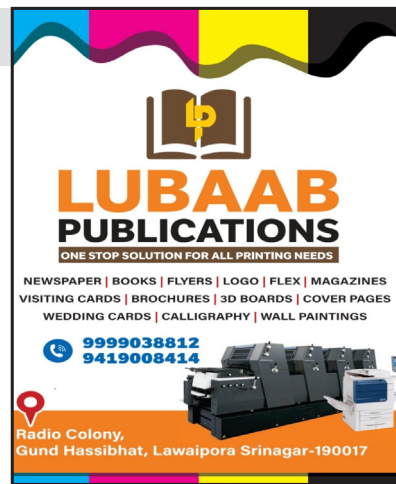


Srinagar  
Tuesday  
February 10 | 2026  
22 Shaban 1447 AH  
Issue No: 35  
Volume: 16  
Pages: 12  
Price: Rs 02/-

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## Maoism Only Brought Bloodshed, Bastar Now on Path of Peace & Prosperity: Amit Shah

Home Minister Vows to Wipe Out Naxalism by March 31, Unveils Sweeping Development and Cultural Revival Roadmap for Tribal Heartland

■ HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

**JAGDALPUR (CHHATTISGARH), FEB 9:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday delivered a strong message against left-wing extremism, declaring that Maoism has never benefitted any society and has only spread destruction, fear and backwardness wherever it existed. Addressing the closing ceremony of the three-day division-level Bastar Pandum 2026 cultural festival here, Shah reiterated the government's resolve to completely eliminate the Naxal menace from the country by March 31.

Calling upon the remaining Naxal cadres to surrender and join the mainstream, the Home Minister assured them of dignified rehabilitation, stating that the Chhattisgarh government's Maoist surrender and rehabilitation policy is among the most attractive in the country.



He expressed particular concern over the presence of young tribal girls among the remaining insurgents, urging them to lay down arms and rebuild their lives.

"Maoism has only caused bloodshed, destroyed education, stalled development and ruined generations. It never brought justice or equality. Wherever it spread,

it left behind fear and devastation — be it Colombia, Peru, Cambodia or parts of India," Shah said, while warning that armed violence, IED attacks and the destruction of public infrastructure would be met with a firm response.

Highlighting the suffering inflicted on tribal communities, Shah said that IED blasts have killed or maimed countless innocent villagers and children, while decades of school closures pushed the region into deep illiteracy. He said Bastar, once synonymous with fear, is now rapidly transforming, with roads, schools, mobile connectivity, electricity, drinking water, banking facilities and postal services reaching remote villages.

Unveiling a comprehensive development roadmap, the Home Minister said the government aims to ensure electricity in all villages by December 2027,

● Turn on Page 2

## Adversity Will Not Break Our Spirit, Terror Will Be Crushed: LG Manoj Sinha

Inaugurates J&K Police Martyrs Memorial Hockey Tournament in Jammu, Calls For Decisive Action Against Terrorism and United Societal Resolve

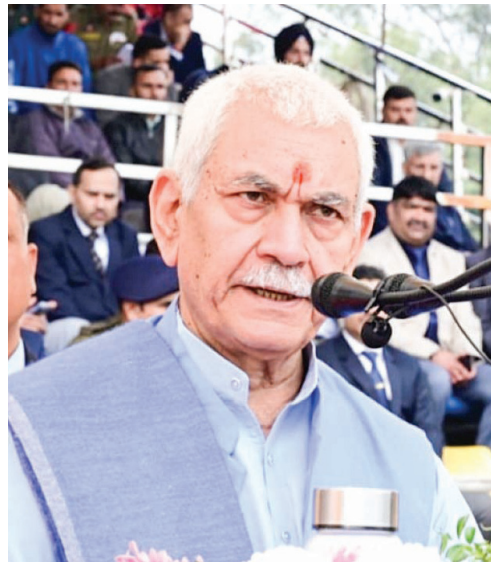
■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 09:** Asserting that the spirit of Jammu and Kashmir Police remains unshaken in the face of adversity, Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha on Monday called for decisive action against terrorism and urged society-wide collaboration to completely dismantle the terror network.

Inaugurating the J&K Police Martyrs Memorial Hockey Tournament at the KK Hakku Hockey Stadium here, the Lieutenant Governor said the force's message to the nation was clear and resolute. "Adversity will not crack our spirit. We will cross every barrier to claim new milestones as we advance," he said.

Directing the police to intensify the fight against terrorism, LG Sinha stressed the need for collective societal participation to uproot terror ecosystems. "We must strike decisively against terrorism and collaborate with every individual in society to eradicate the terror network entirely," he asserted.

Paying rich tributes to the police martyrs, the Lieutenant Governor said the brave personnel who sacrificed their today for the nation's tomorrow wore their uniform as a sacred duty and



placed national honour above life. He observed that true tributes to bravehearts never fade but continue to inspire generations, flowing through their veins as living values.

Highlighting the ethos of duty and

● Turn on Page 2

## Healthcare Upgradation Top Govt Priority ; Focus on Rural, Peripheral Health Services: Sakeena Itoo

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 09:** The Jammu and Kashmir government on Monday reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening healthcare delivery, with Health and Medical Education Minister Sakeena Itoo telling the Legislative Assembly that upgradation of existing health infrastructure remains the top priority, particularly in rural, border and peripheral areas.

Replying to a question by legislator Mir Mohammad Fayaz regarding facilities at Sub-District Hospital (SDH) Kupwara, the Minister said that Kupwara's District Hospital has already been upgraded to the level of an Associated Hospital of Government Medical College (GMC) Handwara, providing advanced tertiary healthcare services to the population.

She informed the House that a 50-bedded Critical Care Block (CCB) is currently under construction at SDH Kupwara at a cost of Rs. 23.75 crore under ECRP-II, aimed at boosting emergency and critical care capacity in the frontier district. In addition, a District Integrated Public Health Laboratory (DIPHL) and Block Public Health Units (BPHUs) are being established under the PM-Ayushman Bharat

● Turn on Page 2

## No Household Will Remain Without Power: CM Omar Abdullah

Vows 100% Electrification of Remote Habitations, Says Rising Population Makes Electrification a Continuous Process

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 09:** Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Monday reaffirmed the government's firm commitment to ensuring electricity access to every household across Jammu and Kashmir, declaring that "no home will remain in darkness," even in the most remote and challenging ter-

rains.

Replying to a question during the Question Hour in the Legislative Assembly, the Chief Minister, who also holds the Power portfolio, said that rapid population growth, village expansion and the emergence of new habitations have made electrification an ongoing process rather than a one-time exercise.



"With increasing population and expansion of villages, new houses are continuously coming up. Electrifying them requires time, proper planning and preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs). However, there is no village in Jammu and Kashmir that is completely un-electrified," Omar Abdullah told the House.

● Turn on Page 2

## Kashmir Tourism Booms on Domestic Strength, Eyes East Asia for Foreign Push: Director Tourism

■ HT NEWS DESK / KNO

**SRINAGAR, FEB 09:** With domestic travellers accounting for more than 95 per cent of tourist arrivals, Kashmir's tourism sector is witnessing steady growth, while the Tourism Department has intensified its outreach in East Asian markets to boost foreign tourist inflow, Director Tourism Kashmir, Syed Qamar Sajad, said on Sunday.



Speaking to Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Sajad said that Kashmir tourism has historically been driven by domestic visitors and continues to remain resilient on that foundation. "Over 95 per cent of tourist arrivals are domestic, while foreign tourists constitute less than five per cent. The Valley is currently witnessing a consistent inflow of visitors," he said.

● Turn on Page 2

## Light rain, snow likely in J&K on Feb 10

■ HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

**SRINAGAR, FEB 09:** A weak western disturbance is likely to affect Jammu and Kashmir on February 10, bringing light rain and snowfall at many places across the Union Territory, weather officials said on Monday.

As per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), there is no forecast of any major rain or snow activity over

● Turn on Page 2

## JKSSB Merit List Delay Sparks Outrage, Paralyzes Power Department

Over 50 Days After Document Verification, JE Aspirants Seek CM's Intervention as Manpower Crisis Cripples PDD Operations

■ HT NEWS DESK

**SRINAGAR, FEB 09:** The prolonged delay in the release of the provisional and final merit list for the Junior Engineer (Electrical) recruitment by the Jammu and Kashmir Services

Selection Board (JKSSB) has triggered widespread anger and anxiety among aspirants, while severely impacting the functioning of the Power Development Department (PDD), already

grappling with an acute shortage of technical manpower.

The recruitment process, initiated after a gap of nearly a decade, was widely seen as a crucial step to

revive the technically depleted Power Department. However, repeated and unexplained delays at every stage have pushed hundreds of qualified candidates into prolonged uncertainty, raising serious questions

● Turn on Page 2

## Chief Secretary calls Financial Inclusion key to Inclusive Growth

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 09:** Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo today inaugurated the Financial Literacy Week (FLW) 2026 for the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. The week-long programme is being organised by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) from February 09 to February 13, 2026, with a focus on strengthening financial awareness and safe banking practices among citizens.

The event was also attended by Rachna Sharma, Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department; Sh. Vidhu

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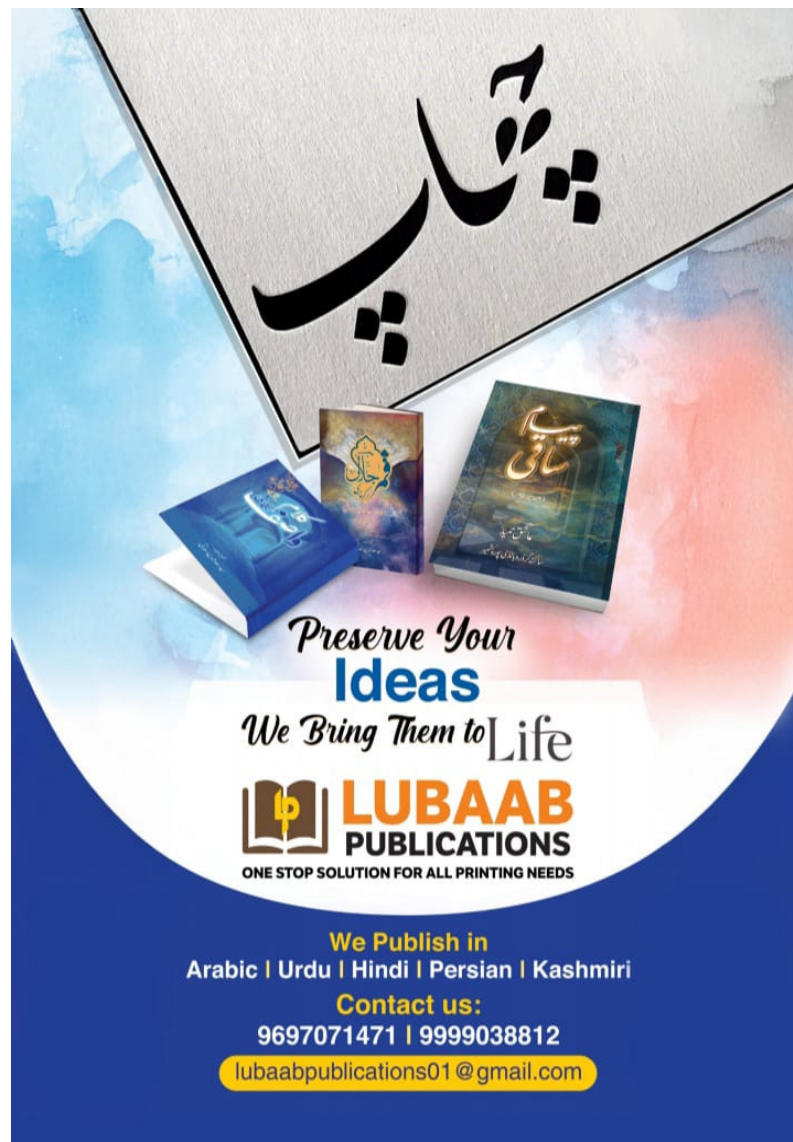
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CONTINUE FROM FRONT PAGE.....

Maoism Only.....

mobile connectivity in every habitation, and a post office or bank branch within five kilometres of every village. Paddy will be procured from tribal farmers at Rs 3,100 per quintal, cooking gas cylinders will be provided to households, and tap water connections ensured in every home.

With peace returning to the region, Shah said Bastar is being developed as a major tourism hub, with adventure tourism, homestays, canopy walks and glass bridges being introduced to boost local employment and economic activity. A new 118-acre industrial area is also being set up to generate jobs for tribal youth.

On irrigation and power, he announced new projects on the Indravati river to irrigate 2.75 lakh hectares across Dantewada, Bijapur and Sukma districts, besides generating 120 MW of electricity.

Emphasising cultural revival, Shah said Bastar's identity lies not in guns and explosives but in its rich tribal heritage, folk traditions, music, dance and art. Praising Bastar Pandum 2026 for bringing together over 55,000 participants, he said the festival symbolises Bastar's return to peace and pride. He announced that the top performers in all 12 disciplines would be invited to Rashtrapati Bhavan to showcase their art before the President.

Thanking the Chhattisgarh Police, CRPF, ITBP and BSF for their relentless fight against Naxalism, Shah paid tribute to the martyrs who laid down their lives for the nation. He expressed confidence that with sustained security operations and focused development, Bastar will emerge as the country's most developed tribal region within the next five years, marking a decisive victory of peace over extremism.

Adversity Will.....

self-sacrifice embodied by the martyrs, LG Sinha said it was the collective responsibility of society to pass these values to the youth and build strong character. He also commended the J&K Police for its Civic Action Programme, describing it as a powerful instrument of trust-building, peace, and community partnership.

Calling for a united fight against drug abuse, the Lieutenant Governor reaffirmed the administration's resolve to make Jammu and Kashmir drug-free, stating that the hockey tournament itself symbolised that commitment.

The Lieutenant Governor reiterated the UT administration's focus on youth empowerment, saying sustained efforts were underway to create opportunities, nurture talent, and provide direction to young energies.

The tournament, resuming after a gap of over a decade, will feature 14 teams, celebrating the spirit of sportsmanship while honouring the supreme sacrifices of J&K Police martyrs.

Senior officials including DGP J&K Nalin Prabhat, Special DG S.J.M Gillani, Commandant General HG, CD & SDRF Abdul Ghani Mir, ADGP Armed Police Anand Jain, along with senior civil and police officers, members of hockey associations and eminent sports personalities, attended the inaugural ceremony.

No Household.....

He clarified that while all villages in the Jammu Division have been electrified either through on-grid or off-grid systems, certain remote habitations, morhas and newly developed clusters remain partially or fully without electricity.

The Chief Minister said electrification work is being carried out under centrally sponsored schemes as well as through the Union Territory CAPEX programme, adding that DPRs for uncovered areas are being prepared to extend power connectivity at the earliest.

Referring to the Billawar constituency, Omar Abdullah said that some remote habitations, including Thingnen, Kanodi and Hanok of Panchayat Madoon/Dehota, remain un-electrified or partially electrified. These areas were proposed for coverage under the DA-JGUA scheme, but were later dropped from the final DPR due to escalation in project costs.

He, however, assured the House that fresh DPRs for these habitations are currently under preparation and that the government is fully committed to achieving universal electrification across Jammu and Kashmir.

"This is a continuous process, and every effort will be made to ensure that no household remains without electricity," the Chief Minister asserted.

Healthcare.....

Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM) to strengthen diagnostics and public health surveillance.

The Minister said that Sub-District Hospitals across the Union Territory have been upgraded in terms of manpower, equipment and infrastructure, enabling them to function on par with District Hospitals. She added that tele-medicine services through the e-Sanjeevani platform are being expanded under a hub-and-spoke model, while Mobile Medical Units are being introduced to deliver healthcare in difficult and remote terrains.

To address manpower gaps, Sakeena Itoo said the department is carrying out rationalization and redistribution of medical and paramedical staff, with particular focus on SDH Kupwara. She added that periodic transfers of long-posted staff are also being undertaken to ensure balanced deployment and improved patient care.

Highlighting quality assurance measures, the Minister said that duty rosters, attendance norms, supervisory inspections, emergency care systems, diagnostics, pharmacy and referral services have been strengthened, alongside the implementation of National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS) to enhance overall service delivery.

During the discussion, legislator Mir Saifulah raised a supplementary question seeking further improvements in healthcare services in the district.

Kashmir Tourism.....

He said the department is actively engaging East Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, where Kashmir already receives encouraging tourist response. "Following sustained participation in international travel marts and promotional engagements, we are seeing arrivals from these regions. Our immediate focus is to strengthen communication channels and outreach to make our efforts more effective," he added.

Highlighting the government's infrastructure-led growth strategy, Sajad said that improving facilities at key destinations and developing offbeat tourist locations remain top priorities. He said that infrastructure developed under the Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP) will be outsourced in the coming months to generate employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local youth.

On adventure tourism, the Director said that the installation of ski drag lifts at Kongdori and the Gulmarg bowl has significantly strengthened winter sports infrastructure, providing a major boost to skiing, snowboarding and other snow-based activities.

He also said that the Tourism Department is fully prepared to host sporting and adventure events across the Valley, asserting that adequate infrastructure is in place to conduct such activities smoothly.

Referring to participation in OTM Mumbai 2026, Sajad said the event provided a major platform for promoting Kashmir's diverse tourism offerings, including adventure, pilgrimage and heritage destinations such as Mata Vaishno Devi, Hazratbal shrine and Hariparbat.

Expressing optimism, he said tourist arrivals are expected to remain consistent in the coming months, driven by improved infrastructure, aggressive promotion and expanding tourism avenues across the Valley. — (KNO), he said tourist arrivals are expected to remain consistent in the coming months, driven by improved infrastructure, aggressive promotion and expanding tourism avenues across the Valley.

Light rain.....

Jammu and Kashmir till February 20. However, light snowfall is likely at a few higher reaches during the night of February 9, followed by light rain or snow at most places on February 10.

From February 11 to February 20, weather conditions are expected to remain generally dry, the IMD said, with only brief spells of light snowfall at isolated higher reaches around February 14 and February 17.

Independent weather forecasters said the western disturbance expected on February 10 is weak in nature and may cause only light precipitation, with moderate rain or snow at a few locations.

Another weak western disturbance is currently expected to approach the region around February 17, though its impact is also likely to remain limited.

"There is no indication of any major weather system for the remainder of the month as per current forecasts," Kashmir Weather, a private forecasting agency, said in a statement.

Forecasters cautioned that the prolonged dry spell could result in a significant rainfall and snowfall deficit for February, which is otherwise a crucial month for winter precipitation in the region.

They added that such conditions may have implications for water availability and could also trigger early blooming of trees, particularly in the Kashmir Valley—(KNO)

JKSSB Merit.....

over the efficiency and transparency of the recruitment system.

After months of waiting, the written examination was finally conducted on October 25, 2025, and results were declared on November 24, 2025. Document verification followed on December 16, 17 and 18. Despite the completion of all mandatory formalities, more than 50 days have passed, yet JKSSB has failed to issue even the provisional merit list, leaving aspirants in limbo.

Candidates allege that the delay has taken a heavy psychological and financial toll. Many said they had dedicated years to preparation and structured their careers around this recruitment. "After clearing both the written test and document verification, the uncertainty is unbearable. There is no official communication, no timeline, and no accountability," said an aggrieved aspirant.

The ripple effects of the stalled recruitment are being felt across the Power Development Department, particularly during the peak winter season. Officials said that the shortage of Junior Engineers has hampered routine maintenance, delayed fault repairs, disrupted power distribution, and weakened emergency response mechanisms, resulting in prolonged

outages and public inconvenience.

"The department is functioning with skeletal technical staff. Several divisions are struggling to manage field operations, especially during adverse weather conditions. Immediate induction of Junior Engineers is critical for restoring operational stability," said a senior PDD official.

In view of the worsening situation, aspirants have made an urgent appeal to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Advisor to the Chief Minister, Nasir Aslam Wani, to personally intervene and direct JKSSB to immediately release the provisional and final merit lists.

They stressed that timely completion of the recruitment process would not only provide relief to hundreds of distressed candidates but also strengthen the Power Department's capacity and improve electricity services across Jammu and Kashmir. The aspirants expressed hope that swift government intervention would restore faith in the recruitment system and address the growing technical manpower crisis.

Chief Secretary.....

Shekhar, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Jammu; Sh. Deepak Dubey, Joint Director Information, Jammu; Shri Vikas Mittal, GM/O-i-C, NABARD, Jammu; Shri Sunit Kumar, CGM, J&K Bank; controlling heads of banks; and officers and representatives from Government departments, RBI, banks, financial institutions and UT LBC J&K and Ladakh.

Addressing bankers and stakeholders on the occasion, the Chief Secretary observed that financial inclusion reflects the Gandhian principle of "Sarvodaya through Antyodaya", both as a policy objective and as a shared responsibility of all institutions. He underlined that the importance of financial inclusion is evident from the fact that nearly seven of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are directly linked to financial access and empowerment of the masses.

Highlighting recent achievements, the Chief Secretary stated that during the three-month financial inclusion campaign conducted from July to October 2025, the Government, in collaboration with banking institutions, worked extensively at the Panchayat level to saturate benefits under various Government of India schemes including Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Atal Pension Yojana (APY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY). These efforts resulted in KYC updation of nearly 5.9 lakh accounts, covering about 51 percent of the targeted accounts.

He further noted that institutions such as RBI, NABARD, SEBI, PFRDA and banks are collectively working towards creating financial awareness among citizens. He added that financial integration through governance is also gaining momentum with the introduction of financial literacy lessons in JKBOSE curriculum, alongside livelihood training and skill development programmes.

Speaking about this year's theme, "KYC – Your First Step to Safe Banking", the Chief Secretary emphasised the need for adopting Centralised KYC mechanism, which, like UPI, can simplify financial transactions and credit access while ensuring account hygiene and strengthening defence against financial fraud and cyber threats. He reiterated that the vision of Viksit Bharat and sustainable development is closely linked to comprehensive financial inclusion.

Stressing the importance of grassroots outreach, he called for greater use of Common Service Centres (CSCs) as effective last-mile delivery platforms. He also emphasised leveraging the network of Self Help Groups (SHGs), which have nearly 8 lakh members across J&K, to enhance financial awareness at the community level. Additionally, he suggested using ATM kiosks, social media platforms and railways as tools for mass financial awareness, stating that financial literacy directly translates into financial empowerment.

This year's theme, "KYC – सुरक्षित बैंक का गी और पहला कदम / KYC – Your First Step to Safe Banking", focuses on sub-themes including Basics of Know Your Customer (KYC), Central KYC Registry (CKYC), and Account Hygiene and Financial Discipline. The theme aims to highlight the importance of KYC as the foundation of safe and secure banking.

In his opening remarks, Chandrashekhar Azad, Regional Director, RBI Jammu, highlighted that last year a nationwide campaign was undertaken at the Gram Panchayat level to saturate Financial Inclusion schemes, including re-KYC of bank accounts. RBI Jammu, along with banks and stakeholders in J&K and Ladakh, actively supported the campaign to ensure re-KYC enrolment for eligible account holders.

Building on the awareness created through the campaign, FLW 2026 focuses on educating the public on all aspects of KYC compliance. The campaign emphasises that while KYC is a regulatory requirement, it is simple to complete through multiple safe and convenient modes. It also aims to familiarise citizens with facilities like Central KYC (CKYC), which simplifies the KYC process.

Further, the campaign encourages citizens to remain alert against fraudulent calls, messages and links related to KYC updation, which can result in financial loss. It also sensitises the public about the serious consequences of becoming money mules due to inducements.

During the week, RBI, in collaboration with

banks and stakeholders, will conduct awareness programmes and outreach activities across the country, including the Uts of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. These initiatives will continue throughout the year to ensure sustained impact.

Through these collective efforts, RBI aims to reinforce the message that KYC is not merely a regulatory requirement, but a vital step towards building a secure, transparent and trustworthy financial ecosystem for all.

MHA Forms Inter-Ministerial Panel To Deal Digital Arrests; CBI Takes Over Rs 1.64 Cr Fraud Probe

HT NEWS NETWORK

**NEW DELHI, FEB 9:** In a bid to crack down on the rising menace of "digital arrests", the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has informed the Supreme Court that it has constituted a high-level inter-departmental committee (IDC) to eliminate systemic gaps and ensure real-time protection for cybercrime victims.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant on December 16, 2025 ordered inter-departmental ministerial consultations under the guidance of Attorney General R Venkataramani on the issue and apprised it of the outcome.

The bench further directed that the recommendations made by the Amicus Curiae should also be considered by the concerned quarters alongside the directions already issued on December 1 last year.

The status report filed by the MHA on January 12 detailed a multi-agency offensive involving the CBI, RBI, Telecom Department and top IT ministries to dismantle transnational syndicates using forged documents and "digital arrest" tactics to siphon funds from innocent citizens.

Acting on the directions of the bench, the report said the CBI has officially taken over the investigation into a high-profile fraud case of Delhi where the victim, a 76-year-old widowed pensioner, was allegedly duped of Rs 1.64 crore through a "digital arrest" scam where she was threatened by impersonators using fake documents.

The CBI informed the court that these scams are often perpetrated by "organised and transnational cybercrime syndicates" and that the agency is now utilis-

ing INTERPOL channels to dismantle international modules. The MHA has established an IDC under the chairmanship of the special secretary (internal security).

The panel includes joint secretary-level officers from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre.

It said the committee is mandated to identify legislative gaps, suggest corrective measures and ensure "time-bound compliance" across the banking and telecom sectors.

The DoT reported significant progress in curbing "spoofed" calls (calls from foreign locations appearing as Indian numbers), it said.

Through the newly introduced Central International Out Roamer (CIOR) mechanism, the government successfully blocked approximately 1.35 crore spoofed calls in October 2024 alone, bringing the current volume down to roughly 1.5 lakh calls.

Furthermore, it said the DoT is finalising rules under the Telecommunications Act, 2023, to address negligent issuance of SIM cards by point-of-sale (PoS) agents and enforcement of the 9-SIM-per-person cap and the regulation of "SIM Boxes" used by fraudsters.

The RBI informed the IDC that 23 banks have already implemented "Mule Hunter AI", a specialised tool to detect "mule accounts" used by criminals to launder stolen money.

The panel also discussed key banking reforms like mandatory "cooling-off" periods and a delay mechanism for suspicious transactions to preserve the "golden

hour" for law enforcement.

It also referred to proactive freezing of the defrauded amount by using Section 12AA of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) before funds are moved.

It also discussed putting in place standard operating procedures (SOPs) for ensuring uniform guidelines for banks to identify and close dormant accounts.

The court-appointed amicus curiae, senior advocate N S Nappinai, has proposed a landmark shift in victim relief and suggested that releasing frozen proceeds to victims based on portal complaints and indemnity bonds, without mandating a formal FIR registration in all cases.

The amicus also suggests that platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram limit the duration of video calls from unknown numbers to prevent prolonged coercion.

The government has requested a one-month extension from the Supreme Court to consolidate inputs from all stakeholders.

The committee's next focus will be on strengthening the "Adjudication Mechanism" under Section 46 of the IT Act and finalising a national online portal for cybercrime adjudication.

"In view of the foregoing facts and circumstances, it is most respectfully prayed that this Hon'ble Court may be pleased to grant a period of at least one month to enable the respondents to obtain inputs from the remaining members of the Inter-Departmental Committee and to undertake further 4 deliberations thereon, so as to place a consolidated and considered outcome before this Hon'ble Court," the MHA said in its status report. (Agencies)

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CMYK



# CS chairs 2nd UTLSMC to clear 879 housing units under PMAY–U across J&K

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 09:** Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo today chaired the 2nd meeting of the Union Territory Level Sanctioning & Monitoring Committee (UTLSMC) under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Urban (PMAY–U) 2.0. The meeting reviewed major implementation milestones, approved key project proposals, and deliberated on quality monitoring, social audit compliance, and capacity building initiatives aimed at accelerating affordable housing delivery across the Union Territory.

The meeting besides ACS, APD and PDD was attended by Commissioner Secretary, H&UDD; DG, Budget; Commissioner, JMC/SMC; Representative from J&K Bank and other concerned officers.

During the meeting, the Chief Secretary emphasized the need to extend proactive support to economically weaker sections to enable them to complete construction of their dwelling units within a stipulated timeframe. He directed the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Municipal Corporations to reach out to all eligible beneficiaries who were previously surveyed for coverage under the Interest Subsidy Scheme for Self Construction/Enhancement (ISSS) vertical of PMAY–Urban. He observed that reaching out to nearly 80,000 households is achievable through coordinated efforts between ULBs and banking institutions.



The Chief Secretary further instructed the department to develop a dedicated digital tool to facilitate seamless beneficiary outreach and application processing, minimizing manual intervention. He also stressed the importance of organizing special camps across all ULBs and municipal wards to ensure maximum enrolment of eligible beneficiaries under the scheme.

The Committee approved 47 Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) submitted by various Urban Local Bodies under the Beneficiary-Led Construction (BLC) vertical. These DPRs cover 879 dwelling units, further strengthening the affordable housing ecosystem in the Union Territory and enabling eligible beneficiaries to construct or upgrade their own houses.

Commissioner Secretary, Housing & Urban Development Department (H&UDD), Mandeep Kaur, highlighted the significance of PMAY–Urban 2.0 in ensuring housing for all urban poor. She elaborated on the different

scheme verticals including BLC, Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP), and ISSS, stating that the combined implementation of these components would help in saturating the housing needs of all eligible urban households in the UT.

Managing Director, J&K Housing Board, Shahbaz Ahmed Mirza, briefed the Committee on the Action Taken Reports (ATRs) submitted in response to observations made by Third Party Quality Monitoring (TPQM) agencies during their second and third inspection visits to BLC houses.

He informed that TPQM agencies were engaged as per PMAY–Urban guidelines to ensure construction quality across projects sanctioned in multiple Central Sanctioning & Monitoring Committee (CSMC) meetings, covering 463 BLC projects across Jammu & Kashmir.

Moreover he added that all mandated inspections have been completed and submission of duly approved ATRs to the Ministry of

Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) is mandatory for release of final instalments under BLC projects.

The UTLSMC reviewed and approved the Social Audit Report for BLC projects conducted in accordance with PMAY–Urban guidelines. The audit assessed transparency, beneficiary satisfaction, beneficiary selection processes, and adherence to approved norms.

The Social Audit was conducted by the Directorate of Social Audit, Department of Rural Development, J&K, across nine cities and towns of the Union Territory. The approved report will be submitted to MoHUA to facilitate release of final instalments under the BLC component. The Committee also approved the Annual Capacity Building Plan under PMAY–Urban 2.0 for the financial year 2025–26. The plan aims to strengthen institutional capacity, enhance technical skills of implementing agencies, and improve monitoring and execution effi-

ciency across the housing mission

The meeting also reviewed physical and financial progress under PMAY–Urban 1.0. It was given out that in Jammu & Kashmir, 6,368 houses are currently under construction which are targeted for completion by 30 September 2026 before the set deadline.

On the financial front, it was revealed that mother sanctions have been received for BLC and salary components. Utilization Certificates amounting to Rs. 3,730.52 lakh are being prepared for submission. The Committee was further informed that 103 bills amounting to Rs. 25.67 crore, covering 2,501 beneficiaries, are going to be cleared soon after availability of UT share.

The meeting was apprised that under the BLC vertical of PMAY–Urban 2.0, financial assistance of Rs. 2.50 lakh per house is provided for houses with a carpet area of 30–45 sq. m., comprising Rs. 2.25 lakh Central Assistance and Rs. 0.25 lakh UT share. The Central Assistance is released in three construction-linked instalments of 40% in first instance, 40% as second instalment, and 20% as final instalment.

The Chief Secretary emphasized timely submission of mandatory compliance reports to MoHUA, early resolution of fund flow issues, and strengthening of monitoring mechanisms to ensure timely completion of houses and seamless benefit delivery to eligible beneficiaries.

## Gurez Valley Sees Surge In Tourism; J&K Govt Taking 'Proactive Measures' To Safeguard Ecology

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 9:** The Jammu and Kashmir government on Monday informed the legislative assembly that Gurez valley in north Kashmir is witnessing a steady rise in tourist arrivals, prompting sustained efforts to strengthen sanitation and waste management infrastructure in region.

Located in the Bandipora district near the Line of Control, Gurez valley, sits at an altitude of 8000 feet. It is considered one of the most scenic and strategically important areas in the Union Territory.

In a reply to a question of National Conference MLA Nazir Ahmad Khan, Rural Development minister Javid Ahmed Dar said tourist inflow to the valley has increased significantly.

He informed the House that Gurez recorded 40,105 tourist visits in 2022, which rose to 48,797 in 2023. The number surged to 1,11,613 in 2024. In 2025, the region witnessed 54,675 tourist arrivals, including domestic visitors and locals. The minister said the government has invested in improving sanitation and waste management facilities in the valley. He noted that infrastructure such as community compost pits, soakage pits and segregation sheds has been developed while door-to-door solid waste collection is being carried out on a regular basis.

"A plastic waste management unit is presently under construction and twin-pit dustbins have been installed at strategic locations, including along the banks of river Kishenganga, to ensure scientific disposal of waste and prevent littering," he said.

Dar said dumping of garbage into River Kishenganga is strictly prohibited and such practices are not permitted either by residents or by commercial establishments, including hotels. He assured the assembly that the government is taking "proactive measures to safeguard the fragile ecology" of the region and prevent environmental degradation.

Specific sanitation and hygiene interventions are being implemented, particularly in and around Dwar town, through creation of community assets, strengthening of waste collection and segregation systems and installation of dustbins at high-footfall locations, he said.

The minister added that regular awareness and sensitisation campaigns are being conducted among residents, shopkeepers and tourists to promote responsible waste disposal and maintain cleanliness in the area. Known for its untouched Himalayan landscapes and cultural heritage, Gurez, has emerged as a major attraction for visitors and is often described as a campers' paradise. (Agencies)

## Power generation capacity of J&K to rise by 47% in upcoming fiscal

■ HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

**SRINAGAR, FEB 09:** In the upcoming fiscal, 'Jammu and Kashmir is all set to have nearly 47 percent of extra hydro power generation capacity'.

According to the official figures available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Jammu and Kashmir will have an additional 1685.7 Megawatts (MWs) of power generation capacity in addition to the existing 3540.15 MWs.

It also said that by the financial year 2030–31, Jammu and Kashmir will have 7314.85 MWs of power generation capacity.

The figures revealed by the government in the Legislative Assembly states that "The UT of J&K has 32 existing power projects with aggregate capacity of 3540.15 MW. This includes projects of aggregate capacity 1197 MW in the UT sector, 6 projects of aggregate capacity 2250 MW in the Central sector and 12 Projects of aggregate capacity 92.75 MW in the IPP (private) sector."

"A capacity addition of 3704.5 MW is expected through eight proposed and six under construction Hydroelectric Power Projects (HEPs) in the UT of J&K in the next 5 years Viz 2026–27 to 2030–31," the government



said. Stating the breakup wise details, the government further informed that in the financial year 2026–27 four HEPs will be commissioned including the 1000 MWs Pakaldul, 624s MW Kiru and 12 MW Karnah as well as 49.70 MWs (IPP JAKEDA).

It also said that in the 2027–28 financial year, 540 MWs Kwar and 37.5 MWs Parnai projects will be commissioned.

The government further informed that in the financial year 2029–30, the 850 MWs Ratle, 240 MWs Uri-I Stage-II and 260 MWs Dulhasti-II as well as 20.50 MW (IPP JAKEDA) projects will be commissioned.

For the financial year 2030–31, the authorities said that 93 MWs New Ganderbal and 48 MWs Lower Kalnai projects will be commissioned—(KNO)

## DC Srinagar Surveys Proposed VUP, FOB Sites

Three key projects proposed to enhance traffic flow and connectivity in Srinagar

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, FEB 09:** Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo on Monday conducted a tour of the City areas and carried out on-site visit of proposed Vehicular Underpasses (VUP) and Foot Over Bridge (FOB) at vital traffic junctions in the District aimed at ensuring traffic decongestion and improved connectivity to facilitate smooth movement of commuters.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Mir Imtiyaz UI Aziz; Joint Commissioner SMC, Nuzhat Khurshid; SP Traffic, Zaheer Ahmad; Chief Planning Officer, Fayaz Ahmad Dar; SDM West, Irfan Bahadur; Superintending Engineer R&B, Tatheer Manzoor; Executive Engineers of Jal Shakti, R&B, KPDCCL, Tehsildar Shalteng, Chief Sanitation Officer besides others accompanied the DC during the visit.

During the tour, the DC inspected the proposed sites identified for construction of vehicular underpasses at the Mominabad intersection and Railway Crossing Nowgam, besides a Foot Over Bridge (FOB) near the busy junction at Children's Hospital, Bemina. The inspections were carried out to assess ground conditions with regard to feasibility, land demarca-



tion, utility shifting and alignment of the projects with the City's traffic management and infrastructure upgradation plans.

While taking spot inspections of the infrastructure upgradation projects, the DC underscored the need for effective inter-departmental coordination among line departments including Revenue, Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), R&B, Jal Shakti, KPDCCL and Traffic Police, in order to ensure timely execution of the projects with minimal inconvenience to the general public. He also directed the concerned officers to expedite necessary technical evaluations, utility shifting measures and administrative processes to facilitate early commencement and timely completion of the works.

The DC further emphasized the importance of time-bound execution of these projects, stating that the proposed infrastructure would play a crucial role in traffic decongestion, smoother vehicular movement and enhanced connectivity in vital traffic junctions of Srinagar. He added that these major projects at Nowgam, Mominabad and Children's Hospital Bemina, funded by The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), Government of India, are part of the administration's planned and sustainable development initiatives aimed at strengthening urban infrastructure in the City.

Meanwhile, the DC also visited Parimpora and took stock of traffic movement and related infrastructure requirements in the area.

## Bahu Fort Residents Urge CM, Transport Minister to Extend Smart City E-Bus Services

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 9:** Residents of the historic Bahu Fort area have urged Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Transport Minister Satish Sharma to introduce Smart City electric bus services on the Bawe Wali Mata–Bahu Fort route, citing the need for improved last-mile connectivity, sustainable transport, and better access to one of Jammu's most prominent religious and tourist destinations.

In a collective appeal, locals highlighted that the Bawe Wali Mata Temple—one of the most

revered shrines in the region—witnesses a steady influx of devotees throughout the year, with particularly heavy footfall on Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays, during Navratri, and on other auspicious occasions as per the Hindu calendar.

The Bahu Fort belt is also a major tourism and cultural hub, home to prominent attractions such as Bagh-e-Bahu, North India's largest fish aquarium, an open-air theatre, and the popular ropeway (cable car). These sites draw large numbers of domestic tourists and local visitors on a daily basis, significantly increasing transport demand in the area.

In addition to its religious and tourism importance, the Bahu Fort area is a densely populated residential zone, with nearly 20,000 residents spread across two municipal wards. A large section of the population depends on public transport for daily commuting, including students, office-goers, senior citizens, and small traders.

Despite this significance, Smart City electric buses do not currently ply on the Bawe Wali Mata–Bahu Fort route. Government-operated e-bus services terminate nearly three to four kilometres before the temple, around the Police Station Bagh-e-Bahu, leaving

a critical gap in connectivity.

As a result, pilgrims, tourists, elderly citizens, and local residents are compelled to rely on outdated and overcrowded mini-buses or walk long distances, a situation that becomes particularly difficult for senior citizens and people with mobility challenges.

"The absence of eco-friendly, air-conditioned electric buses on such a high-footfall route severely affects last-mile connectivity and undermines the objectives of sustainable urban development envisioned under the Smart City Mission," said Yogesh Sagotra, a journalist and local resident of

Bahu Fort.

He added that extending e-bus services up to Bawe Wali Mata Temple would not only ease traffic congestion but also promote green mobility and significantly enhance the experience of pilgrims and tourists visiting Jammu.

Residents further pointed out that the introduction of electric buses on this route would align with the government's vision of developing Jammu as a modern, environmentally responsible city. It would strengthen public transport infrastructure, reduce dependence on polluting private vehicles, and support tourism growth.



# Srinagar District Administration felicitates Specially-Abled Students of Abhinandan Home Solina

DC Srinagar praises JKBOSE-qualified students for setting excellence benchmarks

## HT NEWS NETWORK

**Srinagar February 09:** To encourage and honour the hard work of specially abled students of Abhinandan Home Solina who successfully passed the JK Board of School Education (JKBOSE) Class 10th and 12th examinations for the academic year 2025, the District Administration Srinagar today organized a felicitation ceremony here at the Meeting Hall of the DC Office Complex.

The event was presided over by Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo along with Noted Neurosurgeon, Dr Sushil Razdan as the Guest of Honour and was marked by an atmosphere of pride and encouragement as students were applauded for overcoming challenges and excelling in academics.

On the occasion, the DC felicitated the meritorious students of Class 12th and 10th including distinction holders, with awards and certificates in recognition of their academic excellence and for their outstanding academic



performance. The students with challenges of hearing and speaking

demonstrated exceptional determination, resilience and excellence by securing distinctions and first divisions in the recent JKBOSE examinations.

Congratulating the students on their success, the DC commended their hard work and dedication. He also lauded the unwavering support of their teachers and families, stating that their exceptional performance is a testament to their academic ability and perseverance. He described the achievement as a proud moment not only for the students but also for the District Administration Srinagar and the community at large.

Addressing the gathering, the DC said the achievements of these children stand as a powerful example of overcoming challenges when combined with dedication, proper guidance and institutional support. He appreciated the efforts of the Department of Social Welfare, teachers, caretakers and parents for their continuous commitment to the holistic development of children with special needs.

The DC also assured continued support from the District Administration towards the education, empowerment and inclusion of specially-abled children, particularly the students of Government's Abhinandan Home. While interacting with the students, he assured them of all possible assistance in academics and sports and announced the provision of a school van for the convenience of the students.

The DC also encouraged the students to prepare for competitive examinations such as UPSC and JKAS, assuring them of full support from the District Administration.

Noted neurosurgeon Dr. Sushil Razdan also spoke on the occasion and shared his views, inspiring the students with his words of wisdom.

Among those present on the occasion were, Assistant Conservator Forests, Atharva Tiwari; District Social Welfare Officer, Dr Mukhtar Ahmad; Coordinator Abhinandan Home, Neelofar Sultan, and Principal along with teachers, caretakers, and students.

## Director Agriculture Kashmir reviews Agricultural Activities in Bandipora

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**BANDIPORA, FEBRUARY 09:** Director Agriculture Kashmir, Sartaj Ahmad Shah, today conducted an extensive visit to various agricultural establishments in District Bandipora to assess ongoing activities, infrastructure, and service delivery to farmers.

During the visit, the Director inspected the Sub-Divisional Agriculture Officer (SDAO) office, Agriculture Extension Officer (AEO) office, District Store, Seed Multiplication Farm, and the Soil Testing Laboratory. He closely reviewed the seed production processes, interacted with field staff and officers, and evaluated the operational efficiency of the soil testing laboratory.

The Director emphasized the critical role of quality seed multiplication and timely soil testing in boosting crop productivity and providing reliable support to the farming community. He directed the officers to strictly adhere to technical standards, enhance the quality of seed production, and strengthen farmer-oriented extension services. The focus, he said, must remain on promoting sustainable agricultural practices through scientific interventions to ensure long-term growth and resilience in the sector.

The Director reiterated the department's unwavering commitment to modernizing agricultural practices, improving infrastructure, and delivering effective, timely services to farmers across Kashmir. Such field visits, he noted, are essential for monitoring progress, addressing challenges on the ground, and aligning departmental efforts with the needs of the farming community.

The visit underscored the Directorate of Agriculture Kashmir's proactive approach towards enhancing farm productivity, ensuring food security, and fostering sustainable development in the region.

## DM Baramulla reviews Anti-Drug Measures at 25th NCORD Meeting

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**BARAMULLA, FEBRUARY 09:** District Magistrate Baramulla, Minga Sherpa, chaired the 25th meeting of the District Level Committee under the Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD) today at the Meeting Hall of the DC's office Baramulla.

During the meeting, the District Social Welfare Officer, Sajad Ahmad Bhat gave a detailed presentation, highlighting ongoing awareness, preventive and rehabilitation initiatives being implemented under various anti-drug programmes in the district.

The District Magistrate reviewed the overall anti-drug strategy in the district and issued several key directions to strengthen enforcement.

The DM directed the concerned authorities to



cancel the arms licences of any person found involved in drug trafficking and cancel driving licences in cases where drugs are recovered from a vehicle.

Further, the DM instructed the Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) to ensure strict enforcement of the NDPS Act with regard to the attachment of properties belonging to drug peddlers. Meanwhile, Minga Sherpa directed the concerned authorities to maintain close surveillance over the sale of prescription-based and controlled substances at drug stores, to prevent their misuse or diversion for illicit purposes. SSP Baramulla, Gurinderpal Singh, SSP Sopore, Iftakhar Talib, ADC Sopore, S.A Raina, ADC Baramulla, Syed Altaf Hussain; District Social Welfare Officer, Sajad Ahmad Bhat along with other concerned district and sectoral officers, were present during the meeting.

## DC Kulgam inaugurates classes of Joy Initiative Phase-II

Says initiative to boost Foundational Learning in Schools

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**KULGAM, FEBRUARY 09:** The Classes of Joy Initiative (Phase-II) was today formally inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner (DC), Kulgam, Athar Aamir Khan today here at conference hall, Mini Secretariat Kulgam.

The initiative taken by District Administration in collaboration with Pratham Foundation towards creating joyful, inclusive, and engaging classrooms.

The event was attended by Joint Director Planning, Malik Suhail, district officers, education department officials, and representatives of the Pratham Education Foundation.

Addressing on the occasion, the DC said that the programme aims to strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy in schools through joyful, activity-based, and child-centric teaching practices.

On the occasion, the MME personnel of Pratham presented a comprehensive Report of Previous Class of joy intervention which was conducted from July-November 2025 in 463 Govt. Schools of District Kulgam in which 9,722 children were reached.

The report provided detailed account of program implementation and impact of learning levels of children.

As reported, during the baseline assessment only 31% of children could read Grade 2nd text which increased to 57% after the program was implemented and Endline was conducted. Similarly in maths, only 35% of children were able to solve simple division. But after the program intervention the number reached to 68% when Endline was conducted.

Also, zone-wise performance analysis, program Impact highlighting students' learning



levels, key strengths, and existing gaps were also discussed during the report.

In July 2025, 2100 teachers underwent the Teaching at the Right Level training for conducting

class of joy and implementation of the intervention in the actual classrooms.

The presentation provided teachers with valuable first-hand insights to support better academic planning and targeted classroom interventions using the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach.

An interactive session with teachers was also held to gather feedback on the orientation programme and to address classroom-level challenges. Teachers expressed enthusiasm and strong commitment towards adopting activity-based teaching methodologies.

Demonstrations on the use of assessment tools, proper record maintenance, and systematic tracking of student progress were conducted to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of the initiative.

## DC Bandipora inaugurates women SHG-Managed Cafeteria at Mini Secretariat

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**BANDIPORA, FEBRUARY 09:** Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, today inaugurated the "Umeed Ka Zaika Cafeteria" at Block-C, 3rd Floor of the Mini Secretariat, Bandipora.

The initiative aims to promote local entrepreneurship while providing quality and hygienic refreshment facilities within the Mini Secretariat premises. The cafeteria is being managed by women Self-Help Groups under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), highlighting the district administration's commitment to women empowerment, financial inclusion, and sustainable livelihood generation. The initiative serves as a platform for rural women to showcase their skills,



enhance income opportunities, and move towards self-reliance.

Speaking on the occasion, the Deputy Commissioner appreciated the role of NRLM and women SHGs in successfully running the cafeteria. She emphasized that such women-led initiatives are instrumental in strengthening grassroots

entrepreneurship, fostering confidence among rural women, and contributing to inclusive economic development in the district. Officials and staff members welcomed the initiative and expressed hope that "Umeed Ka Zaika" will emerge as a vibrant and sustainable model of women-driven enterprise under NRLM, while also enhancing facilities for employees and visitors at the Mini Secretariat. Additional Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Zaffar Husson Shawl; Assistant Commissioner Revenue Bandipora, Shabir Ahmad Wani; Assistant Commissioner Development Bandipora; Assistant Commissioner Panchayat, along with other district officers, were present during the inauguration ceremony.

## DC Baramulla conducts Sector-wise Review of Physical & Financial Progress under District Capex Budget 2025-26

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**BARAMULLA, FEBRUARY 09:** Deputy Commissioner Baramulla, Minga Sherpa today chaired a sector-wise review meeting to assess the physical and financial progress of ongoing projects and new works under the District Capex Budget 2025-26. During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on the performance of key sectors including Public Works, Jal Shakti, Rural Development, Health, Education, Power, Urban Development, Agriculture and allied sectors. The DC reviewed project-wise status, expenditure trends, and implementation timelines to ensure efficient utilization of allocated funds.



Emphasizing timely completion and quality execution of works, the DC directed all departments to expedite slow-moving projects and strictly adhere to prescribed timelines. Special focus was laid on resolving bottlenecks affecting execution at the ground level. The DC also reviewed sector-wise proposals for new projects under Capex 2025-26 and stressed that projects must be need-based, outcome-oriented, and aligned with district development priorities. Departments were instructed to complete all requisite formalities in advance to avoid delays. Stressing the importance of inter-departmental coordination and regular monitoring, the DC directed officers to submit periodic progress reports and ensure transparency and accountability in implementation. Chief Planning Officer Baramulla, Nisar Ahmad besides Senior district officers and District heads of concerned departments attended the meeting and briefed the chair on sector-wise achievements and challenges.

## DC Bandipora inaugurates Wullar Bird Watch Conclave 2026

Five-Day Eco-Tourism event begins with Enthusiastic Public Participation

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**BANDIPORA, FEBRUARY 09:** Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, today inaugurated the Wullar Bird Watch Conclave 2026 at S.K. Payeen, marking the beginning of the five-day eco-tourism and conservation event.

On the first day, a large number of visitors, youth volunteers, and members of local communities participated in the conclave.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Commissioner highlighted

the importance of protecting migratory bird habitats, promoting nature-based tourism, and creating diversified livelihood opportunities linked with Wullar Lake.

Various stalls showcasing traditional foods, local products, and self-help group initiatives were set up at the venue.

The Deputy Commissioner inspected exhibition counters displaying local cuisine, handicrafts, and eco-tourism products, and appreciated the efforts of women entrepreneurs



and community groups in promoting sustainable livelihoods.

On the occasion, bird-watching activities, awareness interactions, and community engagement programmes were also conducted, with participants assembling along identified routes for on-ground field experiences. The event witnessed active involvement of youth groups, eco-guides, and visitors who attended the inaugural session in large numbers.

The conclave will continue

till February 13, featuring exhibitions, painting competitions, documentary screenings, and conservation awareness programmes aimed at promoting environmental stewardship and sustainable tourism.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Zaffar Husson Shawl; Coordinator WUCMA; and officers from Forest, Tourism, Fisheries, Education, WUCMA, and other concerned departments were present on the occasion.





# Govt considering de-freezing of teacher posts: Education Minister

## HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, FEB 9 :** Education Minister Sakeena Itoo informed the Legislative Assembly that the de-freezing of Teacher posts is under active consideration of the government to overcome shortage of teachers in schools across Jammu and Kashmir.

The Minister said this while replying to a question of Legislator Pawan Kumar Gupta, regarding shortage of teaching staff, in the House today.

The Education Minister said that recruitment of teacher posts were freezed by State Administrative Council decision taken in year 2018 and the government is actively working to de-freeze these posts so that fresh recruitment is expedited in the department.

She informed the House that 594 posts of Lecturers in 27 disciplines have been referred to JKPS, besides 727 non-teaching and 43 posts of MTS have been referred to Finance Department for revival/concurrence.

Regarding filling up of vacant posts of Teachers, she apprised that all these posts have been frozen



for transition of RRETs, Teacher Grade II/III to clear the salary issue of Teachers who were engaged under SSA.

The Education Minister also said that in 2025-2026, a total of 258 Senior Lecturers have

been elevated as in-charge Principals besides 56 PG Masters/ Teachers have been elevated as in-charge Lecturers. She added that 551 PG Masters/Teachers were placed as in-charge Headmasters and a proposal for

placement of more than 500 additional Masters as Headmasters is currently under process in the department.

The Minister said that 80 Headmasters were elevated as in-charge Zonal Education Officers.

In non-gazetted cadre, she said that 1170 Teachers have been elevated as Masters in 2025-26.

Regarding Udhampur district, the Education Minister said that 42 positions of Principals out of 43, 8 posts of ZEOs out of 11 and 243 posts of lecturers out of 538 have been filled in the district. She added that engagement of CRCs as well as rationalisation of staff is under process to overcome shortage of staff in schools across J&K.

The Minister further said that the Pupil Teacher Ratio in respect of Schools of Udhampur West constituency is 1:16, which shows sufficient staff is available as per enrolment. She added that for academic quality enhancement subject specific teachers, CRCs, online classes are being arranged.

The Minister attributed the improved performance of Jammu Division in the 10th and 12th board exams to the government's initiatives, saying these efforts have led to a notable academic upswing, with results surpassing those of previous years.

Legislator Ranbir Singh Pathania raised supplementary question.

## Achabal area adequately served by existing WSSs: Javed Rana

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, FEB 9 :** The government today clarified that there is no proposal for establishment of a new PHE Division at Achabal as the area is effectively being catered by the PHE Sub-Division Anantnag and PHE Sub-Division Kokernag.

Replying to a question raised by Legislator Abdul Majeed bhat in the House, Minister for Jal Shakti, Javed Ahmed Rana, informed that Achabal area falls under the jurisdiction of Jal Shakti (PHE) Division Bijbehara. He said that Achabal area is being effectively catered by the PHE Sub-Division Anantnag and PHE Sub-Division Kokernag, which together manage 157 Water Supply Schemes (WSSs) covering 31,448 households.



Javed Rana said that since a large number of operational WSSs are functioning efficiently with a balanced workload, there is presently no functional or administrative justification for creation of a separate PHE Division at Achabal.

The Minister informed that out of the total, 70 Water Supply Schemes feeding the area have been taken up under Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), UT Capex and NABARD at an estimated cost of Rs. 17,182.02 lakh. Of which, 52 schemes have already been operational. He said that the remaining are at various stages of execution.

He further informed that the division has a substantial number of operational schemes and the existing Sub-Division-wise workload remains within manageable limits.

Legislators Altaf Ahmad Wani and Hasnain Masoodi raised supplementary questions

## Govt adopts two pronged strategy to enhance flood resilience in Anantnag: Javed Rana

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, FEB 9 :** The government has adopted a two-pronged strategy, involving short-term and long-term measures, to mitigate the flood risks in Anantnag district and enhance overall flood resilience.

This was informed by Minister for Jal Shakti, Javed Ahmed Rana, in response to a question raised by Legislator Nizam-ud-din Bhat on behalf of Legislator Peerzada Mohammad Syed.

Javed Rana said that the recent interventions have significantly strengthened the flood management infrastructure and improved the district's flood resilience. He informed the House that Anantnag district has 195 flood-prone villages and continuous efforts are underway to safeguard life, property and agricultural assets through sustained preventive and protective measures.

Providing details, the Minister said that permanent flood protection works have been undertaken under PMDP Phase-II for strengthening of flood management infrastructure in vulnerable areas of Anantnag district.

He informed that bank protection works have been executed at critical locations at a cost of Rs 10.07 crore, covering a length of 873 metres. He added that embankments in flood-prone stretches have been raised at a cost of Rs 18.97 crore, covering a length of 9,168 metre.

Javed Rana said that short-term measures are being focused on immediate preparedness and mitigation in vulnerable areas. He said that these measures include restoration of weak spots identified during safety audits of river embankments through temporary protection works, such as laying filled EC bags on bunds.

He further informed that with the onset of the flood season, advance preparedness is being ensured by pre-positioning EC bags at vulnerable locations and keeping men and machinery in a state of readiness.

Regarding the irrigation projects in Anantnag district, the Minister stated that the district has a total of 64 irrigation schemes, comprising 47 gravity schemes, 15 Lift Irrigation Schemes (LIS) and 2 Tube Well Irrigation Schemes (TWIS). He informed that these schemes cover a Cultivable Command Area (CCA) of 22,742 hectare, against which an irrigation potential of 18,667 hectare has been created with 18,481 hectare presently under utilization. He further informed that 19 irrigation schemes were earlier taken up under the AIBP-PMKSY, of which, seven have been completed while the remaining are at various stages of completion.

Furthermore, seven irrigation schemes have been undertaken under UT Capex, of which, two stand completed while the remaining are currently in progress, he added.

## GBEA delegation calls on Javed Rana, Advocates for integrated tribal reform and employee welfare

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEBRUARY 09:** Gujjar-Bakarwal Employees Association (GBEA), Jammu & Kashmir, led by its President, Ch. Muhammad Asad Noomani, today called on Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana.

During the interaction, the association presented a comprehensive memorandum highlighting the professional grievances of tribal employees and the broader socio-economic welfare of tribes.

Regarding the service conditions

of the members especially Gujjar-Bakarwal currently in government employment, the delegation placed emphasis on achieving administrative equity and career progression.

The delegation also raised demand for implementation of reservation in promotions, alongside the urgent need to expedite growth avenues for Anganwadi Workers and Supervisors whose career advancement has remained stagnant for years.

Furthermore, the GBEA demanded the provision of TA/DA for mobile teachers and the immediate filling of vacant posts in seasonal schools to ensure a stable and motivated

workforce.

They advocated for the establishment of additional Tribal Smart Schools in far-flung areas and the integration of vocational training to prepare tribal youth for modern economic challenges.

To support students from marginalized backgrounds, the memorandum called for the enhancement of Scheduled Tribe scholarship schemes and the construction of adequate hostel facilities in every district.

Javed Rana gave a patient hearing to the delegation and acknowledged the legitimacy of the concerns raised.

## DC Ramban reviews arrangements for Mahashivratri

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**RAMBAN, FEBRUARY 09:** Deputy Commissioner Ramban, Mohammad Alyas Khan, today chaired a meeting of officers to finalise arrangements for the Mahashivratri festival, with emphasis on smooth, safe and harmonious celebrations across the district.

The meeting was attended by SSP Arun Gupta; ADC Varunjeet Singh Charak; ACR Shokat Hayat Mattoo; Dy SP Traffic, AD FCS&CA, Tehsildar Headquarters, CMO, Executive Engineers of JPDCL, Jal Shakti, PWD and PMGSY, Executive Officers of Municipal Committees, Food Safety Officer, Fire & Emergency Services officials, while SDMs and Tehsildars joined virtually.

The Deputy Commissioner directed SDMs, Tehsildars and other concerned officers to ensure adequate arrangements in their respective jurisdictions, including deployment of magistrates and security personnel at the prominent religious places.

The Senior Superintendent of Police briefed the meeting on security and traffic management plans and advised coordination with temple committees for installation of

CCTV cameras at vulnerable locations.

To maintain sanitation and hygiene, all BDOs and Municipal Committees were instructed to ensure cleanliness in and around temples.

The AD FCS&CA was asked to conduct joint market inspections with Revenue, Police and other departments to prevent overpricing and ensure availability of essential commodities, LPG cylinders and other food items.

The Executive Engineer JPDCL was directed to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply during Mahashivratri, while the Jal Shakti Department was asked to maintain regular water supply and deploy water tankers wherever required.

The Chief Medical Officer was instructed to ensure availability of ambulances, adequate medical staff and essential medicines during religious processions and celebrations.

The PWD Department was directed to ensure proper road maintenance near temples and adjoining areas to facilitate smooth movement of devotees. Meanwhile, Fire & Emergency Services were instructed to deploy fire tenders at key religious locations during Mahashivratri to ensure prompt response in case of emergencies.

## DC Kathua flags off farmers' exposure tour to Central Potato Research Institute Jalandhar

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**KATHUA, FEBRUARY 09:** Deputy Commissioner Kathua, Rajesh Sharma today flagged off a group of 50 farmers drawn from different villages of the district on an exposure-cum-training tour to the Central Potato Research Institute (CPRI), Jalandhar.

Chief Agriculture Officer, Jatinder Kumar Khajuria; District Agriculture Officer (Extension), Raj Singh and other officials were present at the flag off ceremony. The farmers' tour has been organized under the Sub Mission on Agriculture Extension (SMAE-ATMA) scheme.

Interacting with the farmers, the Deputy Commissioner advised them to take full advantage of the training opportunity at the reputed research institute and put in use the gained knowledge and skill back at home to enhance production.

The CAO informed that the initiative aims to equip farmers with modern



agricultural knowledge and practical skills.

"Under the SMAE-ATMA scheme, the Agriculture Department Kathua is focusing on bridging the gap between agricultural research and field-level practices through training programmes, demonstrations and exposure visits," he added.

Among others present on the occasion were ADO (Vegetables) Kathua Vijay Kumar Abrol, MDO Kathua Ashok Sarmal besides officers and officials of the Agriculture Production Department Kathua.

## Saras AAJEEVIKA Mela concludes: Grand Celebration of craft, culture & cuisine with 'Umeed Ka Zaika' take center stage

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEBRUARY 09:** Saras AAJEEVIKA Mela 2026 organised by Jammu Kashmir Rural Livelihood Mission (JKRLM) concluded today, marking another successful chapter in the celebration of craft, culture, cuisine and entrepreneurship.

The Mela which began here at Kalakendra Jammu on January 31 concluded today, offering the visitors a myriad collection of hand made products and cuisines from across the country.

One of the central features of the mela was "Umeed Ka Zaika", the Union Territory's first Food Service Enterprise

(FSE) brand. Conceptualised by the Jammu and Kashmir Rural Livelihoods Mission (JKRLM), the initiative is designed as an intervention to upgrade food-based livelihoods into structured, market-ready enterprises, improving presentation, quality standards and commercial viability.

Under a strategic partnership with Swiggy, "Umeed Ka Zaika" was introduced at the SARAS food court to strengthen sales and widen market access for participating groups.

The platform brought together culinary practitioners to present traditional dishes, offering visitors insight into



regional food practices and heritage.

Addressing the closing ceremony, Mission Director,

JKRLM Kashmir Dr Shubhra Sharma emphasized the

significance of the event. She remarked, "The Saras Aajeevika Mela is not just a fair; it's a crucial platform that empowers women artisans, promotes their craftsmanship and offers them opportunities to thrive in a competitive marketplace. This Mela plays a vital role in boosting the confidence and economic independence of rural women, while also contributing to the holistic development of the region," she added.

Referring to "Umeed Ka Zaika", Dr Shubhra Sharma said the initiative was a labor of love that highlighted not just the food we cherish, but the stories behind every dish. It encapsulated the

spirit of our community," Events like the SARAS Aajeevika Mela provide a physical space for this community spirit to flourish, fostering unity through cultural exchange and shared entrepreneurship. She said the mela contributed to strengthening confidence and economic independence among rural women, while also supporting broader regional development.

The event concluded in the presence of Additional Mission Director, JKRLM, Manpreet Kaur, along with State Project Managers, District and Block Programme Managers and officials from various line departments.





HT EDITORIAL

It is time to provide relief to unemployed youth of J&K

At a time when the educated but unemployed youth of the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir are feeling the heat on account of scarce job opportunities in the government sector, startling figures have come to the fore. These figures refer to the amount received by the Services Selection Board (SSB) as fees from the youth who applied for various posts advertised by the Board from time to time.

The Board has received as many as 48 crore rupees from the applicants who applied for the different non-gazetted posts advertised over the past two years. The figures were dished out by the union government in the legislative assembly. Replying to a question the government said that over the past two years the SSB received Rs. 48 crores as fees from the youth who applied for the posts. Going by the amount one can easily understand that thousands of youths have applied for the various posts in the past two years.

In his budget speech chief minister Omar Abdullah said that the union territory government would fast track recruitment of more than 20,000 posts in the next one year or so. In such a scenario there is likely to be a windfall for the SSB as lakhs of youth are expected to apply for these posts once the formal announcement is made and advertisements get published in the local newspapers. In other words, it can be said that there would be further increase in the kitty of SSB.

For years together most of the unemployed youth have been demanding that they should not be forced to pay any amount as and when they apply for a government post advertised by SSB. There are many others who say that the fees charged by SSB should be minimal so that there is very less burden on their pockets more so when they are unemployed. The demand of the youth has also been reiterated by leaders of different political parties.

Since Jammu & Kashmir is considered to be a welfare state it is imperative that all privileges are extended to the people including the unemployed youth. As such one can expect the present government to take a path-breaking step in this regard. If the government announces that no fee will be charged from applicants it would be a great service to the unemployed youth. If this is not possible then at least the government can slash the amount of fees.

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Is burden of Vulgarly and Adultery on Women?



■ RAQIF MAKHDOOMI.

Before we get to the main point. Let it be clear "I am not a feminist nor do I support anything called Moderation". I have exclusively written against all the forms of "Modernizations" which have led us to vulgarity.

Coming to the main point. Most of my articles are based on what I see happening around in the society. What mostly contributes to my ideas of writing articles is "Social Media". Most of my time is spend on the social media apps and I get the theme of my articles from social media.

Allah says in Quran Surah Nisa Ayat 34 "Men are the caretakers of women". When we speak about Modesty (Pardha) it's not just for the women. No doubt in Quran it's explained how properly should a women dress herself. And how she should talk to man who's Non-Mahram to her. But does all this excuse men from being Modest? No, it doesn't. Where Quran calls for women to be properly covered, the Same Quran asks Men to lower his

Gaze. Which means a man isn't even allowed to look at Non Mahram. Talking to her in a jolly way is out of Question.

The modern concept of Equality" always annoys me and it in no ways does justice to any of the Gender. Islam has put women at a very high position even without asking her to prove her abilities. The modern concept demands a woman to show her capabilities to attain a position. While as Islam doesn't demand it in anyway.

Islam has given respect to women in a way which no other religion has ever given. When we speak about having a modest society. It's doesn't put burden on any of the gender. It has assigned a role to man and a woman separately. I have always said it "Islam doesn't grant equality, it has struck a balance between both the gender"

This balance isn't a hypocrite concept like as of "Feminism".

We often shift the burden to others to make ourselves clean. And to get away with the growing vulgarity and degrading of values

We have so easily shifted this blame on "Female" gender and made male gender clean. It same as when elders get together in a wedding and say "The Youth of today is involved in various evils". And somehow take their children out of it. Same way we have shifted the blame on females and got away with our responsibilities.

Late night, in a X space we were randomly talking and joking among ourselves. A friend of ours came and started saying "He's alone. He wants a Girlfriend. He wants to get physical with her". And so on. And then suddenly he said "These girls have degraded our society. They get men into evil" I was left speechless. He was the one who wanted a Girlfriend, he wanted to things and now he's the one blaming them? The another one said "If they are so good they shouldn't reply to our messages". According to him, he will do everything to trap a girl but the girl should be enough strong not to fall for this trap. This concept is completely against every single human realities. He completely shifted the blame on a woman. Even after accepting that he's the one who messages them. And this is not the only place where I have heard these talks. But these talks are baseless and have no meaning.

"And Don't even go near to adultery" isn't for female gender but for both the genders. Allah calls upon both male and female to not even go near to adultery. Had there been a thing that being modest was job of a single gender. Allah would have mentioned it in Quraan.

Even when we take a look at Hadiths, one won't find burden put on any single gender. Both the genders have been asked to play their role in ensuring things work in proper. You can't

in anyway justify that growing adultery in our society is just because of single gender. Both the genders have played their and playing their role in the growing vulgarity in our society.

Not many of you shall be familiar with this fact that. A man has been asked to cover his chest. The reason being a woman finds chest of a man attractive. To ensure the temptation is prevented a man has been asked to cover his chest. But we often see chest being displayed. If a woman gets attracted seeing your chest. Will you still put blame on the woman? If you say yes, they you should read psychology and know how attraction works.

Writing this piece doesn't intend to excuse any of the gender from his or her duty. But to call upon both of them to fulfill their duties to as prescribed by Quran.

Allah says in Quran Surah At-Tahrim Ayat 6 "O' you believer save yourself and your family from hell fire". Understand the Ayat, Allah has on the very first step asked you to save yourself from hell fire and then your family. When you will begin saving yourself and your family from hellfire. The society shall change. Because we are the society.

Remember shifting blame won't help. You have to start changing yourself. All the arguments you present to excuse yourself shall not work on the day of Judgment.

DG Assam Rifles Lt Gen Vikas lakhera has that's Smile always and everytime on his face!



■ M S NAZKI

Three small stories but the purpose was one! Director General Assam Rifles Lt General ViKas Lakhera on a visit to Mizoram!

For the general a few lyrical lines: Geet gata hoon main, Geet gata hoon main, gungunata hoon main, Maine hasne ka vaada kiya tha kabhi, Isliye ab sada muskurata hoon main!

The historical facts about Mizoram: The insurgency in Mizoram began in 1966 in what was then the Mizo Hills district of Assam, initiated by the Mizo National Front (MNF) led by Laldenga. It started as a violent, secessionist movement for an independent nation, directly triggered by the Indian government's perceived failure to handle the 1959-1960 Mautam famine.

Key details regarding the start of the insurgency: The Catalyst (1959 Famine): A massive bamboo flowering caused a rat epidemic that destroyed crops, leading to severe starvation in the Mizo hills.

Initial Organization: The neglect of this famine by the Assam government led to the formation of the Mizo National Famine Front in 1960 to provide relief, which later transformed into the separatist Mizo National Front (MNF).

The Uprising (1966): On February 28, 1966, the MNF launched coordinated attacks on government offices, treasuries, and security posts across the Mizo district.

Declaration of Independence: On March 1, 1966, the MNF formally declared independence from India.

Foreign Support: The insurgents used East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as a safe haven and training ground for their armed struggle.

The insurgency lasted for two decades, resulting in significant loss of life, before concluding with the historic Mizoram Accord of 1986.

Mizoram, known as the "Land of the Highlanders," has a rich history rooted in the migration of Mizo tribes from China and Myanmar into the Chin Hills, later settling in the region by the 16th century. Originally the Lushai Hills District under British rule, it became a Union Territory in 1972 and a full-fledged Indian state in 1986 following a peace accord.

Origins: The Mizo people are believed to have originated from Shinlung (China), migrating to the Chin Hills in Myanmar around the mid-16th century, and subsequently moving into the Lushai Hills in the 17th-18th centuries.

Tribal Structure: The inhabitants were divided into various clans (Lushai, Pawi, Mara, etc.).

British Rule: The British formally brought the area under their control in the late 19th century (1890s) after a series of raids.

Colonial to Independent India: Lushai Hills: The area was initially administered as the Lushai Hills District of Assam.

Independence: In 1947, the region remained part of Assam, becoming the Mizo Hills District in 1954. Insurgency and Statehood:

Mautam Famine (1959): A severe, widespread famine occurred, which was exacerbated by a lack of government response, sparking intense dissatisfaction.

Mizo National Front (MNF): Formed to fight for independence, the MNF launched an armed insurgency in 1966.

Union Territory (1972): The region was separated from Assam and became a Union Territory.

Peace Accord (1986): After 20 years of conflict, the Mizoram Peace Accord was signed in 1986, creating a peaceful, democratic state with Laldenga as the first Chief Minister.

Key Aspects: Cultural Fusion: The 20th century saw many tribes unite under the, "Mizo" identity, with Christianity becoming dominant.

The first story Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera, AVSM, SM, Director General Assam Rifles, visited Assam Rifles units at Lunglei and Parva in Mizoram. During the visit, the General Officer inaugurated a newly constructed Riflemen Barrack, marking a significant step towards improving infrastructure and welfare facilities for women personnel. He also interacted with the troops, appreciating their professionalism, operational readiness and dedication to duty, while motivating them to continue upholding the highest standards of service.

Parva village, Lawngtlai district, Mizoram, India ...Lunglei and Parva are distinct, significant locations in southern Mizoram, India, known for their natural beauty and strategic importance. Lunglei, the state's second-largest city and a district headquarters, is a cultural hub known for its "rock bridge" history, Mizo-style architecture, and scenic landscapes. Parva (specifically Parva-I) is a, remote, largely agricultural village located on the Indo-Myanmar border in the Lawngtlai district.

Lunglei: The "Bridge of Rocks" Location: South-central Mizoram, surrounded by hills at an altitude of 729 meters.

Significance: It is the headquarters of Lunglei district, the largest district in the state.

Highlights: Known for the Nghashih Brook, Saitkuti Hall, and Thangliana Lung.

Tourism: It is a base for nature lovers, offering scenic spots like the Khawlung Wildlife Sanctuary.

Parva-I: Border Village Location: Situated in the Lawngtlai district of southern Mizoram, near the Indo-Myanmar border.

Economy: Primarily agricultural, with a significant population engaged in cultivation and labor.

Geography: It is a remote, rural area.

Commonalities and Recent Events Strategic Importance: Both areas are critical, with Lunglei and Parva being key locations for Assam Rifles units.

Infrastructure Growth: Director General of Assam Rifles, Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera, visited both locations in February 2026 to enhance, and inaugurate new facilities, such as the Riflemen Barrack in Parva.

Both locations reflect the diverse character of Mizoram, ranging from the urban, cultural hub of Lunglei to the, remote, border-aligned life in Parva. Yeh mohabbat ke pal kitne anmol hain, Kitne phoolon se nazuk mere bol hain, Sab ko phoolon ki mala pehnata hoon main, Muskurata hoon main! Assam Rifles in collaboration with the non-prof-

its organisation Rudram Dynamics Foundation, has launched a dedicated UPSC coaching programme for aspiring civil services candidates from Mizoram. Based on a rigorous merit-based selection process, twenty-five students were shortlisted to undergo an intensive year-long UPSC coaching programme conducted by Rudram Dynamics Foundation. The initiative aims to empower talented youth from the region by providing them with structured guidance, quality mentorship, and academic support to compete at the national level. The programme was inaugurated by Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera, AVSM, SM, Director General Assam Rifles on 04 February 2026 at Aizawl, Mizoram. During the inauguration, the Director General interacted with the selected aspirants, encouraging them to pursue their goals with determination, discipline, and confidence.

Rudram Mission: Prioritize field-tested innovation to enhance India's technological capabilities.

Foster indigenous technology solutions for India's security in collaboration with domestic start-ups and friendly nations.

Prioritizing tangible experiences and field knowledge as the foundation of any technological advancement, Rudram seeks to rigorously test solutions in real-world scenarios, relying on invaluable feedback from the partners and incorporating an iterative approach to meet the specific needs of the end-users and effective implementation.

Rudram was established, dedicated to enhancing Indian military capabilities through indigenous technologies, encouraging both in-house development and partnership with domestic start-ups to address India's security challenges.

Aizawl, established in 1890, is the scenic capital and largest city of Mizoram in Northeast India, situated on a, ridge roughly 1,132 meters (3,715 ft) above sea level. Known as the cultural and administrative hub of the Mizo people, it has a population of over 400,000 and features a moderate climate, bustling markets like Bara Bazar, and landmarks such as Solomon's Temple.

Key Aspects of Aizawl: Geography & Climate: Located north of the Tropic of Cancer, it features a ridge-top setting with a temperate climate, ranging from 11-21°C in winter to 20-30°C in summer.

Culture & Lifestyle: It is a, predominantly Christian city that serves as the heart of Mizo culture. Key festivals include Chapchar Kut in March.

Key Attractions: Bara Bazar: The main, chaotic commercial hub. Solomon's Temple: A major, prominent, modern church.

Mizoram State Museum: Showcases tribal history, costumes, and artifacts. Durtlang Hills & Mini Zoo: Offers panoramic city views.

Economy & Education: The economy is driven by government services, agriculture, and handicrafts. It is an educational hub hosting Mizoram University and NIT Mizoram. Transportation: Connected by air via Aizawl Airport (Lengpui) to cities like Kolkata and Guwahati. Taxis are the primary, main mode of, local, transport.

Aizawl is often referred to as a, bustling hill city, noted for its, unique community values and,, scenic, surroundings.



# Enid Blyton’s Famous Five Inspired Children Across Cultures



■ DR. RATAN BHATTACHARJEE

‘Leave something for someone , but don’t leave someone for something” These words of Enid Blyton in her ‘Five on a Hike Together’ epitomizes her motto as a writer for children. Enid Blyton’s Famous Five occupies a unique and enduring place in the world of children’s literature, not merely as a popular adventure series but as a formative reading experience that has shaped the imaginations of generations of young readers across cultures and continents. First introduced in 1942 with Five on a Treasure Island, the series emerged at a time when the world was overshadowed by war and uncertainty. Against this grim backdrop, Blyton offered children stories filled with sunshine, sea breezes, secret passages, picnics, and the exhilarating promise that courage, curiosity, and friendship could still triumph. More than eight decades later, the appeal of the Famous Five remains remarkably intact, making the series a must-read for children even in an age dominated by screens and instant entertainment. At the heart of the series are four children—Julian, Dick, Anne, and their tomboy cousin Georgina, who insists on being called George—and George’s fiercely loyal dog, Timmy. Their adventures are set largely during school holidays, when adult supervision is minimal and the world seems open to exploration.

Blyton’s adventures do not rely on fantasy worlds, magic spells, or superhuman abilities. Instead, they unfold in recognizably real settings—rocky islands, ruined castles, old lighthouses, desolate moors, and sleepy villages that hide dark secrets. These landscapes are not merely backdrops but active participants in the stories. Secret tunnels, hidden rooms, and coded messages transform ordinary places into realms of mystery. This approach subtly teaches children that adventure does not have to be imported from imaginary universes; it can exist all around them if they are observant, curious, and brave enough to look for it. Children’s adventure and mystery stories have always been more than entertainment. They are cultural mirrors, reflecting the societies in which they were written, the anxieties and aspirations of their times, and the values that adults hoped to instill in young readers. When we look at Enid

Blyton’s Famous Five, Franklin W. Dixon’s Hardy Boys, Carolyn Keene’s Nancy Drew, and other series like The Secret Seven or Tom Swift, we see not only thrilling tales of treasure hunts and detective work but also snapshots of England, America, and beyond in the twentieth century. These stories endure because they capture the universal thrill of youthful independence, yet each carries the imprint of its cultural soil.

Take Blyton’s Five on a Treasure Island, published in 1942. The story introduces Julian, Dick, Anne, George, and Timmy the dog, who discover a shipwreck and hidden treasure on Kirrin Island. On the surface, it is a simple adventure, but beneath it lies wartime England’s yearning for resilience and continuity. Blyton’s children roam freely, unsupervised, solving mysteries without adult interference. This independence reflects both the reality of wartime Britain, where children often had to fend for themselves, and the ideal of self-reliance. George, insisting on being called by a boy’s name and rejecting traditional femininity, embodies a subtle challenge to gender norms, mirroring the shifting roles of women during the war. The island itself, mysterious and untamed, becomes a metaphor for England’s landscape—scarred by conflict yet full of hidden strength.

Across the Atlantic, the Hardy Boys were already solving mysteries in small-town America. First published in 1927, the series follows brothers Frank and Joe Hardy as they unravel smuggling rings, haunted houses, and criminal conspiracies. ‘The Hardy Boys’ reflects American optimism of the early twentieth century, portraying young people as capable of confronting crime and corruption. Their father, a professional detective, often guides them, symbolizing the importance of family and institutional authority in American culture. The stories emphasize rational deduction, courage, and teamwork, values that resonated in a society proud of its democratic ideals and technological progress. The Hardy Boys’ adventures are rooted in the American landscape—suburban neighborhoods, coastal towns, and highways—mirroring the mobility and dynamism of the nation.

‘Nancy Drew’, introduced in 1930, offered something revolutionary: a female detective who was intelligent, resourceful, and fearless. Nancy’s independence was groundbreaking, providing young girls with a role model who combined intellect with adventure. Her mysteries often involved hidden wills, secret passages, and family secrets, blending domestic settings with suspense. Nancy Drew’s cultural mirror reflects the changing role of wom-

en in America, particularly during the Depression and later during the feminist movements of the twentieth century. She challenged stereotypes, showing that women could be leaders, thinkers, and adventurers. Her enduring appeal lies in this balance of femininity and autonomy, a cultural statement as much as a literary one.

Other series add further dimensions to this cultural tapestry. Blyton’s Secret Seven, for instance, emphasizes teamwork and everyday problem-solving. The group of children, with their badges and secret meetings, mirrors post-war Britain’s fascination with clubs, order, and collective identity. Victor Appleton’s Tom Swift series, beginning in 1910, reflects America’s faith in science and invention. Tom Swift’s adventures are driven by technology—airships, submarines, and futuristic gadgets—mirroring the nation’s industrial optimism and belief in progress. Laura Lee Hope’s Bobbey Twins, lighter in tone, reflect family-centered values, portraying mysteries as extensions of domestic life. Each series, while entertaining, carries cultural messages about independence, authority, gender, and progress.

What unites these stories is their reliance on youthful independence. Whether it is the Famous Five exploring Kirrin Island, the Hardy Boys chasing smugglers, or Nancy Drew uncovering family secrets, the children act without adult supervision, embodying a fantasy of autonomy. This independence is culturally significant. In England, it reflected wartime resilience and the countryside’s symbolic strength. In America, it reflected optimism, mobility, and democratic values. In Nancy Drew, it reflected feminist aspirations and the possibility of female leadership. The cultural mirrors are clear: these stories are not only about solving mysteries but about imagining societies where youth are empowered. The enduring appeal of these stories lies in their universality. Children everywhere long for adventure, independence, and justice. Blyton, Dixon, and Keene tapped into these universal desires, but they did so through culturally specific lenses. Blyton’s children embody English resilience, Dixon’s boys embody American optimism, and Keene’s girl embodies feminist aspiration. Together, they form a global tapestry of childhood adventure, showing how literature can be both universal and particular.

In today’s world, shaped by technology and globalization, these stories remind us of the enduring magic of imagination, nature, and human connection. They remind us that childhood is a time of exploration, that independence is a cherished fantasy, and that justice is a universal

value. They also remind us that literature is a cultural mirror, reflecting societies even as it entertains. To read Five on a Treasure Island, The Hardy Boys, or Nancy Drew is to read not only a mystery but also a cultural history, a story of England, America, and beyond. Thus, children’s adventure and mystery stories are more than tales of treasure hunts and detective work. They are cultural mirrors, reflecting the landscapes, values, and aspirations of their times. They endure because they capture the universal thrill of youthful independence, but they also endure because they carry the imprint of their cultural soil. In Blyton’s England, Dixon’s America, and Keene’s feminist imagination, we see societies in miniature, reflected through the eyes of children. And in reading them, we see ourselves—not only as readers but as participants in the cultural stories they tell.

Equally significant is the emphasis on friendship and teamwork. The Famous Five never succeed alone. Julian’s leadership, Dick’s humour, Anne’s sensitivity, George’s fierce independence, and Timmy’s loyalty each play a vital role in solving mysteries and overcoming danger. Children reading the series learn, often unconsciously, the value of cooperation and mutual respect. Conflicts within the group are not ignored—George’s temper and Anne’s fears are recurring themes—but these differences are resolved through understanding and loyalty. Such portrayals help young readers appreciate that friendships are not about uniformity but about accepting and valuing differences. George, in particular, stands out as a revolutionary character for her time and continues to be relevant today. At a period when girls in children’s books were often portrayed as passive, domestic, or dependent, George defied convention. She is outspoken, courageous, and resistant to traditional gender expectations. Her desire to be treated as an equal, her rejection of frilly dresses, and her insistence on competence rather than conformity send a powerful message to young readers about individuality and self-respect. For many children, especially girls, George becomes a figure of identification and empowerment, demonstrating that strength and sensitivity can coexist and that identity need not be dictated by societal norms.

Another reason the Famous Five is a must-read lies in its accessibility. Blyton’s language is simple, direct, and rhythmic, making the books ideal for developing readers. The sentences are short, the vocabulary manageable, and the dialogue lively. This clarity does not imply a lack of depth; rather, it allows children to focus on the story without being hindered by linguistic complexity. For many readers, the Famous

Five serves as a gateway to independent reading. Finishing one book often leads naturally to the next, fostering a habit of sustained reading that can last a lifetime. In an era where children’s attention is increasingly fragmented, such immersive reading experiences are invaluable. The moral universe of the Famous Five is another aspect that contributes to its lasting appeal. Right and wrong are clearly delineated, but not in a heavy-handed or didactic manner. Villains are driven by greed, cruelty, or dishonesty, while the protagonists succeed through integrity, courage, and compassion. The children do not seek rewards or recognition; their motivation is a sense of justice and a desire to protect what is right. This moral clarity provides young readers with a reassuring framework, especially in a world that often appears morally ambiguous. The stories reinforce the idea that ethical choices matter and that ordinary individuals, even children, can make a meaningful difference.

The act of reading allows children to visualize the adventures in their own way, fostering imagination and creativity. This imaginative engagement is one of the most valuable gifts literature can offer. In educational contexts, the Famous Five can serve as an effective bridge between pleasure reading and more complex literary works. The series introduces basic narrative structures—mystery, suspense, character development—that prepare children for more challenging texts. Teachers and parents often note that children who develop a love for reading through Blyton’s books are more confident and enthusiastic readers later on. This foundational role in literacy development cannot be overstated.

When a child opens a Famous Five book, they step into a world where courage is rewarded, loyalty matters, curiosity is celebrated, and friendship is the greatest strength of all. In offering this world, Blyton has given generations of children not just stories, but memories, habits of reading, and a lasting love for literature. That is why the Famous Five is, and will remain, essential reading for children everywhere. Enid Blyton once said, “The best way to treat obstacles is to use them as stepping stones. Laugh at them, tread on them, and let them lead you to something better.” This is the best ever inspiration for the young readers from a children’s litterateur.

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## From a Finite World to an Unlimited Imagination: The Crisis of Child-Reading Culture

■ DR VIJAY GARG

In an age marked by digital devices, fragmented attention, and rapid information flows, children’s reading culture faces a deepening crisis. Once rooted in slow, immersive engagement with books, childhood reading now competes with endless streams of short-form digital content. This shift is not simply about what children read but about how they read—and what that means for their imagination, cognitive development, and cultural participation.

The “Finite World” of Fragmented Attention

Modern digital environments shape how young readers interact with text. Screens offer constant stimulation, hyperlinks, videos, and notifications that fragment attention and encourage skimming rather than deep reading. Researchers have found that while digital access brings a vast array of materials instantly to young people, it also promotes distraction and shorter attention spans—hindering the development of sustained engagement with stories and complex ideas.

This limits reading to a finite world of quick hits rather than a deep dive into the limitless possibilities that narrative and fiction offer. Consequently, children may struggle to develop higher-order literacy skills such as inferential reasoning, empathy, and critical thinking—all of which flourish through rich literary engagement over time.

Why Imagination Matters  
Reading fiction does far more than teach vocabulary or comprehension. It opens

doors to worlds that go beyond lived experience, fostering imagination—the mental space where children can explore alternative realities, reflect on emotions, and understand other people’s minds. When children read, they actively construct worlds in their minds, enriching their capacity for creativity and empathy in ways passive media rarely achieve.

Imagination is not a frivolous skill: it fuels innovation, narrative understanding, and the ability to grapple with complex ethical situations—capacities increasingly recognized as essential in the 21st century. Without it, education can become a sterile exercise in memorizing facts, losing the transformative power that stories hold.

The Decline of Reading Culture  
The crisis in reading culture manifests in several ways:

1. Motivation Loss (Aliteracy)  
Many children can read but simply do not choose to do so. This state, known as aliteracy, reflects a decline in reading motivation even where literacy skills are present.
2. Digital Displacement  
Digital media often displaces traditional reading with quick consumption, reducing opportunities for extended imaginative engagement with text. The ease of switching between apps and content makes deep reading harder and less habitual.
3. Educational Pressures  
Some educational systems emphasize measurable outcomes and testing over experiential reading. When curricula prioritize standardized assessments, books

that inspire wonder and creativity risk being sidelined.

4. Access and Equity Challenges  
In many parts of the world, children still lack access to a variety of reading materials and supportive reading environments, intensifying the crisis rather than alleviating it.

Reading’s Transformational Power  
Despite these challenges, research highlights why reading remains vital:

Fiction reading supports empathy, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence.

Reading broadens children’s worldviews, helping them explore perspectives and cultures beyond their immediate environments.

Sustained reading builds language proficiency and strengthens cognitive skills that carry into adulthood.

In times of crisis—whether educational disruption, global instability, or rapid societal change—reading acts as an anchor that preserves learning continuity and provides emotional stability for young learners.

From a Crisis to Creative Possibilities  
To move beyond the crisis of child-reading culture, we must shift from a finite view of reading—limited to school tasks or digital blips—to an unlimited imagination orientation that values books as spaces of wonder, inquiry, and self-expression. What Can Be Done?

Cultivate reading for pleasure: Encourage children to choose books that spark their curiosity rather than merely books assigned by adults.

Integrate diverse literatures: Provide

stories from multiple cultures and genres, expanding children’s imaginative horizons.

Balance technology and deep reading: Use digital tools to enhance rather than replace immersive literary experiences.

Support access to books: Libraries, community programs, and family reading time remain pivotal in building a culture of reading.

Conclusion  
The crisis in child-reading culture is not just about declining literacy rates; it is about the shrinking space for imagination in children’s lives. Moving beyond this crisis requires nurturing environments where stories are lived, imagined worlds are explored, and reading becomes a joyful, boundless journey. A culture that cherishes imagination equips children not merely to navigate an increasingly complex world—but to dream, question, and transform it.

The Erosion of Deep Literacy  
The crisis of child-reading culture is also a crisis of attention. Digital environments are designed for “skimming and scanning”—a survival mechanism for navigating the data deluge. However, deep reading requires linear focus and patience.

Linear Thinking: Books teach cause and effect through sustained narrative arcs.

Empathy Development: Literature allows children to inhabit a character’s inner monologue, fostering a depth of empathy that a 15-second clip simply cannot simulate.

Vocabulary Expansion: Written text typically utilizes a far more diverse lexicon than conversational speech or television scripts.

Why the “Finite World” is Winning

The decline in reading isn’t happening in a vacuum. Several cultural stressors are accelerating this shift:

The Convenience of the Algorithm: Digital platforms are engineered to remove “friction.” Reading, which requires mental effort, often loses out to the frictionless ease of an auto-playing feed.

The Death of Boredom: Imagination thrives in the gaps of “doing nothing.” Today, every spare second is filled with digital noise, leaving no room for a child to pick up a book out of sheer curiosity.

Performative Parenting: In a high-pressure world, parents often prioritize “measurable” skills (coding, sports, grades) over the “invisible” growth that happens during quiet reading time.

Reclaiming the Unlimited  
To solve this crisis, we must stop viewing reading as a chore or a school assignment and return to viewing it as a subversive act of freedom. > “A book is a device to ignite the imagination,” wrote Alan Bennett. If we allow that flame to flicker out, we risk raising a generation that can navigate a screen perfectly but cannot envision a world better than the one currently being shown to them. To transition from the finite to the unlimited, we must provide children with the space to be bored, the agency to choose their own stories, and the example of adults who still find magic between the covers of a book.

Dr Vijay Garg Retired Principal  
Educational columnist Eminent  
Educationist street kour Chand MHR  
Malout Punjab

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF HONEY



■ **DR. SURINDERPAL SINGH**

Honey has been used as a natural food and medicinal substance since ancient times. Traditional systems of medicine across cultures have long recognized its healing value, and modern scientific research has now validated many of these uses. Studies reveal honey to be a complex bioactive substance with immunomodulatory, antimicrobial, antioxidant and digestive benefits, making it highly relevant in contemporary health practices.

Honey is a natural sweet substance produced by Apis species from floral nectar. Chemically, it is a supersaturated solution of sugars, primarily fructose and glucose, along with enzymes, amino acids, organic acids, vitamins, minerals, polyphenols and volatile compounds. Unlike refined sugar, honey is a biologically active food with therapeutic properties that extend far beyond its caloric value. With the growing interest in functional foods and natural immunity boosters, honey has gained renewed attention in nutritional science, preventive medicine and integrative healthcare.

From a nutritional and biochemical perspective, honey contains approximately 80 percent carbohydrates, 17-18 percent water and small amounts of proteins, enzymes such as invertase, glucose oxidase and catalase, minerals including potassium, calcium, magnesium and iron, vitamins mainly from the B-complex group with trace amounts of vitamin C, and antioxi-

dants such as flavonoids and phenolic acids. These components collectively contribute to honey's wide range of physiological effects. Of particular importance is glucose oxidase, an enzyme that produces low concentrations of hydrogen peroxide when honey is diluted, providing antimicrobial activity without damaging body tissues. Darker varieties of honey generally contain higher levels of antioxidants, which is especially beneficial for immune and metabolic health.

Honey plays a notable role in enhancing the immune system through several mechanisms. Its antioxidant activity helps neutralize free radicals and reduce oxidative stress, a major factor in immune dysfunction, chronic inflammation and aging. By lowering oxidative stress, immune cells are able to function more efficiently. Honey also exhibits broad-spectrum antibacterial and antiviral effects. Its low pH, high osmotic pressure, hydrogen peroxide production and bioactive compounds work together to inhibit the growth of harmful microorganisms, thereby reducing the infectious burden on the immune system. Research further suggests that honey can stimulate cytokine production from monocytes, activating both innate and adaptive immune responses. This immunomodulatory effect enables the body to respond effectively to infections without triggering excessive inflammation. In addition, honey supports respiratory health by soothing coughs, reducing throat irritation and improving sleep quality during upper respiratory infections, indirectly aiding immune recovery.

The role of honey in digestive health is equally significant. Honey contains oligosaccharides that act as prebiotics, promoting the growth of beneficial gut bacteria such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium. A healthy gut microbiome is essential for proper digestion, nutrient absorption and immune regulation. Honey has also been



found to protect the gastric mucosa, reduce acid-induced injury and inhibit Helicobacter pylori, a bacterium associated with gastritis and peptic ulcer disease. The natural enzymes present in honey assist in carbohydrate digestion, while its mild laxative effect, especially when consumed with warm water, can help relieve constipation. Furthermore, honey's anti-inflammatory properties soothe the intestinal lining, making it useful in conditions such as indigestion and mild irritable bowel

symptoms.

Honey can be consumed in various simple and health-promoting ways. Taken with warm water in the morning, it supports digestion and bowel regularity. When combined with lemon or ginger, it enhances immune defense and respiratory health. Consuming honey with milk provides energy and supports sleep and recovery. It can also be used as a natural sweetener in tea, cereals and baked goods, though moderation is advised. Beyond dietary use,

medical-grade honey is widely applied in wound care due to its antimicrobial and tissue-healing properties. Raw or minimally processed honey is generally preferred, as excessive heating can reduce its enzymatic and antioxidant activity.

The benefits of honey include its role as a natural source of antioxidants and bioactive compounds, its ability to support immune function and reduce infection risk, its positive effects on digestion and gut health, and its antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties. Honey also offers a better glycemic response compared to refined sugar when used moderately, and it holds therapeutic potential in wound healing and respiratory ailments. However, honey does have certain limitations. Its high sugar content means excessive consumption may contribute to weight gain and poor glycemic control, particularly in individuals with diabetes. Adulteration is another concern, as commercially available honey may be mixed with syrups, reducing its nutritional value. Allergic reactions, though rare, can occur, especially in individuals sensitive to pollen. Therefore, honey should be consumed judiciously and sourced from reliable, high-quality producers.

In conclusion, honey is far more than a natural sweetener. It is a scientifically validated functional food with significant medical relevance. Its capacity to enhance immune responses, support digestive health, combat pathogens and reduce oxidative stress positions honey as a valuable adjunct in preventive nutrition and holistic healthcare. While it should not be regarded as a substitute for medical treatment, moderate and informed use of honey can contribute meaningfully to overall well-being.

The author is a Faculty, Science Department Sri Amritsar Sahib Punjab

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8:00PM On January 18<sup>th</sup> , Sunday







# J&K Culture goes digital as Chief Secretary launches new website

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEBRUARY 09:** Chief Secretary of Jammu & Kashmir, Atal Dulloo, today launched the newly developed official website of the Department of Culture, marking a major step towards digital governance and improved public access to cultural services. The portal has been designed to provide comprehensive information on the cultural heritage, activities, and initiatives of the Department.

The website was launched in presence of Principal Secretary, Culture Department; Secretary, IT; ED, Mubarak Mandi Heritage Society; Secretary, J&K AAC&L and other concerned officers.

The website, <https://culture.jk.gov.in>, serves as a single digital window for citizens, artists, researchers, and institutions to access departmental information, cultural resources, and public services in a transparent and user-friendly manner.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Secretary described it as a significant step towards leveraging technology for preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, while enhancing citizen



engagement and service delivery under the Digital J&K initiative. A key upcoming feature of the

portal as described by Principal Secretary, Culture, Brij Mohan Sharma is the Online Auditorium and Hall Booking Facilities belonging to the Department which will allow users to check availability and submit booking requests digitally. The system is aimed at ensuring transparency, efficiency, and ease of access to cultural infrastructure across the Union Territory.

The portal offers detailed sections on departmental profile, divisions, legislation, projects, and both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It also provides real-time updates on events, orders, circulars, and official notifications.

The website hosts rich digital galleries showcasing monuments, festivals, performances, archaeological artefacts, sculptures, terracotta objects, traditional jewellery, and other cultural assets, reflecting the diverse and vibrant heritage of Jammu & Kashmir.

The Department of Culture reiterated its commitment to safeguarding, promoting, and digitally documenting the cultural legacy of Jammu & Kashmir through modern, accessible, and transparent platforms.

## Budget discussion resumes in Legislative Assembly

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEBRUARY 09:** The discussion on Budget 2026-27 resumed in Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly on Monday with Legislators holding detailed deliberations on government's financial proposals and policy priorities.

Initiating the debate today, Legislator Dr. Sajjad Shafi Uri described the Budget as the best possible within the resources available to the government. He said that Budget reflects a balanced approach, addressing the key social welfare concerns while ensuring fiscal prudence.

He highlighted fee waivers for the students from economically weaker families, free transport facilities for the persons with disabilities among other things in the budget.

Legislator Altaf Ahmad Wani said that no decision should be taken without the consent of the concerned MLA. He stressed the need for upgradation of the health sector in Anantnag district and raised concerns over the closure of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence in Katra.

Legislator Balwant Singh Mankotia urged the government to fulfil promises made to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. He highlighted the need to address the issue of daily wagers.

In his address, MLA Mohammad Yousuf Rather (Tarigami) said that industrial development should be a priority for the government to create employment opportunities for the youth. He stressed that locals must be preferred for employment in industries set up in Jammu and Kashmir.

He also raised the issues of daily wagers and persons with disabilities, seeking concrete measures to safeguard their rights and welfare.

MLA Shopian, Shabir Ahmad Kullay, said that the overall development and livelihoods of people in the region have been severely affected due to recent incidents. He appealed all Members of the House to maintain the decorum of the Assembly to ensure smooth and uninterrupted proceedings. He also demanded macadamization of roads, upgradation of tourism spots, filling of the vacant post of relief under KCC loans, establishment of Controlled Atmosphere (CA) stores and resolution of No Objection Certificate (NoC) issues by the Forest Department for road macadamization and upgradation in his constituency.

Participating in the debate, Legislator Ghulam Ahmad Mir welcomed enhancement of Marriage Assistance Schemes, Old Age Pension and support for specially-abled persons in the last budget.

Mir demanded regularization of daily wagers and need-based employees, whose attendance data

is available through biometric systems. He also sought construction of the Anantnag-Doda road, establishment of an ITI institute, completion of the Receiving Station at Dhudwajan, compensation for crops under KCC and early conduct of Panchayati elections to strengthen democracy at the grassroots level.

In his address, Legislator MLA Waheed ur Rehman Para expressed concern over rising unemployment among youth and urged the government to generate adequate employment opportunities for them. He proposed establishment of deemed universities in every district of Jammu and Kashmir to enable students to pursue higher education within their home districts. He also demanded establishment of a Cancer Hospital in J&K.

Joining the debate, Legislator Arvind Gupta demanded the subjects like brain drain should have been touched and addressed in the budget 2026-27. He also raised issues including water, tourism, employment and other issues in the house.

Speaking during the debate, MLA Daleep Singh said that the government should have announced packages of upgradation of power, tourism and agriculture sectors. He said that unconnected habitations and tourist spots should be connected through robust road network and also asked for upgradation of education facilities in his Constituency.

Speaking during the debate, MLA Javid Ahmad Mirchal appreciated the Chief Minister for coming up with the pro-people budget terming it as a vision document for underprivileged and relief to all. He appreciated the army for active role and rescue during natural disasters and providing employment sources to the people in frontier areas of Karnah.

He asserted on tourism promotion and setting up required facilities including cable care service in Karnah. He also demanded relief packages for the affected families, hit during unfavourable situation, better healthcare including trauma hospital, education facilities, filling of vacancies and other facilities.

Speaking in favour of the Budget, Legislator Peerzada Feroze Ahmad said that it touches every sector and every section of the society. He highlighted that health, road network and other sectors have witnessed enormous boost and free bus service and restoration of Darbar Move are among the various promises which have been kept by this government.

Joining the debate, MLA Vijay Kumar demanded staff strengthening in sub district hospital and other healthcare facilities in Hiranagar Constituency. He also raised the issues related to education and power sectors.

Speaking in support of the Budget, MLA Iftikar Ahmad congratulated the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah for people-friendly budget. He expressed gratitude for the Carh Lab

facility at GMC Rajouri. Citing recent road accident in Rajouri, where in a youth lost his life, the Legislator said that there is a dire need of an air-ambulance service facility for the border areas.

He also said that tangible steps be taken for fast track filling up of vacant posts in different departments in Rajouri district.

Joining the debate, Legislator Dr. Rameshwar Singh supported the Budget as people centric. He said that it is historic that a first of its kind event was held for tourism promotion in Bani.

He said that free education, six gas cylinders for poor and other announcements are welcome and will help the end beneficiaries on the ground.

He appreciated the government for restoration of Darbar Move and urged that steps be taken for development of infrastructure for tourism promotion in Bani areas.

Speaking in support of the Budget, MLA Zafar Ali Khatana said that this government has provided road connectivity and water supply to various habitations which were unconnected for last 79 years.

He demanded that Warwan and Margan-Pass areas be brought on the tourist map for their promotion as tourist destinations. He also demanded upgradation of the 50 bedded hospital and establishment of trauma hospital for hassle-free health services to the patients in his Constituency. He also underlined the need to train the teachers for different subjects to cater to the demand in far flung areas.

Legislator, Mohan Lal Bhagat said that Budget had no mention of issues related to employment and regularization of daily wagers. He added that the issues of Asha workers, chowkidars and others have also been left out.

He further said that the tourism is the backbone of J&K's economy and special focus be given on this sector, particularly in Chenab and Pir Panjal areas of Jammu region.

Speaking in support of the Budget, Legislator, Ali Mohammad Dar appreciated the government for announcing various measures including free education, adding that facility of free gas cylinders is a revolutionary step of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's administration.

He appreciated the government for various developmental initiatives undertaken in his Chadoora Constituency.

He demanded complete ban on mining activities in Shaliganga Nallah in Chadoora and demanded upgradation of health facilities, work on irrigation project in his Constituency.

Joining the debate, MLA Shagun Parihar raised various issues related to her Constituency. She demanded improvement in power supply, health and upgradation of tourism infrastructure in Kishtwar.

## Maiden NSS Special Winter Camp concludes at GDC Ramkote with Valedictory function

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**KATHUA, FEBRUARY 09:** The NSS Special Winter Camp concluded today at Government Degree College Ramkote with a grand valedictory function. Principal Government Degree College Hiranagar Dr. Pragya Khanna was the Chief Guest. She was accompanied by faculty members from her college Prof. Rakesh Sharma and Dr. Shapia Shamim.

The formal session opened with a welcome address by the NSS Convener, Dr. Suresh. He expressed gratitude to the guests and commended the volunteers for their dedication throughout the camp.

Prof. Pankaj Nandan, IQAC Convener congratulated the volunteers for successfully completing seven day special winter camp. The Camp Report, highlighting the week-long activities, was presented by NSS volunteers Hritika and Tanu. Prof. Anu Sharma, NSS PO, congratulated the volunteers for their dedication and summarized the achievements that the volunteers undertook as a part of social responsibility.

A poignant moment of the ceremony was the personal reflections and experiences of the camp shared by volunteers Hritika and Neha Devi.

The atmosphere was further energized by a spirited group presentation of the NSS Song by Tania, Reeta, Seema Devi, Reenu Devi and Priya Devi.

The Chief Guest lauded the GDC Ramkote and emphasized the role of youth in nation-building, urging volunteers to carry the camp's lessons into their daily lives. To recognize the excellence, awards were given to the high achievers of the camp.

The ceremony transitioned into a vibrant cultural segment, showcasing the artistic talent of the volunteers. A soulful Dogri song titled "jammu diya kandyen bar khilagi" was performed by Tania Sharma.

The host college Principal hailed the successful execution of the winter camp. The college presidium members were given their title badges by the Chief Guest. As a token of appreciation and memory, the college honored the Chief Guest with a memento.

## Government Of Jammu & Kashmir OFFICE OF THE TEHSILDAR KALANTRA / KREERI

Subject: Application of GHULAM MOHAMMAD GOJJER DEADER S/O MOHD ABDULLAH GOJJAR DEADER for the issuance of R/O..BANDI BALA ( SCHEDULE TRIBE Gujar and Bakerwal )in favour of self & ZAHID AHMAD , SHAHID AHMAD & SHAFAYAT AHMAD R/O BANDI BALA

### PUBLIC NOTICE

Regarding the subject cited above, the applicant has submitted the file in the office of the undersigned for the issuance of ST . in this connection a report of patwari halqa concerned has been sought which reveals that the applicant is currently residing in village BANDI BALLA and belongs to the ST caste and GOJJER DEADER community, having annual income is 150000 the details of the family of the applicant are as follows

- 1...GH MOHD GOJJAR DEADER self 62 years Labour
- 2.... HALEEMA BEGUM wife 60 years H/W
- 3...ZAHID AHMAD Son 20 years student
- 4...SHAHID AHMAD son 17 years student
- 5..SHAFAYAT AHMAD son 13 years student

The applicant has applied for Issuance of ST ( SCHEDULE TRIBE Gujar & Bakerwal ) certificate in favour of Self

If anyone have any objection to the issuance of delay order of said certificate certificate shall present his/her claim this office within 07 days, after that no objection shall be entertained.

NAIB TEHSILDAR KREERI

## Public Notice

IT is hereby notified that my "Daughter "going to apply for Birth certificate in Block Development office Handwara, Bron at Handwara, Namely NABIHA ,D/o. SHAHZADA ZIE UL REHMAN R/o: KHAHIPORA RAJWAR, HANDWARA under DOB: 15-07-202.If anybody having any objection in this regard he/ she may file his /her objection in the office of the Block Development Office Handwara with in 07 days .After that no objection shall be entertained.

**Name: NABIHA , D/O: SHAHZADA ZIE UL REHMAN, R/o: KHAHIPORA RAJWAR HANDWARA DOB: 15-07-2021, BDO office: HANDWARA**

## Government Of Jammu & Kashmir OFFICE OF THE TEHSILDAR KALANTRA / KREERI

Subject: Application of ARSHID ASLAM DEADER S/O MOHD ASLAM DEADER for the issuance of R/O..BANDI BALA ( SCHEDULE TRIBE Gujar and Bakerwal )in favour of self

### PUBLIC NOTICE

Regarding the subject cited above, the applicant has submitted the file in the office of the undersigned for the issuance of ST . in this connection a report of patwari halqa concerned has been sought which reveals that the applicant is currently residing in village BANDI BALLA and belongs to the ST caste and GOJJER DEADER community, having annual income is 150000 the details of the family of the applicant are as follows

- 1...MOHD ASLAM DEADER Father 65 years Labour
- 2.... KHATOON BEGUM Mother 62 years H/W
- 3...ISHFAQ AHMAD Brother 27 years Labour
- 4...NASREENA BEGUM sister in Law 25 years H/W
- 5..OSMAN ISHFAQ Nephew 04 years infant
- 6..ISHAN ISHFAQ // 02 years //
- 7....ARSHID ASLAM self 19 years student

The applicant has applied for Issuance of ST ( SCHEDULE TRIBE Gujar & Bakerwal ) certificate in favour of Self

If anyone have any objection to the issuance of delay order of said certificate certificate shall present his/her claim this office within 07 days, after that no objection shall be entertained.

NAIB TEHSILDAR KREERI

## Government Of Jammu & Kashmir Office Of The Tehsildar Kreeri

Subject: Application BILAL AHMAD GANAI S/O GH MOHI UD DIN GANAI R/O BURZAWACHAN for issuance of RBA certificate in favour of self for the issuance of RBA in his /her / their favor

### PUBLIC NOTICE

Regarding the subject cited above the file in the office of the undersigned for the issuance of RBA in this connection a report of patwari halqa concerned has been sought which reveals that the applicant is currently residing in the village of BURZAWACHAN of Tehsil KREERI and belongs to the GANAI community having annual income 410200// the details of family of the applicant are as follows

- 1.GH MOHI DIN GANAI Father 65 years Farmer
- 2..BILAL AHMAD GANAI self 29 years pravit Teacher ...
- 3....AMRATA BILAL wife 24 years H/W
- 4...MUSKAN JAN sister 19 years student

If anyone have any objection to the issuance of delay order of said certificate certificate shall present his/her claim this office within 07 days, after that no objection shall be entertained.

Naib Tehsild Kreeri

## Government Of Jammu & Kashmir OFFICE OF THE TEHSILDAR KALANTRA / KREERI

Subject: Application of ARSHID ASLAM DEADER S/O MOHD ASLAM DEADER for the issuance of R/O..BANDI BALA ( SCHEDULE TRIBE Gujar and Bakerwal )in favour of self

### PUBLIC NOTICE

Regarding the subject cited above, the applicant has submitted the file in the office of the undersigned for the issuance of ST . in this connection a report of patwari halqa concerned has been sought which reveals that the applicant is currently residing in village BANDI BALLA and belongs to the ST caste and GOJJER DEADER community, having annual income is 150000 the details of the family of the applicant are as follows

- 1...MOHD ASLAM DEADER Father 65 years Labour
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- 7....ARSHID ASLAM self 19 years student

The applicant has applied for Issuance of ST ( SCHEDULE TRIBE Gujar & Bakerwal ) certificate in favour of Self

If anyone have any objection to the issuance of delay order of said certificate certificate shall present his/her claim this office within 07 days, after that no objection shall be entertained.

NAIB TEHSILDAR KREERI

## Public Notice

My son's name has been wrongly mentioned as MOHD AAZIM S/O MUSHTAQ AHMAD RATHER R/O SAFAPORA ASHAM in his Date of Birth certificate while his correct name is AAZIM MUSHTAQ S/O MUSHTAQ AHMAD RATHER R/O ASHAM SAFAPORA SONAWARI which needs to be corrected if anybody having any objection in this regard he/she may file his/her objection in the office of TEHSIL OFFICE WAGOORA / BDO WAGOORA within seven days from the publication of this notice after that no objection will be entertained

**Name...MUSHTAQ AHMAD RATHER F/O...AAZIM MUSHTAQ R/O ...ASHAM SAFAPORA SONAWARI Distt....BANDIPORA**





# India-US trade deal 'Bonanza' for apparel and textile industry: HKL Magu

■ SOURAV SHEKHAR

**NEW DELHI, FEB 9 (UNI):** HKL Magu, former chairperson, Apparel Export Promotion Council (APEC), said that India's textile and apparel industry is set for a major growth phase following the recent developments in the India-US trade deal. In a telephonic interview with UNI, Magu described this situation as a 'bonanza' for exporters.

Speaking on the impact of the latest executive orders and trade agreements, Magu said, "Indian manufacturers are now far better placed to compete globally, especially in the US market."

According to him, the removal of the earlier tariff burden has significantly improved India's competitiveness.

After tariffs were imposed around April 2025, Indian export-

ers had struggled to retain buyers, as higher duties made their products less attractive compared to rival countries.

To prevent buyers from shifting elsewhere, exporters were forced to offer steep discounts of 15-20 per cent, squeezing margins across the sector.

The situation has now changed decisively. With the 25 per cent penalty removed and a second executive order expected to reduce tariffs further to around 18 per cent, Indian textile exporters are regaining lost ground. Magu pointed out that this places India in a stronger position compared to several competing countries.

While nations such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia face duties ranging from 19 to 20 per cent, and China as high as 34 per cent, India's lower tariff



structure gives it a clear pricing advantage.

"This will make us the most competitive supplier in many categories," Magu said, adding that the benefits will be felt across the value chain, including small and medium businesses.

Lower tariffs mean better order

flows, improved margins, and the ability to scale operations without excessive discounting.

He also highlighted the broader global opportunity opening up for Indian textiles.

Along with the momentum in the US market, India has recently entered into a free trade agreement

with the European Union, covering 27 countries.

While exports to Europe may take some time to fully pick up, Magu said the agreement strengthens India's long-term position in global apparel and textile trade.

However, he cautioned that the industry must act quickly to capitalise on the opportunity. Capacity expansion will be critical, particularly in addressing labour availability.

"The main challenge now will be labour," he said, stressing the need for better workforce planning, higher availability of skilled workers, and improved working conditions to support increased production.

Magu expressed confidence that the sector is on the cusp of strong growth. He estimated that India's textile and apparel business could increase by at least USD 2-3

billion in the coming year, driven largely by renewed demand from the US market.

Overall, the easing of tariffs and strengthening of trade ties are expected to provide a strong boost to India's textile exports, restoring buyer confidence and positioning the industry for sustained expansion in the global market.

Even the Textile Ministry said that for exports, the India-US trade deal will open up USD 118 billion global markets of textiles, apparel and made ups.

As the United States being India's largest export destination of around USD 10.5 billion exports which comprises around 70 per cent apparel and 15 per cent made ups, this is a major opportunity. It's expected to play a crucial role in India achieving its intended target of USD 100 billion exports in 2030. UNI

## Market valuation of eight of top 10 firms spikes by Rs 4.55 trillion

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, FEB 9:** The combined market valuation of eight of the top 10 valued firms spiked by Rs 4.55 trillion last week. In the list, Reliance Industries emerged as the biggest winner.

Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finance, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers, while Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys faced losses.

Reliance Industries added Rs 1,41,887.97 crore,



taking its market valuation to Rs 19,63,358.79 crore.

LIC's valuation zoomed from Rs 64,926.1 crore to Rs 5,70,198.54 crore.

HDFC Bank's valuation advanced by Rs 32,350.28 crore to Rs 14,48,249.63 crore, and that of ICICI Bank jumped Rs 52,476.97 crore to Rs 10,06,258.82 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of Bajaj Finance climbed Rs 48,659.83 crore to Rs 6,10,830.20 crore, while that of State Bank of India rose from Rs 45,460.79 crore to Rs 9,84,353.06 crore.

The market valuation of Bharti Airtel surged by Rs 52,516.39 crore to Rs 11,62,288.64 crore, and that of Hindustan Unilever appreciated by Rs 17,058.03 crore to Rs 5,69,482.18 crore.

TCS eroded by Rs 88,172.8 crore to Rs 10,64,242.35 crore, while Infosys declined by Rs 63,462.66 crore to Rs 6,26,067.95 crore.

In a rank-wise analysis, Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm, followed by HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, TCS, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, Bajaj Finance, LIC, and Hindustan Unilever.

On Friday, the stock market shed previous losses in a volatile session with the Nifty trading near 25,700. At close, the Sensex was up 266.47 points or 0.32 per cent at 83,580.40, and the Nifty was up 50.90 points or 0.20 per cent at 25,693.70. UNI

## CREDAI Hyderabad property show clocks Rs 300 cr sales, signals strong buyer confidence

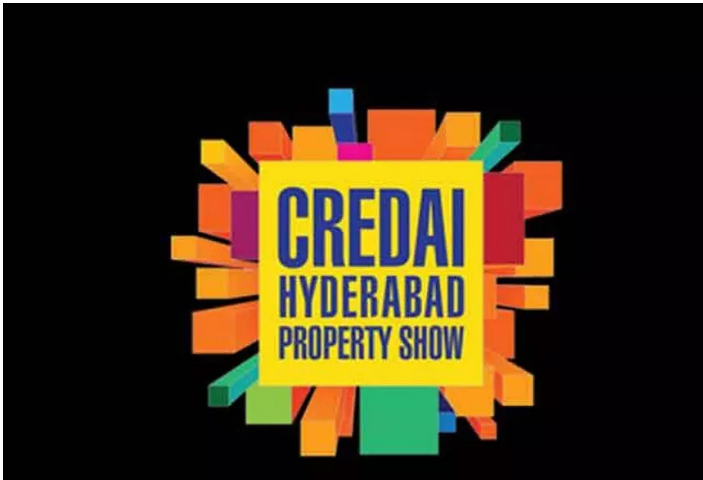
■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, FEB 9:** The three-day CREDAI Hyderabad Property Show 2026 concluded on a high note, generating property sales worth Rs 300 crore and creating a business pipeline estimated at Rs 1,000 crore, reflecting strong buyer confidence in 'Brand Hyderabad'.

Organised by the Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI), the event highlighted the growing inclination of homebuyers to make Hyderabad their

permanent home. Industry leaders said sustained infrastructure growth, expanding employment opportunities through global capability centres (GCCs), and proactive governance were driving demand across residential and commercial segments.

A panel discussion featuring leading real estate content creators concluded that Hyderabad was poised to lead real estate growth over the next decade, supported by competitive pricing, robust commercial development and diverse housing



options.

CREDAI Hyderabad president N Jaideep Reddy said the city's culture, lifestyle and economic opportunities had positioned it as one of India's most resilient real estate markets, while urging buyers to invest only in RERA-approved projects.

The event also saw strong buyer engagement, with several enquiries translating into site visits and advanced negotiations, reinforcing Hyderabad's long-term growth prospects, according to a statement released on Sunday. UNI

## Bartronics bets on Voice-First AI Platform to scale rural Agritech Business

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, FEB 9:** Bartronics India Limited (BIL) is strengthening its agritech business strategy with plans to launch a voice-first, multilingual, AI-powered rural technology platform in March, following a successful pilot in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

The pilot phase delivered strong farmer engagement and validated Bartronics' business model, supported by assured off-take linkages through partnerships with SNN and Origo Commodities, the Hyderabad based company said in a release today.

These linkages are expected to strengthen supply-chain integration and enhance monetisation opportunities across procurement and market access services.

As part of its scale-up strategy, the company is upgrading the platform to offer AI-driven, voice-first interactions in English, Hindi, Marathi, Telugu and Kannada.

Market benchmarking and farmer feedback highlighted voice technology as a key differentiator, enabling



faster adoption in rural markets and reducing customer acquisition and support costs.

The AI voice architecture is being developed by Ampivo Smart Technologies.

The conversational voice layer is expected to convert the platform into a digital assistant rather than a simple transactional app, improving retention and lifetime value as adoption expands.

Beyond advisory services, the platform is designed to build a structured, consent-driven farmer data asset, enabling integration with eMandis, output marketplaces and agri-financial ecosystems. This data

layer is also expected to open future revenue streams through participation in climate and sustainability-linked initiatives such as carbon credit programmes and climate-positive agriculture projects.

Commenting on the initiative under Project Avio Agritech, Managing Director Vidhya Sagar Reddy said the company aims to build a unified rural intelligence layer connecting farmers to markets and climate-linked opportunities. Bartronics has set a target to onboard 20 million farmers over the next three years, positioning the platform as a key growth engine in its rural and agritech portfolio. UNI

## Ramesh Watch Company expands Luxury Portfolio with Britime London launch in Hyderabad

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, FEB 9:** Strengthening its presence in the premium watch retail segment, Ramesh Watch Company has introduced British luxury automatic watch brand Britime London at its flagship outlet in Jubilee Hills here on Saturday.

The launch marks Britime London's formal entry into the Telangana market, positioning Hyderabad as a strategic growth hub.

The move aligns with Ramesh Watch Company's strategy to upscale its product mix amid rising demand for premium mechanical timepieces.

Britime London's 2026 collection features in-house automatic movements, surgical-grade 316 stainless steel cases, and sapphire crystal glass—specifications aimed at consumers seeking durability, craftsmanship, and long-term value.

Speaking on the occasion, Ramesh Watch Company Managing Director Rohit Chugani, said "Britime London brings mechanical excellence and contemporary British design that complements our premium portfolio. The launch enhances our value proposition both in-store and online."

Founded in 1948 by Gulabrai Chugani, Ramesh Watch Company currently operates 11 stores across Telangana and is set on an aggressive expansion in South India, he announced plans to double its retail footprint over the next four years, driven by strong momentum in the Indian watch market.

As part of its immediate expansion strategy, we are planning to enter Andhra Pradesh within the next two months, opening two new stores one each in Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada.

Commenting on industry trends, he said that the Indian watch market, valued at around ₹15,000 crore, is witnessing robust growth of 25-30 per cent annually, creating significant opportunities for organised and premium retailers.

Hiren Morbia, Founder of Sanskruti Time Group, said the partnership provides immediate access to a trusted retail network.

"Ramesh Watch Company's strong customer relationships and after-sales capabilities make it an ideal launch partner as we scale in India," he noted.

With over 78 years of legacy and 10 outlets across Hyderabad, Ramesh Watch Company plans to leverage its footprint to drive brand visibility.

The Britime range is now available at the Jubilee Hills store and across the retailer's Hyderabad network, marking the first phase of the brand's South India expansion. UNI

## India, US move closer to bilateral trade pact with interim framework

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, FEB 9:** The United States and India on Saturday announced that they have reached a framework for an Interim Trade Agreement, marking a significant step toward strengthening economic ties and advancing negotiations for a comprehensive Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), according to a joint statement released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The framework reaffirms commitments made during the launch of BTA negotiations by US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 13, 2025.

As part of the agreement, India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of food and agricultural products.

These include dried distillers' grains, red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruits, soybean oil,

wine, spirits, and several other items.

The United States, meanwhile, will apply a reciprocal tariff rate of 18 percent on Indian-origin goods under an existing executive order.

These goods include textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, plastic and rubber products, organic chemicals, home décor, artisanal items, and certain categories of machinery.

The US has also committed to removing reciprocal tariffs on a range of Indian exports, including generic pharmaceuticals, gems and diamonds, and aircraft parts.

In addition, Washington will remove tariffs imposed on certain Indian aircraft and aircraft parts under national security-related proclamations covering aluminum, steel, and copper imports.

India, in turn, will receive preferential tariff-rate quotas for automotive parts exported to the US, subject to American

national security requirements.

Negotiated outcomes for Indian generic pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical ingredients will depend on the findings of an ongoing US Section 232 investigation.

Both sides agreed to provide preferential market access to each other in sectors of mutual interest on a sustained basis and to establish clear rules of origin to ensure that the benefits of the agreement accrue primarily to the two countries.

The framework also addresses long-standing non-tariff barriers affecting bilateral trade. India is committed to resolving issues related to US medical devices, easing restrictive import licensing procedures for information and communication technology goods, and reviewing the acceptance of US-developed or international standards for certain sectors within six months of the agreement's entry into force. India also agreed to address barriers

affecting US food and agricultural exports.

To improve regulatory cooperation, the two countries plan to hold discussions on standards and conformity assessment procedures in mutually agreed sectors. They also agreed that any future changes to tariffs by either country would allow the other to modify its commitments accordingly.

The statement further noted that both sides will continue negotiations to expand market access under the broader BTA. The United States said it would take into consideration India's request for further reductions in tariffs on Indian goods during the talks.

The framework places strong emphasis on economic security cooperation, including steps to counter non-market policies of third countries, strengthen supply chain resilience, and enhance coordination on investment reviews

and export controls. India also announced plans to purchase USD 500 billion worth of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products, and coking coal over the next five years.

Trade in advanced technology products, including graphics processing units and data centre-related equipment, is expected to increase, alongside expanded joint technology cooperation. The two countries also committed to addressing barriers to digital trade and setting a clear pathway for robust and mutually beneficial digital trade rules as part of the BTA.

Both governments will move quickly to implement the framework and work toward finalising the Interim Agreement, with the ultimate objective of concluding a comprehensive Bilateral Trade Agreement in line with the agreed roadmap. UNI





# Siraj Answers Last-Minute Call

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD:** Mohammed Siraj had just finished leading Hyderabad in the league stage of the Ranji Trophy in back-to-back games. Since his team didn't make the knockouts, he had put his feet up, planned to travel to Madrid next week for a football match between Real Madrid and Real Sociedad, and then planned to be with his family during Ramzan before the IPL.

"Miyan bag pack karke aaja (pack your bags and come)," Siraj recalled, after getting a message from India T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav. Siraj immediately told him not to mess with him. When Suryakumar again said that he wasn't joking and Siraj had to join the India team for the T20 World Cup, Siraj packed his bags for the flight, joined the team at 3am in Mumbai in the wee hours of the opening day of the World Cup, did some homework on the opposition, then got some sleep. He woke up to a message that he was going to slot right into the XI against USA.

Siraj had not played a T20I since July 2024, not long after India's victory in the previous T20 World Cup. But when he got the chance to open the bowling on Saturday, he made the new ball talk like he had never let it go.

With two quick wickets in his first spell, he and Arshdeep Singh reduced USA to 13 for 3, which set the tone for India to defend their score of 161.

"Almighty changed my destiny in 24 hours," an emotional Siraj said in the press conference after India's 29-run win.

"I was spending time with my family when Adrian (Le Roux, India's strength and conditioning coach) messaged me to ask what I was up to. I told him, 'don't message me right now, I'm resting after playing two four-day games. I need rest.'"

Not only was Siraj's call-up sudden, as a late injury replacement for Harshit Rana, but it also came with some luck. When Siraj joined the squad, India's ace fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah was down with an illness and didn't train with the side on the eve of the game. If India wanted to play two fast bowlers, Siraj was the only option to partner Arshdeep.

On what he described as a two-paced pitch, Siraj corrected his length quickly after being smashed for six on his second ball. His supple wrists pitched one in the channel outside off which Andries Gous drove uppishly straight to point. In his next over, Siraj alternated between that length and his lethal back-of-a-delivery that nips off the pitch, and this time Saiteja Mukkamalla mistimed one straight to midwicket. With two wickets in eight deliveries, Siraj had shown his time away from the T20I set-up hadn't taken much edge off his A game.

"Since I was coming here after Ranji Trophy, I stuck to similar line and length here," Siraj said. "I saw that when we were batting, the new ball wasn't coming on easily on the bat. So my plan was also to bowl wicket-to-wicket which worked and helped the team. I'm very happy that the execution worked out and I got those wickets."

Siraj didn't change his game in those months when he was out of the T20I side,

nor did he change his phone wallpaper from the poster of his football hero Cristiano Ronaldo, with the text "BELIEVE" that had motivated him to seal India's emphatic win on the last day of the Oval Test in England last year. His approach to playing at the highest level stayed the same too.

"You have to be mentally ready to play in a World Cup," he said. "Now I'm also closing in on 10 years since I started playing for India, I have been with the team continuously, and for long enough to know how to prepare in this format, and what kind of mindset to have. So while going to bed at night I told myself to just stick to the things that have worked for me so far, and that's what I did today."

Joining a team at 3am in a format he hasn't played in a while is not new for Siraj. Early in December, Siraj had been called up suddenly by Hyderabad in the middle of the 20-over Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, a tournament he hadn't played in four years. On that occasion too, Siraj quickly hopped on a flight from Hyderabad to join his side in Kolkata late at night and played the next evening to return with frugal figures of 4-0-15-1 that restricted Uttar Pradesh to 127 and set up a three-wicket win.

On Saturday against USA, Siraj also struck on the last ball to seal India's victory, which might make him forget about his late-night flight, the "shock" call-up and surge of emotions as the crowd chanted his nickname "DSP, DSP" when he opened the bowling. The only compromise is, he might have to watch that La Liga game in his hotel room.



## Indian Army Felicitates Young Hockey Star Hanan Nazir in Handwara

DR. AB QAYOOM

**LANGATE, FEB 09:** The Indian Army on Monday felicitated national-level hockey player Hanan Nazir at his residence in village Kulangam, Handwara, in a gesture that highlighted the force's commitment to encouraging youth and sports talent in the region. Hanan Nazir, who belongs to a humble family, has created history by becoming the only hockey player from District Kupwara to



represent the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir in the Under-14 National School Hockey Championship held in Madhya Pradesh. His remarkable achievement has brought pride and recognition not only to his family but to the entire district. From the remote fields of Kupwara to the national sports arena, Hanan's journey stands as a powerful example of determination, discipline and hard work. His success proves that talent, when supported and nurtured, can rise beyond all limitations.

During the felicitation ceremony, Army personnel praised Hanan's dedication and encouraged him to continue striving for excellence. They also emphasized the role of sports in building character, unity and a healthy future for the youth. The event was attended by Hanan's parents, neighbours and local residents, who expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Indian Army for motivating young athletes and standing with them in their pursuit of success. Hanan Nazir's story serves as an inspiration for countless young boys and girls across Kupwara and beyond, showing that with courage, commitment and support, dreams can indeed turn into reality.

## Hetmyer puts his hand up to fill Pooran-sized hole at No. 3

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**BENGALURU:** Shimron Hetmyer landed in Kolkata less than 24 hours before West Indies opened their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign. By then, the rest of the squad had already trained together and played a warm-up in Bengaluru, while Hetmyer was delayed by what the team described as a "minor visa issue".

Unconfirmed reports suggested the delay was because the passport he carried to South Africa did not contain his India visa. For most, it would have been a small logistical issue, but for Hetmyer, it reopened an old chapter.

In 2022, Hetmyer was dropped from the T20 World Cup squad after he missed two flights to Australia ahead of a bilateral series that preceded the global

tournament. Cricket West Indies at the time said that "actions have consequences". The episode has lingered since, colouring perceptions of his commitment, particularly for a player whose T20 value stretches across leagues worldwide.

So when Hetmyer walked in at No. 3 against Scotland at Eden Gardens, with West Indies sliding from 54 for no loss to 58 for 2 in the ninth over, the innings carried added significance. The run rate hovered around six, the middle overs were threatening to drift, and Scotland had the opportunity to take the upper hand with just one more wicket.

He was welcomed with spin, and why not? Across 2023 and 2024, Hetmyer had been slowed down by spin, averaging 19.92 at a strike rate of 121.3 against it, but in 2025, he addressed that weakness head-on. His strike rate



against spin jumped to 162.44 and his average to 39.94, effectively removing the most obvious tactic teams had used against him.

The plan simply did not work.

Hetmyer began decisively, as he often does when playing as a finisher, taking on debutant

left-arm spinner Oliver Davidson. He stepped into the line and drilled Davidson straight over long-off. Michael Leask followed, his part-time offspin sent flat and hard over wide long-on.

When Scotland turned to Mark Watt, their most reliable spinner, Hetmyer struck consecutive sixes - first over midwicket, then over deep-backward square. Safyaan Sharif brought his pace to try to cramp him for room; he was swivel-pulled over deep square leg. When Sharif pushed it wider, Hetmyer extended his arms and drove him cleanly over covers. Davidson returned in the 14th over and tried to keep the ball away. Hetmyer waited and lifted him over extra cover to bring up a 22-ball fifty, the fastest by a West Indian in men's T20 World Cups.

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