or a reluctance to report issues.

The department reassured that every genuine student presenting a valid ID is entitled to the half-fare, regardless of how many other students are travelling on the same bus. Passengers facing denial of the benefit or being charged full fare are advised to note the details of the bus, such as route number, date and time, and report the incident to the GM (Operations).

The scheme also extends concessions to categories like differently-abled persons, war widows, and HIV/AIDS patients, each with specific documentation guidelines. For example, children up to three years old are exempt from fare calculations, while children aged three to twelve are charged half the fare. Fifty per cent of the seats in all state-registered stage carriage vehicles are reserved for women and persons with disabilities, with provisions allowing other passengers to occupy these seats if vacant, and no fare is charged

for mobility aids like wheelchairs and tricycles—

### DC PULWAMA

community and facing daily hardships such as long walks to school and extreme weather, Shabnum's determination has made her a symbol of hope for underprivileged students, especially girls. Her story has earned praise from officials, educators and civil society members across the region.

During the felicitation, DC Pulwama, as reported by the news agency— said her success highlights the hidden potential within remote and disadvantaged communities. “Shabnum has set a powerful example. Despite lacking resources, she has achieved excellence through sheer hard work and dedication,” he said.

Shabnum, who aspires to become an IAS officer, expressed her desire to contribute to the development of her area, which still faces infrastructural challenges like poor road connectivity and inadequate educational facilities. “I want to clear the UPSC exams to bring positive change to our community so that no child has to struggle the way I did,” she told KNO.

She shared that meeting the Deputy Commissioner, an IAS officer himself, made her feel even more motivated and closer to her goal. “I will work hard and do my best to crack the UPSC exam and serve my people,” she added.

Recognising her exceptional achievement and determination, the Deputy Commissioner presented her with a cash prize of Rs 50,000. He assured continuous support for her future endeavours and reiterated the district administration's commitment to improving educational standards in tribal areas.

Dr Qayoom acknowledged the connectivity and infrastructure issues faced by residents of Paner. He assured them that their concerns regarding road construction and infrastructure development would be addressed as a priority—

### PASS

centage of just 28%. This comes in stark contrast to the impressive results achieved by students from other government and private schools in the district, including those from far-flung and economically weaker areas who passed with flying colours.

According to school authorities, the low pass percentage is largely due to poor attendance and lack of classroom participation by students. “Most of the students remained absent during regular classroom. Despite our dedication and timely delivery of lectures, the absence of students severely hampered their preparation,” said one of the lecturers.

The school currently has 14 sanctioned lecturer posts, but 4 are lying vacant—including subjects such as Education, Biotechnology, History, and Economics. Faculty members claim they've been trying to manage these gaps with the help of other available staff members to ensure students aren't left behind. “We even go the extra mile to cover subjects beyond our assigned roles just for the sake of our students, but it becomes futile when they don't attend classes,” another teacher added.

Principal and faculty members further expressed frustration over the poor infrastructure, revealing that the school operates with only three classrooms and an incomplete building under renovation. “We urge the concerned authorities to expedite the completion of the second building. With better facilities, we can provide a more conducive learning environment,” a senior teacher said.

Despite having a team of experienced, well-qualified, and committed educators, the school continues to struggle with basic infrastructure and student engagement. The situation calls for urgent attention from education authorities, parents, and the community to improve attendance, fill vacant posts, and upgrade infrastructure to ensure that students of the school also shine in future examinations.

### GULMARG

Party, who alleged that the fashion event featured obscene content, insulted religious sentiments, and involved public consumption of alcohol. Khan, represented by advocates Hasnain Khawja and Naveed Bukhtiyar, claimed the fashion show was “offensive and explicitly sexualized,” especially since it took place during the holy month of Ramadan. He sought prosecution under Sections 296 and 299 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, and Section 50-A of the J&K Excise Act.

The Srinagar court later issued a pre-cognizance notice to the accused named in the complaint.

The accused, through their legal counsels, filed detailed responses before the court and rebutted the charges, submitting event permissions and alcohol service licences issued by local authorities.

They also placed on record before the court copies of permission for serving liquor issued by Deputy Excise Commissioner (Executive) Kashmir Division.

Special mobile magistrate, Srinagar, railway magistrate, Kashmir Faizan-I-Nazar said

two models wearing skimpy clothes or swim wear in the broader scheme of the event do not attract the penal offence of obscenity so far as facts disclosed in the complaint pertain, hence cognizance cannot be taken of such offence.

The court also cited lack of requisite government sanction for pursuing charges under Section 299 BNS which proscribes deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.

“As the complainant has not placed on record sanction of appropriate government, thus the bar for taking cognizance of such offence operates. The complainant can renew, if law permits so, his complaint with respect to offence under section 299 BNS only after obtaining the sanction from the appropriate government as stipulated in the section 217 BNSS, 2023. At this stage in the absence of such sanction, this court cannot proceed to take cognizance of such offence,” the court order issued on April 30 read.

On the complaint of consumption of alcohol at the event, the court said the local law bars taking cognizance of complaints made by private individuals.

“In view of above discussion this Court deems it fit not to proceed further in the complaint and is, accordingly, disposed of as such,” the order read.

## J&K students enrolled in Iran Universities can directly transfer tuition fees via UCO Bank

■ [HT News Network](#)

Srinagar, May 02: The parents, who have enrolled their wards in different educational institutions in Iran, can now directly transfer the student tuition fee through UCO Bank.

According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the Ministry has officially approved the transfer of student tuition fees to Iran through UCO Bank. “This important development now enables students to legally and securely send their tuition fees to Iranian universities using the official banking channel provided by UCO Bank,” said officials.

This breakthrough is the result of two years of continuous efforts and coordination with the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in New Delhi, the officials said.

“During the past over two years, we worked diligently to address the legal, financial and diplomatic aspects of the process. Our sincere gratitude goes to the Ambassador of Iran, whose guidance, support and active involvement played a vital role in facilitating communication with the relevant authorities and obtaining the necessary approvals,” the officials said.

“With this new channel in place, students and their families can now avoid unofficial or risky methods of fee transfer. The process through UCO Bank ensures transparency, legal compliance, and peace of mind for all parties involved.”

“We remain committed to supporting students in their educational journey and will continue to work towards simplifying and improving procedures that affect their academic progress,” the officials said—(KNO)

## Drug Control team cracks down on violations along Baltal route

■ [HT News Network](#)

Ganderbal, May 02: In view of the upcoming Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra (SANJY) 2025, the Drugs Control Department of Ganderbal district intensified inspections of pharmacies and medical establishments along the Baltal axis through Sonamarg, a critical route for yatra pilgrims. According to officials, the inspection drive was carried out on April 26 under the supervision of Dr. Shiber Ahmad Bhat, Assistant Controller Drugs for Ganderbal and Bandipora. According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the team inspected 20 medical shops in the area, out of which four were found flouting mandatory drug regulations and were consequently sealed on the spot under Section 22(d) of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

Following this, a review inspection was conducted on May 1, where it was observed that the sealed shops had brought their operations into compliance. However, the license of one pharmacy in Kangan was suspended for three days due to continued non-adherence to guidelines. Speaking to KNO, an official said that pharmacies en route the yatra must uphold high standards of compliance. “Medical shops were directed to ensure availability of emergency medicines, staff must follow proper dress code, and signboards with license details and contact numbers should be displayed visibly,” he said. In a related development, the department also inspected the PHC Sonamarg, where six samples were taken from the drugstore for lab testing and analysis to ensure quality assurance in public healthcare services.





# Div Com Kashmir reviews progress under Special Summary Revision for 27-AC Budgam

## HT News Network

Budgam, May 02: The Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Vijay Kumar Bidhuri, who is also the Electoral Roll Observer, today chaired a meeting to review the progress achieved under the Special Summary Revision (SSR)-2025 of Electoral Rolls for 27-AC Budgam. The meeting was held at the Conference Hall, Budgam, where Deputy Commissioner (DC) Budgam, Akshay Labroo, who is also the District Election Officer (DEO), briefed the chair

about the progress and status of work with regard to the SSR of Photo Electoral Rolls in the constituency. At the outset, the ERO of 27-AC Budgam provided a detailed review of the progress achieved under SSR as of date, and also highlighted the number of fresh applications received, as well as the number of claims, objections, and rejections so far. On the occasion, the ERO also briefed the chair that the Special Summary Revision commenced on 8th April and ended on 24th April, and will be



published on 5th May 2025 accordingly for the 27-AC Budgam. Div Com emphasised upon the concerned Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs) to conduct revisions strictly according to the guidelines of the ECI and as per the notified schedule. Div Com stressed on intensifying SVEEP activities and ensuring timely disposal of claims and objections. ERO and AEROs were directed to cross-check the completed

summary revision with a focus on 100 percent enrolment of eligible voters, including the addition of new voters and deletion of duplicate voters, within the set timeline. He emphasised that the successful conduct of all SVEEP programmes in 27-AC Budgam must focus on achieving maximum registration of all eligible voters in the constituency. ACR/ERO for 27-AC Budgam, Dy. Election Officer, AEROs, and representatives of various political parties were present in the meeting.

## DDC Chairperson Kulgam expresses grief over loss of life in cloudburst at Gownsargam

## HT News Network

KULGAM, MAY 02: Chairperson of the District Development Council Kulgam, Mohammad Afzal Parry, expressed profound grief over the death of Tariq Ahmad Paddar, Son of Mohd Subhan Padar in a cloudburst at Gownsargam vil-

lage of the district. He extended his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and prayed for the departed soul. He urged the District Administration and concerned authorities to provide immediate compensation and rehabilitation support to the affected family.

## Multifarious activities against drug abuse held in educational institutions in Ganderbal

## HT News Network

GANDERBAL, MAY 02: In a determined effort to curb substance abuse and raise awareness among the youth, multifarious activities under the "Nasha Mukti" campaign against drug abuse were held today in various educational institutions of district Ganderbal. Several educational institutions were actively engaged under the campaign's banner, aiming to maximize outreach to the most vulnerable and impressionable age group to create a drug-free district by fostering awareness, community participation, and support for rehabilitation. Energetic student rallies echoed through streets, inside classrooms and auditoriums, vibrant poster-making competitions, debates, and thought-provoking awareness sessions were organized, each one a testament to the youth's

commitment to a healthier future. In the rallies, teachers, volunteers, and officials from various departments joined hands to ensure that the message of a drug-free society reach every corner of the district. While in the institutions, students enthusiastically participated in debates, poster-making competitions, and awareness talks, voicing their commitment towards building a healthier and drug-free future. The resource persons from various departments emphasized the importance of the campaign against drug abuse. Parents and guardians were urged to remain vigilant for early warning signs. Furthermore, the campaign also emphasized rehabilitation and support for those already affected, reminding the community that compassion and solidarity are key to recovery.

## JKBOSE Lodges FIR Over Fake 12th Class Results Website

## HT News Network

Srinagar, May 2 (KNS): The Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education (JKBOSE) has formally lodged an FIR after a fake website link showing fabricated results for Class 12 went viral on social media, causing confusion and distress among students. According to officials, unidentified individuals created a fraudulent website mimicking the official JKBOSE portal. The fake link, which falsely displayed what it claimed to be the Class 12 results, quickly circulated online, prompting widespread panic among students and parents. Confirming the development, Secretary JKBOSE talking to Kashmir News



Service, said an FIR has been registered against the perpetrators. "We have taken serious note of the incident and lodged a formal complaint with the police. Strict action will be taken against those responsible for creating and circulating the fake website," the official said. The board has urged students and guardians to rely only on the official JKBOSE website for any updates. The cyber wing of the police is now investigating the source of the fake link and attempting to identify those behind the fraudulent activity.

## Remarkable improvement of Government School in Board Results Dr. Itoo highlights measures for Quality Education in Government Schools

## HT News Network

Srinagar, May 02: Following the announcement of Class 12 examination results, it has become evident that teaching standards in government schools are progressing rapidly. There has been a significant and positive shift not only in innovative achievements but also in academic outcomes. A recent example of this is the exceptional performance by students from the Valley in a national-level innovation competition, besides, remarkable performance of government school students by securing more than 100 merit positions in the Class 12 results. Sharing the details, Director of School Education Kashmir, Dr. G. N. Itoo, stated that while the Class 12 results are encouraging with no school having a pass percentage close to zero, the performance in Class 10 exams is equally commendable with 438 schools achieving over 90% pass percentage. He further added that 219 schools recorded a 100% pass rate, which is extremely encouraging. Expressing satisfaction over the success, Dr. Itoo said these achievements are the result of the students' hard



work, the dedicated role of teachers, and the growing trust of parents in government schools. Director affirmed his full confidence in the overall success rate of students in both Class 10 and 12 examinations, emphasizing that these statistics indicate a significant improvement in the quality of education. He credited this progress to initiatives like the estab-

lishment of various laboratory facilities, ICT labs, implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the provision of education aligned with modern-day requirements.

Dr. Itoo attributed this success to the collective efforts of teachers, school heads, and parents, stating that these achievements are the result of their consistent dedication. He extended heartfelt congratulations to the successful students and assured that the government and the Department of Education will continue to ensure modern educational facilities are made accessible to students in every corner of Jammu and Kashmir. It is worth noting that this year, 39,768 students appeared for the Class 10 exams, out of which 31,010 passed, bringing the overall pass percentage to 77.97%. He extended heartfelt congratulations to the successful students and assured that the government and the Department of Education will continue to ensure modern educational facilities are made accessible to students in every corner of Jammu and Kashmir. It is worth noting that this year, 39,768 students appeared for the Class 10 exams, out of which 31,010 passed, bringing the overall pass percentage to 77.97%.

## Celebrating Excellence: Dir Education felicitates Sehrish Jahangir

## HT News Network

Kulgam, May 02: A felicitation ceremony was held at Higher Secondary School Bugam, Kulgam to honor outstanding academic achievers. The highlight of the event was the recognition of Sehrish Jahangir, a 12th class student of the institution, who secured 2nd position in the Science stream across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The ceremony was graced by the Director of School Education, Kashmir, Dr. G. N. Itoo, who felicitated Sehrish Jahangir for her exceptional performance. Dr. Itoo also congratulated the students, their parents, and teachers for their hard work and success in the Class 10th and 12th examinations for which results were declared



by the Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education (BOSE). In his address, Dr. Itoo stated that the Department of Education has implemented the National Education Policy 2020 and undertaken several initiatives to modernize school education, among which the establishment of ICT laboratories is particularly noteworthy. He added that aligning the education system with contemporary demands remains a top priority of the state government. On this occasion, Chief Education Officer Kulgam, Mohammad Shabir, welcomed the Director and expressed that his presence had greatly encouraged successful students, teachers, and field officers across the district. He also briefed the Director on the overall educational landscape of the district and mentioned that educational services are being advanced in full accordance with the Director's guidance.

## Altaf Bukhari slams irrational eligibility rule in marriage assistance scheme

Says, mandatory 8th-grade education requirement is illogical

## HT News Network

Srinagar, May 2: Apni Party President Syed Mohammad Altaf Bukhari has expressed concern over a flawed rule which states that anyone seeking to benefit from the government's marriage assistance scheme must have attained education up to at least the 8th standard. He has termed this eligibility criterion an "illogical and irrational" guideline and urged the authorities to revisit it to better serve the interests of girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Pertinently, under this scheme, the government provides a one-time financial assistance of Rs 75,000 to eligible unmarried girls before their marriage. Syed Mohammad Altaf Bukhari wrote on his X handle: "Making educational qualification up to 8th class as a mandatory eligibility criterion for the Marriage Assistance Scheme for girls from economically weaker sections is completely



illogical." He further said, "I have been informed that many applications are being rejected by the Social Welfare Department simply because the applicants—underprivileged girls—are unable to produce a certificate confirming they have passed the 8th grade. This is utterly illogical." "I urge the government to revisit this flawed guideline. The 8th pass eligibility criterion is defeating the purpose of what is otherwise a helpful and commendable scheme," the post further reads.

## Div Com visits Hajj House Bemina; inspects arrangements for Hajj-25; directs meticulous service delivery

## HT News Network

Srinagar, May 02: Ahead of the commencement of Hajj-25, Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Vijay Kumar Bidhuri today visited Hajj House Bemina to take first hand appraisal of arrangements & basic amenities laid out by various departments. Intending pilgrims would start leaving for the pilgrimage from Sunday, May 04, 2025. During the visit, Div Com was accompanied by Deputy Commissioner Srinagar Bilal Mohi ud din Bhat. Other officers present during the visit includ-



ed Director, Airport Authority of India, Srinagar International Airport, Regional Director of BCAS, representatives

from Health, PHE, KPDCL, Information, Hajj Committee, SMC, JK Police, Customs, Emigration, SpiceJet, and various

banks. On the occasion, Div Com took comprehensive inspection of services and infrastructure, including forex counters set up by banks, luggage screening machines, e-bracelet counters, and boarding facilities. Div Com also reviewed the cleanliness of lodging rooms and the availability of basic amenities, such as water and uninterrupted electricity supply. On the occasion, Officers from the Hajj Committee briefed the Div Com on the extensive measures taken to ensure comprehensive arrangements for security, traffic management, sanitation, and other essential services.



EDITORIAL

Remove the flaw from SMAS so as to make it implementable on ground

The special marriage assistance scheme (SMAS) launched by the government in the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir has hit a roadblock due to a serious flaw in the same. It is due to this flaw the people especially those who were supposed to benefit from the scheme sharply criticized the same. The people at helm seem to be living in a world of illusion and reality seems to be a distant away from them.

The SMAS was launched to provide financial assistance to the girls of the Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) for their marriage. Under this scheme financial assistance of Rs. 75,000 is provided to the girls of the lower strata of the society so that they get married. The scheme was welcomed by the people with the hope that the poor girls would be able to get married from the amount sanctioned under the scheme. However, a condition set out by the social welfare department has put the entire scheme under a cloud.

The people are very disappointed about the condition and they demand immediate roll-back of the same. The condition is that the girl applying under the scheme should have at least passed the eighth standard. Since the scheme has been launched for the girls of AAY category the people in general believe that not many girls of the category are able to receive education under the middle class. Most of the people opine that given this condition not many girls would be able to avail the benefits under this scheme.

In the contemporary Kashmiri society a lot of money is incurred on a marriage and as such the SMAS was expected to come as a huge relief for the girls belonging to the AAY category. The social welfare department needs to make the necessary correction so that the SMAS is implemented in letter and spirit and more and more girls avail the benefits out of the scheme. In such a scenario the scheme would be a welfare measure for the people belonging to the lower strata of the society.

One fails to understand the mantra behind the setting of the condition that a girl should have at least passed the eight standard examination. If the scheme was aimed to provide relief to the poor girls then why was such an out of mind condition set by the social welfare department? The government should come out with the necessary corrigendum in this regard so that the girls benefit out of the scheme.

A bloodbath in Paradise  
The deadliest and heart-wrenching terrorist attack in Pahalgam that shook humanity

The blood of innocents stained the Valleys of Pahalgam

BY FAROOQ AHMAD KHAN

The mountains of Pahalgam, once a symbol of serenity and beauty, now echo with the screams of the innocent. The pristine valleys, where laughter once mingled with the whispers of pine trees, are today stained with blood. On the serene morning of April 22nd, the picturesque valleys of Pahalgam, a jewel in Jammu and Kashmir's crown, turned into a slaughterhouse. A place where aura of joy and happiness once echoed amidst snow-capped peaks and gushing streams now reverberated with gunfire, screams, and the deafening silence of death. A place where lovers whispered promises, where families created memories, where honeymooners began their journey of togetherness was turned into a slaughterhouse. Twenty-eight innocent souls were brutally massacred. Among them tourists who had come seeking joy, locals who had welcomed them with warmth, children who had laughed just moments before, husbands who had held their wives' hands, fathers who had carried their little ones on their shoulders and as they strolled through the meadows, collapsed in a pool of blood. The little girl, her frock stained crimson, kept shaking him, begging him to wake up. But he never will. Innocent souls, were brutally massacred in a terror attack so savage that it has left the entire nation gasping for breath, drowning in an ocean of tears. A day that will forever be etched in horror, terrorism struck with its ugliest fangs, tearing apart families, dreams, and the very fabric of humanity. This day will forever remain etched in the memory of our nation as a dark and soul-crushing day.

A big chunk of priceless lives were snatched away in the blink of an eye, murdered in cold blood by heartless, faceless cowards who deserve not to be called humans though human in form but far from humanity and would certainly be wild beasts. The victims were not soldiers in battle, not combatants of war but were ordinary men, women, their only crime being the desire to bask in the serenity of nature in kashmir. Alongside



them died a few local Kashmiris who were merely standing in service with the guests of their homeland. What kind of monster looks into the eyes of a smiling child, a newlywed couple, an elderly father, and still pulls the ugly trigger of his ugly gun?

The heavens must have wept on this day, and the earth must have shuddered as the sacred soil of Pahalgam, one of the most beloved tourist places in Jammu and Kashmir, was stained with the innocent blood ruthlessly gunned down in a barbaric terrorist attack. They had come to rejoice in the breathtaking beauty of Kashmir. They never knew that their smiles were momentary and moments away from being eternally silenced.

What kind of heart does it take to fire upon an unarmed couple taking photos of snow-kissed meadows? What twisted mind finds courage in slaughtering children and women in cold blood? I ask this question to myself? The answer is simple, no heart, no soul, and no religion can justify what happened in Pahalgam. This is something beyond imaginations and only beast instinct can do this.

The videos surfacing on social media are too horrific and even unwatchable reflecting the ugliest face of evil. Even the coldest stone-hearted man would break down in tears witnessing the lifeless bodies, the cries of mothers, the trembling hands of orphaned children and widows, and the haunting silence of a place that just yesterday was bursting with laughter.

One newlywed couple, hand in hand, dreaming of a future together had come to celebrate the beginning of a new life. The husband was shot dead in front of his wife's eyes. Now

she weeps alone, shattered beyond comprehension, her dreams burned alive. What was to be the beginning of their love story became its tragic end. A Navy officer, Lieutenant Vinay Narwal a proud servant of the nation, who had promised his parents an unforgettable vacation, brought his beloved wife on vacation only for terror to take them all. His lifeless body now lies wrapped in the tricolor, his family wiped out in an instant. Can there be a greater cruelty than this? How does one comprehend such senseless violence? Mothers lost sons, wives witnessed husbands slain before their eyes, fathers and brothers were taken away mercilessly. These weren't just statistics; they were lives, each with stories abruptly ended by this cowardly.

Terrorists have no religion and only a beastly instinct to kill

Let us be clear that terrorism has no faith, no ideology, no justification, no morality, no soul and knows no God. It is the act of wild beasts driven by unfathomable hatred, predators with no conscience. These cowards are wild beasts, drunk on hatred, devoid of conscience and cannot face our brave soldiers, instead prey on the unarmed and innocents. They do not represent any religion, for the greatest religion is humanity and they have none and are far away from that blessing. They attacked unarmed civilians, women, children, elders simply because of their absolute moral decay.

In the face of this unspeakable tragedy, the people of Jammu and Kashmir Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian have stood together in one voice to condemn this in the strongest possible words. Traders' federations, religious leaders, bar associations, trans-

port unions, private school bodies, and government officials, scholars, students all observed a complete shutdown, suspending their work and uniting in grief and protest. They protested not for politics, but for humanity because terrorism does not discriminate, it kills without reason, and so, the grief is universal. Solidarity was not just shown but it was lived, breathed, and felt in every corner of the Valley.

Justice will come, and it will be merciless.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi who leads the world's largest democracy, and he knows the language these monsters understand. They will be crushed, erased, made an example of, so that no mother, no wife, no child ever suffers like this again. We have faith that these terrorists will be hunted down, no matter how far they run or how deep they hide. They will be made to pay for their sins.

To the families of the victims, No words can heal your pain. But know this that a billion hearts weep with you. Our bleeding hearts weep with you. Your pain is now the pain of an entire nation. We stand with you hand in hand, heart to heart. Your loved ones did not die in vain. Their blood will water the roots of a fiercer, stronger India, one that will never bow to terror.

To the terrorists, You have killed innocents, but you will never kill our spirit. Kashmir will rise. India will rise and when justice comes, it will be merciless and you will succumb. Your days are numbered. Your terror cannot silence our unity. Your hatred cannot overpower our humanity. You tried to burn our hopes but from the ashes, a fire will rise, a fire of justice. We are angry, we are grieving, but we are neither broken nor defeated.

Let this be the last time. They came here with great dreams but unfortunately left in coffins. May their souls find peace, and may this land never again bear witness to such a tragedy. Let no mother ever again cry over the bullet-ridden body of her child. Let no person ever again return from Kashmir in a coffin. Let this soil, sacred and beautiful, bloom again with peace not blood.

With deepest grief and unshakable resolve.

Farooq Ahmad Khan, from the wounded yet hopeful land of Kashmir  
The writer is a humble teacher, mentor for IAS/KAS aspirants and can be mailed @khanfarooq786786@gmail.com.

Finally, caste census in the country: representation or revival?

PRIYANKA SAURABH

India was divided into castes, but no sincere effort was ever made to unite it. The Constitution gave everyone the right to equality, but the foundation of equal opportunity rests on recognizing caste inequality. On this basis, when the demand for a caste census is gaining momentum today, the question arises: is this a tool for social justice or an exercise to divide society into more sections?

The last comprehensive caste census in India was in 1931. After that, in the process of nation-building after independence, an ideal was put forward—a 'casteless society.' This ideal had its attraction, but in practice it was a kind of silence. From 1951 to 2011, in every census, only Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) were counted; the rest of the castes remained 'invisible.' But if the policy is based on reservation schemes for classes, then why not have data? Is it possible to have equitable distribution without information?

Bihar's caste-based survey created a new wave. The initiative of Nitish Kumar and Tejashwi Yadav forced other states to think. On one hand, the caste census was

described as the foundation of social justice, while on the other hand, some sections called it a tool of social division. Many political parties are supporting this demand, especially those whose politics is based on the deprived sections. But the role of the central government has been hesitant. The Center says that this is a very complex process, and it can create social tensions.

There are many strong arguments being given in support of the caste census. If we do not know which castes are in what economic and social status, then the schemes will continue to run on mere estimates. Whether it is to re-evaluate reservations or to set targets for social schemes, accurate data is required. The population of Other Backward Classes (OBC) is considered to be 40-50% in many states, while they get 27% reservation. If there is correct data, the policy can be more equitable.

The main argument of those opposing it is that the caste census will further strengthen caste identity in society. This will threaten social unity, and political parties will start garnering votes only by playing the caste card. Some sections fear that if the correct figures are revealed, their 'inherent rights'

For decades, India has counted only the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, while other castes have remained invisible in policymaking. Caste census is not just a count but the foundation of social justice. Without accurate data, reservations, schemes, and resource distribution will be incomplete. Those protesting fear that their privileges may be challenged. But this count is a tool to ensure visibility and participation of the deprived, not to divide society. When policy is based on caste, there must be data too.

may be taken away—for example, the upper castes feel that if reservation increases in proportion to the number of OBCs or Dalits, then opportunities for them will be reduced further.

When Bihar conducted its caste

survey, the central government kept its distance from it. Demands were also raised in states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, but consensus could not be reached. It was argued many times that this subject comes under

the jurisdiction of the Center, and it should be done at the national level. The Supreme Court did not directly ban the caste-based census in 2021 but said that it is a matter of policy and governments should decide at their discretion.

For the deprived communities, a caste census is not just a count; it is a question of their visibility. If a class in the society is economically, educationally, and politically backward, then first of all, it is necessary to know where it is. How much? Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar had said, "If you want to make reforms, first know the facts." Caste figures are also such facts. These figures are not only necessary for deciding reservations but also for policies like education, health, housing, and self-employment.

It is surprising that there is little serious debate in the mainstream media on a topic as deep as the caste census. The intellectual class that considers itself progressive either rejects it by calling it 'regressive' or remains silent. Actually, the problem is not that caste is being counted. The problem is that those who are worried about their 'privilege' are uncomfortable with this count.

Now the biggest question—suppose a caste census is con-

ducted and the data of all castes is revealed. What will happen then? Will the governments change the reservation policy based on this data? Will it be possible to give more shares to a caste if its number is found to be higher? Or will the data be suppressed, as happened with the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011? The data of the SECC conducted in 2011 is still incomplete in the public domain. Governments came and went, but no one released it with complete transparency.

Caste is a social reality that cannot be ignored. The powers that talk of a casteless society look at caste in giving election tickets, forming cabinets, and appointing officers—then why fear the data? Caste census will neither bring about social breakdown nor weaken the foundation of society—provided it is used for equitable policy-making. Those who already have more are afraid. Those who are deprived only want confirmation of their presence.

After all, this country belongs to all castes—so why not count everyone?

Writer is a Research Scholar in Political Science, Poet, freelance journalist, and columnist



# Beyond Tourism: Why Kashmir must diversify or risk economic collapse

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For decades, the breathtaking beauty of Jammu and Kashmir has been the lifeblood of our economy. Tourists from around the globe have flocked to our valleys, stayed in our hotels, bought our handicrafts, and become the backbone of our livelihood. Tourism has become the primary source of income for thousands of families, providing jobs to hoteliers, drivers, guides, artisans, shopkeepers, and many others.

However, today we must ask ourselves a crucial and uncomfortable question: Are we relying too heavily on a fragile pillar?

## A Vulnerable Economic Model

Whenever political unrest, security challenges, or natural calamities strike, tourism is the first sector to collapse. We have witnessed this repeatedly – empty hotels, idle taxis, shuttered markets, and disappointed visitors. The economic consequences are immediate and devastating. Young people who have taken loans to build guest-houses or purchase tourist vehicles often find themselves buried under debt, with no stable source of income to repay it.

A region's economy cannot afford to be this sensitive to disruption. Tourism, while important, is seasonal and highly vulnerable. It cannot be the only engine pulling our society forward. Over-dependence on one sector creates economic fragility, stifles innovation, and reduces our ability to respond to crises. It is high time that we diversify our economic foundations.

## A Call to the Youth

This article is a sincere appeal to the youth of Jammu and Kashmir – the torchbearers of tomorrow. We cannot afford to remain trapped in

outdated models of livelihood. The world around us is transforming rapidly with technology, automation, and a shift towards knowledge-based economies. We must equip ourselves with skills that are future-ready, resilient, and capable of generating consistent income, regardless of political or environmental conditions.

Our land is fertile not just in beauty but in opportunity. We have immense potential in agriculture, horticulture, apiculture (beekeeping), floriculture, medicinal plants, and food processing. These are industries that have global demand and local relevance. Our apples, walnuts, saffron, and honey are among the best in the world – yet we export most of them without value addition. Imagine if our youth learned how to process, package, brand, and market these products both nationally and internationally.

## Unlocking the Power of Skill Development

The time has come to make “skill” the most valuable currency in Kashmir. From rural youth to urban graduates, everyone should have access to skill development centres offering practical training in a wide range of domains: tailoring, carpentry, solar installation, computer repair, app development, digital marketing, content creation, cybersecurity, graphic design, machine operation, organic farming, dairy processing, and more.

These aren't just skills; they are survival tools in a rapidly changing economy. A skilled young person is not a burden on society but a builder of the economy. Whether as a freelancer, artisan, entrepreneur, or technician, skilled individuals can shape their own destiny.

In fact, it is essential that we transition from a job-seeking mindset to a job-creating mindset. Let us



build a culture of local entrepreneurship where young Kashmiris are not just looking for employment but creating employment for others.

## The Role of Technology

One of the greatest enablers in this transformation is technology. Digital platforms can open up opportunities for online education, e-commerce, telemedicine, remote work, and financial inclusion. A young Kashmiri woman sitting in Baramulla can now learn coding online and work remotely for a company in Bengaluru or even California. A craftsman from Budgam can sell his handmade carpets on platforms like Etsy or Amazon. The only requirement is digital literacy and connectivity.

We must bridge the digital divide and ensure that even the remotest villages have access to affordable internet, smartphones, and computer labs. Government, private institutions, NGOs, and civil society must work together to create a digitally empowered Kashmir.

## Reforming Education

Another pillar of a self-reliant future is education. Currently, many of our brightest students are forced to leave the Valley in search of better colleges, coaching centres, and exposure. This is not just a financial burden on families – it also represents a brain drain. Our region loses some of its finest minds every year to other states and countries.

If we can build luxurious hotels and malls for tourists, can we not invest in world-class educational institutions for our own children? Why can't Srinagar or Anantnag be home to a state-of-the-art science university or an international-level research institute?

We must invest in quality faculty, modern infrastructure, innovation labs, libraries, and research funding. But beyond that, we must also overhaul our outdated syllabus. Our children must be taught problem-solving, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, environmental awareness, and digital fluency – not just rote learning for exams.

Education must become relevant to the real world, connected to local needs, and empowering for

the learner.

## Reviving Traditional Crafts with Modern Vision

Kashmir has a rich heritage of art and craft – from Pashmina weaving and Sozni embroidery to wood carving and papier-mâché. These crafts are not just cultural treasures; they are potential income sources. However, many artisans are giving up due to poor wages, lack of marketing, and middlemen exploitation.

We need to modernise this sector without losing its soul. That means digital marketing, design innovation, better branding, and fair trade practices. Government and private investors should collaborate to create craft villages, e-commerce training programs, and international trade expos for Kashmiri products.

## Harnessing the Power of Returnees

Thousands of Kashmiris have gone out into the world and achieved great success in medicine, engineering, academia, technology, and business. Many of them wish to give back – to return and contribute to the land that raised them. We must create an ecosystem that welcomes them back – through startup support, consultancy platforms, investment incentives, and policy support.

Let our successful diaspora become mentors, guides, and investors for the next generation. Let us build a Kashmir where success doesn't mean escape but return.

## Women as Economic Leaders

No progress can be complete without the empowerment of women. In many areas of Kashmir, women remain underrepresented in business, technology, and public leadership. This must change. Women must be encouraged, trained, and supported to start their own businesses, learn

new skills, and take leadership roles in their communities.

Microfinance, SHGs (self-help groups), women-led cooperatives, and digital platforms can be tools of transformation. A skilled woman is a multiplier – she uplifts not only herself but her family and her community.

## Sustainable Development – The Only Way Forward

As we envision a new Kashmir, we must ensure that our growth is sustainable. We must not trade nature for short-term gains. Whether in tourism, industry, or agriculture, environmental responsibility must be a core principle. Solar energy, water conservation, organic farming, and eco-tourism are not luxuries – they are necessities.

Let Kashmir become a model for green development – where progress doesn't mean pollution, and prosperity doesn't mean exploitation.

## Conclusion: Time to Rise

Tourism is a blessing, but it cannot be our only identity. Real development happens when people become self-reliant, skilled, and confident in their ability to shape the future. Let us create an economy that survives every political storm, every lockdown, every disruption – because it is rooted in diversity, innovation, and knowledge.

The valley of Kashmir has always stood tall in the face of adversity. Now is the time for our dreams to rise even higher – bold, inclusive, and unstoppable.

Let us move from uncertainty to self-reliance, from dependency to dignity, from fragility to strength. Let us build a Kashmir that is not just a place of beauty, but a symbol of brilliance, resilience, and progress.

## Laborers: The Backbone of National Development



SAHIL MANZOOR  
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Laborers are the backbone of any nation. They bravely face challenges and contribute tirelessly toward achieving developmental goals. Their dedication and hard work leave no stone unturned in marking great achievements for the country.

## Development and the Role of Workers

Development is the collective dream of every citizen. Various sectors contribute to a nation's progress and generate employment, offering comprehensive facilities to its people and visiting tourists alike. Whether directly or indirectly, laborers are central to empowering major sectors such as tourism, agriculture, horticulture, transport (both land and air), science and technology, and healthcare. Advanced machinery, modern infrastructure, and efficient services in these sectors are the

result of the persistent efforts of workers, who simplify our lives and help us overcome everyday challenges.

Everything we use—big or small—has passed through the hands of dedicated laborers. Their unseen contributions form the silent foundation upon which societies function and flourish.

## Workers' Rights and May Day Observance

Laborers play an immense role in the overall development of a country. Recognizing their contributions, India has observed May 1st as Labour Day since 1923. On this day, seminars, rallies, and awareness programs are conducted across the country to highlight labor rights and acknowledge the immense sacrifices made by the working class.

Writers and media professionals use print and electronic platforms to shed light on laborers' struggles and achievements. Educational institutions organize seminars and discussions to raise awareness among students about the challenges laborers face in today's world.

## Government Initiatives and the Way Forward

The government has implemented several schemes to support and uplift the labor class. For

instance:

Scholarship schemes for laborers' children to support their education.

Marriage assistance for daughters of laborers after fulfilling necessary formalities.

MGNREGA, which guarantees 100 days of employment to rural households.

While these initiatives are commendable, more supportive schemes are needed. Suggestions include:

Loans at subsidized interest rates.

Job reservations for qualified children of laborers.

AAY ration cards and domestic gas at special subsidized rates.

Festival bonuses to help workers purchase essential items and enjoy festivities with dignity.

Compensation and policy support for families of laborers who lose their lives while on duty.

## Conclusion

Laborers are the unsung heroes of our society. It is our moral responsibility to respect their work, safeguard their rights, and support their well-being. Through strong policies, awareness campaigns, and public appreciation, we must continue to honor the labor force that propels our nation forward.

## Pahalgam horror: A cruel assault on humanity !

BY MS NAZKI

Another dark shadow has fallen over the Valley. The recent terror attack in Pahalgam was not merely an act of violence – it was a brutal assault on the very spirit of humanity. In a place renowned for its breathtaking beauty and serene charm, sudden gunfire shattered peace, turning moments of joy into tragedy, laughter into screams, and serenity into sorrow.

Families, children, and elderly tourists – ordinary people who had come seeking nature's comfort – were caught in a heartless ambush. Some were injured. Others never returned. This was more than terrorism; it was a direct blow to the ideals of compassion, peace, and coexistence. It was a shameless attempt to stain the spirit of Kashmir, and to sabotage the collective efforts of those working tirelessly to rebuild peace and harmony in the region.

The attack stands as one of the most inhuman crimes imaginable – targeting innocent guests who had come only to admire the valley's splendor. No ideology, no religion, no political grievance can ever justify such savagery. Tourism, a symbol of unity and shared humanity, was the target. The victims brought



goodwill and dreams – and paid for it with their lives.

Kashmir has long borne the scars of conflict. But in recent years, there had been signs of hope. Tourists were returning, and with them, life was returning to the streets, markets, and mountains. Shikarawalas, pony riders, hotel owners, and artisans were beginning to dream again. This attack didn't just take lives – it struck at the very heartbeat of Kashmir's recovering economy and collective morale.

Once again, Kashmir is in the headlines – not for its beauty, but for violence. Yet the majority of Kashmiris yearn only for peace, progress, and dignity. They too are victims, for every act of terror damages their future. This tragedy drew swift and unified condemnation from across political parties, social organizations, and religious

groups. The government vowed decisive action, and security has been ramped up to safeguard visitors and restore public confidence.

Nationwide, people stood in solidarity with the victims – offering prayers, support, and a powerful message: terrorism will not divide us. The international community, too, reacted with outrage and called for justice. Around the world, voices rose to declare: terror has no place in civil society.

But the most profound response came from the people of Pahalgam themselves. Locals rushed to help – donating blood, offering first aid, and comforting the wounded. In the face of horror, the Valley's timeless tradition of “Mehman Nawazi” – hospitality and kindness to guests – shone through. Even in tragedy, Kashmir's heart

remained generous.

This brutal attack is a stark reminder that the battle against terror must be fought with unity, empathy, and unshakable resolve. We must resist those who seek to divide us, and together build a future rooted in peace, not fear. Political games must not be allowed to deepen the wounds or delay justice.

The Pahalgam attack was a crime against all humanity. Yet, while terror seeks to paralyze us with fear, we must respond with courage and unity. Let us honor those lost not just with words, but with unwavering commitment to a future where such bloodshed has no place. Terrorism has no religion, no justification, and no destiny – but humanity does. And it will always rise above hate.











## Chairman, Secretary, DLSA Shopian visit fire victims of Peer Mohalla

■ HT News Network

Shopian, May 02: In a compassionate outreach to families affected by the recent devastating fire in Peer Mohalla, Shopian, Mehmod Ahmad Chowdhury, Chairman DLSA Shopian along with Mudasar Farooq, Secretary DLSA Shopian today visited the affected area to assess the damages. During the visit, the Chairman DLSA Shopian assured the victims that necessary steps would be taken to expedite compensation through insurance companies. He further directed SHO Shopian to expedite the investigation and determine the cause of the fire. Accompanying the delegation were Mohammad Waseem Mirza, Munsiff and Rafie Ahmad Ganie, Chief Legal Aid Defense Counsel who provided legal guidance and assistance to the distressed families, reinforcing the DLSA's commitment to upholding justice and welfare in times of crisis.

## Toyota Launches Exclusive Edition of Innova HyCross ZX(O), Available in Limited Units from May to July 2025

■ HT News Network

SRINAGAR: Trusted by over a lakh customers nationwide, the Toyota Innova HyCross continues to stand out for its blend of elegance and efficiency. Now, Toyota Kirloskar Motor is set to release a special Exclusive Edition of the Innova HyCross ZX(O)—available in limited quantity and only for a short window from May to July 2025. The edition will come in two striking shades: Super White and Pearl White.

Mr. Varinder Wadhwa, Vice President of Sales, Service, and Used Car Business at Toyota Kirloskar Motor, said the Exclusive Edition is a response to evolving customer aspirations. "The Innova HyCross has consistently been appreciated for combining SUV-like styling with MPV-level spaciousness. This new variant adds more value and convenience, offering a refined experience for families seeking comfort and reliability."

Since its launch in November 2022, the Innova HyCross has become a favorite among Indian buyers. Built on Toyota's New Global Architecture (TNGA) and featuring the 5th Gen Self-Charging Strong Hybrid Electric System, it pairs a 2.0-litre 4-cylinder gasoline engine with an e-drive sequential shift, delivering 186 PS of power along with best-in-segment fuel efficiency. Its hybrid system allows the car to operate in electric mode for up to 60% of the time, offering both dynamic performance and eco-friendliness.

The vehicle also boasts high-end features such as Powered Ottoman Second Row Seats, Front Ventilated Seats, Dual Zone AC, Panoramic Sunroof, and Toyota Safety Sense™, along with a connected infotainment suite. With these upgrades, the Exclusive Edition aims to redefine comfort and style in the premium MPV segment. (KNT)

## International Labour Day GDC Ramgarh hosts Lecture on Workers' Rights

■ HT News Network

SAMBA, MAY 2: In a thoughtful initiative aimed at raising awareness about the significance of labour rights and honouring the contribution of workers, Government Degree College (GDC) Ramgarh organized a lecture to mark the International Labour Day 2025.

The event was held under the leadership of Principal of the College Prof. (Dr.) Meeru Abrol, who highlighted the importance of acknowledging the efforts of workers across sectors and the need to uphold their rights and dignity in a fair and just society.

The programme was initiated by Head of the Department of Political Science Priya Sharma, with introduction to the significance of International Labour Day. In her address, she shed light on the historical struggles of workers worldwide, the emergence of labour laws, and the ongoing challenges faced by the labour force in India. She emphasized the importance of educating students about labour rights, legal frameworks such as the Minimum Wages Act, the Industrial Disputes Act, and various Social Security Schemes designed to protect workers' welfare.

A detailed and interactive lecture was delivered, focusing on the fundamental rights of workers, working conditions, social protections, and the role of labour unions. The lecture also addressed contemporary issues such as informal labour, economic challenges, and gender disparity in the workforce.

The programme also featured discussions on the role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Indian Constitution in securing the rights and welfare of workers. Real-life examples and relevant case studies were shared to give students a better understanding of the ground realities and the legal remedies available for workers.

The event was coordinated by the Department of Political Science with active support from faculty members including Dr. Aditi Khajuria, Dr. Snobar, Ashok Kumar, Prof. Brham Dutt, Dr. Neeraj Bargartra, Dr. Susheel Kumar, Priya Sharma and Ms. Sayema. The session concluded with an engaging interaction between students and faculty.

# Mission Director JJM J&K reviews progress of Water Supply schemes in Rajouri district

## Emphasises effective financial management to avoid cost escalation of projects

■ HT News Network

RAJOURI, MAY 01: As part of the government's ongoing commitment to grassroots governance and responsive administration, Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, today conducted a public outreach camp at Panchayat Chowkian and Panchayat Kalsian in Nowshera division. The outreach programme aimed to foster direct communication with the people and resolve their issues promptly. During the interactive session, the locals raised several concerns including the need for macadamization of roads, staff shortage in government institutions, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, water scarcity and establishment of a Primary Health Centre (PHC) at Panchayat Chowkian. Other highlighted issues included the need for additional border bunkers and Angan-



wadi centres, repair of dilapidated Government Middle School (GMS) Chowkian, low voltage problem and upgradation of GMS

Jhanghar and GMS Sarya. The Deputy Chief Minister assured the public that their genuine issues would be

addressed in a time bound manner. He directed the concerned departments to initiate prompt redressal measures.

While reviewing implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), the Dy CM expressed concern over the slow pace of work. He instructed the officers to expedite project completion so that the benefits reach the people at the earliest.

Regarding the electricity issues, he directed the Power Development Department to take necessary corrective steps to ensure uninterrupted power supply.

On the occasion, the Dy CM also distributed labour cards among the eligible beneficiaries, reaffirming the government's commitment to welfare and inclusivity. ADC Nowshera, PO ICDS, Executive Engineers PDD Rajouri, PWD (R&B) Rajouri, PMGSY Rajouri and REW, ACP, CAHO, ALC, AD FCS&CA were present in the camp.

## JKEDI hosts Entrepreneurship Orientation Program for students of MIET College

■ HT News Network

JAMMU, MAY 02: In a step towards strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem, the Jammu and Kashmir Entrepreneurship Development Institute (JKEDI) on Friday organized an Entrepreneurship and Startup Orientation Program in collaboration with the Model Institute of Engineering and Technology (MIET) here. The program was aimed at sensitizing the participating students about the opportunities and support mechanisms available under the J&K Startup Policy 2024-27. The program majorly focused on educating the students regarding the role of entrepreneurship and innovation in shaping their career.



Around 40 students participated in the orientation programme, held at JKEDI Bari Brahmana campus, featuring interactive sessions on startup ideation, business plan modeling, and the support of the government under the J&K Startup Policy 2024-27. The experts from JKEDI provided valuable insights into the various schemes and

incentives available for budding entrepreneurs. Speaking on the occasion, Director JKEDI Khalid Jahangir emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship and startup awareness programmes in nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit among youth. He stressed that these programs shall help the students to think innovatively,

understand the basics of entrepreneurship, and explore the path of becoming job creators rather than job seekers.

The session witnessed enthusiastic participation from the students and faculty members along with other officials of the institute. This initiative is a part of JKEDI's broader efforts to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit among the youth in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, contributing to the economic development of the region by creating new opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. The session witnessed enthusiastic participation from the students and faculty members along with other officials of the institute. This initiative is a part of JKEDI's.

## Secretary DLSA Ganderbal chairs meeting of LADCs

■ HT News Network

Ganderbal, May 02: The Secretary, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Ganderbal, today chaired a meeting of Legal Aid Defense Counsels in his office chamber.

The meeting was attended by all Legal Aid Defense Counsels (LADCs) and aimed to discuss strategies for improvement and provision of qualitative and competent legal services in criminal matters to all eligible persons and strategies for legal research & implementation of calendar of activities.

During the meeting, the Secretary emphasized the importance of managing and implementing the legal aid system in a professional manner in criminal trials. He stressed upon the Legal Aid Defense Counsels to ensure that the legal aid services are delivered in an efficient and effective manner, upholding the principles of justice and fairness. The meeting provided a platform for the Legal Aid Defense Counsels to discuss challenges and share best practices in providing legal aid services to the marginalized sections of society and conduct a legal research for effective implementation of schemes devised by NALSA.

The Secretary's guidance and directions are expected to further strengthen the legal aid system in the district, ensuring that justice is accessible to all.

## DC, SSP interact with Civil Society members at Poonch

■ HT News Network

POONCH, MAY 02: Deputy Commissioner Vikas Kundal and Senior Superintendent of Police Shafakat Hussain convened a meeting with civil society members and religious leaders to address local developmental issues. The gathering aimed to gather feedback and coordinate efforts for the betterment of the district. Key attendees included DDC Members, ADC, ACR, DSWO/DIO, Tehsildar Haveli, ARTO, Former MLC, and the BDC Members, along with prominent civil society members



and religious leaders. Participants shared their concerns regarding the need for unity and communal harmony, reaffirming their commitment to support the administration. Deputy Commissioner Vikas Kundal listened attentively

to all issues raised, assuring attendees that their concerns would be prioritized. He emphasized the administration's commitment to the district's development and the necessity of cooperation to foster communal harmony.

## DC reviews working of FCS&CA Department in Poonch

■ HT News Network

POONCH, MAY 2: Deputy Commissioner Vikas Kundal chaired a review meeting here today to assess the working of the Food Civil Supplies and Consumers Affairs Department. Assistant Director FCS&CA Adil Shabir and all Tehsil Supply Officers (TSOs) of the district attended the meeting. At the outset, the Assistant Director FCS&CA gave a detailed presentation regarding the functioning of the department. He said that the district has ample stocks of essential commodities including wheat, rice, LPG, petrol and diesel. A thorough discussion ensued and the DDC reviewed the status of E-KYC/e-Shram/NFSA/Non-NFSA&PMFSS schemes focusing on three categories of Non-Priority Households (NPHH), Priority Households



(PHH) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY). He reviewed the current status and issues faced by the TSOs from various zones in the district. The DDC reviewed E-KYC reports from each zone and asked the TSOs to complete the E-KYC registration in their jurisdictions. He also discussed issues related to online transactions, instructing officers to only provide ration through online mode.

# NITI Aayog Releases Report on "Enhancing Competitiveness of MSMEs in India"

■ HT News Network

New Delhi May 2 (KNS): NITI Aayog today released the report on 'Enhancing MSMEs Competitiveness in India', prepared by NITI Aayog in collaboration with the Institute for Competitiveness (IFC). The report presents a detailed blueprint for unlocking the immense potential of India's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through systemic reforms in financing, skilling, innovation and market access.

The report delves into the key challenges affecting the competitiveness of MSMEs in India. Using firm-level data and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), it provides recommendations to foster sustainable integration and enhance their incorporation into global value chains. It focuses on four important sectors - textiles manufacturing and apparel, chemical prod-



ucts, automotive and food processing while highlighting the sector-specific challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed to unlock the potential of MSMEs in India. The report examines current national and state policies, highlighting gaps in implementation and limited awareness among MSMEs.

One of the important findings of the report

is the notable improvement in MSMEs' access to formal credit. Between 2020 and 2024, the share of micro and small enterprises accessing credit through scheduled banks rose from 14% to 20%, while medium enterprises saw an increase from 4% to 9%. Despite these improvements, the report reveals that a substantial credit gap remains. Only 19% of MSME credit demand was met formally by FY21, leaving an estimated 780 lakh crore unmet. The Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) has expanded significantly, but still faces significant limitations. To bridge the credit gap and unlock inclusive, scalable finance for MSMEs, the report calls for a revamped CGTMSE, supported by institutional collaboration and more targeted services. The report also highlights the pressing issue of skill shortages within the MSME sector. A large portion of the

workforce lacks formal vocational or technical training, which hampers productivity and limits the ability of MSMEs to scale effectively. Many MSMEs also fail to invest sufficiently in research and development (R&D), quality improvement, or innovation, making it difficult to stay competitive in national and global markets. The report further points out that MSMEs face barriers in adopting modern technologies due to unreliable electricity supply, weak internet connectivity and high implementation costs. Despite state government schemes designed to support technological advancement in MSMEs, many enterprises are either unaware of them or unable to access them. In its analysis of clusters, the report finds that upgrading outdated technologies and improving marketing and branding capabilities are critical to improving competitiveness.





## DC Reasi reviews performance of Health department, lays emphasis on maternal, neonatal Healthcare

HT News Network

REASI, MAY 02: Deputy Commissioner Reasi Nidhi Malik today chaired a comprehensive review meeting of the Health Department to assess the status of ongoing health programmes and initiatives in the district.

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Kohli, provided an overview of the department's functioning in the district including Maternal and neonatal healthcare, Family Planning and immunisation and a briefing on the 100-Day TB Elimination Campaign.

The Deputy Commissioner laid special emphasis on Maternal and neonatal Healthcare and instructed the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to furnish detailed data on institutional deliveries and home births. She emphasized the need to minimize home deliveries, highlighting the risks these pose to both mothers and newborns. The DC Reasi urged health officials to ensure that all deliveries take place in registered healthcare institutions,



where proper medical support is available, to enhance the overall safety and outcomes of childbirth in the district. For improving child healthcare, the Deputy Commissioner emphasized on

the significance of the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK). She directed the CMO to ensure early detection and prevention of diseases among children, so that timely treatment and support can

be provided to them.

It was informed that the district has improved many parameters like ANC registration touching 91% in the first trimester of 2024-25 in comparison to last year's 80%, institutional deliveries reaching 91% during 2024-25, BCG Vaccines rate recorded at 108% and considerable improvement in PPIUCD insertion. The Deputy Commissioner stressed that the hilly, inaccessible, remote areas of Mahore, Reasi & Pouni, where people still resort to home deliveries need to be given special attention. She asked for conducting Block wise monthly review of implementation of each Programme. She further directed the officials to compile monthly health data and furnish the same to her office.

The meeting also included a briefing on the 100-Day TB Elimination Campaign, a focused initiative to raise community awareness around TB prevention and treatment. The meeting also included a briefing on the 100-Day TB Elimination Campaign, a focused initiative to raise community awareness around TB preven-

## 75 Teaching, Non-Teaching Staff get Time-bound promotion

HT News Network

JAMMU, MAY 02: The Directorate of School Education Jammu has given time-bound promotion to 75 employees across various cadres in the education department. The officials promoted include 68 Masters; 5 Senior Assistants and 2 Librarians.

The time-bound promotion cases were examined and approved by the duly constituted promotion committee headed by the Director School Education, Jammu, with the Joint Director (SE), Personnel Officer, FA/CAO and AAO as committee members. The committee meticulously reviewed and sanctioned all 75 cases as per the norms and eligibility criteria.

"These promotions are part of the department's routine exercise to ensure timely career progression and to maintain high morale among staff" DSEJ officials said.

## Rogi Kalyan Samiti reviews patient care services in Govt Hospital Gandhi Nagar

HT News Network

JAMMU, MAY 02: The Government Hospital Gandhi Nagar Jammu hosted a meeting of Rogi Kalyan Samiti (RKS), a patient welfare committee, to discuss and implement initiatives aimed at improving Patient care services.

The meeting was chaired by MLA Bahu, Vikram Randhawa (Chairman of the committee) and attended by Chief Medical Officer Jammu Dr. Harbaksh Singh; Deputy Medical Superintendent Dr. Balvinder Singh and the members from other departments like PWD, PDD PHE, AYUSH, Information, ICDS, eminent members — Dr. Sunita Puri, Rahul, EX-corporator, Akhill along with staff of Government Hospital Gandhinagar Dr. Sanjeev, Dr. Poonam Manyal and Dr. Ruchita Mahajan.

The meeting focused on the quality improvement initiatives, patient amenities such as improving hospital infrastructure & providing support to patients who are admitted without any attendants. They discussed different patient safety protocols, implementation of staff dress code & the ways to overcome the shortage of staff in different departments of the hospital. This was followed by discussion on agenda points framed for the meeting of the RKS. It was noted that the Government Hospital Gandhi Nagar Jammu is situated in the heart of the city catering to nearby urban & rural population & strengthening of health care facilities in this hospital is must to fulfill the needs of the general public. The Chairman took a detailed tour of the hospital campus including Pediatrics ward, OPD Block, Blood Bank, Maternity Ward, MICU & interacted with patients, their attendants and elicited the patient response for working of staff of Govt Hospital Gandhinagar. He directed the staff to work with Zeal and enthusiasm in the interest of patient care and also admired the efforts of staff in providing patient care.

## District Social Welfare Department (SANKALP) HEW signs MoU with GDC Ramgarh to empower Women Affinity Group

HT News Network

SAMBA, MAY 2: To empower young women through skill development and other schemes & facilities. Government Degree College (GDC) Ramgarh today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the District Social Welfare Department (SANKALP-HEW). The MoU was signed by the College Principal Dr. Meeru Abrol, and District Social Welfare Officer (Nodal Officer, SANKALP HEW) Nawaz Sharief. Also present at the event were Associate Professor Dr. Aditi Khajuria and Associate Professor Dr. Snobar, along with District Mission Coordinator Social Welfare Department Dr. Ruchi Thakur & Gender Specialist, SANKALP, HEW, Social Welfare Department Mansi Abrol. As part of this collaboration, Hub for Empowerment of Woman (HEW) has been established in the College, offering a dedicated platform to women students pursuing higher education & various other fields.

## Inter-School Zonal Level Tournament held at Ghat

HT News Network

DODA MAY 02: An Inter-School Zonal Level Sports Competition was today organised at Ghat under the directions of the Deputy Commissioner Harvinder Singh and the guidance of District Youth Services and Sports Officer Pritam Singh. The Zonal Physical Education Office coordinated the tournament featuring spirited contests in Volleyball, Kabad-di, and Kho-Kho.

The event drew enthusiastic participation from 162 students representing different schools of the Ghat Zone. The young athletes showcased remarkable talent, teamwork, and sportsmanship throughout the competition, making the event a vibrant celebration of youth and physical fitness.

Principal of Government Higher Secondary School Ghat Dinesh Kumar was the chief guest. He lauded the participants for their dedication and energy. PEL and I/C ZPEO Surinder Kumar served as the Nodal Officer and played a crucial role in organizing and overseeing the event. The successful execution of the tournament was made possible by the collective efforts of all PEMs, PETs, and REKS.

A special vote of thanks was extended to the Block Medical Officer, Ghat, for deploying medical staff and ensuring first aid support on-site. The organizers also expressed sincere gratitude to the Diamond Youth Club Ghat for providing a free ambulance service, further contributing to the safety and smooth conduct of the event. The tournament not only promoted healthy competition but also reinforced the importance of sports and physical education among school students.

## Deputy Chief Minister inspects progress on construction works in Dak Bungalow Nowshera

HT News Network

RAJOURI, MAY 2: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Chowdhary, today visited the PWD Dak Bungalow in Nowshera to inspect the progress on construction works being executed there. The visit aimed to evaluate the progress on ongoing developmental works, especially conference hall at PWD Dak Bungalow Nowshera.

During his visit, the Deputy Chief Minister was apprised that the estimated cost of the project is



Rs 249 Lakh and it will be completed by December 2025.

The Dy CM inspected the quality of construction works and

directed the executing agencies to expedite the pace of progress while maintaining high standards in work execution.

Highlighting the significance of infrastructure development, he directed the officials to ensure strict adherence to deadlines besides addressing any bottlenecks hindering the timely completion of projects.

"Quality should not be compromised at any cost, as these projects are pivotal for overall development of the region and well-being of the people," Surinder Chowdhary remarked.

## DC interacts with toppers of Board exams at Poonch



HT News Network

POONCH, MAY 02: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Vikas Kundal today interacted with top scorers of class 12 and class 10 Board exams, the results of which were recently declared.

The students with 95% marks met with DC at his office. He congratulated the students for their exceptional academic achievements and praised their dedication and hard work.

The DC lauded the government schools in providing quality education and nurturing the potential of students, even in the face of various challenges. He acknowledged the efforts of teachers and parents who supported the students throughout their academic

journeys.

In Class 10th exams, the toppers included Shabana Mirze from GHSS Girls Surankote, who scored 491 marks (98.2%); Tabassam Latief Paswal, also from GHSS Girls Surankote, with 485 marks (97%) and Arzoo Asif Manhas from GHS Jaranwali Gali, who achieved 483 marks (96.6%).

The Class 12th toppers include Mohammad Motayoub from GHSS Fatehpur with 478 marks (95.6%); Iqra Qureshi from GHSS Girls Surankote with 477 marks (95.4%); and Vanshika Bali from GHSS Girls Poonch, with 476 marks (95.2%).

District Education and Planning Officer (DEPO) Mukhtar Manhas announced that a formal felicitation ceremony will be held soon to honor these outstanding students.

## District Admin Ramban intensifies anti-drug campaign

HT News Network

RAMBAN, MAY 02: In a determined effort to combat the menace of drug abuse, the District Administration Ramban, under the leadership of Deputy Commissioner Baseer-Ul-Haq Chaudhary, intensified its anti-drug campaign under the nationwide Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan and Nasha Mukht Jammu and Kashmir initiative.

A series of awareness activities were organized across various educational institutions in the district to sensitize students and the community about the harmful effects of drug and substance abuse.

These initiatives are part of a sustained campaign initiated by DC Ramban Baseer-Ul-Haq Chaudhary to eradicate drug abuse and build a safer, healthier future for the youth of Ramban.

In Gool, the girl students of the Government Model Higher Secondary School led from the front by conducting sensitization drives within their community. Their active participation and leadership underlined the role of youth especially young women in driving social change.

At the PM Shri Government Higher Secondary School (GHSS) Tethar, students actively participated in anti-drug pledge ceremonies and awareness programs aimed at promoting a healthy and drug-free lifestyle.

Similarly, the PM Shri Government High School Chakka also held awareness events under the same campaign, where students took part in discussions and activities emphasizing the importance of staying away from drugs.

In a notable grassroots effort, the students of the Government High School Shagan staged a Nukkad Natak (street play) highlighting the devastating impact of drug addiction. The performance received appreciation for its impactful message and creativity. Meanwhile, students at Kaskoot, Bankoot and various other schools took a pledge to observe the Anti-Tobacco campaign and joined the Nasha Mukht Bharat campaign, reaffirming their commitment to an addiction-free lifestyle.

## ADC reviews working of school Education Department in Bhadarwah, Bhalla Zones

HT News Network

BHADERWAH, MAY 2: Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Sunil Bhutyal today chaired a meeting with key stakeholders of the Education Department of Bhadarwah and Bhalla zones to review academic activities in the schools and execution of different schemes. The meeting was attended by the Chief Education Officer, ZEOs of Bhaderwah and Bhalla, ZPEOs of both zones, and Principals from all GHSSs of the Sub Division. The meeting focused on mea-

sures to improve quality of education and assessment of developmental projects related to school infrastructure, student enrollment, and resource allocation.

The ADC directed the officials to ensure timely completion of ongoing infrastructure works, such as classroom repairs, drinking water facilities and sanitation improvements as per quality standards.

A major area of focus during the meeting was the growing concern of drug abuse among students and youth. The ADC instructed school heads to collaborate with civil society, par-



ents, and local law enforcement to create awareness and implement preventive strategies. He also suggested organizing anti-drug campaigns, counselling sessions, active participation of students in sports activities and moral education programs to steer students toward a healthy lifestyle and responsible behavior. Promoting social harmony and a safe learning environment was also discussed. The ADC asked for imbibing inclusiveness and values of unity, tolerance, and discipline among the students. The Principals were urged to take proactive steps in address-

ing grievances of students and ensure that teachers maintain a positive, engaging environment in classrooms. The meeting concluded with directions to ensure transparency in educational programmes, effective use of ICT labs and smart classrooms, and regular teacher performance evaluations. Promoting social harmony and a safe learning environment was also discussed. The ADC asked for imbibing inclusiveness and values of unity, tolerance, and discipline among the students. The Principals were urged to take proactive steps in address-







# PM dedicates Vizhinjam seaport to nation, says it will reduce reliance on foreign ports

## AGENCIES

THIRUVANANTHAPURM, MAY 2 (UNI)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday inaugurated the Rs 8,900 crore Vizhinjam International Seaport in Kerala -- India's first mega transshipment container terminal that will significantly strengthen India's position in global trade, sharpen logistics efficiency and cut down reliance on foreign ports.

The seaport is a significant advancement in India's maritime infrastructure," Modi said while dedicating the seaport to the nation. "India's coastal states and our port cities will become key centres of growth for a Viksit Bharat," the PM said.

The Prime Minister remarked that the capacity of the transshipment hub will triple in the coming years, enabling the smooth arrival of some of the world's largest cargo ships.

He pointed out that 75% of India's transshipment operations were previously conducted at foreign ports, leading to significant revenue loss for the country.

Emphasizing that this situation is now set to change, he asserted that India's money will now serve India and the funds that once flowed outside the country will now generate new economic opportunities for Kerala and Vizhinjam's people.

Modi remarked that before the colonial rule, India witnessed centuries of prosperity, emphasizing that at one point, India held a major share in the global GDP.

He highlighted that what set India apart from other nations during that era was its maritime capacity and the economic activity of its port cities.



Noting that Kerala played a significant role in this maritime strength and economic growth, he highlighted Kerala's historical role in maritime trade, emphasizing that through the Arabian Sea, India maintained trade links with multiple nations.

He noted that ships from Kerala carried goods to various countries, making it a vital hub for global commerce. "Today, the Government of India is committed to further strengthening this channel of economic power", he added and asserted, "India's coastal states and port cities will become key centers for the growth of a developed India".

"The port economy reaches its full potential when infrastructure and ease of doing business are promoted together", said the Prime Minister, stating that over the past 10 years, this has been the blueprint of the government of India's port and waterways policy.

He highlighted that the government has accelerated efforts for industrial activities and holistic development of states.

He noted that under PM Gati Shakti, waterways, railways, highways, and airways are being rapidly integrated for seamless connectivity. He added that these reforms in ease of doing business have led to greater investment in ports and infrastructure sectors.

The Prime Minister

stated that his government has also reformed regulations concerning Indian seafarers, yielding significant results.

He pointed out that in 2014, the number of Indian seafarers was below 1.25 lakh. Today, this figure has surged beyond 3.25 lakh. He emphasized that India now ranks among the top three countries globally in terms of seafarer numbers.

Highlighting that a decade ago, ships faced long waiting times at ports, significantly delaying unloading operations, Modi noted that this slowdown affected businesses, industries, and the overall economy.

He stressed that the situation has now transformed and over the past 10 years, India's major ports have reduced ship turn-around time by 30%, improving operational efficiency.

He remarked that due to enhanced port efficiency, India is now handling greater cargo volumes in shorter durations, strengthening the nation's logistics and trade capabilities.

"India's maritime success is a result of a decade-long vision and effort", exclaimed the Prime Minister, underlining that over the past 10 years, India has doubled the capacity of its ports and expanded its National Waterways eight-fold.

He noted that today, two Indian ports are among the global top 30

ports, while India's ranking on the Logistics Performance Index has also improved. Additionally, he pointed out that India is now among the top 20 countries in global ship-building.

The Prime Minister further remarked that after strengthening the country's basic infrastructure, the focus has now shifted towards India's strategic position in global trade.

He announced the launch of Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision, which outlines India's maritime strategy to achieve the goal of a developed India.

He recalled the G-20 Summit, where India collaborated with several major countries to establish the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, highlighting Kerala's critical role in this corridor, emphasizing that the state will greatly benefit from this initiative.

Underscoring the critical role of the private sector in elevating India's maritime industry to new heights, Shri Modi said that under Public-Private Partnerships, thousands of crores have been invested over the past 10 years.

The Prime Minister highlighted that India is advancing towards the establishment of a ship-building and repair cluster in Kochi. He emphasized that once completed, this cluster will create numerous new employment opportunities, providing Kerala's local talent and youth with a platform for growth.

The Prime Minister further stated that India is now setting ambitious targets to strengthen its shipbuilding capabilities.

He noted that this year's Union Budget introduced a new policy to promote the construction of large ships in India, which will significantly boost the

manufacturing sector.

He emphasized that this initiative will have direct benefits for MSMEs, generating a large number of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities across the country.

"True development is achieved when infrastructure is built, trade expands, and basic needs of the common people are met", stressed the Prime Minister, remarking that the people of Kerala have witnessed rapid progress over the past 10 years, not just in port infrastructure, but also in highways, railways, and airports.

Reiterating that the welfare of fishermen remains a top priority, the Prime Minister noted that under Blue Revolution and Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, projects worth hundreds of crores have been sanctioned for Kerala.

Underlining that Kerala has always been a land of harmony and tolerance, Modi highlighted that centuries ago, Saint Thomas Church, one of the oldest churches in the world, was established here.

He acknowledged the recent moment of grief that has touched people across the world when Pope Francis passed away a few days ago, leaving behind a profound legacy.

He shared his personal experiences, expressing his gratitude for having had multiple opportunities to meet Pope Francis. He noted that he received special warmth from him and cherished their discussions on humanity, service, and peace, which will continue to inspire him.

Governor of Kerala Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Union ministers Suresh Prabhu, George Kurien were present among other dignitaries at the event.

# SC grants interim protection to Srinagar family facing deportation amid Pahalgam fallout

## AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, MAY 2 (UNI)

In a significant order, the Supreme Court on Friday granted interim protection to a Srinagar-based family facing the risk of deportation to Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack that occurred on April 22.

A bench comprising justices Surya Kant and NK Singh directed the authorities not to take any coercive action, including deportation, against the family until a decision is made after verifying their claims of Indian nationality.

The family, which includes a married couple and their four children, contended that they are Indian citizens and possess valid government identification such as Aadhaar cards, PAN cards, voter IDs, and Indian passports.

Tensions between India and Pakistan escalated after the Pahalgam attack, prompting the Indian government to suspend visa services for Pakistani nationals and mandate that all Pakistani citizens leave the country by April 27.

Despite this, the petitioner-family family alleged that they were detained unjustly, even though one of them had



long surrendered his Pakistani passport and settled in India.

Advocate Nanda Kishore, representing the family, informed the Court that while one family member works in Bangalore, the rest are settled in Srinagar.

The bench emphasized the need for proper verification of the family's documents before any action is taken.

"Besides the human element, there are issues which need to be verified. Since the factual plea requires verification, we dispose of the matter without expressing anything on merits, with a direction to authorities to verify the documents and any other relevant facts brought to their notice."

The court instructed that an appropriate decision be taken by the authorities at the earliest, while refraining from pre-

scribing a fixed timeline. The bench made it clear that if the family is not satisfied with the outcome, they may approach the Jammu and Kashmir High Court for further relief.

"This order shall not be treated as a precedent as it is in the peculiar facts and circumstances of this case," the Court added.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Union government, suggested that the family approach the relevant authorities for redress.

However, the petitioner's counsel maintained that the entire family had been arrested despite being Indian citizens.

The court closed the matter, leaving it to the authorities to verify the family's claims. Until such verification is completed and a final decision made, no deportation or other coercive action shall be undertaken against them.

# Hope Pakistan cooperates with India to ensure Pahalgam terrorists are hunted down: US VP Vance

## AGENCIES

WASHINGTON/NEW DELHI, MAY 2 (UNI)

Backing India's stance that the Pahalgam terrorist attack was overseen by handlers in Pakistan, the US Vice President JD Vance has asked Islamabad to cooperate with New Delhi and ensure that the terrorists are hunted down and dealt with.

Vance also said that the US is in touch with both Pakistan and India, and expressed hope that New Delhi's response to the April 22 terrorist attack does not lead to a broader regional conflict.

Asked by Fox News if the Trump administration is worried about the break-out of tensions between India and Pakistan, he said:

"Sure, I am worried about anytime you see a hotspot breaking out, especially between two nuclear powers.

"We've obviously been in close contact with our friends in India and Pakistan.

"Our hope is that India responds to this terrorist



attack in a way that doesn't lead to a broader regional conflict.

"And we hope frankly that Pakistan, to the extent that they are responsible, cooperates with India to make sure that the terrorists, sometimes operating in their territory, are hunted down and dealt with.

"That's how we hope this unfolds; we are obviously in close contact. We'll see what happens."

The US VP's statement comes after the US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth spoke with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday and reiterated full support of the US government in India's fight against terrorism.

"US stands in solidarity with India and supports India's right to defend itself," a Defence Ministry statement quoted him as saying.

During the conversation, Rajnath told Pete Hegseth that Pakistan has a history of supporting, training and funding terrorist organisations.

"Pakistan has been exposed as a rogue state, fuelling global terrorism, and destabilising the region. The world can no longer turn a blind eye to terrorism," Rajnath said.

He added that it is important for the global community to explicitly and unequivocally condemn and call out such heinous acts of terrorism.

Notably, 26 tourists were killed in the terrorist attack in Pahalgam. Following the dastardly act, India took stringent measures against Pakistan, including holding the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, closing the Integrated Check Post Attari, asking all Pakistani nationals to leave India, downsizing the Pakistani HC staff as well as its own in Islamabad. Pakistan has also replied in kind, suspending the 1972 Shimla Agreement, stopping use of its airspace by Indian aircraft, among other measures.

# Link students of tech and vocational education with industries: Yogi

## AGENCIES

LUCKNOW, MAY 2 (UNI)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday underscored the importance of prioritising innovation and hands-on training in technical and vocational education.

During the review meeting of the Technical and Vocational Education departments, the CM said that over the past eight years, the state government has undertaken several impactful initiatives to make technical education more accessible, high-quality, innovative and outcome-driven, the results of which are now becoming evident.

Appreciating the successful implementation of the State Institutional Ranking Framework (SIRF) for government and aided polytechnic institutes, he directed that private institutions be brought under the framework as well, to maintain uniform quality benchmarks across the board.

Yogi stressed that all technical institutions must actively participate in quality evaluations conducted by bodies such as NAAC, NBA, and NIRF. However, he underlined the need for thorough preparation before applying for these accreditations to maintain



excellence.

During the meeting, it was informed that 1.64 lakh seats have been enrolled for the 2024-25 academic session in Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Technical University, Lucknow. The university has aligned its curriculum with the National Education Policy 2020, introducing MOOC-based learning, a choice-based credit system, multiple entry and exit options and integrated programmes.

In the 2023-24 academic year, 12,739 students from the university secured employment, with the highest annual package reaching Rs 59.91 lakh. Similarly, students from MMMUT, Gorakhpur, were placed in reputed firms with packages up to Rs 52 lakh per annum.

The CM directed universities and engineering colleges to strengthen practical training and ensure that laboratories are well-

equipped. Besides, he directed the officials to expedite the recruitment process for all vacant academic and non-academic positions.

He directed that all infrastructure and campus development projects related to the newly established Government Engineering Colleges in Basti, Gonda, Mirzapur and Pratapgarh be completed within stipulated timelines, ensuring these institutions become fully operational from the next academic session. He said that the courses offered must align with the local industrial landscape and emerging job opportunities.

In the review of diploma-level technical education, it was noted that 2,139 polytechnic institutes are currently functioning in UP. These include 147 government, 18 PPP-mode, 19 aided and 1,948 private institu-

tions, with a total intake capacity of over 2.68 lakh students.

The department has introduced digital classrooms, Aadhaar-based biometric attendance, industry-integrated programmes and cutting-edge technologies such as drone technology, cyber security, data science and machine learning to modernise the curriculum. Since 2017, the state has established 39 new government polytechnics and provided training to over 13,000 faculty members and officers.

The Department of Vocational Education and Skill Development informed Yogi that 324 government and 2,982 private ITIs are operational in the state. With support from Tata Technologies Limited, 212 government ITIs have been upgraded with modern laboratories and trained instructors. These institutions now offer both long-term courses and short-term skill development programmes.

For the 2024-25 academic year, approximately 1.25 lakh trainees have secured apprenticeship and employment opportunities. More than 30,000 students have also applied under the PM Internship Scheme.

# Telangana Cong leaders meet Guv, thank him for 42 pc quota bill

## AGENCIES

HYDERABAD, MAY 2 (UNI)

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president Mahesh Kumar Goud, Minister Ponnamm Prabhakar, and a delegation of Telangana Congress BC leaders met Governor Jishnu Dev Verma at Raj Bhavan on Friday and expressed their gratitude for approving the bill that provides 42 per cent reservation for Backward Classes (BCs) in political representation and educational opportunities.

# MEA in touch with Odisha govt, Nepali authorities over death of Nepali student at KIIT

## AGENCIES

BHUBANESWAR, MAY 2 (UNI)

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, is in touch with the Odisha government and Nepali authorities regarding the tragic death of a Nepali girl student at KIIT University on Thursday night.

In a release, the MEA stated: "We are deeply saddened by the tragic

demise of a Nepali student of KIIT University, Bhubaneswar."

The ministry has extended its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family of the student, who was found dead in her hostel room at KIIT University on Thursday night.

"We extend our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family during this difficult time," the

statement added.

The Ministry of External Affairs also said it has been in constant contact with the Odisha State Government since the incident occurred.

Furthermore, it noted that the Odisha Government has extended full support to the family of the deceased, and a thorough inquiry is currently being conducted by the Odisha Police.

"The Government of India takes the safety, security, and well-being of all international students very seriously," the release emphasized.

"We remain in close contact with the Nepali authorities, the Odisha State Government, and KIIT management to ensure real-time communication and coordination," the MEA concluded.



## Malnutrition as a global health concern



DR. TASADUK HUSSAIN ITTOO (FELLOW, INTERNATIONAL DIABETES FEDERATION (IDF) FELLOW, BELGIUM)

As per World Health Organization (WHO) data of year 2020, globally around 149 million children under 5 years of age were estimated to be stunted (too short for age), 45 million were estimated to be wasted (too thin for height), with around 45% of deaths among children under 5 years of age linked to undernutrition. Childhood overweight and obesity that attribute to other forms of malnutrition are also on rise.

While every country in the world is affected by one or more forms of malnutrition - the major impact is found to occur in middle and low income countries, including India. As a result, combating malnutrition in all its forms is becoming one of the serious global

health challenge. Under-nutrition makes children in particular much more vulnerable to disease and death.

Broadly understanding the forms of under-nutrition - wasting, which means low weight-for-height. It usually indicates recent and severe weight loss, because a person has not had enough food to eat and/or they have had an infectious disease, such as diarrhoea, which has caused them to lose weight. A young child who is moderately or severely wasted has an increased risk of death, but treatment is possible.

Low height-for-age is known as stunting. It is the result of chronic or recurrent undernutrition, usually associated with poor socioeconomic conditions, poor maternal health and nutrition, frequent illness, and/or inappropriate infant and young child feeding and care in early life. Stunting holds children back from reaching their physical and cognitive potential.

Low weight-for-age is known as underweight. A child who is underweight may be stunted, wasted, or both. Moreover, micro-

nutrient-related malnutrition can occur due to inadequacies in intake of vitamins and minerals often referred to as micronutrients. Micronutrients enable the body to produce enzymes, hormones, and other substances that are essential for proper growth and development - their deficiency represents a major threat to the health and development of populations, particularly children and pregnant women.

Generally speaking, all age groups are at risk of malnutrition -- women, infants, children, and adolescents. Poverty amplifies the risk - people who are poor are more likely to be affected by different forms of malnutrition. Moreover, malnutrition increases health care costs, reduces productivity, and slows economic growth, which can accentuate a cycle of poverty and ill-health.

To combat this emerging global health challenge of malnutrition, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in the year 2016, proclaimed 2016 to 2025 as "United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition". Led by WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),

the Decade can provide as a great opportunity for addressing all forms of malnutrition.

The Decade sets a timeline to meet a set of global nutrition targets and diet-related NCD targets by 2025, as well as relevant targets in the Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030 - Sustainable Development Goals like SDG 2 (to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) and SDG 3 (to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages).

Moreover, it promises to take steps for creating sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets; providing social protection and nutrition-related education for all; aligning health systems to nutrition needs, and providing universal coverage of essential nutrition interventions; ensuring that trade and investment policies improve nutrition; building safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages; and strengthening and promoting nutrition governance and accountability everywhere.

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## 9 reasons why you should start your day with soaked dry fruits

Eating soaked dry fruits in the morning is a healthy and beneficial habit that many people incorporate into their daily routines for a variety of reasons. This practice not only enhances the digestibility and absorption of nutrients but also helps kickstart your day with a boost of energy, hydration, and essential vitamins and minerals. Soaked dry fruits can be a great choice for anyone looking to improve their overall health, manage their weight, or simply fuel their body with nutritious, whole foods in the morning. Here's why soaked dry fruits can be beneficial for your health:

### 1. Boosts Digestion

Soaking dry fruits like almonds, walnuts, and raisins helps break down the enzymes and phytic acid present in them. This makes it easier for the body to digest and absorb nutrients.

The soaked fruits are gentler on the stomach, especially after a long overnight fast, aiding smoother digestion in the morning.

### 2. Improved Nutrient Absorption

Soaking activates beneficial enzymes and reduces anti-nutrients, such as phytic acid, which can block the absorption of important minerals like zinc and iron. This results in better nutrient absorption.

Nutrients like fiber, healthy fats, vitamins, and antioxidants in dry fruits are more readily available for your body when they are soaked.

### 3. Helps with Hydration

Dry fruits are packed with natural sugars and fiber, and soaking them helps them retain moisture, making them more hydrating and easier to consume, especially after waking up.

Staying hydrated in the morning helps kickstart your metabolism and energy levels for the day.

### 4. Increases Satiety

Soaked dry fruits are rich in healthy fats, proteins, and fiber, which promote a feeling of fullness. Eating them in the morning can help control

hunger throughout the day, reducing the likelihood of unhealthy snacking.

### 5. Helps Regulate Blood Sugar Levels

Dry fruits such as almonds and walnuts are known for their ability to regulate blood sugar levels due to their healthy fats, fiber, and protein content. Soaking these fruits before eating them can enhance their benefits for blood sugar control.

Soaked dry fruits can prevent sharp spikes in blood sugar, making them a great option for people with diabetes or those looking to maintain steady energy levels.

### 6. Rich in Essential Nutrients

Soaked dry fruits are packed with vitamins (like vitamin E and B-complex), minerals (like magnesium, calcium, and potassium), and antioxidants, all of which support overall health, including immune function, skin health, and heart health.

Almonds, for example, are rich in healthy fats, while raisins are packed

with iron, making them great for boosting energy in the morning.

### 7. Supports Skin and Hair Health

Many dry fruits like almonds and walnuts are high in vitamin E and omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential for maintaining healthy skin and hair. Consuming them in the morning can contribute to your daily intake of these vital nutrients.

### 8. Boosts Mental Health

Soaked almonds, walnuts, and figs are known to have cognitive benefits. They contain omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, and vitamins that support brain health, improve focus, and enhance memory. Starting your day with these can give you a mental boost for the rest of the day.

### 9. Natural Detox

Soaked dry fruits like raisins and apricots have mild detoxifying properties. The high fiber content helps cleanse the digestive tract, removing waste and promoting regular bowel movements.

## Social Justice department brainstorms issues affecting beggars, homeless

AGENCIES NEW DELHI

The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DoSJE) has hosted a seminar to understand and deliberate on strategies and share knowledge regarding rehabilitating beggars, the homeless, and the destitute in the country.

The seminar in collaboration with the World Bank, was held with the theme 'Hard to Reach Population - SMILE (Beggary)' in the national capital.

The event, witnessing participation from both national and international experts, formed part of an ongoing knowledge seminar series aimed at deepening dialogue and action to strengthen social protection systems for the



most vulnerable sections of society in India.

"We need to hear directly from real stakeholders -- those who have transitioned out of begging -- to understand the root causes and impact of support systems," said Rajesh Aggarwal, Secre-

tary, DEPwD, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, while sharing his vision on inclusive development and disability-friendly outreach. He also acknowledged the complexity of the issue, touching upon its social, religious, and economic dimensions. "It is important for individuals to have foundational documentation -- such as having a registered address, a bank account, and access to healthcare -- to enable identification and support in vulnerable conditions," said Benedicte Leroy De La Briere, Lead Economist, World Bank, while bringing a global lens to the discussion on beggary rehabilitation. Noting that such events provide valuable grass-

roots insights and authentic data from the field, La Briere stressed the need to focus discussion on targeted interventions and actionable solutions. The seminar also featured compelling presentations by nodal officers and grassroots organisations from various states who shared on-the-ground realities, challenges, and success stories in engaging with hard-to-reach populations. "Approximately 18,000 individuals have been identified under the SMILE initiative, of which 1,612 have already been rehabilitated," said Ajay Srivastava, Economic Advisor (MoSJ&E). He assured that efforts are underway to accelerate the rehabilitation of the remaining individuals.

AGENCIES NEW DELHI

Just three minutes a day of moderate activity may be enough to boost better heart health in older adults, according to a study.

Previous studies have shown that as people age, many do not engage in physical activity, increasing their chances of experiencing a cardiovascular event.

In the new study, researchers from the UK and Australia noted that doing household chores or shopping for groceries -- referred to as incidental activities -- may also be enough to boost health. Incidental physical activity (IPA) encompasses activities of daily living outside the leisure-time domain



and includes preparing meals, keeping the house clean, mowing the lawn, or gardening.

"Any daily IPA amount of vigorous or moderate-intensity was associated with lower cardiovascular disease risk in a dose-response manner," said the researchers from the University of Sydney.

"Our findings highlight

the potential cardiovascular health value of incidental physical activity, especially for people who struggle to do structured exercise," they added.

In the study published in the journal Circulation, the team analysed data on 24,139 people who wore wrist monitors that tracked their activity levels and who self-identified as

non-exercisers.

These were compared with those whose wrist monitors showed they engaged in regular moderate activity with those who were more or less active.

The results showed that people who engaged in regular moderate incidental activity had a lower risk of experiencing a cardiovascular event or dying from one.

More specifically, the team found that people who were moderately active for at least three minutes regularly reduced their chances of having a heart attack, stroke, or other type of cardiovascular event.

The key is to try to do several short-duration activities every day, said the researchers.

## Even short-term antibiotic use may cause resistance in gut bacteria

AGENCIES NEW DELHI

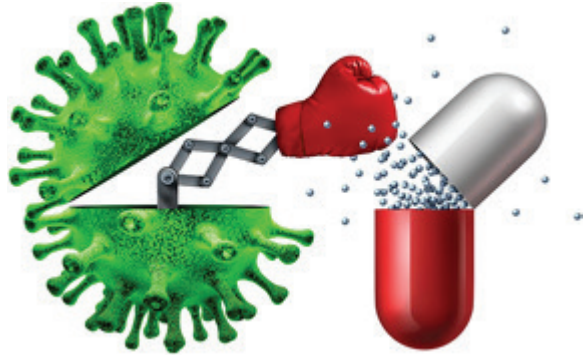
As antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has become a global health concern, with millions of deaths occurring each year due to it, a new study showed how even a short period of antibiotic use can lead to persistent resistance in human gut bacteria.

Researchers from the Stanford University in the US focused their study on ciprofloxacin -- used to treat bacterial infections in many different parts of the body.

They showed that ciprofloxacin can lead to resistance that can emerge independently across diverse species and continue for more than 10 weeks.

AMR is widely driven by excessive and inappropriate antibiotic use.

Previously studies have relied on in vitro experiments and animal models to understand AMR. But, the new study, published



in the journal Nature, performed a longitudinal metagenomic study to explain how resistance evolves in 60 humans.

The researchers prescribed 500 mg of ciprofloxacin to 60 healthy adults, to be taken twice daily for five days.

The team used stool samples and a computational tool to reconstruct 5,665 genomes representing commensal bacterial populations and identified

2.3 million genetic variants.

Among these, 513 populations showed genetic changes or mutations in *gyrA* -- a gene associated with fluoroquinolone resistance. Fluoroquinolones are a class of broad-spectrum antibiotics that work by interfering with bacterial DNA replication, ultimately killing the bacteria.

Many mutations typically arise independently

within individuals. Nearly 10 per cent of initially susceptible bacterial populations acquired resistance through these mutations.

The resistance persisted beyond 10 weeks and was predicted to remain detectable for up to a year.

Notably, resistance was more likely to emerge in populations that were abundant before treatment. These also experienced significant declines during exposure.

"These findings revealed that brief ciprofloxacin exposure drives the evolution of resistance in gut commensals, with mutations persisting long after exposure," said the researchers in the paper.

"This study underscores the capacity of the human gut to promote the evolution of resistance and identifies key genomic and ecological factors that shape bacterial adaptation in vivo (in humans)," they added.

## Sleep well, avoid junk food to keep your liver healthy

AGENCIES NEW DELHI

Having a good night's sleep and avoiding junk food is essential to keep the liver healthy, said Dr. S.K. Sarin, Director of the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) on Friday.

He said that junk food, as the name suggests, must be put in dustbins as its regular consumption can significantly affect liver health.

"The word junk food means it is junk. It has to be put in the dustbin. But if you think your stomach and intestines are dustbins, put that food inside. Otherwise, avoid, don't use it," Sarin said, in a post on social media platform X.

Junk food which is rich in unhealthy fats, sugars, and processed ingredients increases the risk of obesity, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes. These diseases then raise the chances of non-alcoholic fatty



liver disease (NAFLD), and progress to more serious complications like cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Sarin also urged people to sleep well and not eat late as it may affect the gut bacteria, critical for better health. Studies have shown that people with poor sleep are at increased risk of fatty liver disease.

Further, eating late at night has been linked to a higher risk of significant fibrosis -- a sign of liver damage. It is because the body is unable to process

fat and carbohydrates during sleep, leading to their accumulation in the liver.

"Sleeping late and eating late-night food is not a great idea, because the bacteria in your intestines which process the food, will also sleep late. Restorative good sleep is the best thing," the leading hepatologist said.

Sarin advised people to not lose their health by running after "money, power and positions". Instead maintaining "a

sound healthy body and good night's sleep" is essential as these are the "only two things which give happiness in life", the expert said.

NAFLD, currently termed metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD), is a chronic liver disease that occurs when fat builds up in the liver in people who don't drink much alcohol. It can affect people with diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol.

Fatty liver disease is emerging as an important cause of liver disease in India, affecting about three in 10 people in the country.

In September last year, the Union Health Ministry released the revised operational guidelines and training module for MAFLD to promote early detection and help boost patient care and outcomes related to the disease.



