

Srinagar
 Thursday
 December 25 | 2025
 05 Rajab1447 AH
 Issue No: 303
 Volume: 15
 Pages: 12
 Price: Rs 02/-

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Decade of Resolve Brings Peace to J&K, Nation More Secure Than Ever: Amit Shah

HT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, DEC 24: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said that firm leadership and sustained policy measures under Prime Minister Narendra Modi have transformed India's internal security landscape, asserting that Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed lasting peace after decades of turmoil.

Addressing the Passing Out Parade of Recruit Basic Course (RBC) Batch-93 at Panchkula in

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Fresh Snowfall at Sonamarg Rekindles Hope for Winter Tourism Amid 'Chillai-Kalan' - HT-PHOTO / Courtesy-UNI

DIPKs:9318/25
Dated: 24-12-2025

Red Fort Terror Case:

Delhi Court Sends Seven Accused Back to Jail Till January 8

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, DEC 24: A Delhi Court on Wednesday extended the judicial custody of seven accused in the Red Fort blast case till January 8, as investigations by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) continue to unravel the wider conspiracy behind the attack.

The accused, Dr Adeel Rather, Dr Muzammil Ganaie, Dr Shaheen Saeed, Maulvi Irfan Ahmed Wagay, Jasir Bilal Wani, Amir Rashid Ali and Soyab were produced before the Patiala House Court amid tight security following the expiry of their earlier remand periods. Media persons were barred

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Public Transport Fares to Rise in J&K as Government Clears 18% Hike from January 2026

HT NEWS DESK / GNS

SRINAGAR, DEC 24: In a significant decision impacting daily commuters across the Union Territory, the Jammu and Kashmir Government has approved an 18 per cent increase in public transport fares, to be implemented from January 1, 2026.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by Principal Secretary, Finance Department, Santosh D. Vaidhya, following prolonged

demands from transport operators citing rising operational costs.

Senior officials present at the meeting included Secretary Transport Avny Lavasa, Acting Transport Commissioner J&K Anju Gupta, Managing Director JKRTC Abdul Rashid War, Additional Secretary General Administration Department Rohit Sharma, Joint Transport Commissioner Vikas Anand, and Regional Transport Officer Jammu Jasmeet Singh. Officers

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PoJK Woman Returned Via Chakan Da Bagh LoC Gate After Week-long Custody

M S NAZKI

MENDHAR, DEC 24: A woman hailing from Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK) was formally handed over to authorities across the Line of Control (LoC)

at the Chakan Da Bagh crossing point in Mendhar sector of Poonch district on Wednesday evening, officials said.

The woman, identified as Shahnaz Akhter (35), daughter of Mohammad Ismail and a resident

of village Mohra Sharief in tehsil Nakyal of Kotli district, PoJK, had been apprehended on December 16 by troops of the Army's 22 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles. She was intercepted near the Dabi post in the Hamirpur area, which falls

under the operational jurisdiction of the 120 Infantry Brigade.

Following her apprehension, Akhter was handed over to Police Station Mendhar, where she remained under custody while legal and procedural formalities

were completed, officials added.

On Wednesday, the LoC gate at Chakan Da Bagh was opened for a brief period between 5:00 pm and 5:25 pm, during which the woman was officially

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Beware of Impostors: DSEK Warns Against Fake WhatsApp Account Using His Photo

HT NEWS DESK / GNS

SRINAGAR, DEC 24: Director School Education Kashmir (DSEK) Naseer Ahmad Wani on Wednesday issued a strong public caution after a fake WhatsApp account surfaced, allegedly misusing his photograph to mislead people.

In an advisory shared with the public, Wani said an unknown individual has created a fraud-

ulent WhatsApp profile bearing his image and may be attempting to impersonate him. He urged citizens, especially those connected with the education sector, not to respond to, engage with, or trust any messages received from such accounts.

Clarifying his official digital presence, the Director stated that the only WhatsApp

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Srinagar Airport Handles 35.26 Lakh Passengers in 2025

HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

SRINAGAR, DEC 24: Reflecting both strength and bounce-back ability, Srinagar International Airport handled 35.26 lakh passengers and 21,576 flight movements between January and

December 21, 2025, officials said here.

The year was marked by tourism peaks, weather challenges, and temporary route suspensions following the Pahalgam attack.

Official data, accessed by the

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LG, CM, Cabinet Ministers greet people on Christmas

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, DEC 24: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has extended his heartiest greetings to the people on the joyous occasion of Christmas.

In a message, the Lieutenant Governor said, "On the joyous occasion of Christmas, I convey my warm greetings to the people. I hope that this occasion of festivity ushers in love and harmony amongst the people."

"The festival, commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, serves as a reminder to embrace Lord Christ's teachings of love, compassion, and forgiveness in our daily lives. This auspicious occasion inspires us to renew our commitment towards the welfare of each other for a prosperous future for all. May the spirit of Christmas encourage us to help those in need and bring peace, prosperity and happiness to all."

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also extended warm greetings to the people celebrating Christmas in Jammu and Kashmir and across the world.

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When a Voice Becomes Memory: Farewell to Abdul Ahad Farhad (1946–2025)

FROM EDITORIAL DESK

SRINAGAR DEC 24 : He Spoke with restraint, wrote with soul, and gave Kashmir a language of dignity that time itself cannot silence

From the moment his voice first travelled across the airwaves, Abdul Ahad Farhad ceased to be merely a broadcaster; he became a presence—calm, cultured and deeply trusted. With his passing, Kashmir does not simply mourn a distinguished poet, writer and

broadcaster; it mourns the fading of a moral cadence that once guided public discourse with elegance and restraint.

Born in 1946, Farhad belonged to a generation that treated language as a responsibility and expression as a form of service. His early inclination toward literature and thought soon matured into a lifelong commitment to words—spoken and written—not as ornament, but as instruments of meaning. In a region shaped by memory, emotion and resilience, he emerged as a voice



that neither sensationalised nor surrendered to silence.

For decades, his presence on radio shaped the listening habits of Kashmir. His voice carried authority without arrogance, warmth without excess. In an era when radio was the heartbeat of households, Farhad's broadcasts became moments of collective pause—where news was delivered with gravity, cultural programmes with affection, and serious conversations with

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Div Com Kashmir for In-Situ De-Addiction Mechanism in Educational Institutions

Stresses on concerted efforts for elimination of drug menace

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, DEC 24: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg, chaired a meeting on Wednesday to review and strengthen measures aimed at curbing the growing menace of substance abuse in the Valley.

Emphasizing the need for coordinated and sustained efforts by all concerned departments, the Div Com directed educational institutions, including schools and colleges, to establish in-situ de-addiction mechanisms within their respective campuses.

He instructed that each educational institution shall nominate one male and one female nodal officer responsible for implementation of IEC (Information, Education and Communication) activities, student counselling, identification of vulnerable individuals, and continuous monitoring and tracking of affected students.



ed students.

Wakf authorities were directed to organize orientation programmes for religious leaders to effectively utilize their influence in society for generating awareness regarding the harmful effects of substance abuse and

promoting social responsibility.

With regard to coaching institutions and student accommodations, IMHANS was directed to develop a structured monitoring framework to keep effective oversight on coaching hubs.

Director Health Services was

instructed to prepare a comprehensive training calendar for training of trainers, with the objective of creating a robust pool of trained resource persons for educational institutions.

Further, Director Colleges and Director Schools were directed

to compile and submit a list of staff members to be trained and assigned the responsibility of identification, counselling, and monitoring of students vulnerable to substance abuse.

The Div Com emphasized the conduct of regular awareness sessions, maintenance of performance reports, and documentation and dissemination of success stories.

Police Department was directed to enhance surveillance over identified drug hotspots across Srinagar city and other districts in close coordination with the Health Department.

The meeting was attended by the DC Srinagar, Akshay Labroo; Director School Education, Director Social Welfare, Joint Director Information, and officers from Health Services, Higher Education, IMHANS, Wakf Board, Police Department, along with representatives of civil society.

JKTF Srinagar Meets, Congratulates Vice President BHAT MEHRAJ SB on Umrah

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, DEC 24: An important meeting of the Teachers' Forum (JKTF), District Srinagar, was held today in which all district body members and stakeholders were present. During the meeting, the team members congratulated Vice President Mr. Mehraj-ud-Din Bhat on the occasion of his forthcoming Umrah pilgrimage and extended heartfelt prayers for his safe journey and a spiritually rewarding Umrah. Meanwhile

The Forum reaffirmed that students remain its foremost priority, and all initiatives will focus on strengthening the teaching learning process and safeguarding students' academic interests.

The Forum called for unity among teachers and stressed the need to strengthen zonal bodies to ensure effective coordination and representation.

It was further emphasized that cordial and professional relations must be maintained with colleagues outside the Forum to promote a healthy academic environment.

The Teachers' Forum (JKTF), District Srinagar, reaffirmed its commitment to serving both the student community and the teaching fraternity with sincerity and collective responsibility.

Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore' Initiative Culminates with Mega Grievance Camp at Langate

■ DR. AB QAYOOM

LANGATE, DEC 24: The week-long celebration of Good Governance Week 2025 under the banner "Sushasan Saptah – Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore" concluded successfully today with the organization of a Mega Grievance Redressal Camp at the Town Hall, Langate. The programme was organized by the Tehsil Administration Langate, in coordination with various line departments, in district Kupwara.

As part of the concluding event of the campaign, grievance redressal camps were organized at the Panchayat level across Tehsil Langate, enabling senior officers to directly interact with the public and address their concerns. People from all corners of the tehsil actively participated, highlighting their day-to-day developmental and civic issues for timely resolution. The mega camp at Town Hall Langate was chaired by the Tehsildar Langate, along with the Executive Officer, Municipal Committee Langate, and officers from different departments. A large number of residents from various



villages of Langate Tehsil attended the programme. Officers and representatives from key line departments were present to ensure on-the-spot interaction and redressal of grievances. During the interaction, the public raised issues related to road connectivity, irrigation schemes, ration distribution, drinking water supply, power supply, healthcare facilities, education, door-to-door garbage collection, and other civic amenities. The concerned officers and Heads of Departments responded to the grievances pertaining to their respective departments and provided immediate clarifications. Addressing the gathering, the Tehsildar Langate

Mohd Ismail emphasized the significance of the Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore initiative in strengthening grassroots governance and ensuring transparency and accountability. Several local issues were resolved on the spot, while necessary directions were issued to concerned departments for the timely redressal of remaining grievances.

The public expressed gratitude to the Government and District Administration Kupwara for organizing the grievance redressal camp and resolving many public concerns on the spot, terming the initiative as people-centric and highly beneficial.

Cultural Academy Holds Condolence Meeting on the Demise of Abdul Ahad Farhad

Abdul Ahad Farhad's Contributions Are a Guiding Light for the New Generation: Speakers

■ JAMEEL ANSARI

SRINAGAR, DEC 24: The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages today organised a dignified condolence meeting at the Conference Hall, Tagore Hall, Srinagar, to pay rich tributes to renowned poet, writer, journalist and broadcaster Abdul Ahad Farhad, who passed away in Jammu on December 22.

Speakers on the occasion described the late Farhad as a shining luminary of Kashmiri literature, stating that his poetry, writings and broadcasting services enriched the Kashmiri language and culture with intellectual depth, cultural dignity and contemporary relevance. They said that Abdul Ahad Farhad was not only a great poet but also an eminent scholar, a visionary intellectual and a sensitive human being whose voice and words influenced



generations and shaped literary thought.

The condolence meeting began with Fatiha Khwani led by Ghulam Hassan Ghamgeen, lending a solemn and spiritual tone to the gathering. The meeting was presided over by noted poet, actor and playwright Bashir Dada, who spoke in detail about his long and close association with the departed soul. He said that Abdul Ahad Farhad was not only a distinguished creative writer but also a sincere friend, a compassionate mentor and a true lover of literature. He added that Farhad's personality reflected truthfulness, sincerity and intellectual integrity, and his conversations were marked by refinement, grace and deep literary awareness.

The special guest on the occasion was eminent writer and intellectual Mushtaq Ahmad Mushtaq, who highlighted his professional association and shared literary and broadcasting experiences with the late Farhad. He said that Abdul Ahad Farhad was extremely careful in matters of language, deeply respectful of literary tradition and well aware of emerging literary trends. He noted that Farhad always encouraged young writers and considered it his responsibility to take literature to the common reader. According to him, Farhad's true legacy lies not only in his writings but also in the intellectual light he passed on to his students and contemporaries.

A large number of journalists, writers, poets, intellectuals, artists and prominent personalities from different walks of life attended the condolence meeting and paid tributes to the literary and cultural services of the departed soul. Those who expressed condolence included Inayat Gul, Gulzar Ahmad Ganai, Engineer Shabnam Bashir, Editor-in-Chief of Daily Asian Mail Rashid Rahil, Hamidullah Hameed, Ghulam Mohammad Rather, Hamid Nasir, Nazir Ahmad Bhat, Syed Riyaz, Editor-in-Chief of Brighter Kashmir Farooq Ahmad Wani, President Adbi Markaz Kamraz Mohammad Amin Bhat, Prof. Nasir Mirza, Dr. Aabid Ahmad, Mohammad Yousuf Shaheen, Dr. Ghulam Nabi Haleem, and Nazim Nazir among others.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Additional Secretary of the Academy, Adeel Saleem, who was present on the dais, thanked the participants on behalf of the host organisation. Paying homage to Abdul Ahad Farhad, he said that the late literary figure was not merely a great creative writer but an institution in himself, whose personality was a fine blend of knowledge, dignity and humility. He added that Farhad devoted his entire life to the promotion of Kashmiri language and literature with sincerity, honesty and dedication, and through his creative and broadcasting contributions played a significant role in shaping the intellectual fabric of Kashmiri society.

The condolence meeting concluded with prayers for the eternal peace of the departed soul and patience for the bereaved family. The Academy reiterated its resolve to preserve and carry forward the rich literary and cultural legacy of Abdul Ahad Farhad for future generations.

AICRP-Biological Control Celebrates Kisan Diwas at SKUAST-Kashmir

■ DR. AB QAYOOM

SRINAGAR, DEC 24: On the occasion of Kisan Diwas (National Farmers Day), the All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) on Biological Control, Division of Entomology, Faculty of Horticulture (FoH), SKUAST-Kashmir, reaffirmed its commitment to empowering farmers through sustainable and eco-friendly pest management practices.

Kisan Diwas, celebrated annually on December 23, honours the invaluable contribution of farmers to India's economy and society. On this day, the University paid tribute to farmers whose relentless hard work feeds the nation and sustains life. Emphasizing that farming is not merely a profession but a way of life passed down through generations, SKUAST-Kashmir highlighted its role in promoting biological control as a safe and natural approach to crop protection.

The University advocates the use of beneficial insects, bio-agents and bio-pesticides to manage pests without harming soil, water, human health or beneficial organisms. This approach helps reduce dependence on chemical pesticides, lowers production costs and ensures healthy crops and safe food.

In this context, the inaugural function of a 15-day training programme on "Mass Production of Biological Control Agents" under HADP-18: Minimisation of Pesticide Use in Agriculture was organized at Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-



Kashmir), Shalimar. The programme is being attended by farmers from various districts of the Kashmir Valley, representing diverse agro-ecological zones and cropping systems. The training is jointly organized by the Division of Entomology and the Division of Plant Pathology, Faculty of Horticulture. The inaugural function was graced by the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, SKUAST-Kashmir, Prof. (Dr.) Nazir Ahmad Ganai, as the Chief Guest. In his address, the Vice-Chancellor stressed the urgent need to minimize the indiscriminate use of chemical pesticides, citing their adverse effects on human health, the environment, soil biodiversity and ecological balance. He strongly advocated the adoption of bio-pesticides and biological control agents as safe, sustainable and environmentally sound alternatives for modern agriculture.

Reiterating the University's resolve, he stated that farmers are the true heroes of the nation, and promoting natural and sustainable farming practices today is essential for a healthier and more prosperous tomorrow.

Capacity Building Programme under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Held for Field Functionaries in Budgam

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

BUDGAM, DEC 24: A Capacity Building Programme for field functionaries was organised under the flagship Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme by the SANKALP Hub for Empowerment of Women, Mission Shakti, at the District Social Welfare Office, Budgam.

The programme was aimed at strengthening the knowledge and skills of grassroots-level functionaries to ensure effective implementation of women and child welfare schemes across the district. Field functionaries from the Social Welfare Department, including officials from the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), One Stop Centre, Child Helpline, Child Care Institutions, and other allied wings actively participated in the programme.

During the session, participants were sensitised on the key objectives of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative, with special focus



on prevention of child marriage, promotion of gender equality, protection of women and children, and the need for coordinated inter-departmental efforts. Emphasis was also laid on enhancing community outreach, improving service delivery, and ensuring that welfare schemes reach the intended beneficiaries in a timely manner.

Addressing the participants, the District Social Welfare Officer, Budgam, underscored the pivotal role of field functionaries

in bringing about behavioural change at the community level and reiterated the department's commitment towards the empowerment of women and safeguarding children's rights.

The programme concluded with an interactive discussion, followed by a collective resolve to work towards building a gender-sensitive and inclusive society through the effective implementation of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiatives.

Deputy CM calls for pro-public decisions on Gair Mumkin Khads issues

Chairs Sub-Committee review meeting

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

JAMMU, DECEMBER 24: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, today chaired a meeting of the Sub-Committee constituted to examine the issues related to Gair Mumkin Khads in Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting, held at the Civil Secretariat, Jammu, was attended by Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs Departments, Javed Ahmad Rana and Minister for Agriculture Production, Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Cooperative and Election Departments, Javid Ahmad Dar, as members of the Sub-Committee.

Additional Chief Secretary, Jal Shakti Department, Shaleen Kabra, briefed the Sub-Committee on the current status of Gair Mumkin Khads and the challenges associated with their identification, protection and management.

Speaking on the occasion, the Deputy Chief Minister emphasized the need for taking



pro-public and pragmatic decisions to ensure amicable redress of genuine issues faced by the people. He stressed that the policy interventions must strike a balance between the

environmental protection and safeguarding the livelihoods and property rights of citizens.

The Sub-Committee discussed in detail the existing status of Gair Mumkin Khads, Daryas and Nallahs,

along with related concerns with the objective of providing relief to the general public wherever required.

The Deputy Chief Minister called for sensitization of all

stakeholders and directed for proper scientific mapping of Gair Mumkin Khads, Nallahs and adjacent non-cultivable waste lands.

The meeting also discussed climatic challenges and measures being taken to mitigate climatic impact on the environment, human life and properties.

The Deputy Chief Minister asked for comprehensive mapping of flood-prone areas to strengthen the disaster preparedness and mitigate risks. He further instructed the concerned departments to take stringent action against the illegal encroachments and ensure retrieval of encroached land across Jammu and Kashmir in a time-bound manner.

The members of the Sub-Committee put forth their valuable suggestions and highlighted various public concerns requiring urgent attention.

Among others, the meeting was attended by Special Secretary, Jal Shakti and other concerned officers.

Principal Secretary Finance chairs FRC meet at Jammu

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

JAMMU, DECEMBER 24: Principal Secretary Finance, Santosh D Vaidya chaired a high-level meeting of the Fare Revision Committee (FRC) at Civil Secretariat here to deliberate upon the issue of revision of passenger transport fares across the Union Territory.

The meeting was attended by Secretary Transport, Avny Lavasa; Acting Transport Commissioner, J&K,



Anju Gupta; Managing Director JKRTC Abdul Rashid War; Representative of Headquarters Northern Command (C/o 56 APO); Regional Transport Officer, Kashmir; Regional Transport Officer, Jammu, Additional Secretary GAD; members of the Committee, including representatives of various Transporters' Associations of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

During the meeting, the representatives of the transporters submitted a proposal seeking a hike of 40% in passenger fares, citing a substantial increase in operational costs.

The Committee held a detailed and threadbare discussion on the matter, taking into account multiple factors such as the sharp rise in the cost of spare parts, fuel-related expenses, taxes, maintenance costs, and other operational inputs. A comprehensive cost analysis exercise was also examined during the deliberations.

While acknowledging the genuine concerns raised by the transporters, the Committee also carefully considered the socio-economic impact of fare revision on the general public, with particular emphasis on ensuring that the common man is not subjected to an undue financial burden.

After extensive deliberations and consensus among all stakeholders, it was unanimously decided that an 18% increase in passenger fares would be implemented across all categories of passenger vehicles operating in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir and the revised fares shall come into effect from 01.01.2026.

The decision reflects a balanced approach aimed at safeguarding the sustainability of the transport sector while simultaneously protecting the interests of commuters.

SWD Srinagar Holds sensitization Program with SHGs under Beti Bachao Beti Padaho

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 24: Social Welfare Department (SOD), SANKALP-Hub for Empowerment of Women- Mission Shakti Srinagar organized Sensitization Programme with the members of Self Help groups associated with NRLM at Government Degree college for Women Nawakadal under the banner of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP).

The programme focused on key issues such as prevention of gender-based discrimination, importance of girl child education, PC&PNDT Act, prohibition of child Marriage and legal provisions for the protection of women and children.

Participants were sensitized about the objectives of the BBBP scheme and the collective role of society in ensuring a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for girls.

Resource Person, SANKALP-HEW Mission Shakti, Srinagar while addressing the gathering, emphasized that educating and empowering the girl child is fundamental to social and economic development. The speaker highlighted that changing mindsets at the grassroots level is essential for achieving the goals of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative.

Later, Spokespersons from the Government Degree college, spoke about the importance of collective responsibility in protecting the rights of girls and ensuring equal opportunities for them. The speakers also highlighted various government initiatives and legal safeguards available for the welfare, education, and safety of women and children.

The programme witnessed active participation from Self Help Group members from NRLM. Informative sessions, interactive discussions, and awareness talks were conducted to reinforce the message of "Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child."

The event concluded with a pledge by participants to support gender equality and work collectively towards the empowerment and well-being of girls in society.

Such sensitization programmes will continue to be organized under the BBBP scheme to strengthen community engagement and promote positive social change.

SWD celebrates Birth of Girl Child under BBBP at JLNM Hospital

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 24: Social Welfare Department (SWD), through SANKALP Hub for Empowerment of Women (Mission Shakti), Srinagar, today organized an event to celebrate the birth of the girl child along with distribution of Baby Kits under the flagship programme Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) at JLNM Hospital, Srinagar.

The event aimed to highlight the importance of valuing and celebrating the birth of a girl child, while challenging long-standing patriarchal norms that undermine the dignity and potential of women. Celebrating the birth of a girl child signifies recognition of her inherent worth, promotion of gender equality, and assurance of her rights to health, education, and future opportunities.

The initiative reflects a shift in societal mindset from viewing daughters as a burden to embracing them as pillars of hope, prosperity, and positive social change, in line with



the spirit of National Girl Child Day.

As part of the event, Baby Kits were distributed to mothers of newly born girl children. These kits include essential hygiene and care items for both newborns and mothers, aimed at promoting health, hygiene, and financial support during the critical postnatal period.

The initiative ensures that mothers leave the hospital equipped with basic necessities, providing comfort, reassurance, and dignity at the beginning of motherhood.

The distribution of Baby Kits reinforces the commitment of the Social Welfare Department to support families, empower women, and ensure that every newborn girl receives a warm, respectful, and dignified start to life.

The programme witnessed the presence of Medical Superintendent JLNM Hospital, Dr. Tariq, District Mission Coordinator, S-HEW Srinagar, Ruqaya Ashraf, along with other officials and staff from JLNM Hospital and S-HEW Srinagar.

DC Ganderbal reviews arrangements for Republic Day-2026 celebrations

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

GANDERBAL, DECEMBER 24: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ganderbal, Jatin Kishore, today chaired a comprehensive meeting to review and finalize arrangements for the forthcoming Republic Day-2026 celebrations in the district.

The DC conducted a detailed review of all key preparations to ensure a successful and well-coordinated event. The arrangements discussed included preparedness of the main venue, podium and stage setup, security and traffic management, seating and transportation facilities, barricading, uninterrupted power

supply, stationing of water tanker and ROs, parking, deployment of ambulance and medical staff, deployment of fire tenders, public address system, sanitation, refreshments, and decoration of prominent buildings.

It was informed that the main function will be held at Qamaria Stadium, Ganderbal, where the National Flag will be unfurled by the chief guest.

The programme will feature a ceremonial march past by contingents of the District Police, CRPF, Armed Police, IRP, PTS Manigam, Forest Protection Force, along with students from various educational institutions.

The DC also emphasised proper arrangements be made for a vibrant cultural performances on the occasion of Republic Day.

He stressed the need to ensure fool-proof and meticulous arrangements for the befitting celebration of the nation event.

The DC also directed that flag unfurling ceremonies be carried out across all government offices in the district prior to the main function to mark the occasion. He further emphasized the importance of the National Flag unfurling and instructed officers to ensure strict adherence to the Flag Code and the National Anthem protocol.

The meeting stressed

cleanliness, proper illumination of Mini-Secretariat and other government offices. Special emphasis was laid on public convenience, smooth crowd management, and emergency preparedness.

Departments were assigned specific responsibilities, and monitoring committees were constituted to oversee execution on the ground and ensure timely completion of all arrangements.

Additionally, the DC directed to ensure that Republic Day celebrations at subdivision and tehsil levels are organized smoothly.

Meanwhile, the Mechanical Engineering Department, Municipal

Council Ganderbal and other agencies were directed to ensure snow clearance beforehand at main and other function venues in case of snowfall for hassle free celebrations.

The meeting was attended by Additional District Development Commissioner, Manzoor Ahmad Bhat; Additional Deputy Commissioner, Syed Fahim Bihagi; Additional SP Ganderbal, Superintending Engineer R&B, SDM Kangan, Assistant Commissioner Development/Panchayat, Chief Medical Officer, CEO Municipality, Executive Engineers of various wings, ARTO and other concerned officers and officials.

DLSA Bandipora Observes National Consumer Day

Emphasises Consumer Awareness and Legal Empowerment

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

BANDIPORA, DECEMBER 24: District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Bandipora on Wednesday observed National Consumer Day with an awareness programme at the Conference Hall Bandipora, with a focus on consumer rights, accountability and legal empowerment.

The programme, organised in collaboration with the Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Department, Bandipora, witnessed participation of officers and officials from the FCS&CA, Tehsil Supply Officers, Fair Price Shop (FPS) dealers, salesmen, Multi-Tasking Staff, and representatives from various administrative units.

The observance was overseen by

Shazia Tabasum, Member Secretary, J&K Legal Services Authority, and Jeema Bashir, Chairperson, DLSA Bandipora (District & Sessions Judge), under the supervision of Sheikh Babar Hussain, Secretary, DLSA Bandipora.

The objective of the programme was to sensitise stakeholders about consumer rights and duties under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, and to promote transparency and fairness in public service delivery.

On the occasion, advocate Nawaz Ul Haq highlighted the concept and importance of consumer rights, elaborating on the six fundamental consumer rights, including the right to safety, information, choice, to be heard, redressal, and consumer education.

He also informed participants about the functioning of Consumer

Commissions at district, state and national levels, besides online complaint mechanisms for easy access to justice.

Advocate Javid Iqbal emphasised the legal responsibilities of traders, sellers and service providers, particularly in essential services, and cautioned that practices such as overcharging, under-weighting, adulteration and hoarding are punishable offences under law. He reiterated the role of Legal Services Authorities in providing free legal aid, especially to the poor and marginalised sections.

During the program, an interactive session was also held, wherein participants raised queries related to consumer grievances and complaint procedures, which were addressed by the resource persons.

SKUAST-K hosts Two-Day Workshop on 'Solid Waste Biochar Intervention in Farming under Temperate Environment'

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 24: Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences & Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-Kashmir) hosted a Two-Day Workshop on 'Solid Waste Biochar Intervention in Farming Under Temperate Environment' for College Faculty Members.

The workshop, organised by the Division of Basic Sciences & Humanities, Faculty of Horticulture, SKUAST-Kashmir was attended by college faculty members across the valley.

Chief Guest of the occasion, Prof. (Dr) Nazir A Ganai, Vice Chancellor, SKUAST-Kashmir, highlighted that the temperate regions like ours face unique challenges in terms of declining soil fertility, waste management issues, changing climate patterns, and the need to enhance crop productivity in

an eco-friendly manner. "Solid waste generation from agricultural and urban sources is increasing at an alarming rate. Converting this challenge into an opportunity is where biochar emerges as a promising solution", he added. While briefing about the workshop, Head, Division of Basic Sciences & Humanities, Prof. Javed Iqbal Ahmad Bhat, gave an overview of the workshop which was thoughtfully designed to bring together scientists, academicians, to exchange knowledge, share research findings, and discuss practical experiences related to biochar interventions in farming.

The workshop provided the opportunity for the young intellects of various colleges to connect with the research advancements of SKUAST-Kashmir that has been transformed into innovation driven research organization. The participants (College

Faculty) recognized that they gained valuable insights into the scientific foundations and practical applications of biochar, particularly its role in improving soil health, enhancing nutrient use efficiency, sequestering carbon, and promoting climate-resilient agriculture. The deliberations during the workshop highlighted that biochar is not merely an input, but a strategic intervention that aligns agricultural productivity with environmental stewardship. On the conclusion of workshop, Prof. Azmat Alam, Registrar, SKUAST-Kashmir, reiterated that SKUAST-Kashmir's commitment to promoting sustainable agriculture, innovation, and environmentally responsible research and hoped that let this workshop serve as a stepping stone towards long-term initiatives that benefit farmers, students, and society at large.

DC Srinagar reviews implementation of PM Surya Muft Bijli Yojana in district

Takes detailed assessment of division wise performance

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

SRINAGAR DECEMBER 24: To assess the progress achieved in installation of Solar Rooftops under PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana across the district, the Deputy Commissioner(DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo, who is also the Chairman Monitoring and Management Committee of the scheme, today chaired a review meeting at Meeting Hall of the DC Office Complex.

Besides, Chief Planning Officer, Fayaz Ahmad Dar, Executive Engineers of KPDCL, Lead District Manager (Banks), the meeting was attended by KPDCL Engineers and empanelled scheme vendors who presented team wise appraisal of the ongoing installation works and the current status of implementation



under the centrally sponsored scheme.

At the outset, the DC took a detailed assessment of division-wise and team-wise performance,

focusing on targets achieved, applications received, and installations completed across all four Electric Divisions of Srinagar. On the occasion, the DC stressed

the concerned and stakeholders to reach all the eligible households in a time bound manner so that consumers can avail the benefits of the scheme. He directed all stakeholders to ensure greater public awareness, faster banking facilitation and timely installation of solar rooftops so that benefits reach the beneficiaries without delay.

During the meeting, the DC appreciated the efforts of teams performing well in the implementation of the scheme and took cognizance of poor performers, directing them to improve their pace and efficiency to meet the prescribed targets.

Earlier, the DC was informed that more than 3,000 solar rooftops have been installed in the district so far under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana.

Deputy Chief Minister felicitates Rollball World Cup gold medallists

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

JAMMU, DECEMBER 24: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, today felicitated the winners of the 7th Rollball World Cup, held in Dubai from December 14 to 18, 2025, for their outstanding performance at the international level.

Representing India, Hiteshwar Singh and Suvidha Sarin, who competed in the Men's and Women's categories respectively clinched gold medals in their respective events, bringing immense pride and laurels to the Jammu and Kashmir.

Congratulating the players on their remarkable achievement, the Deputy Chief Minister lauded their dedication, discipline and perseverance.

He said that their success reflects the immense sporting potential of the youth of Jammu and Kashmir.

"J&K youth possess exceptional talent and the ability to compete at any national and international level. With the right platform, encouragement and institutional support, they can excel and bring glory to the region," the Deputy Chief Minister said.

He reiterated the Government's commitment to promoting sports culture



in Jammu and Kashmir and assured all necessary support to budding sports persons to help them realise their full potential.

The Deputy Chief Minister added that achievements like these serve as an inspiration for young athletes and strengthen Jammu and Kashmir's presence on the global sports map.

Forest Department clarifies allegations of Mass Tree Felling in Drung-Danwas Area

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 24: The Forest Department has taken prompt cognizance of a video circulated on social media by a trekker, alleging mass felling of trees in the Drung-Danwas area.

The Department has categorically clarified that no mass felling of trees has taken place in the area. A detailed field verification conducted by the Forest Department revealed that only one Fir tree, falling in the 50-60 cm diameter class, had been illegally



felled by timber smugglers.

It was found that the offenders had attempted to convert the felled tree into planks at the site. The tree had been debarked and chipped, resulting in scattered wood chips, which appears to have led to the misinterpretation and exaggeration depicted in the circulated video.

The offenders have been booked under relevant forest laws, and an FIR No. 89 of 2025 has been registered at Police Station Khag in this regard. A total of 34 cubic feet of illicit timber has been seized, and further legal proceedings are underway. A spokesperson of the Forest Department stated the site of occurrence is located at a high altitude above 3,000 metres, which resulted in some delay in accessing the area and taking immediate cognizance of the incident due to difficult terrain and weather conditions. The incident has been misrepresented and exaggerated without due consideration of the actual facts and the challenging geographical conditions of the area. The Forest Department has appealed to trekkers and visitors to act responsibly, verify facts before sharing content on social media, and refrain from spreading misinformation that may create unnecessary alarm. The spokesperson further reiterated that the Forest Department remains fully committed to the protection and conservation of forest resources and continues to maintain strict vigilance against illegal activities.

Sakeena Itoo holds virtual Public Darbar with South Kashmir residents

Also e-Inaugurates key Public Welfare Projects

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

JAMMU, DECEMBER 24: Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo today held a virtual public darbar with residents of several areas of South Kashmir districts, reaffirming the Omar Abdullah led Government's commitment to responsive and people-centric governance.

During the interactive session, the Minister patiently listened to public grievances and developmental concerns raised by participants from various districts of South Kashmir. The

participants raised issues related to healthcare facilities, power, drinking water, ration and other basic civic amenities.

While interacting with the participants, the Minister emphasized on the importance of public outreach, highlighting that these public darbars have emerged as an effective tool to bridge the gap between the Government and the people, ensuring transparency, accessibility and swift service delivery, especially in far-flung areas.

During the Darbar, the Minister issued on the spot directions to concerned officers for time-bound redressal of genuine issues. She



asked the officers to address grievances in time bound manner, particularly regarding Power and PHE sectors during winters.

The Minister directed the officers of PDD to provide electricity

as per the established schedule and also rectify the defects in transformers timely. She also asked the officers to utilise the buffer stock at times when the repairing time of transformers takes more

than a day.

On the sidelines of the public darbar, the Minister also e-inaugurated several public welfare projects of significant public importance, aimed at strengthening essential services and improving the quality of life for the local population, reflecting the government's focus on inclusive and sustainable development.

The Minister reiterated that public welfare and grassroots development remain top priorities of the Omar Abdullah led Government and assured the people that their concerns would continue to be addressed with sincerity and accountability.

Intensify active case finding, timely referral of TB patients: DC Anantnag

Reviews implementation of TM Mukht Bharat Abhiyan

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

ANANTNAG, DECEMBER 24: Deputy Commissioner (Chairman, District Red Cross Society) Anantnag, SF Hamid, reviewed the implementation, progress, and challenges of the TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan in the district during a meeting with the concerned officers today.

The meeting was attended by the CMO, DTO, BMOs, and other officials of the Health Department.

During the meeting, the District Tuberculosis Officer (DTO) briefed the chair about the achievements of the district under TB MBA, including the screening of the vulnerable population and the treatment of TB patients, through a detailed presentation.

While crediting the "Detect-Treat-Prevent-Build" (DTPB) strategy for officially achieving TB-free status for the district, the DC cautioned



that the challenge is to prevent any resurgence.

Lauding the success of the Ni-Kshay Mitra initiative, the DC urged citizens to register as volunteers to ensure full coverage of the remaining patients.

On the occasion, the health authorities were directed to conduct door-to-door screenings, especially in vulnerable clusters, using handheld X-ray machines and NAAT-based testing, besides ensuring active case finding (ACF) through ASHA workers and Mid-Level Health Providers (MLHPs) for timely referral to District Tuberculosis Centres (DTCs) and early treatment initiation under the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP).

Calling TB elimination a social task in addition to a medical one, the DC emphasized to make the TB MB Abhiyan a "Jan Andolan" (people's movement) and create mass awareness for removing the stigma associated with the disease.

DC Budgam inspects progress of restoration, repair work on Panzan Bridge

Also reviews post-flood restoration works

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

BUDGAM, DECEMBER 24: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Budgam, Dr. Bilal Mohi-ud-din Bhat, today inspected the Panzan Bridge on the Budgam Chadoora road and reviewed the progress of restoration works being executed under the UT Capex Budget at an estimated cost of Rs. 71.25 lakh.

During the inspection, it was informed that the embankment of the Panzan Bridge had sustained damage due to recent flood incidents. The DC was assured by the Executive Engineer, PMGSY, that the restoration work has been taken up on priority and is expected to be completed within a period of 20 days, ensuring early restoration of safe and uninterrupted connectivity.

The DC stressed that quality, durability, and safety parameters must be strictly adhered to, and that no compromise shall be tolerated in execution standards.

He further emphasized that frequent field inspections and technical supervision are being ensured to monitor progress and maintain accountability of the executing agencies.

The DC underscored that restoration of public infrastructure remains a top priority of the district administration, particularly in flood-prone areas, and that all available resources are being mobilized for timely rehabilitation and strengthening of damaged assets. Subsequently, the DC reviewed the execution of multiple post-flood restoration and flood mitigation works being carried

out in the Chadoora area including restoration of drop walls at Karambuland Bridge and Main Bridge Chadoora, flood damage restoration of KLR Road from Km 4th to Km 6th, construction of a crate wall at Quangipora Bridge, and restoration of the link road/ approach towards the New Bus Adda, Chadoora.

The DC said that these interventions are aimed at enhancing flood resilience, protecting vital road infrastructure, and minimizing the impact of future flood events.

He issued the directions to ensure inter-departmental coordination, timely release of funds, and completion of works well within sanctioned timelines.

During the visit, the DC also reviewed the proposed alignment

of the road connecting the New Bus Adda with the Dawlatpora Road. The proposed alignment was examined on site, and it was observed that the project would play a crucial role in decongesting traffic, providing alternate connectivity, and improving overall urban mobility in the Chadoora town area.

The DC emphasised that necessary procedural and technical formalities be expedited for early execution of the project.

Later, the DC also interacted with the Driver's Association of Chadoora, during which concerns related to transport facilities, parking space, and operational challenges were raised.

The DC assured that the construction of a new conveyance complex is being actively pursued

and will be taken up to address the genuine demands of the transport fraternity and to ensure organized and efficient transport operations. The DC reiterated that the district administration is firmly committed to people-centric governance, speedy restoration of flood-damaged infrastructure, and implementation of long-term mitigation and development measures. He stated that safeguarding public assets, improving connectivity, and ensuring safety and convenience of the general public shall continue to remain key focus areas of the administration. Besides, CPO Budgam, SDM Chadoora, Exen R&B, Tehsildar Chadoora, EO MC Chadoora and other officials accompanied the DC during his visit.

Good Governance Week Activities held across Bandipora; Awareness and Outreach intensified

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

BANDIPORA, DECEMBER 24: As part of Good Governance Week "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore", a series of awareness and outreach programmes were held across various educational institutions and public platforms in District Bandipora to promote transparency, accountability and citizen-centric governance.

Good Governance programmes were organized at BMS Konan, MS Drugbal, UPS Shokbaba, GHSS Gadakhud and PM SHRI Government Higher Secondary School Shadipora.

The events witnessed active participation from Zonal Education Officer, Heads of Institutions, teachers, students, parents and SMDC members. Discussions focused on the importance of good governance, quality



education, community participation and responsible citizenship, with students also taking pledges to uphold integrity and ethical values.

Meanwhile, under Good Governance Week, the Motor Vehicles Department (MVD) Bandipora conducted a road safety awareness and grievance redressal camp at Sumo Stand Sumbal. ARTO Bandipora sensitised drivers and transporters on road safety, traffic norms and the dangers of drug abuse while driving.

On-the-spot services including issuance of fitness certificates were provided. Enforcement drives were also carried out on Argam-Chapran Road and Bandipora-Sumbal route, during which vehicles were checked, e-challans issued and penalties realised, reinforcing transparency and rule compliance in public transport.

The activities reflected the district administration's continued commitment to responsive governance and effective service delivery at the grassroots level.

HT EDITORIAL

Create space for contract carriage vehicles

The contract carriage vehicle service operating in Srinagar city and its outskirts are facing different problems in their daily operations. The drivers of these vehicles could be seen cursing their luck and some of them have in fact shut down their services while shifting to other means of employment. The biggest problem by majority of these drivers is that they don't have any specific stand where the passengers can board these vehicles or alight from them.

Even though a yard has been designated at militia (known as Malaysia) for the contract carriage vehicles operating in the uptown areas of South Srinagar but the location of the yard is causing problems to the people. Since most of the people living in the uptown areas could be seen waiting for the contract carriage vehicles at Iqbal Park there are hardly few who reach the designated stand. The stand for the contract carriage vehicles should have been set up in the vicinity of Iqbal Park area.

As on date there is a huge rush of people near the Iqbal Park area as they want to board the vehicles bound for different destinations at this place. At times there are chances of accident and one can find messy situation at this place. If a stand would have been set up at this place, then there were less chances of an accident and as such lives of people could be saved.

Over the past few days, the traffic police department has swung into action and many contract carriage vehicles were seized. The seizure of these vehicles has compounded the problems of people and they could be seen waiting for the vehicles so that they reach their respective destinations. Due to the seizure of some of the vehicles many other vehicle owners are not operating their cabs and as such there seems to be no end to the woes of the common masses.

It is high time that the concerned departments find out a place in the vicinity of Iqbal Park that can be developed as a stand for the contract carriage vehicles operating in the South Srinagar areas and the outskirts. The ideal place in this regard can be the huge area near the Khalsa School. At present the kiosks set up for the roadside vendors have occupied this place. Once the kiosks are allotted to the beneficiaries then the space can be used as a designated stand for contract carriage vehicles.

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Under Chillai Kalan, the Garden Still Breathes



■ AUBAID AHMAD AKHOON

The winter of Kashmir is not merely an onset of a season change but an understated transition of rhythm and responsibility. When Chillai Kalan descends upon the valley, life paces itself outward but deepens in introspection. Preparations begin within households, and the kitchen adjusts. And then, of course, the kitchen garden, which is easily neglected, becomes an area that needs both foresight and attention. A land of snowy bliss and destruction warrants both.

Preserving a kitchen garden with flowers during winter requires serious preparation and sensitive care, but most of all, it needs an understanding of precisely how such plants react to cold. Winter is the time of year that slows down the rate of plant growth and tends to damage plants due to icy temperatures, freezing winds, morning frost, and shortened days. Proper application of appropriate techniques can keep your kitchen garden and flowers in healthy condition up to next spring.

First, one has to know the effects of winter on plants: scanty sunlight restricts photosynthesis, cold soil diminishes the activity of roots, and frost may destroy tender leaves and buds. The knowledge of the above

facts helps in taking necessary precautions beforehand. Selection of cold-resistant plants is an important thing for winter gardening. Vegetables that grow well in low temperatures are spinach, methi, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, beetroots, green peas, and lettuce. Flowers that bloom well in winters include marigold, petunia, pansy, calendula, chrysanthemum, and dahlia.

If you already have tender plants like tomato, chilli, basil, hibiscus, jasmine and bougainvillea, they need protection. One of the easiest ways is to shift potted plants to sheltered locations - sunny windows, verandahs, enclosed balconies or corners protected from strong winds. Keeping pots near walls helps because the walls absorb heat during the day and slowly release it at night. When bringing plants indoors is not possible, group a number of pots together to create a relatively warmer microclimate.

One of the best methods for winter care is mulching. Mulch is defined as a layer of material spread upon the soil for protection of roots from cold. Straw, dry leaves, grass clippings, coconut husk, wood shavings, and compost work well. A thick layer spread around each plant covers the whole surface of the soil. Mulching keeps the soil warm, checks evaporation, discourages weed growth, and shields the roots from freezing—hence giving your plants a very good chance of surviving winter.

Watering also requires special attention in winter. As the rates of evaporation are low, the soil remains wet for longer, and hence plants require less water. Overwatering causes root rot in cold and wet soil.

Always check the topsoil with your fingers and water only when it feels dry. Water early in the morning so the plants have their whole day to absorb moisture before night temperatures fall. Never water late in the evening, as cold and wet soil invites fungal infections. Frost protection is another very important part of winter care. It generally forms when the nighttime temperature has gotten very low, and with that low temperature, it forms ice crystals on leaves which can damage or kill tender plants. Protect the plants with cloth, jute sacks, cotton sheets, or frost cloth every night and uncover them in the morning to allow sunlight and air circulation during the day. Plastic must not be put directly onto leaves, because it will trap moisture and increase deterioration in the worst way. You can also build a temporary greenhouse or tunnel by using transparent plastic sheets in the very cold areas. Fertilization during winters should be minimal. As the plants grow very slowly during cold weather, they don't require being heavy-fed. Mild organic fertilizers of compost, vermicompost, or liquid manure at a dilution can be used once every three to four weeks. Strong chemical fertilizers scorch the inactive winter roots. Light pruning is also quite useful. Remove the dried leaves, faded flowers, and weak stems so that the plant may concentrate its energy on keeping healthy. This improves aeration and sunlight penetration, which in turn reduces pest and fungal problems. Indoor herbs like mint, coriander, oregano, or thyme need special care during winter. Place indoor herbs at spots receiving plenty of sunlight

and rotate every once in a while for symmetrical growth. Keep them away from heaters and radiators; this is because dry, hot air may damage the foliage. Provide good air circulation but do not expose the plants to cold drafts from windows and doors. Plant cold-tolerant flowering varieties to keep your garden colorful through winter. This season, winter-flowering plants like marigold, pansy, and calendula will bloom with colors, attracting important pollinators. Flowers are best planted in well-draining soil combined with organic compost. Another thing to watch out for this winter is pests. The common ones include whiteflies and aphids. Occasionally check the underside of leaves and spray neem oil or light soapy water whenever needed. Lastly, well in advance of the coming winter, prepare your garden for the season. Clean fallen leaves, remove debris, loosen the soil, and apply compost before extreme cold comes. Properly cared-for-like judicious watering, mulching against possible frost, and sun management—your kitchen garden and flowers will survive the winter and thrive. Though winter gardening is very different in many ways, the reward from fresh vegetables and pretty blooms makes every effort well worth it.

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Welcoming Chilla-e-Kalan, the harshest winter phase



■ RAYEES AHMAD KUMAR

The 40-day harsh winter period of Kashmir, popularly known as Chilla-e-Kalan, commenced on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, bringing with it a marked change in weather conditions across the Valley. The onset of Chilla-e-Kalan has coincided with a spell of fresh precipitation, offering relief from the prolonged dry, foggy and smoggy conditions that had led to deteriorating air quality in recent days. While the higher reaches of Kashmir received fresh snowfall, the plains witnessed intermittent rainfall, improving visibility and air conditions. Weather officials said the precipitation has helped disperse pollutants, leading to an improvement in overall air quality, particularly in urban areas that were grappling with dense fog and smog. Authorities have advised people to remain cautious, particularly while travelling to snow-bound areas, as Chilla-e-Kalan is known for severe cold, freezing nights and heavy snowfall. Chilla-e-Kalan, the coldest phase of Kashmir's winter, will last for 40 days, followed by the milder periods of Chilla-e-Khurad and Chilla-e-Bachha. The season's first snowfall has transformed Gulmarg - the main winter attraction and health resort into a winter paradise, rekindling the valley's tourism spirit and winning the hearts of visitors from across the country. Tourists delighted by the snowfall and Kashmiri hospitality have appealed people nationwide to experience the charm, beauty and warmth of Kashmir. After a prolonged dry weather in valley, about ten inches of fresh snow blanketed the vast meadows of Gulmarg overnight, turning it into a picture-perfect destination. With the end of dry spell, the tourism stakeholders and adventure operators expressed hope for a good season ahead as they were much concerned previously. The Sadhna top, connecting North Kashmir's Kupwara with the Keran valley witnessed about three feet of snow, the famous Razdan top also received more than one foot snow and the Bandipora Gurez road was soon declared officially as closed. Srinagar Ladakh road, Mughal road, Anantnag Kishtwar road and Machil Kupwara road, all were closed following



a massive snowfall on upper reaches, while the plain areas received an intermittent spell of rains bringing minimum temperatures above the seasons normal and providing some relief to the people especially children and elderly. It is pertinent to mention that only a good snowfall can rejuvenate and recharge our already dried-up water resources such as rivers, rivulets, ponds, and lakes. It sustains life by ensuring the prospect of a healthy agricultural crop ahead. In the absence of adequate snowfall, or in the case of scanty snowfall, we experience even drinking-water shortages during the peak summer season. To overcome such challenges, it is of utmost importance that a substantial snowfall occurs, which would be nothing short of a blessing. When heaters, blowers, air conditioners, and other electrical gadgets fail to provide much-needed relief from the biting cold of Chilla-e-Kalan due to power shortages, the only device that comes to our rescue is the Kangri, which the inhabitants of Kashmir have been using for centuries. The Kangri is a clay vessel encased in a finely woven wicker framework, crafted by skilled artisans. Filled with glowing embers, it helps people keep their bodies warm during the harsh winter months. Meanwhile,

in Kashmir, the celebration of International Pheran Day coincides with the onset of Chilla-e-Kalan on 21st December each year. This year also it was celebrated at winter capital Srinagar's commercial hub Lal Chowk, where scores of locals and tourists gathered to celebrate International Pheran Day. Several people wore Pheran and carried Kangri to get attention from the public. Pheran is a traditionally knee length robe part of the unique identity of Kashmiri culture, a woolen gown worn for protection from cold during this harsh season. Down the memory lane, when I look back at my childhood, I recall that soon after the onset of Chilla-e-Kalan, my parents would strongly advise me not to venture out without wearing headgear, mufflers, and other warm clothes, as winters were far harsher some decades ago. Four to five feet of snow was recorded even in the plains. Children would gleefully play on slippery slopes, while some indulged in friendly wrangling by turning soft snow into hard, spherical balls. Facing winters in those days was truly a fascinating and unforgettable experience.

Writer is a columnist based in Qazigund Kashmir



SHOIAB MOHMMAD BHAT

Chillai-Kalan is the coldest and harshest part of winter in Kashmir. It begins on 21 December and lasts for 40 days. The word comes from Persian, where Chilla means forty and Kalan means major, highlighting the forty toughest days of winter. Starting with the winter solstice, this period marks the peak of bone-chilling winter, during which the valley is clad in a sheet of snow, strong icy winds blow over it, and temperatures nose-dive to way below freezing point.

During Chillai-Kalan, life becomes hard. Rivers and lakes freeze, water pipes often ice over, and snow makes roads slippery and difficult to travel. Despite all these hardships, the snow is very beneficial for the environment. It melts slowly and fills rivers, streams, and reservoirs that provide water throughout the year. People keep themselves warm with a (pheran) long woollen gown and (kangri) an earthen pot in which burning charcoal is kept. Houses are kept warm, and sufficient food, firewood, and other essentials are stored with families to last the long winter.

In earlier times, villagers depended on handmade items and other local crafts to cope with the cold. (Pulhore) shoes made of paddy straw, which would not allow slipping on the frozen snow. Grass ropes were used for tying the animals, storing fodder, and facilitating farming work. Skilled crafts, such as khraaw (mats prepared from wood and dried grass), wagoo, and patij, were skillfully done. These traditional items reflect the creativity, craftsmanship, and knowledge about nature. Each item had its purpose and reflected the resourcefulness of Kashmiri villagers.

People in the villages were skilled in making day-to-day items with grasses, hay, and hedges. They made ropes of all sizes, grass shoes for summer and winter use, and crafted necessary farm and home tools. Each item was made with skill and care, reflecting how people lived in close harmony with nature and

relied on its resources to meet their daily needs.

Long winter nights were spent indoors with the family. Children would gather around elders to hear stories of local heroes, legends, and family tales. These stories were a source of entertainment and also taught important lessons about values, culture, and history. Meanwhile, adults spent time doing indoor crafts like carpet weaving, mat making, and other forms of handicrafts, making long winter days well utilized and purposeful in many ways.

Preparing for Chillai-Kalan was an integral part of life. Many families would

stock up sufficient woollens, pherans, and charcoal for kangris much in advance of the winter season. The old Kashmiri calendar had twelve months: Tsithur, Vahekh, Zeth, Har, Shrivun, Badrupeth, Ashid, Kartikh, Monjhor, Poh, Maag, and Phagun. Poh was literally the period when the most severe cold used to start in Kashmir. People planned for food, fuel, and clothing. Such timely and cautious preparation at the right time helped communities endure and successfully cope with such a long, severe winter.

Food formed an integral part of winter life. Special winter dishes were prepared to keep warm and strong during

the winter months. Some traditional foods are harisa, nadir gade (fish with lotus stem), razmahgogji (kidney beans with turnip), ho-gade, and ale (Hachi), all non-vegetarian dishes made from fish or dried fish and bottle gourd preserved for such times of the year. These were nourishing dishes, but at the same time ways to celebrate the season and preserve the traditional art of cooking.

Traditionally, pherans and kangris were used for hundreds of years. Nowadays, the frequent use of appliances like blowers and heaters has reduced their practical importance. Today, the pheran has largely become a fashion garment,

worn more for appearance than for warmth. This change reflects the evolution that modern life has brought among Kashmiris in experiencing winter, shifting away from traditional practices to appreciation as a cultural symbol.

I have always been mesmerized whenever elderly people talk about winters of the past. Life, though harsh because of the extreme cold, was nevertheless full of warmth and joy. Evenings were spent sitting around in families, sharing dinner, stories and laughter while guests were warmly welcomed. Neighbours, too, would visit one another. And life was so simple with a lot of care and kindness around each other.

This is very much captured in the spirit of this old Kashmiri saying: "Wande tchali sheen gali beyi yiya bahaar", which means "Even after the longest winter, spring will surely come." The saying is found in books today and reminds people of hope, patience, and the promise of better days, even when life has been feeling harsh or hard.

After the Chillai-Kalan, Kashmir enters into Chillai Khurd, the second phase of winter, lasting 20 days from January 30 to February 18. The cold is still there but not as intense; snowfall decreases, and temperatures rise slightly. For the villagers, this is the first relief following the intense Chillai-Kalan.

This period is followed by Chillai Bachha, the final phase of 10 days, from February 19 to February 28, which is commonly known as "baby cold." Winter slowly and gradually loses its hold, days grow longer, snow melts in lower areas, and people start preparing for spring and agricultural work. Together, these three phases, Chillai-Kalan, Chillai Khurd, and Chillai Bachha, from the traditional winter cycle of Kashmir, guide the lives of people from one generation to the next.

Chillai-Kalan was the time of cold weather, but it was also a time of culture, family, and community. It shaped the rhythm of life, strengthening families, preserving traditional crafts, and teaching people resilience and patience. Remembering these traditions today helps us connect to our roots, appreciate the wisdom of our ancestors, and understand the balance between nature, skill, and simple joys that defined life during the Great Winter.

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ZEO Hariganiwan Ganderbal: A Visionary Leader Taking Education to New Heights



IMRAN RAINA

Education is often said to be the foundation of progress, and when leadership is both visionary and compassionate, that foundation becomes even stronger. In the education zone of Hariganiwan, Ganderbal, this belief has come alive under the dynamic and dedicated leadership of Zonal Education Officer Mr. Qamar Ud Din Lone. His tenure has brought about remarkable changes that have not only improved the academic environment but also strengthened the bond between teachers, students, and the community. Through his consistent efforts, Hariganiwan Zone has truly witnessed a new era of growth, discipline, and educational excellence.

Mr. Qamar Ud Din Lone is known for his hands-on approach to administration. He does not believe in leading from behind a desk; rather, he leads from the ground. His regular inspections of schools are not mere formalities but genuine efforts to assess, guide, and improve. During these visits, he interacts directly with teachers and students, observes classroom activities, inspects academic and infrastructural facilities, and provides on-the-spot solutions. His presence in schools creates a sense of accountability and motivation among teachers and students alike. It is often said by teachers in the zone that his inspec-



tions are not about fault-finding, but about finding ways to improve.

One of the most commendable aspects of his leadership has been his focus on infrastructure development. Under his supervision, several school buildings have been renovated, additional classrooms constructed, and essential facilities like drinking water, sanitation, and boundary walls have been ensured. He has taken personal interest in coordinating with higher authorities and different departments to fulfill the infrastructural needs of the schools. His efforts have ensured that even schools in remote and hilly areas of the zone receive due attention and support.

Equally admirable is his friendly and approachable nature. Mr. Lone maintains a warm relationship with

the teaching staff, always ready to listen to their concerns and guide them with empathy. He encourages innovative teaching methods, motivates teachers to participate in professional development programmes, and appreciates their efforts publicly. This open and supportive attitude has created a positive working environment throughout the zone, where teachers feel valued and inspired to give their best.

Mr. Qamar Ud Din Lone's concern for students is another hallmark of his service. He firmly believes that every child, regardless of background or circumstance, deserves quality education and a nurturing environment. He has taken initiatives to ensure regular attendance, proper mid-day meal management, and continuous assess-

ment of learning outcomes. His encouragement of co-curricular and cultural activities has also given students a platform to express their talents and build confidence. Recently, he has been instrumental in organizing field visits, awareness programmes, and student welfare activities that add real value to the educational experience.

Moreover, Mr. Lone's emphasis on community involvement has helped strengthen the relationship between schools and local residents. By involving School Management Committees and parents in school affairs, he has made education a shared responsibility. His transparent style of functioning has earned him the respect of both the teaching community and the public.

The progress seen in Hariganiwan Zone today is a reflection of his vision, dedication, and relentless pursuit of excellence. From academic improvement to infrastructure development, from teacher motivation to student welfare, every initiative bears the mark of his leadership. Under his able guidance, the zone has not only achieved stability but has also set new benchmarks for others to follow.

In an era where education faces numerous challenges, leaders like Mr. Qamar Ud Din Lone remind us that with sincerity, commitment, and compassion, transformation is possible. His work stands as an inspiring example of how effective leadership can uplift an entire educational system and illuminate the path for generations to come.

The writer is a teacher by profession hailing from Kangan Ganderbal. He is a regular contributor to The Headlines Today

In Memory of a Young Girl

*Sister, I am not too far
From your star's reach
I am not alone
Among the many
Who have disappeared,
I stay in your heart
Like a song
That's released
In every possibility,
Of life
Sister, thank you
For smiling at me
When I was with you,
Sister, thank you
For the memories
Of life
Sister, thank you
For been there.*



Sidharth P K
Kochi



When Illness Becomes a Pattern: The Growing Cancer Burden in Kashmir



■ BY MUNEEB SHAFI

Cancer, once considered a distant and rare illness in the Valley, has emerged as one of the most serious public health challenges facing Kashmir today. Hospitals and oncology centres across Jammu and Kashmir report a steady rise in cancer cases each year, placing immense pressure on families, healthcare systems, and policymakers alike. While cancer is a global disease, the reasons behind its increasing prevalence in Kashmir demand urgent and focused attention.

Cancer is a group of diseases characterised by the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells that can invade nearby tissues and spread to other parts of the body. These abnormal changes occur due to mutations in genes that regulate cell growth and repair. While some cancers are linked to genetic factors, a significant number are caused or triggered by environmental exposure, lifestyle choices, and delayed medical intervention.

Health data indicates that thousands of new cancer cases are diagnosed annually in Jammu and Kashmir, with the Kashmir Valley contributing a substantial share. Lung, stomach, oesophageal, breast, and oral cancers are among the most commonly reported. What is particularly alarming is that many patients reach hospitals at advanced stages of the disease, when treatment options become limited and outcomes less favourable.

One of the most prominent contributors to cancer in Kashmir is tobacco consumption. Smoking cigarettes, beedis, hookah, and the use of smokeless tobacco products significantly increase the risk of lung, oral, throat, and oesophageal cancers.



Prolonged indoor smoking during harsh winters further exposes family members to second-hand smoke, increasing health risks even among non-smokers.

Diet plays a crucial role in cancer risk. Traditional Kashmiri diets, often

ageal cancers. The widespread consumption of very hot, salty beverages such as noon chai may further aggravate this risk. In recent years, a shift towards processed and high-fat foods, combined with reduced physical activity, has added to the

Health data indicates that thousands of new cancer cases are diagnosed annually in Jammu and Kashmir, with the Kashmir Valley contributing a substantial share. Lung, stomach, oesophageal, breast, and oral cancers are among the most commonly reported. What is particularly alarming is that many patients reach hospitals at advanced stages of the disease, when treatment options become limited and outcomes less favourable

rich in salt, pickled foods, and preserved items, have been linked to higher rates of stomach and oesoph-

burden of lifestyle-related cancers. Environmental exposure is another significant concern. Indoor air

pollution from biomass fuels and traditional heating methods, vehicular emissions, and the increasing use of pesticides and chemicals in agriculture contribute to long-term exposure to carcinogens. Poor ventilation in homes during winter months intensifies the inhalation of harmful fumes, particularly affecting women and the elderly.

A critical factor worsening the cancer situation in Kashmir is late diagnosis. Limited access to screening facilities, lack of awareness about early warning signs, social stigma, and economic constraints often delay medical consultation. By the time many patients seek help, the disease has already progressed to an advanced stage, reducing survival rates and increasing treatment costs.

Chronic stress, socio-economic instability, and prolonged exposure to uncertainty can weaken the immune system and indirectly affect overall health. While stress alone does not cause cancer, it can contribute to unhealthy coping behaviours such as smoking, poor diet, and neglect of medical care, thereby increasing vulnerability.

Addressing the cancer crisis in Kashmir requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Public awareness campaigns, tobacco control measures, promotion of healthier diets, early screening programs, and strengthening of oncology services are essential steps. Equally important is ensuring affordable and accessible cancer care, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Cancer in Kashmir is not merely a medical issue; it is a social and environmental challenge rooted in lifestyle, tradition, and systemic gaps in healthcare. Recognising the causes and acting decisively can save countless lives. The rising cancer burden is a warning — one that demands immediate action from authorities, healthcare professionals, and society at large.

Instagram @young_author13

Dr Tasaduk awarded prestigious Membership of the Academy of Medical Educators (MAcadMed), UK

■ HT NEW NETWORK

SRINAGAR: Dr. Tasaduk Hussain Itoo, an eminent J & K doctor, Public Health Expert, Medical Educator and writer, has been awarded the prestigious Membership of the Academy of Medical Educators (MAcadMed), United Kingdom. The honor was awarded to Dr Itoo after rigorous assessment and selection process by the Academy. The award



recognizes Dr. Itoo's significant achievements in medical education, and a mark of professional recognition for excellence and scholarly contribution in medical education.

He will be presented the Award of Scroll in a formal awards ceremony by the President of the Academy in the UK.

The Academy of Medical Educators (AoME) is the multi professional organisation for all those involved in medical education. AoME exists to provide leadership, promote standards and support all those involved in the academic discipline and practice of medical education.

Pertinently, Dr Itoo holds several other notable international distinctions. He is a distinguished Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health (FRSPH, UK), Fellow of the International Diabetes Federation (IDF Fellow, Belgium), Member of the Royal Society of Biology (MRSB, UK) and International Practitioner of the UK Faculty of Public Health (IPFPH, UK). He is also a member of leading global medical organizations including the American College of Physicians (USA), and Research Society for the Study of Diabetes in India (RSSDI).

Winter Hair Care



■ SHAHNAZ HUSAIN

There's a toxic relationship between winter and hair fall. Winter weather can be tough on your hair, and it's not just about the cold. The drop in temperature, low humidity levels and indoor heating strip out moisture leaving your hair dry and brittle.

The drop in humidity during the winter season dries out the air, which in turn, pulls moisture from your mane. Moisture is important, as without it, issues like frizz, breakage, dandruff, and an overall dull appearance can cause excessive hair loss during the colder months.

Winter hair care is not limited to your pre- and post-shower routine. Instead, it involves making key adjustments to your overall lifestyle.

■ Use Luke Water

Hot showers might feel comforting in the cold, but they can suck out the moisture from the hair, making it more vulnerable to breakage. Hot water and steam can strip away natural oils, leading to hair dryness. Further, it can also cause dandruff and scalp irritation. So, opt for lukewarm/cold water when washing and rinse off your hair. Always try to finish with a cold water rinse, as it seals down cuticles, locking in the moisture and making the hair look shinier.

■ Avoid Excessive Heat Styling

While it's tempting to blow-dry your hair more often in the winter, Excessive use of heat tools like blow dryers, straighteners and curling irons can further dry out



your hair potentially leading to breakage and further dryness. Allow the hair to dry naturally and use heat-free styling methods whenever possible.

If you like to style your hair with hot tools, apply a heat protectant spray first. A good heat protectant will help keep your hair shiny and smooth, even when using hot styling tools.

Switch to shampoos and conditioners that are specifically designed for hydration. Look for ingredients like aloe vera, shea butter, or keratin to nourish your hair and keep it hydrated. Use a lightweight hydrating serum and leave-in conditioners that help to lock in moisture and keep your hair smooth and manageable.

Avoid products with sulfates or alcohol that can strip your hair of moisture. Stick to nourishing, alcohol-free styling products to keep your hair soft and hydrated.

The right Wintertime hair care products can keep your locks looking their best.

It will help you combat frizz and offer

sleek, manageable hair. Always go for hair serums with argan oil or silicone, as these ingredients build a protective layer on the hair, offering extra protection and shine.

■ Eat Healthy

Healthy hair starts from within. Ensuring proper nutrition is fundamental to maintaining healthy hair, especially during winter.

Staying adequately hydrated is vital, as water is crucial in maintaining hair moisture. By nourishing your body from within, you provide the foundation for luscious and resilient hair, even in winter's challenges.

Drink plenty of water, juices, and soups and eat a balanced diet rich in vitamins A, C, and E, along with omega-3 fatty acids, to nourish your hair during winter.

Vitamin A nourishes the scalp and increases blood into hair follicles, while vitamin E prevents hair breakage.

Include fruits, vegetables, nuts, soy-

beans, and flaxseeds in your diet.

■ Avoid Tight Hairstyles

Hairstyles such as ponytails or braids, which pull your hair back harshly can also often lead to weaker hair and breakage from the roots. It can put excessive tension on the hair shafts leading to hair loss, so keeping things loose is a good idea. A relaxed braid or a low, loose ponytail will keep your hair healthy while looking stylish.

This also applies to rubber bands and hair clips, which can also cause damage if too tight.

■ Oil Your Hair

It is all the more important to nourish your hair regularly with natural ingredients. They are non-toxic and do not harm the structure of the hair.

Incorporate natural oils into your hair care routine to provide an extra layer of protection and hydration. Sesame oil, argan oil, coconut oil, and jojoba oil are excellent choices. Have hot oil therapy once a week. Heat oil and apply on the hair. If the hair is dry and damaged, pure coconut oil or pure almond oil may be applied. Using your fingertips massage the scalp gently, actually moving the scalp in circular motions. This helps to improve blood circulation to the follicles. Then do the hot towel wrap.

■ Apply Hair Mask

Curry leaves are said to contain nutritive elements, including antioxidants, which bring back health to the roots and promote hair growth. Curry leaves contain beta-carotene, which is converted into vitamin A. This vitamin helps in the production of sebum, the natural oil that keeps the scalp and hair roots moisturized. A well-moisturized scalp is conducive to hair growth.

Make a paste of curry leaves, one tablespoon of honey and coconut oil and apply to the hair. Wash off after half an hour.

■ Rinse with Milk

After your shampoo, rinse the hair with milk and leave on for 5 minutes. Then rinse off with plain water. It would help to add body and shine to the hair. For extremely dry hair, add a little milk to egg yolk and apply on the hair half an hour before shampoo. This is a wonderful nourishing treatment for dry hair. The hair looks soft, smooth and shiny.

■ Egg Hair Mask for Damaged Hair

The B-vitamins in eggs, including Biotin (B7) and Niacin (B3), play a significant role in promoting hair growth. The natural oils present in eggs help moisturize the hair, providing a natural shine and luster. The proteins in eggs can help repair damaged hair by filling in gaps and cracks along the hair shaft. Eggs can act as a natural conditioner, providing moisture to dry and damaged hair. Applying egg white on the hair 15 minutes of shampoo helps to reduce oiliness and add body to the hair.

■ Apply Apple Cider Vinegar

The natural pH of the scalp is slightly acidic, and commercial shampoos can sometimes disrupt this balance. Apple cider vinegar, with its acidic nature, helps to restore the pH level of the scalp. A balanced pH contributes to a healthier scalp and can enhance the overall condition of your hair. Apple cider vinegar has natural antibacterial and antifungal properties, making it effective in combating dandruff and alleviating an itchy scalp. Regular use of ACV can help maintain a healthy scalp environment and reduce the occurrence of dandruff. Mix one part apple cider vinegar with two parts water. After shampooing, pour the mixture over your hair as a final rinse. This helps restore the pH balance of your hair and adds shine.

The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India



Sakeena Itoo reviews action plan for achieving Chief Minister's Vision 2030 goal in Health sector

Stresses on efficient resource utilization, people-centric approach in healthcare delivery to meet objectives of Vision 2030

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

JAMMU, DECEMBER 24: In line with the Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah's Vision 2030 for health sector, aligned with J&K Vision Document @2047, Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo today chaired a detailed review meeting at Civil Secretariat here to assess the Health Department's action plan for achieving this goal, primarily aimed at strengthening the public healthcare system across Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting was attended by Secretary, Health and Medical Education, Dr. Syed Abid Rasheed Shah; MD NHM, Baseer ul Haq Chaudhary; CEO State Health Agency, Ananth Dwivedi; Managing Director, JKMSCL, Tariq Hussain Gana; Commissioner Food and Drug Administration, Smita Sethi; Director SKIMS, Dr. Ashraf Ganie; Director Finance Health, Director Planning Health, Director Health Services Kashmir/Jammu, Director Coordination, New GMCs, Director Family Welfare and Immunization, Principals of all Medical Colleges and other concerned officers, either in person or through video conferencing.

During the meeting, Minister Sakeena held detailed assessment of key priority areas like upgradation



of healthcare infrastructure, strengthening primary and secondary healthcare services, human resource optimization, adoption of modern medical technologies, and improved availability of essential medicines and diagnostics. She also laid special emphasis on ensuring last-mile delivery of health services, particularly in rural and far-flung areas.

The Minister emphasized upon the officers that the action plan for achieving the Vision 2030 must be meticulously designed to translate the Chief Minister's vision of accessible, affordable and quality healthcare for all into tangible outcomes on the ground. "Time-bound implementation of ongoing initiatives, efficient resource utilization and people-centric approach in healthcare delivery is vital for achieving the objectives of Vision 2030", Minister Sakeena

stated.

Minister Sakeena stressed on the importance of inter-departmental coordination and continuous monitoring to achieve the targets set under Vision 2030. She directed officials to adopt innovative solutions, leverage digital health initiatives, and enhance accountability mechanisms to improve patient outcomes.

While reviewing the overall functioning of health sector across J&K, the Minister emphasized on the procurement of quality equipments for the health facilities which meet the dire needs of general public. She also called upon officers to maintain transparency in tender procedures as well as timely deployment of procured machines and equipments in hospitals.

She further directed the officers for immediate deployment of newly

procured Ambulance fleet in hospitals, highlighting that the Ambulances are basic need for improving health care services.

To plug the gaps of manpower, doctors and paramedical staff, in rural and far-flung areas, the Minister called upon the department to frame an incentive scheme, so that doctors and other staff posted in rural and far-flung areas get additional benefits while they are serving in these areas. She also called upon the Secretary Health to rationalize the NHM doctors and other staff, and post them at places facing staff crunches. She also asked the Secretary to cancel attachments of all NHM doctors and post them at their respective place of postings.

The Minister also asked the CEO State Health Agency to strengthen the Anti Fraud Unit of the organisation so that the frauds involved in Sehat Scheme are timely

tapped and due action is taken against the violators. She asked the CEO to break nexus between doctors and private hospitals involved in deceiving of patients under Sehat Scheme.

While reviewing the functioning of Food and Drug Administration, the Minister called upon the Commissioner for constant surveillance of food and eatery products being brought in to Jammu and Kashmir. She underscored that the market checking squads need to be strengthened at block, tehsil and district levels to maintain the food standards across Jammu and Kashmir.

The Minister also asked the Commissioner to actively pursue the cases against the violators and take due action as per law against them.

Reiterating the Omar Abdullah led Government's commitment to accessible, affordable health care services, the Minister said that the Health Department remains focused on building a resilient, inclusive and responsive healthcare system that meets the evolving needs of the population and upholds the promise of universal health coverage.

During the meeting, Director Planning Health gave a detailed presentation on the action plan for achieving objectives of Vision 2030.

DC Shopian Chairs Republic Day Meeting

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

SHOPIAN, DECEMBER 24: Deputy Commissioner, Shopian, Shishir Gupta today convened a meeting of officers of district administration and security forces to take stock of arrangements to be put in place for ensuing Republic Day 2026 celebrations here at Meeting Hall of Mini-Secretariat Shopian.



The meeting held threadbare discussions on arrangements to be put in place at the venue including security, car parking, transportation, illumination of Govt. buildings, refreshments, water, Power, Public Address System, award ceremony, cultural programs, Reception, Media Gallery, Medicare facilities besides accommodation for the participants.

The department wise responsibilities were fixed for adherence and directed to ensure impactful celebration of the functions at District Level, subdivisional, tehsil and instutational levels.

The DC also instructed the concerned to organise colorful cultural programmes to mark the event along with presentation of March past contingents and called upon officers to put in place elaborate and fool proof arrangements for Republic Day celebration and Full dress rehearsal.

The contingents of Police, CRPF, Home Guard, NCC, FPF, besides school contingents will be the part of celebration for the presentation of March past.

The meeting was attended by SSP, Mushtaq Ahmad Choudhary; ADDC, Dr. Nasir Ahmad Lone; ADC, Dr. Zakir Hussain Faaz, ACR, SDM, officers of district administration and officers from security forces.

DC Budgam reviews status of Bailey Bridge Installation

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

BUDGAM, DECEMBER 24: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Budgam, Dr. Bilal Mohi-ud-Din Bhat, today conducted an on-site inspection of the progress of works on the approved Bailey Bridge, which is being installed as a temporary alternative to the Chadoora Main Bridge that was recently declared unsafe for vehicular movement.

The inspection was undertaken to assess the pace of execution and to ensure that all works are being carried out in accordance with prescribed technical standards and timelines.

During the visit, the DC also inspected the damaged Chadoora Main Bridge.

It was informed that a comprehensive damage assessment of the bridge has already been conducted by the concerned engineering departments. Based on the assessment, Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for restoration and repair have been prepared and necessary technical formalities are being completed to facilitate early execution of the works.

It was further apprised that an expert team from the National Institute of Technology (NIT) had earlier inspected the bridge and submitted a detailed report highlighting the technical aspects and safety requirements. The recommendations put forth by the expert agency are being duly considered to ensure a safe, sustainable, and long-term restoration of the bridge.

The DC emphasized that public safety and convenience remain the top priorities of the District Administration. He assured that all required measures are being taken to expedite the restoration process without compromising on quality or safety norms.

The DC directed concerned departments to maintain close coordination to ensure timely completion of both temporary and permanent arrangements.

The DC also interacted with various delegations from Chadoora town, who raised concerns regarding transportation difficulties faced by residents due to the closure of the bridge. He informed delegations that the District Administration, in coordination with the Sub-Divisional Magistrates and line departments, has formulated a comprehensive transportation and traffic management plan to provide relief to the local population and to ensure smooth movement of essential services till the Bailey Bridge is made operational for traffic.

The DC further assured them that uninterrupted connectivity for the general public is being accorded utmost importance and all viable alternate routes are being strengthened and regulated accordingly.

The DC reiterated that the District Administration is fully committed to the complete restoration of the Chadoora Main Bridge at the earliest possible time. The DC urged the public to cooperate with the administration and follow traffic advisories issued from time to time in the larger interest of safety and public convenience.

The DC was accompanied by CPO Budgam, SDM chadoora, Executive Engineer R&B, Tehsildar chadoora, EO MC chadoora and other concerned officials.

DLIC Budgam approves 475 Cases under Mission YUVA

DC emphasises Faster Processing, Mentorship, Market Linkages for Young Entrepreneurs

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

BUDGAM, DECEMBER 24: A meeting of the District Level Implementation Committee (DLIC) for Mission YUVA was today chaired by the Deputy Commissioner Budgam, Dr. Bilal Mohi-Ud-Din Bhat, at the Conference Hall of the DC Office Complex.

The meeting focused on accelerating youth entrepreneurship and reviewing the progress of cases submitted under the mission.

During the meeting, 475 cases, duly verified by the Small Business Development Units (SBDUs), were placed before the committee for consideration. After thorough evaluation, all 475 cases were approved for financial assistance, capacity building, and handholding support under Mission YUVA. With today's 475 approvals, the total number of 2412 cases cleared by the DLIC in Budgam has reached, marking a significant milestone in the district's youth empowerment efforts.

The approved cases include entrepreneurial ventures, ranging from traditional crafts such as

shawl embroidery, sozni, aari work, tailoring and cutting units, carpentry and joinery workshops, as well as modern and service-oriented businesses including load carriers, dairy units, repair shops, stationery/printing units, food businesses, retail stores, packaging units, and other micro-enterprise activities. The diversity of ventures reflects the administration's commitment to strengthening both heritage-based skills and emerging livelihood avenues for youth.

Speaking on the occasion, the DC said that Mission YUVA is a transformative initiative aimed at empowering young men and women by enabling them to become self-reliant entrepreneurs. He emphasised that the goal is not only to provide financial support but to create a sustainable ecosystem where youth have access to training, market linkages, guidance, and long-term mentorship.

He said that the district administration is committed towards ensuring that every aspiring youth receives timely



support. "Mission YUVA is our investment in the potential, resilience, and creativity of Budgam's youth. Every project approved today represents a new livelihood opportunity, a family strengthened, and a step towards a more self-reliant district," he noted.

The DC directed all concerned

departments, banks and implementing agencies to ensure time-bound sanctioning, hassle-free disbursement, and continuous mentoring of the approved cases. He instructed that Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) must be completed without delay and emphasised that no application should remain pending unnecessarily at any

level. Accountability, transparency, and efficiency must be maintained throughout the process, he added.

He further said that the success of Mission YUVA will be determined by how many of these ventures become viable and sustainable in the long run. He stressed the need for regular monitoring, skill development programmes, and facilitating market access so that young entrepreneurs can scale their businesses effectively.

The DC further said that Mission YUVA holds special significance for underprivileged and marginalised youth, who will be given priority support to improve their socio-economic conditions. He affirmed that Budgam is emerging as a hub of youth-led enterprises where traditional craftsmanship blends with modern entrepreneurship.

The meeting was attended by General Manager DIC, budgam, ACR budgam, CPO Budgam, Deputy Director Employment, LDM Budgam, District Nodal Officer, representatives from JKEDI, and other concerned officers.

District Admin Shopian Intensifies Grassroots Outreach under "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore" campaign

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

SHOPIAN, DECEMBER 22: On the sixth day of the district-wide people-centric outreach campaign "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore", the District Administration Shopian today continued its efforts to take governance to the doorsteps of the people by organising grievance redressal and public interaction camps across multiple Panchayat Halqas of the district.

As per today's schedule, camps were organised in the Panchayat Halqas of Narwani, Herman (CS Khan), Nadigam, Nowgam, Kaprin, Mantribugh, Pehlipora-A, Pehlipora-B, Nassaspora, Ramnagri-A, Heepora-Chootipora and Awneera, where large numbers of residents participated and interacted directly with the concerned officers.

During the outreach programmes, people raised various issues and grievances related to revenue matters, public services, developmental works and implementation of welfare schemes.

Officers from different line departments listened to the grievances, registered them



for timely redressal and provided on-the-spot solutions wherever feasible.

Meanwhile, a Mega Mutation Attestation Camp was also organised by Naib Tehsildar Shopian, Sajjad Wani, along with his team, under the aegis of the "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore" initiative.

During the camp, a total of 241 mutations were attested, and certified copies were provided to the applicants on the spot, bringing significant relief to the beneficiaries and expediting revenue-related services.

District-Level Good Governance Workshop held at Kulgam

■ HT NEWS DESK / DIPR

KULGAM, DECEMBER 24: As part of Good Governance Week under the initiative "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore," a District-Level Good Governance Workshop was held today at Mini-Secretariat Kulgam.

The workshop aimed at sharing best practices, success stories, and innovative, citizen-centric initiatives undertaken by various departments to strengthen transparent and responsive governance.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Kulgam, Viqar Ahmad Giri in his address highlighted the objective of the workshop, emphasizing the need for innovative approaches and community-driven solutions to achieve sustainable development goals.

The workshop held detailed discussion on preparing a Vision Document for the District Kulgam for the year 2047, District @100.

During the workshop, panelists and representatives from various departments engaged in detailed discussions on key sectors critical to the district's long-term growth.

The participants shared insights,



experiences, and strategic recommendations across a wide spectrum of development themes.

Key subjects deliberated during the workshop included Education and Skill Development, Environmental Sustainability, Youth and Sports Development, and sharing of Good Governance Practices and Initiatives.

They shared valuable perspectives and reaffirmed their commitment to collaboratively work towards achieving the envisioned goals for the district.

Art, Stone, and Sustainability: StoneX Global’s Art Soirée reimagines marble in contemporary India

■ **RITIKA KOCHHAR**

The Parthenon sculptures from the Temple of Athena Nike in Greece, created in 447 BCE; Michelangelo’s Pietà sculpted (1499 AD) in Rome; and the 12th-century Jain Vagdevi at Delhi’s National Museum, have one thing in common, regardless of geography or time, they have been created in a single medium -- marble.

Across millennia, sculptors have prized marble. It is soft enough to permit minute detailing, yet durable enough to survive centuries. More remarkably, marble absorbs light just beneath its surface before scattering it outward, creating a gentle glow that gives skin the illusion of life.

It holds folds of fabric, coded emotion, and anatomical precision. It can be polished to luminosity. Small wonder that civilisations, from Greek temples to Indian shrines, turned to marble for their goddesses and heroes.

Within India, the marble heartland lies in Rajasthan.

Kishangarh, famously known as the Marble City of India, sits just 32 km from Ajmer and 90 km from Jaipur, its cultural identity long intertwined with stone. The Makrana quarries nearby supplied marble for the Taj Mahal.

This winter, Kishangarh became the site of an Art Soirée, an immersive year-end gathering that invited patrons, architects, collectors, cultural thinkers, and 15 internationally respected artists to work directly in marble. Ten of the participating artists were profiled in a new StoneX publication that explores “stone poetry,” interpreting the medium as language.

The invited artists included Shanthamani Muddaiah, Sudarshan Shetty, Gigi Scaria, Shaik Azghar Ali, Harsha Durugadda, R. Magesh, Yogesh Ramkrishna, Teja Gavankar, Chandrashekar Koteswar, Harmeet Rattan, Alex Seton, Cynthia Sah, Kota Kinutani, Nicolas Bertoux, and Sebastian Errazuriz.

Each was given access to an extensive inventory and encouraged to select marble shipped from quarries across Greece, Macedonia, Italy, and Turkey.

The physical setting became an integral part of the performance: massive monolithic blocks stood in a chamber like geological sentinels, while a national award-winning sitar player performed live. Between brute stone and delicate music, the Soirée sought to dramatise the interplay of potential versus skill, raw matter versus imagination—a space where art literally emerges from rock. The sculptors also employed robotic milling systems at the quarry, juxtaposing ancient carving traditions with contemporary fabrication technology.

Among the most widely discussed works was Bloom by renowned sculptor Shanthamani Muddaiah. Carved from Macedonian marble, the sculpture draws inspiration from Karnataka’s silk saree weaving heritage, particularly her mother’s sari, while also symbolically referencing Bengaluru’s nickname as the Garden City. By using stone to evoke the softness of silk, Muddaiah explores the tension between permanence and fragility, transforming a rigid material into a form that exudes wistful grace.

Her work points to the chiton, an ancient pleated Greek garment that supposedly inspired Indian sarees during Alexander’s reign, while simultaneously taking the form of a skeletal, tree-like structure—part shroud, part relic.

Delhi-based multidisciplinary artist Gigi Scaria brought a conceptual intervention in Cappadocian marble with his piece, Impossible Stairway, which interrogates the hubris of urban development. At first glance, the sculpture appears to ascend toward celestial promise, yet the steps are irrational—no human body could climb them. The stairway ultimately leads nowhere, symbolising ambition in the modern urban landscape.

In his sculpture ‘Hidden Gem on Museum Steps’ Chandrashekar Kotesw reimagines the grand staircases of South Indian temples, infusing them with layers of mystery and narrative tension.

Carved in Italian marble, the sculpture depicts an ornate staircase partially concealed behind a large object wrapped in cloth. The artistic power of what is visible and hidden, holy and mundane structures the central focus of this creation.

Sudarshan Shetty’s Untitled sculpture of ‘coffin with an umbrella’ and a tombstone engraved with a story—is crafted from Turkish marble, Binaco Moronus.

The submerged umbrella becomes an unusable artifact, while the poignancy of its death we feel is interlaced with frustration about its inability to do the task for us that it was created for.

Kishangarh, long renowned for its marble and 18th-century miniature painting tradition, is once again emerging as a cultural centre, attracting contemporary artists. The city that gave India its most refined school of miniature art now hosts a thriving hub for contemporary sculpture. UNI

Delhi air quality marginally improves but stays “very poor” amid dense fog

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, DEC 24 : Air quality in the national capital showed marginal improvement on Wednesday but continued to remain in the “very poor” category, as dense to moderate fog gripped several parts of the city and sharply reduced visibility during the early morning hours.

According to data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the Air Quality Index (AQI) remained alarmingly high across key locations in Delhi. The ITO area recorded an AQI of 374, while India Gate registered 354, both categorised as “very poor,” even as Republic Day parade rehearsals continued amid the hazardous conditions.

Sarai Kale Khan reported an AQI of 360, Ghazipur NH-24 stood at 368, and the Indira Gandhi International Airport also recorded an AQI of 368, indicating widespread pollution across the capital.

In view of the deteriorating air quality, the Centre invoked Stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) across Delhi, triggering the strictest pollution control measures.

Wind speeds of around 15 kmph over the past 24 hours have resulted in a minor improvement in AQI levels. Despite this, pollution concentrations remained well above safe limits, keeping Delhi under persistent air quality stress, as per the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The IMD issued a district-level nowcast warning at 3:17 am IST on December 24, cautioning residents about dense fog conditions across large parts of the capital. Dense fog was reported as very likely over New Delhi, North, North-West, South-West, and West Delhi, while moderate fog was expected over the remaining districts.

Visibility dropped significantly at Palam Airport overnight, recording at around 400 metres at 2:00 am IST, and further deteriorated to nearly 100 metres by 2:30 am IST.

Conditions improved slightly by morning, with visibility increasing to about 250 metres at 6:30 am IST, though meteorological officials warned that visibility could deteriorate further.

A follow-up nowcast issued at 5:30 am IST indicated moderate fog over most parts of Delhi, advising commuters to remain cautious during morning travel.

The weather office also warned of possible disruptions to air, rail, and road traffic due to reduced visibility, along with slower commute times. Health concerns were flagged for vulnerable groups, particularly people suffering from asthma and bronchitis. UNI

Delhi court discharges 2 accused in SIMI-IM revival conspiracy case

■ **UNITED NEWS OF INDIA**

NEW DELH, DEC 24 : A special UAPA court in Delhi on Wednesday discharged two people, including an accused involved in Batla House encounter, of conspiring to revive the banned terrorist organizations Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and Indian Mujahideen (IM) in the country, citing a complete absence of admissible evidence to frame charges against them.

The court discharged Abdul Subhan Qureshi (alias Abdus Subhan, Tauqueer, Abdul Rehman) and Ariz Khan (alias Junaid, Salim) from the case registered under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The court’s decision highlights critical investigative loopholes, relying heavily on inadmissible confessional statements and past cases without linking them to a specific, new offense in the present matter.

The case was lodged by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police. The case stems from intelligence gathered after a 2014 blast in Bijnor. The prosecution alleged that Abdul Subhan Qureshi was a “main conspirator” tasked by SIMI and IM leaders based abroad—including Riyaz and Iqbal Bhatkal—to re-establish the terror networks in India.

According to the charge sheet, a key meeting took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where plans were hatched for Qureshi and Khan to return to India, reactivate sleeper cells, and avenge the deaths of SIMI cadres killed in police encounters in Telangana (2015) and the Bhopal jailbreak (2016).

Abdul Subhan Qureshi was first arrested on January 20, 2018, by Delhi Police’s Special Cell after a brief exchange of fire in a separate case. He was subsequently arrested in the present conspiracy case on February 3, 2018. His interrogation reportedly led to the arrest of Ariz Khan—who was also an accused in the infamous 2008 Batla House encounter case—from the India-Nepal border on February 14, 2018.

In a detailed 10-page order, the UAPA court pointed out fundamental flaws in the prosecution’s case. The core of the prosecution’s material comprised the “disclosure/confessional statements” of the accused made to the police. The court reiterated settled law that such statements are inadmissible as evidence unless they lead to the discovery of a fact (as per Sections 25, 26, 27 of the Indian Evidence Act).

The prosecution admitted that no such recovery was made based on these statements.

Crucially, the Investigating Officer (IO) himself stated on record (on February 12, 2024) that no separate incident or crime, apart from the other FIRs in which the accused were already facing trial in various states, was investigated in this case. The present FIR was registered only to probe their alleged “role” and “efforts to revive SIMI & IM,” but no concrete, new unlawful act was uncovered.

The charge sheet heavily relied on a list of 35 other cases and their charge sheets against the accused. The court held that these documents, pertaining to different cases, do not by themselves create a “grave suspicion” of the accused committing the specific offences alleged in this case—conspiracy to revive banned organizations (UAPA Sec 18/20) and waging war against the country (IPC Sec 120B).

The court noted that the witness list mainly consisted of officials meant to prove the existence of other FIRs or the prosecution sanction under UAPA. None provided direct evidence of the conspiracy alleged in this case.

The court applied the legal principle that at the charge-framing stage, it must find if there is a prima facie case revealing “grave suspicion.” While the threshold for framing charges is low, the evidence must be admissible and indicative of the alleged crime.

“There is absolutely no admissible material on record to show or raise a grave suspicion against both the accused persons that they entered into a conspiracy to revive activity of banned terrorist organisation SIMI and IM in India,” the court noted.

Consequently, both accused were discharged. The court ordered their release from judicial custody, provided they are not required in any other case. UNI

Akash-NG clears user evaluation trials, moves closer to induction

■ **UNITED NEWS OF INDIA**

NEW DELHI, DEC 24 : The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully completed the User Evaluation Trials (UET) of Next Generation Akash missile (Akash-NG) system.

During the trials, the missiles successfully intercepted aerial targets at different range and altitude including the near-boundary-low-altitude and Long Range, high altitude scenarios, a statement from the Ministry of Defence said.

Akash-NG, equipped with indigenous RF seeker and propelled by solid rocket motor, is a potent system for ensuring air defense against different types of aerial threats. All the systems



& sub-systems including the Multi Function Radar (MFR), Command and

Control Unit, Missile Launch vehicle (MLV) etc. have been designed by various laboratories of DRDO with the help of Indian industries. The trials were witnessed by Senior Scientists of DRDO & User Reps from the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has complimented DRDO, Indian Air Force and Industry on successful completion of User Evaluation Trials of Akash-NG and said that the state-of-the-art missile system will further strengthen air defence capabilities of the IAF.

Secretary DD R&D and Chairman DRDO stated that the successful completion of the UET has paved the way for induction of Akash-NG into the Indian armed forces. UNI

India’s ‘Bahubali’ LVM3 successfully launches heaviest US satellite BlueBird-6

■ **VENKATACHARI JAGANNATHAN**

Sriharikota (Andhra Pradesh), Dec 24 (UNI) India’s heavy-lift launch vehicle LVM3-M6, popularly known as ‘Bahubali’, on Wednesday successfully launched and precisely placed the US-based AST SpaceMobile’s advanced communication satellite BlueBird-6 into a Low Earth Orbit (LEO), marking a major milestone in India’s commercial space capabilities.

After a smooth 24-hour countdown, the 43.5-metre-tall, 640-tonne LVM3 rocket lifted off majestically from the Second Launch Pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR here at about 0855 hrs.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the successful launch, terming it a “proud milestone” in India’s space journey.

“A significant stride in India’s space sector. The successful LVM3-M6 launch, placing the heaviest satellite ever launched from Indian soil, the spacecraft of the USA, BlueBird Block-2, into its intended orbit, marks a proud milestone in India’s space journey,” Modi said in a post on X.

The launch was briefly delayed by about 90 seconds from the scheduled 0854 hrs as a routine precaution, generally undertaken to avoid possible space debris interference.

Following the initiation of the Automatic Launch Sequence 15 minutes prior to liftoff, the rocket ascended right on time, belching bright orange plumes and emitting a deep rumble that shook the ground.

About 16 minutes into its flight, the LVM3 successfully injected the 6.1-ton BlueBird-6 (BlueBird Block-2) satellite into a 520-km circular LEO. In a post on X, ISRO said: “Liftoff! #LVM3M6 launches the BlueBird Block-2 spacecraft from SDSC SHAR.”

Addressing scientists from the Mission Control Centre, ISRO Chairman and Secretary, Department of Space, Dr V. Narayanan, announced that the US satellite had been successfully and precisely placed into its intended orbit. “This is a great achievement. All the vehicle parameters performed normally.

This is the second LVM3 mission in a short span of 52 days,” he said, congratulating the entire ISRO team. He added that this was the third commercial mission of LVM3 and the second involving a satellite from US-based AST SpaceMobile, thanking the company for reposing confidence in Indian launch capabilities. “We have lined up more launches in the coming days,” he said.



Scientists at the Mission Control Centre, including former ISRO chairmen, senior ISRO officials, and representatives from AST SpaceMobile, closely monitored the flight with bated breath as real-time data streamed in. LVM3-M6 marked the sixth operational flight of the LVM3 and maintained its impeccable record of eight consecutive successful missions. ISRO said the mission carried the heaviest payload ever launched from Indian soil into LEO, weighing 6,100 kg.

“LVM3 is the operational heavy-lift launch vehicle. LVM3-M6 is its sixth operational flight and third dedicated commercial mission,” ISRO said.

The mission was undertaken as part of a commercial agreement between NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), the commercial arm of the Department of Space, and AST SpaceMobile LLC, USA. BlueBird-6 is part of AST SpaceMobile’s global LEO constellation designed to provide direct-to-mobile connectivity, enabling 4G and 5G voice and video calls, messaging, streaming, and data services anywhere in the world.

The satellite features a massive 223-square-metre phased array, making it the largest commercial communications satellite ever deployed into LEO.

AST SpaceMobile describes its network as the world’s first space-based cellular broadband system designed to connect directly with standard smartphones for both commercial and government users.

Founder, Chairman and CEO Abel Avellan had earlier said the next-generation satellites would enable ubiquitous cellular broadband from space. The company plans to deploy 45–60 satellites by the end of 2026.

LVM3, formerly known as GSLV Mk III, is nicknamed ‘Bahubali’, a name originally coined by Telugu media, drawing inspiration from the blockbuster film Bahubali, in which the hero effortlessly lifts a massive lingam, symbolising strength.

On Wednesday, the nickname appeared to receive informal official recognition when Dr Narayanan referred to the vehicle as the “LVM3 Bahubali rocket” while announcing mission success.

The three-stage LVM3 consists of two S200 solid strap-on boosters, an L110 liquid core stage, and a C25 cryogenic upper stage. It can currently lift about 10 tonnes to LEO and 4 tonnes to GTO, with efforts underway to enhance its GTO capacity.

With this mission, AST SpaceMobile becomes the second satellite broadband customer to fly on LVM3, after Eutelsat

OneWeb, which launched 72 satellites using the vehicle in 2022 and 2023.

The successful BlueBird-6 launch further cements India’s position as a reliable global player in the commercial heavy-lift launch market.

The BlueBird 6 also has two Indian connections—Shanti Gupta, Chief Operating Officer, and Sriram Jayasimha, Chief Scientist of Commercial Applications.

As AST SpaceMobile’s COO, Gupta, an Alumnus of Sri Ram College, Delhi oversees the company’s global operations, including supply chain, planning, cost management, information technology, and human resource operations.

Jayasimha earned his B.Tech and M.S. degrees in electrical engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, USA.

He brings a 30-year successful track record of IP creation and product design for the global telecommunications markets.

According to AST SpaceMobile, Sriram has authored 42 peer-reviewed journal and conference publications in an array of digital-signal-processing applications, including: mobility, satellite communications, modem, VLSI and instrumentation signal processing, UNI

Cummins' Ashes Campaign Ends, T20 WC Doubt

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

ADELAIDE: Australia captain Pat Cummins won't feature again in the Ashes and there is uncertainty about whether he will be available for the T20 World Cup in February, with selectors and medical staff unwilling to take any risks over his long-term health. When Australia's squad for the MCG Boxing Day Test was named on Tuesday morning, it was confirmed, as Cummins had flagged after Adelaide, that he would sit out the match. Head coach Andrew McDonald said a few hours later that Cummins' series was over after one appearance, which helped secure the Ashes.

Cummins was diagnosed with a lumbar stress reaction after the tour of the West Indies, but following an aggressive rehab programme, he bowled brilliantly in Adelaide where he claimed six wickets as Australia won by 82 runs.

"He's pulled up fine," McDonald said. "He won't play any part in the rest of the series and that was a discussion that we had a long time out around his return.

"We were taking on some risk and people that reported on that would understand the risk associated with that rebuild. We've now won the series and that was the goal. So, to position him for further risk and jeopardise him long-term is not something that we want to do and Pat's really comfortable with that."

Even though Cummins' Ashes has been limited to one match, McDonald said it had been a huge effort from all involved to even get to that point.

"If he had any setback in the build up, we would have shut him down straight away," he said. "Everything went really smoothly and full credit to him [and] the medical team. To navigate through that risk profile to get him back and take six wickets in that game and nail the Ashes series was incredibly pleasing for everyone associated with that."

"If you look at the... decision sort of four months ago and the journey he went on to get to where he was to be able to play the third Ashes Test when people thought it was nigh on impossible, that took an incredible amount of work from our SSSM [Sports Science Sports Medicine] team," McDonald said that would

be part of a discussion with the other selectors later on Tuesday about the T20 World Cup squad, which is due to be named soon, and indicated that further medical advice would be taken around Cummins' participation.

Cummins has not played a T20I for Australia since mid-2024 at the previous World Cup in the Caribbean and the USA. Shortly after the upcoming edition takes place in India and Sri Lanka, IPL 2026 will begin, where Cummins is due to captain Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH).

"That'll be an assessment," McDonald said of Cummins' T20 World Cup chances. "I'm assuming he'll have a check-in scan at some point and gather more information around where his back is at... looking forward to the World Cup, whether he'll be there or not. I can't really say. It's quite grey at the moment. We're hopeful."

Cummins' injury along with the one suffered by Josh Hazlewood, who won't feature at all in the Ashes, and Sean Abbott, who was ruled out before the first Test, has tested the depth of Australia's pace resources.

Mitchell Starc led the attack superbly in the first two Tests before producing a series-clinching three wickets on the final day in Adelaide and has already stated his desire to continue through all five matches.

"Starc's amazing, he's pulled up fine, I don't know how he does it," McDonald said. "I walked into the physio room the other day and sort of just went through the body count and how we're going. I won't use exactly what [the physio] said, but he just said he [Starc] is a freak."

"He keeps running in, presenting the pace that he does. There's a lot to be learned around preparing yourself and targeting the right matches at the right time. He's given up a lot of IPL opportunities and you're seeing a player that wants to play Test cricket and he's still at his best. It's an incredible story. Let's hope it continues for a long time yet but he's a freak, end of story."

Australia have added Jhye Richardson to their pace options for the fourth Test at the MCG following his recovery from shoulder surgery. Richardson last played a Test during the 2021-22 Ashes.



Gede Priandana Scripts T20I History with 5-in-an-Over

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

BALI: Gede Priandana, Indonesia's 28-year-old right-arm quick bowler, has become the first to pick up five wickets in an over in an international T20I match (where fall-of-wickets data is available), achieving the feat in the first T20I against Cambodia in Bali on Tuesday. He is the first man or woman to achieve the feat.

Indonesia had the upper hand in the game, but Cambodia were not out of it yet at the end of the 15th over of the chase of 168, the scorecard reading 106 for 5. Bowling his first over, Priandana struck off the first three balls to record a hat-trick, sending back Shah Abrar Hussain, Nirmaljit Singh and Chanthoeun Rathanak. A dot ball followed, after which Priandana got rid of Mongdara Sok



and Pel Vennak to finish off the match, Cambodia getting just one run in the over, a wide between the last two wickets, to end 60 runs short.

Priandana had earlier scored 6 in 11 balls opening the innings alongside Dharma Kesuma, the wicketkeeper-batter, who led the batting show for Indonesia with an unbeaten 110 in 68 balls with eight fours and six sixes.

The feat has, however, been achieved twice before in men's T20s. Al-Amin Hossain took five wickets in an over against Abahani Limited playing for UCB-BCB XI in the Victory Day T20 Cup in 2013-14. The other was when Karnataka's Abhimanyu Mithun dismissed five Haryana batters in the semi-final of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy 2019-20.

While this is the first time a bowler has taken five in an over in an international game, there have been 14 instances of a bowler taking four in an over before today. The most famous of these was when Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga famously took four in four balls in the third over of a T20Is against New Zealand in 2019.

Deepti becomes No. 1 T20I bowler; Wolvaardt tops ODI batting charts

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA



VISAKHAPATNAM: Deepti Sharma has risen one spot to become the No. 1-ranked T20I bowler for the first time in her career. She replaces Annabel Sutherland at the top after figures of 1 for 20 in the first T20I against Sri Lanka in Visakhapatnam helped set up victory for India. As a result, Deepti gained five rating points to tally 737, just one more than Sutherland, who has slipped to

second place after holding on to the top spot since August.

Deepti's team-mate Jemimah Rodrigues also gained in the rankings as she jumped five places to be ranked No. 9 among T20I batters. Rodrigues' unbeaten innings of 69 from 44 balls led India's chase against Sri Lanka in Visakhapatnam, as she joined Smriti Mandhana (third) and Shafali Verma (tenth) in the top ten.

However, Mandhana dropped to second among ODI batters as South

Africa's Laura Wolvaardt pipped her to be ranked No. 1 again. Wolvaardt smashed back-to-back centuries in the three-match series against Ireland at home, which South Africa won 3-0.

Wolvaardt was the highest run-getter and the Player of the Series against Ireland. Her 255 runs at an average of 127.50 included knocks of 124 as South Africa posted 375 in the second ODI, and 100* as they successfully chased 206 in the third.

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