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LG Sinha Unveils 'Kashmir-Nativity Regained', Reaffirms Commitment to Pandits' Dignified Return

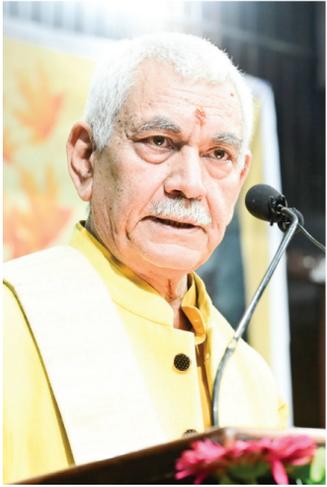
Calls book a powerful testament to resilience; says J&K on path of transformation and terror-free future

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU FEB 19: Manoj Sinha on Thursday released "Kashmir-Nativity Regained", a book by Ashok Kaul that chronicles the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits and the enduring trauma of displacement, describing it as a significant contribution to preserving historical truth.

Speaking at the function in Jammu, the Lieutenant Governor reiterated that the safe and dignified return of Kashmiri Pandits remains a firm commitment of Narendra Modi. He said Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed sweeping changes since 2019, asserting that efforts to destabilize the Union Territory and undermine its progress have been effectively countered.

The book delves into the events of 1989-90, portraying the fear, violence and emotional rupture that forced thousands of families to flee their ancestral homes. Sinha described the publication as more than a



literary work, calling it an attempt to confront decades of silence surrounding one of the most painful chapters in the region's history.

He lauded the Kashmiri Pandit community for safeguarding its cultural and spiritual heritage despite displacement, saying their perseverance reflects an indomitable spirit. "Even in adversity, they preserved their language, traditions and philosophy while achieving success across fields," he said.

Highlighting government initiatives, Sinha referred to the 2021 launch of the Kashmiri Migrant web portal aimed at facilitating the restoration of properties belonging to displaced families. He emphasized that the administration is working to ensure justice for victims of terrorism, including families of innocent Kashmiri Muslims who also suffered at the hands of Pakistan-backed militants.

Turn on Page 2

Assembly Clears Multi-Crore Grants After Marathon Debate

Omar Abdullah Charts Reform Agenda, Promises Jobs Drive, Power Expansion and Relief for Daily Wagers



HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEB 19: The Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly on Wednesday passed

Turn on Page 2

All J&K Tourist Spots to Reopen by May, 9 New Destinations on Anvil: Omar Abdullah

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEB 19: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday announced that all tourist destinations currently closed across the Union Territory are likely to reopen by May, as the government accelerates efforts to fully restore the sector following last year's terror attack in Pahalgam.

Winding up the discussion on Demands for Grants in the Assembly, the Chief Minister said the government had adopted a

Turn on Page 2

DPR preparations for Razdan Pass Tunnel to commence shortly: Dy CM

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEB 19: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, stated in the House that preparations for the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the 8-km Razdan Pass Tunnel in Bandipora district will commence shortly.

The Deputy Chief Minister was replying to a question raised by Legislator, Nazir Ahmad Khan (Gurezi), in the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Chief Minister said that the project Tunnel at Razdan Pass shall facilitate all weather connectivity to the strategically important border constituency, Gurez.

Turn on Page 2

PM Modi Unveils MANAV Vision For AI, Pitches For Human Control Of Technology

HT NEWS NETWORK

NEW DELHI, FEB 19: Making a pitch for democratising AI, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday unveiled the 'MANAV' vision for a human-centric approach and use of the fast emerging technology with a strong accent on sovereignty and inclusivity.

Inaugurating the AI Impact Summit here, he said India believes that artificial intelligence will truly serve the good of the world when it is shared and its codes are open, asserting that the country does not fear AI but sees a fortune in it and a blueprint of tomorrow.

Turn on Page 2



NHRC Flags Misuse Of Its Name, Logo By NGOs; Directs Authorities To Take Action

HT NEWS NETWORK

NEW DELHI, FEB 19: The NHRC on Thursday said it has taken cognisance of "misuse of its name and logo" by some NGOs registered under nomenclatures which are "deceptively similar" to it, and issued notices to authorities in all states and UTs to take action within two weeks.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in a statement, observed that continuation of such "illusory names may erode public trust, lead to misuse of mandate, possible misappropriation of funds and create confusion for public authorities" in distinguishing between a

Turn on Page 2

Railway Expansion Plan Gains Momentum in Kashmir Valley

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

JAMMU, FEB 19: The Jammu and Kashmir Government on Thursday announced that final location surveys are currently underway for four proposed railway lines in the Kashmir Valley, marking a significant step toward expanding rail connectivity in the region.

Informing the Legislative Assembly in response to a query by MLA Javid Hassan Baig, the Transport Department said that Northern Railway is carrying out detailed surveys for the proposed Baramulla-Uri, Sopore-Kupwara, Anantnag-Bijbehara-Pahalgam and Kaka-pora-Shopian rail links.

According to the government, the alignments for these cor-

ridors have been finalised in coordination with the concerned district administrations, and the land requirements have already been assessed. It clarified that the projects are presently at the survey stage and will move forward once sanctioned by the Government of India.

Addressing concerns

Turn on Page 2

Govt making necessary arrangements to hold ULB elections in J&K

HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

SRINAGAR, FEB 19: The Government on Thursday said that necessary arrangements are being made for holding Panchayat and Urban Local Bodies (ULB) elections in Jammu & Kashmir at the earliest.

Replying to an unstarred Assembly question tabled by MLA Mir Mohammad Fayaz, the Election Department, according to the news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO) informed that the superintendence, direction and control of preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of elections

under the J&K Panchayati Raj Act, 1989 and J&K Municipal Act, 2000 vest in the State Election Commission.

The government said that the report submitted by the Dedicated Backward Classes Commission is under examination by the competent authority and further steps for conduct of Panchayat and ULB elections will be taken accordingly.

As per the reply, the term of Panchayats expired on January 9, 2024, while BDCs completed their term on January 9, 2024. The term of DDCs is set to expire on February 24, 2026.

Regarding Municipal bodies, the term of Srinagar Municipal Corporation expired on November 5, 2023, while Jammu Municipal Corporation's term ended on November 14, 2023. The terms of other Municipal Councils and Committees expired between October and November 2023.

On delimitation, the government said that the exercise for 77 ULBs was taken up in pursuance to directions issued by the Housing & Urban Development Department. Delimitation has been completed for 72 ULBs and is under process for the

Turn on Page 2

From Delhi to Haryana: J&K struggles to reclaim vast land holdings

Minister says efforts on to retrieve prized assets

HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

SRINAGAR, FEB 19: The Jammu & Kashmir Government has revealed that its prized properties in New Delhi, Amritsar, and Chandigarh are not in its hands-but under occupation. The revelation has raised questions

over how assets of such huge financial value slipped out of the state's control.

In a written reply to cut motion of Peoples Conference MLA Sajad Gani Lone, Minister in-charge Hospitality & Protocol Department said that 96 kanals of J&K are currently occupied by the Military Engineering Service

under administrative control of Ministry of Defence.

"The Jammu and Kashmir Government owns a property known as "Kashmir House" spanning 114 Kanals and 11.2 Marlas at Rajaji Marg. Of this, 96 Kanals are currently occupied by the Military Engineering Wing under

the Ministry of Defence (Engineer in chief) and have persistently been taken up with Estates department as well as Ministry of Defence," the Minister's reply states, as per news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO).

The Minister said that one

Turn on Page 2

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J&K records 56% rain deficit, temperature rises

Srinagar records 20.1 C, 9.7 degrees above normal

HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

SRINAGAR, FEB 19: Amid a significant precipitation deficit in Jammu and Kashmir, maximum temperatures on Thursday rose sharply above normal across the Union Territory, further intensifying weather concerns.

The Meteorological Centre Srinagar, according to the news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO) informed that Kashmir division has recorded a 56% rainfall deficit so far, while the Jammu division is facing a 35 per cent shortfall.

Turn on Page 2

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CONTINUE FROM FRONT PAGE.....

LG Sinha Unveils.....

The Lieutenant Governor said the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 strengthened faith among younger generations that they could reconnect with their roots without fear. Calling the current period an era of reconstruction, he said the book reinforces the central role of the Kashmiri Pandit community in Jammu and Kashmir's social and cultural fabric.

The release event was attended by academics, literary figures and senior officials, including representatives from University of Jammu.

Assembly.....

substantial grants for key departments under Chief Minister Omar Abdullah after an extensive two-day debate that saw participation from 43 members and over 500 cut motions.

The House approved grants for departments including Finance, Power Development, General Administration, Tourism, Housing & Urban Development, Revenue, Planning, Law, Culture and Disaster Management, along with 19 supplementary grants amounting to Rs. 3,52,341.28 lakh.

Replying to the discussion on Demands for Grants, Omar Abdullah thanked legislators for their active engagement, describing the debate as an opportunity for the government to "learn, understand and correct mistakes." He also acknowledged the efforts of the administrative machinery for responding comprehensively to members' queries.

Addressing concerns over daily rated and ad hoc workers, the Chief Minister said a committee headed by the Chief Secretary has been constituted to prepare a legally and financially sound framework for their regularisation. He assured the House that the process would begin in phases once the report is finalised, emphasising that the government would avoid making announcements that could later face legal hurdles.

On employment, he said around 6,000-6,500 posts have already been filled and nearly 30,000 vacancies are targeted to be filled this year through transparent and time-bound recruitment processes via the Service Selection Board and Public Service Commission. He clarified that outsourcing engagements, though not counted as formal jobs, are providing livelihood opportunities.

Highlighting fiscal realities, Omar Abdullah noted that only about 25 percent of Jammu and Kashmir's expenditure is met through internal revenue, while the remaining 75 percent comes from central assistance. He asserted that the government has ended off-budget borrowings and ensured that all liabilities are transparently recorded. He also urged maximum utilisation of long-term, interest-free loans under centrally sponsored schemes for development works.

Tourism, he said, remains a vital pillar of the economy. Hotels in Gulmarg and Sonamarg are witnessing high occupancy, and efforts are underway to reopen remaining destinations before the peak season. He stressed the potential of Jammu, which draws over one crore pilgrims annually to Vaishno Devi Temple, saying that encouraging longer stays could significantly boost the region's economy. Plans are also in place to develop a riverfront project in Jammu on the lines of Sabarmati Riverfront.

Calling the power sector both a challenge and an opportunity, the Chief Minister said that out of the Union Territory's estimated 18,000 MW potential, only about 3,000-3,500 MW has been harnessed so far. He announced plans to add another 3,000-3,500 MW in the next few years while ruling out privatisation of power distribution.

He also announced major vertical housing projects in Jammu and Srinagar with a focus on Economically Weaker Sections and assured that action against encroachments would primarily target major land grabbers rather than the poor. Steps to address legacy solid waste and complete pending mini-secretariats were also outlined.

On media policy, Omar Abdullah reiterated that government advertisements would be rationalised based on objective criteria such as circulation and reach and would not be used as a tool of pressure.

Following his assurances, members withdrew their cut motions, clearing the way for the smooth passage of the grants and marking the conclusion of one of the most detailed budget discussions in recent sessions of the House.

All J&K Tourist.....

calibrated, step-by-step approach to rebuild confidence in the aftermath of the April 22, 2025 attack that left 26 persons, mostly tourists, dead. At the time, many in the industry feared that visitor arrivals would not recover for years.

Abdullah said the administration engaged extensively with tourism stakeholders and gradually revived activity despite restrictions at several locations. Tourists were allowed to travel to the Valley but faced limited access to certain destinations, including Doodhpathri and Yousmarg, while movement in parts of Gulmarg was restricted.

While many destinations have since been reopened on the directions of the Centre, some sites remain shut due to what he described as certain constraints. "There are certain things I cannot state openly, but discussions have taken place with the Central government. You can assume that by May, all these destinations will reopen," he told the House.

The Chief Minister also unveiled plans to nine new tourist destinations under

a Centrally funded scheme in consultation with the Union government. He said an earlier proposal under multilateral funding had nearly reached the agreement stage but ran into obstacles. The names of the new destinations will be announced gradually, he added, assuring that Jammu would receive its due share of development.

Highlighting infrastructure gaps, Abdullah acknowledged that while iconic destinations such as Pahalgam, Gulmarg and Sonamarg are globally admired for their natural beauty, they often lack basic facilities such as adequate toilets and public conveniences. Addressing these deficiencies, he said, is a key priority.

"Getting tourists to visit for the first time is not difficult. The real benchmark is whether they return," Abdullah said, underlining the government's shift toward promoting repeat tourism as a measure of long-term sustainability.

He pointed to encouraging signs of recovery, noting that hotels in Gulmarg and Sonamarg are operating at full capacity during the winter season, while Srinagar is witnessing strong tourist footfall.

In Jammu, he said, projects such as Jammu Lake and the Riverfront are nearing completion. The Riverfront project, he added, is likely to be extended to its full planned length under SAS-CI or another scheme, drawing inspiration from the Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad.

Abdullah also underscored the potential of leveraging the massive annual footfall at the Vaishno Devi Temple, which attracts over one crore pilgrims each year. Diverting even 10 per cent of those visitors to other destinations in Jammu, he said, could transform the region's economy. The government aims to retain tourists for longer stays through border tourism, pilgrimage circuits, golf tourism and promotion of scenic destinations like Baderwah.

The Chief Minister added that Kashmir is no longer a summer-only destination, with winter tourism gaining momentum in recent years. He cited the success of the Tulip Garden in advancing the tourism calendar and said the Chrysanthemum Garden, Bagh-e-Gul-e-Dawood, developed to boost autumn footfall, would be further expanded this year.

While acknowledging that the government cannot compel tourists to visit specific places, Abdullah said efforts are underway to develop at least one prominent tourist destination in every region, expand infrastructure, and widen the tourism network into remote areas.

DPR preparations.....

He said that construction of Tunnel at Razdan Pass has been endorsed by MoD (Ministry of Defense) to provide all weather connectivity.

The Deputy Chief Minister said that the regular snow clearance is being done by BEACON for providing connectivity to Gurez sector. He added that the road is kept closed for nearly one month and partially closed during winters due to snowfall and for safety of road users.

PM Modi Unveils.....

Welfare and happiness of all is "our benchmark" for AI to ensure that humans don't become a data point or raw material, he stressed.

"I present the M.A.N.A.V. vision for AI where M stands for moral and ethical systems, A for accountable governance, N for national sovereignty, A for accessible and inclusive, V for valid and legitimate," Modi said.

Global leaders, including UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, French President Emmanuel Macron, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Swiss President Guy Parmelin, and CEOs from leading technology companies from around the world were among those present at the Summit.

Modi said India's MANAV vision will become a crucial link for humanity's welfare in the AI-driven world of the 21st century.

AI, he said, must be given an open sky, but command must remain in human hands.

Citing the example of GPS, the prime minister said the navigation tool gives suggestions on directions to take, but the final decision is that of the user.

"The direction in which humanity takes AI today will determine our future," Modi said.

Emphasising the importance of child safety, the prime minister said just as school syllabi are curated, the AI space must also be child-safe and family-guided.

"Today, there are two kinds of people - those who see fear in AI and those who see fortune. India sees fortune and future in AI, backed by talent, energy capacity, and policy clarity," Modi said.

The prime minister also noted that three Indian companies launched their AI models and apps during the Summit which reflect the talent of the youth and showcase the depth and diversity of solutions that India contributes to the global AI landscape.

"AI will make our systems smarter, more efficient and more impactful. It will open more opportunities for people to take up creative roles. It is a major opportunity for innovation, entrepreneurship and the creation of new industries," he said at the event attended by world leaders and CEOs of leading companies.

"Some countries believe that AI should be developed in a confidential and closed manner. But India is different. We believe AI will truly serve the good of the world when it is shared and its codes are open. Only then will millions of young minds be able to improve it further," he said.

He said the expo is taking place in India, which represents one sixth of humanity, and a country

with the world's largest young population and a hub of the largest tech talent pool.

"Artificial intelligence marks a transformative chapter in human history. India is not just a part of the AI revolution, but is leading and shaping it," he said.

The prime minister said India not only builds technology but also adopts it at an unprecedented pace.

"Some people have doubts about new technology. But the way the younger generation is embracing AI is unprecedented. There has also been tremendous enthusiasm here regarding the AI Summit exhibition," he said.

"In the course of human history, there have been certain turning points that shaped entire centuries. These turning points set the direction of civilisation and transform the pace of development. Artificial intelligence is one such transformation in history," he noted.

Modi said India builds new technology and also adapts it rapidly but the real question is not what AI can do in future, "it is what can we do with AI in the present".

He said AI is a transformative power; if it strays away from its goals, it will lead to destruction and if used well, it will give solutions.

"Welfare and happiness of all is our benchmark for AI to ensure that humans don't become a data point or raw material, we have to democratise AI. We have to give an open sky to AI, but at the same time we have to keep the reins in our hands," he said.

The prime minister said AI is making machines intelligent and at the same time, it is multiplying human capabilities many times over.

India's perspective on AI is reflected in the theme of this summit which is welfare and happiness for all, he said.

Modi said the present journey from machine learning to learning machine is not only rapid, but also profound and extensive.

"Therefore, we must keep our vision grand and fulfil our responsibility with equal magnitude. Along with the present generation, we must also be concerned about what form of AI we will hand over to the coming generations," he said.

"It must be made a means of inclusion and empowerment, and especially in the Global South," he said.

Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka and Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Mauritius Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Croatia Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, Serbia President Aleksandar Vucic, Seychelles Vice President Sebastien Pillay, Estonia President Alar Karis, and Finland Prime Minister Petteri Orpo were among others at the event. (AGENCIES)

NHRC Flags Misuse.....

statutory body like the NHRC and NGOs.

The rights panel said it had earlier expressed concern through various platforms regarding the "misuse of its name and logo" and informed authorities concerned to take action against the people behind such "dubious organisations".

However, violations continue to come to its notice, the statement said.

The NHRC said it has been receiving complaints from individual complainants as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across the country alleging violation of human rights.

"While examining these complaints, the Commission has observed that several NGOs have got themselves registered under names deceptively similar to that of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)," the statement said.

Recently, the Commission came across an NGO registered as 'National Human Rights Council (NHRC)', reportedly registered with the government of Delhi in 2022. Its publicity material claims, "Registered by Govt. of NITI Aayog", "Registered by Ministry of Corporate Affairs, India", "Registered under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India" and association with "Andhra Pradesh Human Rights Council Association", the statement said.

A visiting card apparently related to the said organisation also bears the inscription 'Venkatesh, State Chairman, Karnataka,' it said.

Considering the gravity of the matter, it has taken suo motu cognisance of the matter.

It has observed that the name adopted and the designation 'Chairman' is "misleading and creates confusion", the statement said.

"Deceptive nomenclature misleads the public into believing that these organisations are either part of the National Human Rights Commission or recognised/authorised by it to deal with human rights issues," the NHRC flagged. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the chief secretaries and director generals of police of all the states and UTs to "identify such NGOs individuals misusing the name of the NHRC or using names deceptively similar to it, and to take immediate legal action within two weeks, including cancellation of registrations obtained in violation of norms," it said.

They have also been asked to sensitise registering authorities to remain vigilant and take necessary action against defaulters.

"Additionally, in the instant matter of National Human Rights Council (NHRC), the chief secretary and the director general of police, Karnataka and the chief secretary and the commissioner of police, Delhi have been further directed to submit reports within two weeks regarding the action taken against the NGO, having its office in Karnataka and registered in Delhi," it said. (Agencies)

Railway Expansion.....

over land acquisition, particularly the diversion of fertile agricultural land, the government

assured the House that landowners will receive compensation in accordance with applicable laws. It stated that compensation for land, trees and structures would be provided during the execution phase if the projects are approved.

The reply also emphasised that environmental safeguards will be strictly adhered to. Once clearance is granted, mitigation measures will be implemented as per prevailing environmental policies and guidelines to address issues such as deforestation, soil erosion, water resource disruption and ecological balance.

The government further said that close coordination with the Government of India and Indian Railways will be maintained during implementation to minimise social and environmental impact, while district administrations will remain involved to ensure that local concerns are addressed and prescribed norms are followed.

Govt making.....

remaining five.

On reservation, the reply stated that in Panchayats, reservation/rotation of Sarpanch and Panch wards will be done by the Director, Rural Development Department, Jammu/Kashmir, and can be initiated only after the OBC Commission's report is approved and notified. For Municipal Wards, reservation/rotation will be carried out by the State Election Commission after approval of the OBC report.

The government further informed that electoral rolls for Panchayats have been revised/updated with January 1, 2025 as the qualifying date. For Municipal bodies, revision of rolls will be undertaken after completion of delimitation and on receipt of directions from the government under the J&K Municipal Corporation (Elections) Rules, 2003.

It said that the tender for purchase of election material has been completed and the process for DDC elections is underway. Around 30,000 ballot boxes have been purchased and provided to districts. An MoU has also been signed with the State Election Commission, Madhya Pradesh for providing 7,000 Multipost EVMs for conduct of ULB elections in J&K.

Replying to another part of the question, the government said that the Union Government released Rs. 159.13 crore to J&K under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSa) during 2022-23 and 2023-24 for capacity building and training of PRIs, out of which Rs. 109.11 crore was utilised, reflecting an expenditure of 68.56 per cent. It added that Rs. 97.42 crore was approved for 2024-25 and 2025-26; however, due to non-functioning of elected Panchayati Raj Institutions during this period, only about 15 per cent of the approved amount has been utilised so far.

The government also provided details of funds released under District Capex for DDB/BDC and PRI sectors, stating that over Rs. 1.27 lakh crore was released in 2023-24, Rs. 1.28 lakh crore in 2024-25 and Rs. 85,265.80 lakh in 2025-26 (as on date).

The government said that necessary preparatory steps are being taken and further action regarding conduct of elections will be taken as per legal provisions and completion of required formalities— (KNO)

From Delhi to.....

Kanal and 11.2 Marlas of land were successfully retrieved on June 5, 2023.

"Out of the remaining land, 01 Kanal and 11.2 Marlas was under the unauthorized

occupation and successfully retrieved on 05.06.2023. Resultantly, 18 Kanals of land is under possession of the Jammu & Kashmir Government at present and has staff quarters over it," the minister said.

The Minister also disclosed that eight Kanals and five Marlas of land are under illegal occupation at Damai Ganj, Amritsar.

"The Government owns land measuring approximately 32 Kanals and 9 Marlas at Daimganj, Tapai Road, Amritsar, which has been subject to unauthorized occupation. Through sustained legal action and orders passed by the Hon'ble District Court, Amritsar, the Government has successfully retrieved approximately 14 Kanals and 11 Marlas from Raminder Singh Buloria and 9 Kanals and 13 Marlas from Balbir Sharma, thereby recovering substantial portions of the land," the Minister said.

The Minister said the remaining land measuring two Kanals and 15 Marlas under occupation of Kuldeep and approximately five Kanals and 10 Marlas under occupation of Raminder Pal Singh.

These two cases are presently under litigation before competent civil courts.

"Execution proceedings are ongoing, and the remaining land measuring approximately 8 Kanals and 5 Marlas is expected to be retrieved upon final adjudication, with assistance from the Revenue Department and local authorities," the Minister's reply reads.

The Minister said the J&K Government has initiated legal proceedings to recover 1251 Kanals of land leased out in 1960 at Haryana.

"The Government of Jammu & Kashmir owns land measuring approximately 1251 Kanals and 4 Marlas at Mangla area, District Sirsa, Haryana, which was leased out in the late 1960s to Bajwa Brothers. Due to violation of lease conditions, particularly non-payment of lease rent, the Government initiated legal proceedings before the Hon'ble Punjab and Haryana High Court to enforce its ownership rights and secure recovery of possession. The matter is at the final argument stage," reads the reply— (KNO)

J&K records 56%.....

The MeT said that the weather is expected to remain mainly dry from February 19 to 26. On February 27 and 28, light rain or snowfall is likely at a few places. During the first week of March, the weather will remain generally cloudy on March 1, followed by light rain or snow at isolated places on March 2 and 3. From March 4 to 7, conditions are expected to remain partly cloudy.

Meanwhile, several stations recorded temperatures well above normal, with some touching record-breaking levels.

SRINAGAR RECORDS 20.1 DEGREES CELSIUS

In the Kashmir region, Srinagar recorded a maximum of 20.1 degrees Celsius, which is 9.7 degrees above normal.

Qazigund registered 20.4 degrees Celsius, 10.9 degrees above normal, while Pahalgam settled at 16.0 degrees Celsius, 9 degrees above normal. Kupwara recorded 19.4 degrees Celsius, Kokernag 17.8 degrees Celsius and Gulmarg 11.4 degrees Celsius, all significantly above seasonal averages.

In the Jammu region, Jammu city recorded 27.0 degrees Celsius, 5.1 degrees above normal. Banihal registered 19.8 degrees Celsius, Batote 19.5 degrees Celsius, Katra 24.6 degrees Celsius and Baderwah 18.9 degrees Celsius, each reporting temperatures several degrees above normal— (KNO)

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Div Com Kashmir reviews progress on Jhelum Water Transport Project

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 19: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg, along with the Secretary Transport Department, chaired a meeting to review the progress on preparation of cost estimates for utility interventions along River Jhelum aimed at facilitating water transport.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioners of Srinagar, Budgam, Anantnag, Pulwama, Ganderbal, and Bandipora, the Regional Transport Officer (RTO) Kashmir, Assistant Director IWAJ Baramulla, Chief Engineers of KPDC and KPTCL, Superintending Engineers of R&B and PHE departments, among other officials.



During the meeting, the Divisional Commissioner outlined clear timelines for resolving issues affecting the project. He instructed engineers to submit cost estimates within weeks for key interventions, including removal of cofferdams and ensuring adequate height clearance of 33KV and 11KV power lines along the river stretch.

While reviewing the Action Taken Report on land possession at eight identified locations along River Jhelum, officials informed the chair that possession has been secured at seven sites. The remaining location requires further engagement with the local community to resolve pending concerns.

Modi Empowers Youth, Omar Failed J&K: Sunil Sharma

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEB 19: Sunil Sharma, Leader of Opposition in the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly, launched a scathing attack on the NC-led government, accusing it of complete failure and negligence towards the youth of the Union Territory. He asserted that while the government under Narendra Modi is relentlessly working to empower the youth across the nation, the administration led by Omar Abdullah has miserably failed to secure the future of J&K's young generation.

Taking serious note of what he termed as the "utter apathy" of the Omar government, Sunil Sharma said that despite the Chief Minister overseeing as many as



DIPR organises workshop on GeM portal at Jammu

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEB 19: Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) organized a comprehensive workshop on the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) Portal at Media Complex here today.

The workshop was held under the able guidance of Director, Information and Public Relations, Nitish Rajora.

During the workshop Assistant Professor, GCW Parade, Venus Sharma, as Resource person provided detailed insights into the functioning and operational framework of the GeM portal.

He acquainted the participants with various procurement methods available on the portal, including direct purchase, bidding processes, and



other transparent and efficient modes of government procurement. The session also covered insights on vendor registration, order placement, compliance procedures, and best practices to ensure accountability and efficiency in public procurement.

All staff members of the Directorate attended the workshop and actively participated in the interactive session. The programme was also attended by Information Officers, Alka Misra and Maheer Thakur, who appreciated the initiative and emphasized the importance of digital procurement systems in strengthening transparency and efficiency in government operations.

The workshop concluded with a vote of thanks, reaffirming the Department's commitment to capacity building and adoption of e-governance initiatives for improved service delivery.

Javid Dar Extends Greetings on the Holy Month of Ramadan

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEB 19: Javid Ahmad Dar, Minister for Agriculture Production, Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Cooperative and Election Department, Javid Ahmad Dar has extended warm greetings to the people of Jammu and Kashmir on the auspicious occasion of the holy month of Ramadan.

In his message, the Minister conveyed his heartfelt wishes to all sections of society, praying that the sacred month brings peace, prosperity, harmony and spiritual fulfillment to every household across the Union Territory.

He said that Ramadan is a month of reflection, compassion and self-discipline, which teaches the values of patience, generosity and empathy towards the less privileged. He expressed hope that the holy month would further strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and unity among the people. Javid Dar urged the people to uphold the spirit of togetherness and mutual respect during the holy month and to work collectively for the progress and development of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Minister also prayed for sustained peace, prosperity and well-being of the people and reiterated the government's commitment to inclusive growth and welfare of all sections of Jammu and Kashmir.

Amiteshwar Singh emerges topper from J&K

Secures 99.83 percentile in JEE-2026 main session 1

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 19: Amiteshwar Singh, a student of PhysicsWallah (PW) and resident of Jammu, has secured the highest score in Jammu and Kashmir in the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) Main 2026 Session 1.

A spokesperson of PhysicsWallah (PW) said that Amiteshwar achieved an overall score of 99.83 percentile, with a notable 99.48 in Physics, 99.72 in Chemistry, and 99.76 in Mathematics.

The National Testing Agency (NTA) declared the results for Session 1 on February 16, 2026, for the examination conducted across 658 centres including 15 centres globally. Amiteshwar, who prepared through PW Vidyapeeth, was enrolled in the 2-year classroom programme. He credited his success to the structured curriculum, accessibility, and consistent faculty support extended to him during his preparation.

Amiteshwar Singh from Jammu and Kashmir, who secured the first position in the state, said, "JEE preparation seemed challenging at first, but regular learning and practice helped me to stay focused throughout my preparation journey. Access to digital resources helped me with easy revisions and



references, while having teachers around to guide clear my doubts made a big difference in building conceptual clarity. I am thankful to my parents and teachers at PW Vidyapeeth for their constant support. I am now concentrating on revision and mock tests for the upcoming JEE (Advanced) Examination."

Amiteshwar's achievement is a reflection of PhysicsWallah (PW)'s ongoing efforts to make competitive exam preparation accessible to

students across different geographies. By offering a choice between online classes, offline Vidyapeeth centres, and hybrid Pathshala hubs, PW aims to support aspirants in across regions through a multi-format approach. These efforts are an attempt to make the same resources and guidance available to students across India, creating a level playing field for national examinations.

About PhysicsWallah (PW) PhysicsWallah Limited (PW), an education platform, was founded in 2020 by Alakh Pandey and Prateek Maheshwari. Headquartered in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, PW aims to facilitate education through online, offline and hybrid platforms. Initially launched as a YouTube channel in 2014, PW now offers education to students through its native app, tech-enabled offline and hybrid centres, and YouTube channels. PW's offerings span various educational segments, including test preparation, a skilling vertical, coaching for higher education, and facilitating education abroad, with programmes available in multiple vernacular languages.

PhysicsWallah Limited was listed on the National Stock Exchange of India Limited (NSE) and BSE Limited (Bombay Stock Exchange) on November 18, 2025.

18 crucial departments, review meetings are rarely conducted. "This inaction reflects misplaced priorities and administrative paralysis. Jammu & Kashmir deserves accountable governance, not hollow assurances," he stated. Highlighting the alarming unemployment scenario, Sharma said that during the tenure of the present government, merely 650 jobs have been created in various departments, making a mockery of the tall promise of providing one lakh jobs to the youth. "The promise of one lakh jobs now stands exposed as yet another political gimmick. Instead of ensuring transparent recruitment, the government is outsourcing jobs to private entities, crushing the aspirations of educated youth," he said.

He further expressed grave concern over the continued neglect of daily wagers, ReK, ReT, and other temporary workers who have been waiting for years for regularization. These hardworking individuals have devoted the prime of their lives to public service, yet the NC government has abandoned them. Their plight reflects the anti-youth and anti-worker mindset of this regime, he added.

Contrasting the two governance models, Sharma emphasized that the Modi government has consistently prioritized youth welfare through expanded higher education opportunities, technical institutions, skill development missions, start-up support, and transparent recruitment processes. From start-up promotion to skill enhancement and employment generation, the BJP-led government at the Centre is laying a strong foundation for a self-reliant and empowered youth, he said. Reiterating BJP's commitment, Sunil Sharma affirmed that the party will continue to raise its voice against every injustice meted out to the youth, students, and marginalized sections under the oppressive and directionless governance of the NC-led government in Jammu & Kashmir.

Satish Sharma releases Dogri song, calls for enhanced efforts to preserve region's cultural legacy

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEB 19: Minister for Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Transport, Youth Services and Sports, Science and Technology, Satish Sharma, today released a Dogri song by noted artists Neeraj Sharma and Sharon Bakshi, reaffirming the government's commitment towards preserving and promoting the region's rich linguistic and cultural heritage.

The release function witnessed participation of media representatives, prominent cultural personalities, artists and members of the local artistic fraternity, making it a vibrant celebration of Dogri music and tradition. The initiative was widely appreciated as a meaningful step towards strengthening the regional identity and encouraging creative expression rooted in local culture.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister commended the artists for their dedication and valuable contribution to promotion of Dogri music. He emphasised that regional languages and folk traditions are vital pillars of Jammu



and Kashmir's cultural fabric and play a crucial role in preserving the collective heritage of its people.

Highlighting the importance of cultural continuity, he said that preserving indigenous languages like Dogri is essential not only for safeguarding the traditions but also for nurturing a strong sense of identity among the younger generations. He stressed

that cultural heritage must be celebrated, documented and passed on through creative mediums such as music, literature and performing arts.

Satish Sharma further reiterated the government's commitment towards supporting the cultural initiatives that provide platforms to local talent, encourage artistic innovation and create opportunities for artists to reach

wider audiences. He underlined that such efforts contribute to cultural preservation while also promoting social harmony, creativity and community pride.

The Minister also expressed hope that more artists would come forward to create meaningful content in regional languages, ensuring that traditional art forms continue to thrive in contemporary times.

The programme concluded with formal unveiling of the song, followed by an interactive session with the artists.

Neeraj Sharma and Sharon Bakshi expressed their gratitude for the encouragement and support extended by the government and the audience. They shared their commitment towards continuing their work in promoting Dogri music.

Department focusing on strengthening of existing healthcare facilities as per IPHS-2022 norms: Health Minister

Says construction of 50-bedded additional block at Pahalgam Hospital steadily progressing

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU FEB 19 : Minister for Health and Medical Education, Sakeena Itoo, today informed the House that the department is presently focusing on consolidation and strengthening of the existing healthcare facilities broadly as per IPHS-2022 norms to improve the healthcare services across Jammu and Kashmir.

The Health Minister stated this in reply to a question raised by Legislator Altaf Ahmad Wani (Kaloo) in the Legislative Assembly.

The Minister said that as per IPHS norms 2022 districts with less than 5 lakh population with a functional District Hospital (DH) do not need a Sub District Hospital (SDH), districts with populations between 5-10 lakh can have one SDH and thereafter, one SDH for every 10-lakh population can be considered for the provision of comprehensive secondary care health services.

She added that, as per this criteria, district having a population upto 20 lakh can have one DH and two SDHs, whereas each district of J&K has more SDHs than the admissibility as per IPHS-2022.

The Health Minister further said that the department has accorded sanction for up-gradation of NTPHC Pahalgam to the level of 50 bedded Hospital along with creation of 26 posts of different categories. She added that against the sanctioned strength of 38 posts, 17 posts of



doctors and para-medics have been filled up, which included 03 Consultants, 01 Medical Officer and 01 Dental Surgeon.

The Minister also said that efforts are afoot for filling up of vacancies through recruiting agency besides ensuring promotions. She added that during the annual Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra, availability of doctors, paramedics and other support staff is

significantly enhanced as per actual requirement. She further said that the construction of 50-bedded block at Pahalgam Hospital is steadily progressing. She added that an additional block for the hospital is under construction at a cost of Rs. 1889.90 lakh against which Rs. 1100.00 lakh expenditure has been incurred.

She said that during the

current financial year 2025-26, an amount of Rs. 340.00 lakh has been released to the executing agency out of approved allocation of Rs. 400.00 lakh. Besides, additional funding is also approved under SASCI to speed up the pace of work.

"Truss work is complete and finishing works are in progress. The equipment shall also be made available in a phased manner in

line with requirements of the hospital within budgetary resources", she said.

Giving further details, the Minister said that the department is not considering establishment of Trauma Hospital between Qazigund and Pahalgam, as these institutions require specialised manpower and other allied support staff besides high end equipment and modular operation theatres.

She added that two Trauma Care facilities, Trauma Hospital Qazigund and Trauma Centre at Government Medical College Anantnag, are available en-route Qazigund and Pahalgam to meet the trauma related and other healthcare requirements. She said that Trauma Hospital Bijbehara, 4 km away from Khanabal-Pahalgam-Qazigund road, is also available.

During the annual Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra, the Health Minister said that health camps are being established to provide medical facilities to the pilgrims. These included augmenting hospital men, machinery and ambulance services in the existing health institutions like PHC Mattan (additional block under construction), SDH Seer Hamdan, PHC Aishmuqam and 50-bedded Hospital Pahalgam.

She apprised the House that PHC Aishmuqam has already been made operational on 24x7 basis to cater to the medical needs of devotees visiting Ziyarat of Sakhi Zain-U-Din Wali (RA) Aishmuqam.

Govt ensures ex-gratia assistance for human casualties in wildlife conflict: Forest Minister

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU FEB 19 : Adequate compensation or ex-gratia relief is provided in cases of human injury or loss of life under the prevailing policy framework on human-wildlife conflict in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.



This was stated by Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, while replying to a question raised by Legislator Sajad Shaheen.

Legislators, Choudhary Mohammad Akram, Balwant Singh Mankotia, Qaiser Jamsheed Lone and Nazir Ahmad Khan Gurezi raised supplementary questions on the subject. They urged the government to provide adequate relief measures and ensure inclusion of the agriculture sector and livestock under the relevant schemes to safeguard farmers' interests.

Responding to their concerns, the Minister said that currently there is no approved policy or budgetary provision specifically earmarked for compensation of livestock losses due to wildlife attacks in the Union Territory. However, he said that the government is in correspondence with the Animal Husbandry Department to provide compensatory support to the farmers in case of loss of animals.

He said that the Forest Department is in talks with the Agriculture Department and other concerned authorities regarding the inclusion of additional crops under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) in case of damage by the wild animals.

36 Health Sub Centres, PHCs functioning in Reasi Constituency: Health Minister

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU FEB 19 Minister for Health & Medical Education, Sakeena Itoo today informed the Legislative Assembly that 36 Health Sub-Centres and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) are functioning in Reasi constituency, with 175 personnel currently in position at these institutes. The Minister was replying to a



query raised by Legislator Kuldeep Raj Dubey, regarding the status of health facilities in the constituency.

She stated that out of the sanctioned strength of 163 regular staff, including MLPs, FMPHWs, sanitation workers and other categories, 101 are presently in position. Similarly, out of 78 sanctioned staff under the National Health Mission (NHM), 74 have been deployed in these health centres. The Minister further informed the House that three medical/paramedical staff members have been attached or deployed at places other than their original postings, with special reference to the Reasi constituency. She also said that the villages of Drabi Panchayat, Harotekote and Dhakikot Panchayat (Dhakikote) currently do not have any Health Sub-Centre or PHC. "However, these areas do not meet the minimum criteria required for establishment of Sub-Centres/PHCs as per IPHS norms 2022," she added.

16 Water Supply Schemes approved for Khawas block under JJM: Javed Rana

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU FEB 19 The villages of Khawas Block, including Kanthol and Marutha in Budhal Constituency, are being covered under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) to ensure provision of safe and adequate drinking water.

Minister for Jal Shakti, Javed Ahmed Rana informed this while replying to a question raised by Legislator Javid Iqbal in the Legislative Assembly today. He stated that 16 Water Supply Schemes (WSSs) have been approved under JJM for the area.

He said that four schemes have been completed, while the remaining are at various stages of execution.

The Minister informed that despite ongoing works, the region has experienced prolonged drought-like conditions in recent years, coupled with scanty rainfall, leading to depletion of certain water sources during peak summer months.

He informed that the borewell source of WSS Budhal has also been adversely affected, impacting sustainability and resulting in acute shortages in some



habitations during the lean summer period. However, he said that as an interim measure, drinking water requirements are being met through water tanker services.

To address the long-term source sustainability, three Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) namely WSS Badhal-B, WSS Kotecharwal, and WSS Kotranka have been prepared and are under consideration. These projects will augment the existing schemes and extend coverage to left-out and higher-altitude habitations, stated the Minister.

Awareness programme on Self-Employment Schemes organized at Panchayat Ghar Saranoo Bridge

HT NEWS NETWORK

RAJOURI, FEBRUARY 19: An awareness programme on self-employment schemes of the Jammu & Kashmir Khadi and Village Industries Board (KVIB) was organized today at Saranoo Bridge, Rajouri. The programme aimed to educate unemployed youth, aspiring entrepreneurs, women beneficiaries and members of Self Help Groups about the benefits and procedures of different schemes being implemented by KVIB.

During the programme, detailed information was provided about the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) and Jammu Kashmir Rural Employment Generation Programme (JKREGP), including project cost, subsidy pattern, eligibility criteria and online application process. Participants were also sensitized about opportunities in manufacturing and service sectors, margin money assistance and the scope for expansion under the 2nd loan facility.

The programme was attended by representatives from the Banking sector, Lead District Manager (JKB), Area Manager JKGB, District Industries Centre (DIC) Rajouri and the Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) who shared valuable insights regarding credit linkage, training facilities, project preparation and handholding support for prospective entrepreneurs. The Bankers' representative highlighted the importance of proper documentation and timely submission of proposals for smooth sanctioning of cases.

District Officer KVIB Rajouri, Sameer Ahmed highlighted the importance of self-employment for economic upliftment and encouraged the youth to come forward and avail benefits under government-sponsored schemes. Queries raised by participants were addressed on the spot and guidance was provided regarding documentation and bank procedures.

The Board reiterated its commitment to promote village industries and generate sustainable employment opportunities in district Rajouri.

Sankalp Hub Team organises awareness camp at Textile & Embroidery Training Centre in Doda

HT NEWS NETWORK

DODA, FEBRUARY 19:- An awareness camp was organised by the Sankalp Hub for Empowerment of Women team during their visit to a Handmade Textile and Embroidery Training Centre run by the District Employment and Counselling Centre Doda.

The visit aimed to interact with trainees and assess the ongoing skill development activities being conducted for women in traditional crafts.

During the visit, the Sankalp team generated awareness on various women-centric government schemes and informed participants about opportunities to avail skill training under different government initiatives.

Special emphasis was laid on training and entrepreneurship programmes conducted through Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETI), highlighting avenues for women to enrol in free skill development courses and receive support for establishing their own ventures. The team motivated participants to focus on skill enhancement, self-reliance and financial



independence.

Trainees were encouraged to upgrade their embroidery and textile skills, explore market linkages and effectively utilise available government support systems to become successful entrepreneurs.

The programme concluded with an interactive session wherein participants shared their experiences and sought clarifications regarding training opportunities and benefits under various schemes.

Director Agriculture Jammu inspects developmental activities at SM Farm Chinore

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 19: Director Agriculture Jammu, Anil Gupta, today visited the Seed Multiplication (SM) Farm, Chinore to review the physical progress of ongoing projects being implemented at the farm.

Joint Director Agriculture (Farms/SLUB), Aman Jyoti Sharma; Deputy Jyoti

Agriculture (Central), Sanjeev Rai Gupta; Accounts Officer, Vriti Uppal; Farm Manager, Virender Dogra and farm officers accompanied the Director during the visit.

At the outset, the Director chaired a review meeting and took stock of the expenditure and physical progress achieved under various ongoing projects at SM Farm Chinore. Farm

Manager, Virender Dogra, presented a detailed overview of the works in progress and briefed the Director about the infrastructure development initiatives being executed at the farm.

Interacting with the Farm Manager and staff, the Director stressed that all possible efforts should be made to enhance seed production at departmental farms



to ensure the availability of high-quality seeds produced under local agro-climatic conditions and meeting prescribed quality

parameters. Director Anil Gupta appreciated the dedicated efforts of the Farm Manager and the entire team of SM Farm Chinore

in advancing agricultural innovation.

The Director also inspected the crop stand at the farm and reviewed the quality production of Foundation and Certified Seed of various wheat varieties and other crops including Mustard, Toria and Barseem. He further assessed the status of farm mechanization, drainage systems and irrigation facilities to ensure

optimal farm management and enhanced productivity.

During the visit, the Director interacted with staff, technicians, machinery operators and farm workers. He gave patient hearing to their issues and grievances, particularly those related to service matters and assured them that their concerns would be taken up with the concerned authorities at the earliest.

Budgam Ring road drainage system functioning well: Deputy Chief Minister

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

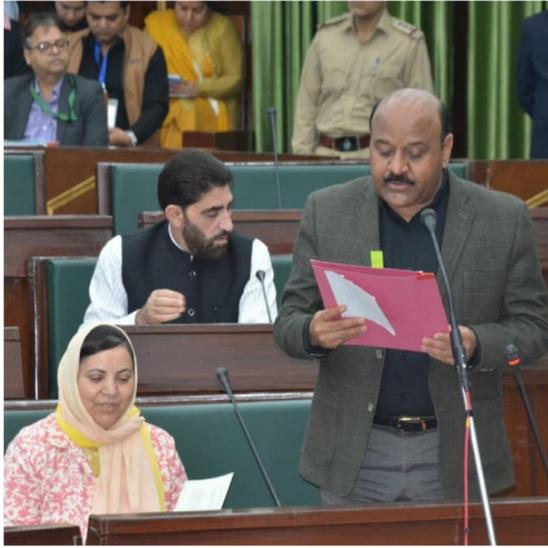
JAMMU FEB 19 Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary today said that the drainage system was functioning satisfactorily to facilitate proper disposal of surface and sub-surface water near Ring Road in Budgam.

The Deputy Chief Minister was replying to a question raised by MLA, Ali Mohammad Dar in the Legislative Assembly.

He said that a detailed technical assessment for drainage and cross-drainage structures was carried out at the Detailed Project Report (DPR) stage, pursuant to which adequate provisions were incorporated in the design.

He said that as many as 148 Box Culverts, 107 Hume Pipe Culverts (HPCs) and 24 Minor Nallah Bridges (MNBs) were incorporated to facilitate proper disposal of the water.

The Deputy Chief Minister said that presently there is no persistent issue of water-logging at the box culverts on the newly constructed Ring Road including Khanda, Kuzwaria, Bugam, Wathora and other locations.



However, he said that temporary accumulation noticed during the construction phase of the Greenfield project was addressed after completion of the structures and the drainage system is functioning

satisfactorily. He further said though there are no reports of water logging issues, however, if required the same shall be addressed through measures including additional constructions.

NTPHC Haripora functioning in Govt building, land being identified for Sumbal centre: Sakeena Itoo

Minister for Health & Medical Education Sakeena Itoo today informed the Legislative Assembly that NTPHC Haripora is already functioning in a three room government building of Health Department.

She was replying to a question raised by MLA Kangan Mian Mehar Ali during the Question Hour of the ongoing Budget Session.

The Minister informed the House that augmentation, if any, may be considered in the interest of patient care, as and when such need arises.

She further said that for construction of a building for NTPHC Sumbal, which is currently functioning in rented accommodation, Deputy Commissioner Ganderbal has been requested to identify suitable land.

"As of now, no funds have been sanctioned or proposed for construction of the NTPHC building, which shall be considered after the formal transfer of encumbrance-free land and availability of budgetary resources in a phased manner," she added.

JMC strengthens water supply infrastructure under AMRUT 2.0, Tube Well project near completion

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 19: In a major step towards ensuring a reliable, sustainable and improved water supply to the residents of Jammu city, the Jal Shakti wing, under the Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC)/ Housing and Urban Development Department, Government of Jammu & Kashmir is actively working on the augmentation of the city's water supply scheme under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0. The centrally sponsored scheme aims to modernize urban water infrastructure, improve service delivery and ensure universal access to safe and adequate drinking water in cities across the country.

Under this ambitious initiative, 13 tube wells have been proposed to be drilled at strategically identified locations across Jammu city. These locations have been selected after assessing existing supply gaps, population density and areas that face frequent water shortages, particularly during the summer months and peak demand periods. The primary objective of the project was to strengthen the existing water supply network, enhance groundwater availability and supplement traditional water sources to meet the growing demand of the expanding urban population.

Sofar, 10 tube wells have been successfully drilled, reflecting substantial progress in the implementation of the project. The remaining three tube wells are currently at various stages of completion and are expected to be completed in the coming months this year.

The concerned departments are closely monitoring the work to ensure that the project is completed within the stipulated time frame, adhering to prescribed technical standards and quality norms.

Once fully commissioned, these tube wells are expected to significantly enhance the availability of potable water in several parts of the city. The augmented supply will help reduce pressure on existing and ageing water sources, minimize supply disruptions and ensure a more consistent and equitable distribution of water to households. The project will also contribute to improved public health outcomes by ensuring access to safe drinking water and



reducing dependence on irregular or alternate sources.

Providing detailed information on the progress of the project, Commissioner, Jammu Municipal Corporation, Dr. Devansh Yadav said that the tube well works are almost complete in multiple areas falling within the JMC limits. These include near Women's Polytechnic College, Shakti Nagar, Shiv Mandir, Lower Muthi (Run), near Vishwa Bharti School, Shanti Nagar, inside the Municipal Park, Bandhu Rakh-1, Bandhu Rakh-2, Tawi Vihar, Sidhra, Sainik Colony Sector-B, Sainik Colony near the Railway Line and Greater Kailash. He further informed that these installations will be made operational in a phased manner after necessary testing and integration with the existing water supply system.

Dr. Yadav emphasized that the initiative is a significant milestone in JMC's ongoing efforts to strengthen urban infrastructure and improve the quality of civic services. He reiterated the commitment of the Jammu Municipal Corporation in coordination with the Jal Shakti Department and the Housing and Urban Development Department, to ensure that every household in Jammu city has access to safe, reliable and sufficient drinking water.

The tube well augmentation project under AMRUT 2.0 reflects the government's broader vision of building resilient urban infrastructure, promoting efficient water management and ensuring long-term water security for the citizens of Jammu city. The successful completion of this project will play a crucial role in meeting future water demands and enhancing the overall quality of life for the city's residents.

DHSJ conducts comprehensive inspection of Rajiv Gandhi Hospital Gangyal

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 19: Director Health Services Jammu, Dr. Abdul Hamid Zargar today visited Rajiv Gandhi Hospital Gangyal to review the overall functioning of the institution and evaluate the quality of healthcare services being delivered to the public.

During the visit, the Director took a detailed round of the OPD, IPD wards, Emergency Unit, Labour Room, Operation Theatre, Diagnostic Laboratory, Pharmacy and other critical sections of the hospital. He inspected the availability of medicines, medical equipment, sanitation facilities, power and water supply and patient record maintenance.



The Director also convened a meeting with the Medical Superintendent, doctors, paramedical staff and other officials. He reviewed staff attendance, duty rosters, referral patterns, biomedical waste management practices and implementation of various national health programmes. He emphasized maintaining discipline, punctuality, proper documentation and a patient-friendly approach in service delivery.

Dr. Zargar appreciated the dedication and efforts of the hospital staff in providing healthcare services and urged them to continue working with commitment and compassion.

The visit concluded with instructions to address identified gaps on priority to further strengthen healthcare delivery in the region.

DC Samba conducts Public Outreach Programme at Kehli Mandi

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

SAMBA, FEBRUARY 19: Deputy Commissioner Samba, Ayushi Sudan today conducted a Public Outreach Programme at Kehli Mandi to address the grievances and demands of local s.

During the programme, the Deputy Commissioner listened patiently to various issues raised by the public. Key demands projected by the residents included development of a playground for football and cricket, renovation of the local pond, improvement in sanitation and cleanliness,

installation of dustbins, strengthening of the drainage system in the locality, and construction of at least two toilets for the community hall.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Commissioner emphasized that sanitation is a fundamental component of sustainable development and urged the public to adopt civic sense and actively participate in maintaining cleanliness. She directed the concerned officers to prepare a proper roster for regular cleaning of the area and ensure strict implementation of waste segregation practices, including separation of dry.

DC Kathua chairs District Level Committee meeting under PMMSY; beneficiaries selected through draw of lots

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

KATHUA, FEBRUARY 19: The District Level Committee meeting under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) was held today under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Kathua, Rajesh Sharma to consider and decide applications received under various components of the scheme. The meeting was attended by

Chief Planning Officer, Ranjeet Thakur, ACD, Akhil Sadotra, Chief Agriculture Officer, Jatinder Khajuria, Assistant Director Fisheries, Pawan Kumar, other concerned officers and all the eligible applicants.

The Chairman, in his capacity as head of the District Level Committee, reviewed the applications received under different components of PMMSY.

As the number of applicants exceeded the number of available units under certain components, namely Construction of Fish Kiosks (General Category) and Three Wheeler including E-Rickshaw (General Category), the selection of beneficiaries was conducted through a draw of lots to ensure fairness and transparency in the process. After following due procedure, beneficiaries were

selected under various components of the scheme. One beneficiary was selected for establishment of Live Fish Vending Centre (General Category). For Fish Kiosk, one beneficiary under General Category was selected through draw of lots, while one beneficiary under Scheduled Caste category was selected as per eligibility. Similarly, under the component of Three Wheeler including E-Rickshaw,

two beneficiaries under Scheduled Caste category and two beneficiaries under General Category were selected, with the latter being finalized through draw of lots. The Deputy Commissioner emphasized that the selection process was carried out in a transparent and impartial manner in the presence of applicants and concerned officers, in line with the guidelines of PMMSY.

DC Doda hands over computers to GMS Saras Kastigarh

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

DODA, FEBRUARY 19: Deputy Commissioner Doda, Harvinder Singh today handed over computer systems to Government Middle School Saras Kastigarh (Zone Bhagwah) aiming to promote digital literacy, enhance ICT-based learning and bridge the digital divide in rural schools of the

district.

The initiative is part of the district administration's continued efforts to strengthen digital infrastructure in government schools and provide students with better access to modern educational tools.

By integrating technology into classroom teaching, the administration seeks to improve learning outcomes,

encourage innovation and equip students with essential digital skills.

The Deputy Commissioner emphasized the importance of digital education in today's fast-evolving world and reiterated the commitment of the district administration to ensure equitable access to quality education, especially in remote and rural areas.

One day training on FP-LMIS Portal held at Doda

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

DODA, FEBRUARY 19: On the directions of the Director Family Welfare, MCH & Immunization J&K Dr Poonam Sethi and Director Health Services Jammu Dr Abdul Hamid Zargar, a one day training programme on the FP-LMIS Portal was organized at the Conference Hall of the CMO Office Doda.



The training session was graced by the presence of Dy. CMO Doda, Dr. Sat Lal Manhas and was attended by participants including Extension Educators, JHIs, MLHPs, BACs and other concerned staff members from various medical blocks of District Doda.

Dy. CMO highlighted the importance of the Family Planning Logistics Management Information System (FP-LMIS) portal in strengthening supply chain management, ensuring timely availability of family planning commodities and maintaining accurate reporting. He stressed upon the participants to utilize the portal efficiently for better monitoring and service delivery. Ravinder Thakur (Projectionist) served as the Master Trainer for the session and provided detailed hands on training regarding the functioning, data entry procedures and reporting mechanisms of the FP-LMIS portal. He also addressed queries raised by the participants and emphasized the need for timely and accurate data uploading. An interactive session was also held on the occasion.

Horticulture Department organises Farmers' training programmes under JKICP

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 19: The Department of Horticulture Jammu organized a Farmers' Training Programme under the Jammu & Kashmir Competitiveness Improvement Project (JKICP) at Udheywala, here today.

The programme was graced by the Director Horticulture, Jammu, Jenab Gul Syed as the chief guest.

Among the distinguished dignitaries present were Prof. Vikas Tandon, Dean, Faculty of Horticulture and Forestry, Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu (SKUAST-J); Chief Horticulture Officer, Jammu, R.K. Kotwal; Professor Dr. Amit Jasrotia; Associate Professor Dr. Monika Reshi; DLSMS Jammu, Rakesh Kumar Bhagat; HDO Akhnoor, Sandeep Sharma; HDO Bhalwal,



Ravinder Kumar; along with field staff of the respective zones.

While addressing the farmers, the Director delivered a comprehensive lecture emphasizing the importance of adopting modern horticulture practices, high-density plantation systems, integrated

pest management and scientific orchard management to enhance productivity and increase farmers' income. He urged the farming community to avail advantage of the benefits being provided under JKICP for strengthening horticulture infrastructure and improving

market linkages.

Chief Horticulture Officer, Jammu, R.K. Kotwal also delivered a detailed lecture highlighting various departmental schemes, orchard rejuvenation practices and the significance of quality planting material. He encouraged farmers to maintain close coordination with field functionaries for better technical guidance and timely support.

Prof. Vikas Tandon, Dr. Amit Jasrotia and Dr. Monika Reshi elaborated on improved cultivation techniques, disease management practices and the importance of certified planting material. The experts also interacted with the farmers and addressed their queries in detail. The programme witnessed enthusiastic participation from a large number of farmers of the area, who appreciated the initiative of the Department in organizing such awareness and capacity-

building programmes at the grassroots level.

Meanwhile, another Farmers' Training Programme under JKICP was organised at Krishi Vigyan Kendra R.S. Pura.

The training programme was attended by distinguished dignitaries including DLSMS, Vishal Magotra, Dr. Muneeshwar Sharma, Dr. Rakesh Sharma, Dr. Muneshwar Sharma, Horticulture Development Officer (HDO) R.S. Pura, Dheeraj Sharma along with field staff of the Department.

During the programme, experts delivered detailed lectures on improved cultivation techniques, quality planting material, soil health management and effective implementation of government-sponsored schemes. Farmers actively participated in interactive sessions and sought technical guidance for improving productivity and income.

HT EDITORIAL

Make all ventilators functional at government hospitals

At a time when the people at helm claim that health is one of their priority sectors disturbing figures have emerged with respect to the functioning of ventilators in the government hospitals of the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir. Only 75 percent of the ventilators put in place in the government hospitals are working with the remaining 25 percent rendered dysfunctional. These figures have been given out by the government itself and not by any private person or group.

Minister for Health and Medical Education, Sakina Itoo on Wednesday (February 18) told the legislative assembly that out of a total of 877 ventilators, 658 are functional while 219 are defunct. Government Medical College (GMC) Jammu and its associated hospitals have a total of 320 ventilators, of which 209 are functional while 111 are non-functional. GMC Srinagar's SMHS Hospital has 76 ventilators, with 68 functional and eight non-functional, while its other associated hospitals have 173 ventilators, including 44 that are not working.

At GMC Anantnag and its associated hospitals, only 10 ventilators are functional while 26 ventilators are defunct. GMC Baramulla reported two non-functional ventilators out of 41, while GMC Doda has 10 defunct ventilators out of 27 installed. GMC Kathua reported two non-functional ventilators out of 52, GMC Rajouri three out of 54 and GMC Udampur reported all 39 ventilators to be functional. GMC Handwara also reported all six ventilators as functional. At the Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Soura, 13 out of 53 ventilators were reported to be non-functional.

It is imperative that the concerned department takes up the issue more seriously and the dysfunctional ventilators are made functional once again. If this can't be done then orders should be placed immediately so that fresh ventilators are procured and installed at the hospitals functioning in the government sector. Since the grants for the concerned department have already been passed by the assembly the onus is on the government to ensure that the money is spent in the right direction. Procurement of fresh ventilators should be one of the key components and this should be done without any further delay.

Since ventilators are pivotal to the functioning of a hospital both government and private it is important that all such ventilators are operational. As and when some snag develops in a ventilator it should be reported so that the necessary repairs are carried out and patients do not suffer. In such a manner lives of patients, especially critical ones would be saved.

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Ramadhan: A Sacred Journey of Faith, Reflection and Unity for the Muslim Ummah



■ SYED SAHRAAN HUSSAIN AL-BUKHARI
AL-NAQVI

As a core member of the All Jammu & Kashmir Shia Association, I feel deeply honored to extend my heartfelt greetings and reflections to the entire Muslim Ummah on the blessed arrival of the holy month of Ramadhan. This sacred month is not merely a period of abstaining from food and drink; rather, it is a profound spiritual journey that renews our faith, strengthens our character, and brings us closer to Almighty Allah (SWT). Ramadhan is the month in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed as guidance for humanity—a divine light that calls us toward righteousness, justice, patience, sacrifice, and compassion. Through fasting, we cultivate self-discipline and humility; through nightly prayers and supplications, we purify our hearts; and through charity and acts of kindness, we reaffirm our responsibility toward the needy and the oppressed.

In these challenging times, when the Muslim world faces numerous trials and divisions, Ramadhan serves as a powerful reminder of unity and brotherhood. It teaches us that beyond differences of language, culture, and geography, we remain one



Ummah united by our belief in the Oneness of Allah (SWT) and the message of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his purified Ahlul Bayt (AS). This blessed month calls upon us to rise above discord, strengthen the bonds of fraternity, and work collectively for peace, justice, and moral integrity within our societies. It is a time to cleanse our hearts from hatred, to forgive one another, and to dedicate ourselves to the higher values that Islam upholds.

Let us make this Ramadhan a turning point in our lives—an opportunity for sincere repentance,

increased devotion, and meaningful service to humanity. Let us remember in our prayers those who are suffering, those facing injustice, and those deprived of safety and dignity. May Allah (SWT) accept our fasts, prayers, supplications, and good deeds; forgive our shortcomings; and grant unity, stability, and prosperity to the entire Muslim Ummah. May this holy month bring peace to our hearts, strength to our faith, and abundant blessings to our families and communities. Ramadhan Mubarak to all.

Are Scholars Irrelevant? How you understand Islam without them?

■ BY RAQIF MAKHDOOMI

The era of Social media has kept us available everything for us on just a single click. For the understanding of anything before the social media age. A person today doesn't have to do much research to get to know things because of the Internet. It takes a single click to know anything that confuses you are makes you curious. Chat GPT and Grok have made things much simple. But let this thing be very much known. Before all this existed gaining knowledge was very much difficult. All books used to be hand written. People had to travel kilometres to learn a single topic. But today we get a whole book just by a single click. The more easily we have knowledge available we are becoming ignorant.

In this age of "Social media" and availability of "Internet data" at cheap rates. We have everyone being too much active on social media. High speed data is helping people scroll through reels and upload things very easily. From watching whole video which extended upto 2 hours, now has shrined into a reel of not longer than 2 minutes. Now people especially the Gen Z doesn't have time to watch the videos on You tube. They instead rely on Instagram reels to gather information. And these reels have made them limited to information. They believe the person they're seeing in reels. Just because he's speaking about Hadith number, verse number and so on. But is that all to verify a person is speaking truth or not? No, it isn't. Being a scholar isn't just referring to Verse of Quran or Hadith. You must be able to interpret the verse of Quran and Hadith properly and keeping in view every aspect of it. For every Ayat of Quran there's a thing called "Shaan E Nazooul". Which means why was the verse reviled. To understand what the verse or verses want to convey the Shaan E Nazooul. Plays an important role.

With social media becoming a daily routine. Social media is giving birth to many new things. Social media has given birth to many self proclaimed "Islamic scholars". They put up Islamic books around them and appear before people. Then they start explaining Hadith that confuse people and then make people believe that the "Scholars" they have been following have misled them. And unfortunately the common masses believe in it and come up with the thing "We don't want scholars". And then these social media scholars feed them with "Study yourself don't follow these scholars". I have no problem with "Study yourself" phrase. But the thing is when you start studying yourself, you

rely on the texts that are available and they have also been written by some "Scholar". And those who feed you with this phrase have also read the same scholars. So how do they come up with "Don't follow scholars" when they have acquired all the knowledge because of scholars?

They actually don't have a problem with scholars the only problem with them is. If they don't take away people from scholars, their business shall not become portable.

While they preach people to follow Quraan and Hadith they don't tell people about a Hadith in Sunan Tirmidhi which States Abu Darda reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Whoever travels a path in search of knowledge, Allah will make him traverse a path to Paradise. Verily, the angels lower their wings in pleasure for the seeker of knowledge. The inhabitants of the heavens and earth, even the fish in the depths of the water, seek forgiveness for the scholar. The virtue of the scholar over the worshiper is like the superiority of the moon over the stars. Verily, the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets. The Prophets do not leave behind gold or silver coins, but rather they only leave behind knowledge. Whoever takes it has taken hold of an abundant fortune." Source: Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2682

Read the line "Verily, the scholars are the inheritors of the prophets". Which means they are one who take the mission of prophets ahead. Once prophets leave the world, the mission that Prophets take up is kept alive by the scholars. The same Hadith is quoted in Sunan Abi Dawud, Hadith: 3636 Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith: 223 Sahih Ibn Hibban; Al Ihsan, Hadith: 88.

Those who keep telling people that scholars have kept things hidden have never explained this Hadith to their followers, because they know that if their followers come to know about this Hadith, it'll blow up their propaganda that they have built up to take people away from the truth.

If we keep going on with this thinking "We don't need scholars" we shall be left with nothing. The tafseer "Explanation of Quran" have been written by scholars. The explanations of Hadiths have been written by scholars. Every single thing that we have what we call "Research" is written by "Scholar". And every scholar has a different ideology and have seen things in a very different way. If you remove scholars from Islam. You'll have nothing, it's these scholars who have put things simplified for us. All these Tafseer (Explanation of Quran)

have been written by these scholars after reading for years and after consulting thousands of books.

Let's take a look at this. Imam Bukhari (ra) was a student of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (ra). Imam Hanbal (ra) taught him Hadith. Now if we see it in a way, Imam Hanbal (ra) might have taught Imam Bukhari (ra) his school of thought supporting Haidths. But that's in no way the case. Bukhari is the most accepted book after Quran. All the Four Fiqahs of Sunni Sects accept it and find Haidths that support their Fiqah. Which means Imam Bukhari (ra) wasn't a guy who was limited to single thought. Hammad ibn Abi Sulayman (ra) was the teacher of Imam Abu Hananfi (ra). Now question your self. When Hammad Ibn Abi sulayman (ra) was teacher of Abu Hananfi (ra) who became an Imam of a Fiqah. Which Fiqah did his teacher belong to? The answer is none. So Abu Hananfi (ra) has been a student of a person who belonged to no Fiqah. Imam Abu Hananfi (ra) was a student of "Zayd ibn Ali: A scholar and descendant of the Prophet (PBUH)". Abu Hananfi (ra) is also a student of Jafar Sadiq (ra). Imam Anas bin Malik (ra) was the teacher of Imam shafi (ra). Both Fiqah Malik and Fiqah shafi has different understanding. Ibn Hurmaz (ra) was the teacher of Imam Malik (ra). Imam Malik (ra) was also student of Jafar Sadiq (ra). Imam Al Shafi (ra) was the teacher of Imam Hanbal (ra). One must understand that all the Imams have studied by different Teachers. And some imams have studied by imam of different Fiqah but still they have become of different Fiqah. So all the Four Imams can't be accused of having limited knowledge or having been taught to be crafted into the ideology of their teacher. Imam Muslim (ra) was the student of Imam Bukhari (ra) and also Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (ra). Imam Tirmidhi (ra) was the student of Imam Bukhari (ra). Imam Bukhari (ra) taught Imam Tirmidhi (ra) the knowledge of Hadith. And Imam Tirmidhi's (ra) book The Tirimidhi is now one among the famous Hadith books.

People nowadays have an opinion which they have crafted out by themselves. "Why should we follow these people?" "They have given opinions related to a single Fiqah". But do they know how have they crafted this opinion? No, they don't. Had they take few minutes and done some real "Research" they would never had such opinion. They come across a guy, who wears turban (Amama) he quoted Hadith numbers and knows how to read Arabi. They consider him someone who can give his opinion on things/issues related to Islam. And under the influence they

start saying they don't follow any "Scholar" they do "Research". The only flaw in their Research is that, their research material is his lectures. Understanding Fiqah and Hadith you need a Scholar. You can't understand Fiqah and Hadith without them. The thing is people nowadays work on confuse the youth. So that they can't frame a particular opinion. And they are in loop. When all the rescrach/s have been done and completed. Things have been sorted long before. What's the need to tell people "Rescrach"? The only thing is that they want to keep people in the loop.

One more category of people is that we don't follow Hadith. We follow "Quraan". Yes, everyone has to follow Quraan. But the only problem with these people is same as them of those who say we don't follow scholars. Had these people read quraan. They would have never said so. Allah has mentioned in Quraan

Surah Ali 'Imran 3:31: "Say, [O Muhammad], 'If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins...".

Surah An-Nisa 4:59: "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you...".

Surah An-Nisa 4:80: "He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah...".

Surah Al-Ahzab 33:21: "There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern [of conduct] for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day...".

Surah Al-Hashr 59:7: "...And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from...".

Surah Al-Nur 24:54: "Say, 'Obey Allah and obey the Messenger; but if you turn away - then upon him is only that [duty] with which he has been charged, and upon you is that with which you have been charged. And if you obey him, you will be [rightly] guided...".

Surah Al-A'raf 7:158: "...So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered prophet, who believes in Allah and His words, and follow him that you may be guided".

Allah has not only once but many times mentioned about following the command of Prophet Muhammad (saw). Where do we find the command of our prophet Muhammad (saw)? In Quraan? No, in Hadith. So when you reject Hadith you reject the command of the Quraan.

Remember everyone on social media isn't a scholar. We need to be very careful while we come across people who come out with different opinion.

The author is a law student.

Industry in Jammu & Kashmir: Not Factories but Weaving Heritage



■ DR. RATAN BHATTACHARJEE

The industrial history of Jammu and Kashmir is relatively modest compared to other Indian states. Traditionally, the economy was agrarian, with horticulture, handicrafts, and small-scale trade forming its backbone. The famed Kashmiri shawls, carpets, papier-mâché, and woodwork were exported across the world, earning the region a reputation for artisanal excellence. However, large-scale industrialisation was slow to take root. Several factors contributed to this: the mountainous terrain, limited connectivity, political instability, and a lack of coherent industrial policy. During the mid-20th century, efforts were made to establish industries in sectors such as textiles, cement, and food processing. Yet, these remained limited in scope and scale. The insurgency of the 1990s further disrupted industrial growth, leading to capital flight and discouraging investors. For decades, the promise of industrialisation remained largely unfulfilled, with the economy continuing to rely heavily on government employment and subsidies.

Jammu & Kashmir's key industries are dominated by agro-based sectors (horticulture, saffron, food processing) and world-renowned handicrafts (carpets, Pashmina shawls, papier-mâché, wood-carving), alongside growing tourism, mineral-based industries (cement, limestone), and small-scale manufacturing (sports goods, leather). The economy heavily relies on these traditional crafts and natural resources, with government support focusing on MSMEs due to infrastructure challenges for large-scale industries. Some of the most important industries of Jammu and Kashmir are: 1. Silk Textile 2. Carpet-Making and Woolen Textile 3. Forest-based Industries 4. Agro-based Industries 5. Papier Mache 6. Cement Industry 7. Industrial Complexes.

Industrialisation falls under the secondary economic activity. The industrial process involves changing the form of goods to enhance their value. To undertake the manufacture of goods, inputs in the form of capital, labour, power and raw materials are required. The output is a finished product that can either be used again as a raw material for another manufactured or consumed in its present form. The location of an industry, thus, largely depends on the availability of raw materials, minerals, pow-

er, capital, labour, infrastructure and managerial skill. The establishment of industry is also influenced by the general climatic conditions, weather, industrial inertia, historical accident and the government policy.

Industrialisation in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) has long been framed as both a promise of transformation and a challenge constrained by history, geography, and politics. The New Industrial Development Scheme (NIDS) launched in 2021 promised Rs. 28,400 crore in incentives to attract investors, aiming to generate employment and diversify the economy. J&K has rich natural resources (timber, minerals, water power) and a strong artisanal heritage (carpets, shawls, papier-mâché), which can be scaled with modern industry. Industrialisation tied to tourism (hospitality, handicrafts, food processing) could create sustainable jobs while preserving cultural identity. Food processing, pharmaceuticals, cement, textiles, and handicrafts have shown resilience, with small-scale industries expanding steadily over the past two decades.

Agro-Based Industries have a big future in the state that includes leveraging horticulture (apples, saffron, walnuts) for food processing and export. Harnessing rivers for clean energy can power local industries and attract investment. With improved connectivity post-2019, IT parks and service industries could emerge, reducing dependence on traditional sectors. If political conditions stabilize, J&K could benefit from trade corridors with Central Asia and neighboring regions. Decades of instability have discouraged investors, with many entrepreneurs suffering losses since the 1990s. Despite repeated promises, J&K still lacks a coherent industrial policy that addresses fiscal realities and investor confidence. Limited logistics, transport bottlenecks, and unreliable power supply hinder large-scale industrial growth. The economy remains heavily reliant on subsidies and public sector employment, slowing private sector dynamism. Industrialisation in J&K is not just about factories—it's about weaving together heritage, resources, and modern infrastructure into a sustainable framework. The promises are bold, but the possibilities hinge on peace, policy clarity, and investor confidence.

Industrialisation has long been regarded as the engine of modern economic growth, a transformative force that reshapes societies, creates employment, and enhances living standards. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the idea of industrialisation carries a special resonance. This region, blessed with natural beauty and cultural richness, has historically been associated more with tourism, handicrafts, and agriculture than with heavy industry. Yet, in recent decades,

policy-makers, entrepreneurs, and citizens alike have debated whether industrialisation could provide the much-needed impetus for sustainable development, employment generation, and integration of J&K into the broader national and global economy. The promises are alluring, but the possibilities are tempered by challenges rooted in geography, politics, and socio-economic realities.

The Kashmiris have an age-old tradition in the manufacturing of carpets, silk textiles, shawls, raffle, woodwork and handicrafts. In the rural areas, leather industry, oil-crushing, pottery, blacksmithy, carpentry, paper machine, willow-wicker, soap making, food processing, cricket bat and toys making are some of the important industries which provide full or part-time employment to the people. The Kashmiris have won a great reputation as artisans and were celebrated in the old days for their skill in art manufacturing. The chief centre of Kashmiri industries is Srinagar, but other localities are also famous for their special manufactures. For example, Islamabad (Anantnag) turns out excellent embroideries; Kulgam is famous for lacquered woodwork. Bijbehara has a reputation for its excellence in wood-carving, while the villagers of the Zainagir Circle are famed for their soft woolen cloth. Every Kashmiri seems to excel as a weaver, and the home-spun cloth woven by the villagers in the winter is highly appreciated all over the world.

Despite these historical limitations, the promise of industrialisation in J&K remains compelling. Industrialisation is seen as a pathway to Employment Generation. With a large youth population facing high unemployment rates, industries could provide jobs across skill levels. Economic Diversification is another promise. Moving beyond dependence on tourism and agriculture, industrialisation could create resilience against seasonal and political disruptions. Harnessing the region's abundant natural resources—timber, minerals, water power, and horticultural produce—offer raw material for industries ranging from hydropower to food processing. Integration with National Economy could strengthen J&K's economic ties with the rest of India, fostering greater stability and development. Handicrafts and agro-products, if industrially scaled, could find larger markets globally, enhancing foreign exchange earnings. This can boost exports. Industrialisation in J&K is envisioned as a transformative force capable of Employment Generation. Addressing high youth unemployment through industries across skill levels. Reducing dependence on tourism and agriculture, thereby creating resilience against seasonal and political disruptions. Harnessing horticultural produce, hydro-

power, and artisanal heritage for industrial scaling along with strengthening economic ties with the rest of India, fostering stability and development are necessary. Expanding global markets for handicrafts and agro-products through industrial value addition is the need of the hour.

The government has recognized these promises. As mentioned above the New Industrial Development Scheme (NIDS) launched in 2021, with an outlay of Rs. 28,400 crore, was designed to attract investment, incentivize entrepreneurs, and create employment. Such schemes reflect the belief that industrialisation can be the cornerstone of J&K's economic transformation. The possibilities for industrialisation in J&K are diverse, spanning traditional sectors and modern industries. J&K is renowned for its apples, walnuts, cherries, and saffron. Food processing units, cold storage facilities, and packaging industries could add value to these products, enabling exports and reducing wastage. While handicrafts are traditionally small-scale, industrialisation could modernize production, improve marketing, and integrate artisans into global supply chains without diluting cultural authenticity. The rivers of J&K offer immense potential for hydropower generation. Industrialisation in this sector could not only meet local energy needs but also supply power to other states, creating revenue streams. Hospitality, adventure sports, and eco-tourism can be supported by industries producing equipment, infrastructure, and services. With improved connectivity post-2019, IT parks and service industries could emerge, offering employment to educated youth and reducing brain drain. The region's biodiversity offers scope for herbal and pharmaceutical industries, while healthcare infrastructure could be industrially scaled to serve both local and medical tourism needs.

Yet, the path to industrialisation in J&K is fraught with challenges. Decades of conflict have created an environment of uncertainty, discouraging investors. Stability is a prerequisite for industrial growth. Poor road connectivity, limited rail access, and inadequate logistics hinder the movement of goods and raw materials. Reliable power supply remains a challenge despite hydropower potential. While schemes exist, the absence of a coherent long-term industrial policy tailored to J&K's unique conditions has limited progress. Industrialisation must balance growth with ecological preservation, given the fragile Himalayan ecosystem. A mismatch between available skills and industrial requirements hampers employability. Vocational training and education reforms are essential. The economy remains heavily reliant on subsidies and public sector employment, slowing private sector dynamism.

Comparing J&K with other hill states such as Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand reveals both possibilities and limitations. These states have successfully developed agro-based industries, hydropower, and tourism-linked enterprises. With similar geography, J&K could emulate these models, provided political stability and infrastructural investment are ensured. However, the unique socio-political context of J&K requires tailored strategies rather than replication.

For industrialisation in J&K to move from promise to reality, a multi-pronged approach is necessary:

Peace and Stability: Political resolution and sustained peace are the bedrock of investor confidence.

Infrastructure Development: Roads, railways, logistics hubs, and reliable power supply must be prioritized.

Policy Clarity: A coherent industrial policy, with long-term incentives and transparent regulations, is essential.

Skill Enhancement: Vocational training, technical education, and entrepreneurship programs can prepare the workforce for industrial jobs.

Sustainable Practices: Industrialisation must be environmentally sensitive, leveraging green technologies and renewable energy.

Public-Private Partnerships: Collaboration between government and private sector can accelerate industrial growth.

Local Empowerment: Industrialisation should involve local communities, ensuring that benefits are equitably distributed and cultural heritage preserved.

Industrialisation in Jammu and Kashmir is both a promise and a possibility. The promise lies in its potential to generate employment, diversify the economy, and integrate the region into national and global markets. The possibilities span agro-based industries, handicrafts, hydropower, IT, and tourism-linked enterprises. Yet, challenges of political instability, infrastructural deficits, and policy gaps must be addressed. The future of industrialisation in J&K depends not merely on capital investment but on a holistic vision that balances growth with sustainability, tradition with modernity, and local empowerment with global integration. If pursued with clarity, sensitivity, and determination, industrialisation could indeed transform Jammu and Kashmir into a hub of prosperity, resilience, and cultural pride.

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The Festival Of Basant

■ MOOL RAJ

Basant is a festival celebrated to herald the arrival of the spring season after harsh winters, which also coincides with the harvesting season. Its origins date back centuries. Before Partition it was celebrated across religious lines in undivided Punjab, especially Lahore, Amritsar and Kasur. Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus flew kites from their well-decorated rooftops wearing yellow clothes and sharing food with guests while enjoying music. It had no regulatory regime imposed by the state.

However, it was during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century that it was institutionalised as a festival at the state level. Over the years it became part of Jammu culture and also developed into an industry providing livelihood to millions of people besides being a source of great enjoyment and recreation for the entire population.

After Partition Jammu and Kashmir became the hub of kite flying and the festival of Basant. However, kites were also flown in other parts of the country throughout the year. It almost became a passion among the public. I still cherish nostalgic memories of kite flying during my school and college years and running around to pick up loose kites. The spirit and enjoyment of the festival could not be explained in words. It was an ecstatic pursuit to say the least. In the late 1990s and early 2000s Basant also became a major tourist attraction

for people from around the world who came to enjoy and be part of the festival.

As the fever for celebrating Basant snow-balled, string producers started making the string stronger than before by adding additional chemicals and better quality glass powder. The result was that the string became sharp like a knife and led to many lethal incidents in which stray kite string cut the throats of many motorcyclists due to the exponential increase in the use of motorcycles from the late eighties onward. According to an estimate there are more than five million motorcycles running on roads in Jammu and Kashmir and likewise their number has also increased substantially in other cities.

In view of the growing popularity of kite flying, particularly during Basant which also attracted foreigners to the event, the government started patronising the festival. However nobody bothered to evaluate the consequences of kite flying due to the changed circumstances and to put in place a regulatory mechanism. To the pursuit.

The revival of the Basant festival by the Jammu and Kashmir government is a welcome and imaginative step, as was evident from the indescribable enthusiasm of the people and their expression of gratitude to the government. At least an effort has been made to care for the sentiments of the people and their love for a cultural event like Basant. It was not only a great moment from a cultural perspective but also from an economic point of view. According to



estimates nearly Rs4 billion were spent on buying kites and related material. The people of Jammu and Kashmir and those coming from other cities spent Rs5 billion on food during the festivities. Transporters who brought people to Jammu and Kashmir from other cities also had a roaring business. Overall the festival was a great success to say the least.

While congratulating the Jammu and

Kashmir government for reviving the Basant festival, I would like to point out that it was an over-regulated event on which billions of rupees were spent from the government exchequer on advertising and extraordinary arrangements to implement regulatory mechanisms which could have been avoided had the planners exercised more discretion and understanding of the spirit of the event.

The impact of the regulatory mechanism was that the string and kites were sold at exorbitant prices which most people could not afford. The kites which were available in the range starting from Rs20 to Rs200 before the ban on kite flying were sold from Rs300 to Rs2000, making it a festival of the moneyed people. The less privileged participated in the event by running after loose kites instead of being part of the kite-flying contests themselves.

In my considered view kite flying can be made safe and secure by putting a complete ban on the production of strings coated with chemicals. It is easier to dry the source of production of chemical-coated strings rather than monitoring the flyers of kites. Another necessary measure is to make it obligatory for motorcyclists to install head-high windshields on their bikes besides wearing helmets. The traffic police can easily monitor it. It will reduce incidents of throat-cutting by strings and also save riders from dust and hot winds during summer and cold winds during winter, creating a win-win situation for all.

My other suggestion is that kite flying must be allowed in the entire province throughout the year as it used to be before the ban. It will generate tremendous economic activity by creating millions of jobs. The young generation will also have a safe and less costly source of entertainment.

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The Running as Fitness Routine



■ DR. SURINDERPAL SINGH

In an age characterized by sedentary lifestyles, technological dependence and a steady rise in non-communicable diseases, running stands out as one of the most accessible, economical and scientifically validated forms of physical activity. Unlike complex fitness regimens that demand specialized equipment, gym memberships or structured facilities, running requires minimal resources while delivering profound physiological and psychological benefits. Modern medical research consistently recognizes running as a cornerstone of preventive health care, cardiovascular fitness, metabolic balance and overall longevity.

Running is a dynamic aerobic activity that engages multiple organ systems simultaneously. It challenges the cardiovascular, respiratory, musculoskeletal, endocrine and nervous systems in a coordinated manner. When a person runs, the heart works harder to pump oxygen-rich blood to working muscles. Over time, this strengthens the cardiac muscle and increases stroke volume, the amount of blood pumped with each heartbeat. As efficiency improves, resting heart rate decreases, reflecting enhanced cardiac performance. Regular runners also develop improved vascular elasticity and reduced arterial stiffness, adaptations that significantly lower the risk of hypertension, coronary artery disease and stroke.

The respiratory system adapts alongside



the heart. Running enhances lung capacity and improves oxygen uptake, a key indicator of aerobic fitness. Better oxygen transport ensures efficient tissue perfusion and cellular metabolism, supporting endurance and sustained energy production. These changes collectively enhance the body's ability to perform prolonged physical work with reduced fatigue.

Metabolically, running plays a critical regulatory role. It improves insulin sensitivity and promotes glucose uptake by skeletal muscles, thereby lowering the risk of type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome. Regular running reduces visceral fat accumulation and improves lipid profiles by

increasing high-density lipoprotein (HDL) while lowering low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and triglycerides. These metabolic improvements contribute substantially to long-term cardiovascular protection.

Contrary to the common misconception that running harms joints, moderate and properly performed running strengthens the musculoskeletal system. Mechanical loading during running stimulates osteoblastic activity, increasing bone mineral density and reducing the risk of osteoporosis. Muscles, tendons and ligaments become stronger and more resilient, improving joint stability and overall functional strength.

The benefits of running extend beyond physical adaptations into the realm of neurochemistry and mental health. Running stimulates the release of endorphins, serotonin, dopamine and brain-derived neurotrophic factor. These neurochemicals elevate mood, enhance cognitive function and improve emotional regulation. Numerous studies link regular running with reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress-related disorders, while also improving sleep quality and mental clarity.

For optimal results, running should be approached scientifically rather than impulsively. Health professionals recommend at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week. Beginners may start with 20 to 30 minutes of brisk walking combined with light jogging three to four times weekly, progressing gradually to prevent injury and ensure sustainable adaptation. Intensity can be monitored through heart rate zones, the talk test or perceived exertion scales. Advanced individuals may incorporate interval training for further cardiovascular gains. A proper warm-up of five to ten minutes prepares muscles and reduces injury risk, while a cool-down phase aids circulation and stabilizes blood pressure.

Precautionary measures remain essential. Individuals above 40 years of age or those with obesity, hypertension, diabetes, cardiac history or musculoskeletal concerns should seek medical evaluation before beginning vigorous training. Gradual progression, often guided by the 10 percent rule of increasing weekly mileage, helps prevent overuse injuries such as shin splints or stress fractures. Appropriate footwear with adequate cushioning and arch support reduces impact stress, and softer running surfaces minimize joint strain. Adequate hydration and balanced

nutrition further support performance and recovery. Listening to the body is equally important; persistent pain, dizziness or chest discomfort requires medical consultation.

Longitudinal research demonstrates that regular runners experience significantly lower cardiovascular mortality, reduced incidence of certain cancers, improved immune function and decreased risk of cognitive decline. Running is also associated with favorable biological markers of aging, including improved mitochondrial efficiency and reduced systemic inflammation. Beyond measurable health metrics, it cultivates discipline, resilience and self-efficacy, strengthening both body and mind.

While excessive training without adequate recovery may lead to overtraining syndrome or musculoskeletal injury, moderate and structured running does not accelerate osteoarthritis in healthy individuals. The determining factor is proper methodology rather than avoidance of activity.

Running represents a scientifically validated, cost-effective and universally accessible intervention for enhancing physical health and preventing chronic disease. When practiced with structured progression and appropriate precautions, it strengthens the heart, optimizes metabolism, fortifies bones, enhances psychological well-being and supports longevity. In a modern world burdened by inactivity and lifestyle disorders, running is not merely exercise; it is preventive medicine in motion. Public health strategies and individual lifestyles alike would benefit from embracing running as a fundamental component of daily life.

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

MS. JAASINDAH MIR

RCI-LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST | EFT MASTER PRACTITIONER | FLOWER ESSENCE PRACTITIONER | AUTHOR

TRAUMA-FOCUSED PSYCHOLOGIST

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For decongestion of city, operationalisation of New Bus Stand, DC Jammu orders strict regulatory measures

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEB 19: Deputy Commissioner Jammu, Dr. Rakesh Minhas, who is also the Chairman Regional Transport Authority, today convened a meeting to review and finalise the functioning and operationalisation of the New Bus Stand Jammu.

The meeting focused on resolving traffic congestion, streamlining transport operations and implementing systematic route-wise allocation of bays and ticketing counters.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioners, Vidhu Shekhar and Anshu Jammwal, SSP Traffic Jammu City, Amit Bhasin, Regional Transport Officer Jammu, Jasmeet Singh besides representatives of various Taxi

and Tempo Traveller associations and other concerned departments.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner made it unequivocally clear that the unnecessary choking of city roads will no longer be tolerated. Strict directives were issued stating that no taxi or tempo will be allowed to halt or cause bottlenecks at vital traffic nodes, particularly near St. Peter's School, BC Road, Ambphalla Chowk, Indira Chowk, KC Chowk, Hari Singh Park and the Government Super Speciality Hospital.

A detailed formal order containing these regulatory measures has been issued. For the awareness of the general public, copies of this detailed order have been shared on official social media accounts of District



Magistrate Jammu besides other media platforms. No operator shall operate from any bay or Ticketing Counter other than the one allotted without prior written approval of the

RTA, the order mandates. To address the issue comprehensively, the DC announced a dedicated, earmarked space for taxi and tempo operators. The top floor of the JDA parking

facility at the Jammu Bus Stand has been allocated exclusively for taxi and tempo unions to function as a centralised boarding and deboarding hub for all routes, a move aimed at bring-

ing order to the city's transport network and easing congestion within core city limits.

To ensure uniform compliance, Dr. Minhas made clear that any unauthorised boarding

and deboarding, whether by taxi and tempo associations or any other bus service, will be strictly penalised.

It was also mandated that Jammu Smart City Buses must conduct their boarding and deboarding operations solely from within the Bus Stand premises, besides other designated bus stops.

The DC directed SSP Traffic Jammu City and RTO Jammu to ensure rigorous on-ground enforcement of all decisions taken during the meeting, while assuring full administrative support to unions that comply with the new directives.

Representatives of the taxi and tempo unions widely welcomed the announcement, lauding the allocation of the space as a beneficial and much-needed initiative.

Srinagar organizes Registration Drive for PMMVY

HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 19: Social Welfare Department (SWD), Srinagar, through SANKALP-Hub for Empowerment of Women (Mission Shakti), successfully organized a registration drive under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) at SKIMS Maternity Hospital, Soura and SKIMS Medical College and Hospital Bemina.

The primary objective of the drive was to identify and enroll eligible pregnant women and lactating mothers under PMMVY, ensure last-mile delivery of maternity benefits, and enhance institutional outreach of the scheme. The drive also aimed at creating awareness among beneficiaries regarding the financial assistance,

eligibility conditions, and procedural requirements of the scheme.

During the drive, beneficiaries visiting OPDs, antenatal clinics, and maternity wards were mobilized, counselled, and guided through the registration process. On-the-spot registrations were carried out with the assistance of concerned health functionaries to ensure accuracy and timely enrolment.

The staff of SANKALP-HEW Srinagar coordinated closely with medical officers, nursing staff, and frontline health workers to facilitate smooth implementation of the drive. Special emphasis was laid on ensuring proper documentation, Aadhaar seeding, and verification to avoid future grievances and delays in ben-

efit disbursement.

The registration drive contributed significantly to improving awareness, strengthening institutional convergence between the Social Welfare and Health Departments, and increasing the enrolment rate under PMMVY. The proactive support and cooperation of hospital authorities, health personnel, and field staff played a pivotal role in the successful conduct of the initiative.

Such drives will continue to be organized in the future to ensure maximum coverage of eligible beneficiaries, promote maternal health and nutrition, and further strengthen the effective implementation of women-centric welfare schemes under Mission Shakti.

DLSA Reasi organises awareness programmes

HT NEWS NETWORK

REASI, FEB 19: Under the visionary leadership of Chairman, District Legal Services Authority Reasi (also Pr. District and Sessions Judge, Reasi), Khalil Choudhary and the able guidance of Secretary, DLSA Reasi, Pooja Gupta, an awareness programme on Beti Bachao Beti Padhao was conducted by the Para Legal Volunteers of TLSC Katra at Panchayat Akhli, Katra and also by the Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) of DLSA, Reasi was successfully conducted in collaboration with ICDS at Panchayat Laiter, Pouni.

During the programme, the PLVs highlighted the objectives of the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme, emphasizing gender equality, the value of education for girls, prevention of female foeticide and the collective responsibility of society to ensure equal opportunities for daughters. The participants were also informed about various legal provisions and government welfare schemes aimed at safeguarding the rights and dignity of women and girl children.

Another awareness programme was conducted by the Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) of DLSA, Reasi at Village Kotla regarding various schemes of the Department of Horticulture. The programme focused on spreading awareness among the local residents, farmers and beneficiaries about different welfare schemes being implemented by the Department of Horticulture, including the Fruits Plants Drive, Warming Compound Scheme, Dug Well Scheme and Sphere Pump Scheme of the Government.

The participants were sensitized about the objectives, benefits, eligibility criteria and the procedure for availing these schemes aimed at promoting horticulture development and improving the socio-economic condition of farmers. Emphasis was laid on encouraging farmers to adopt modern horticulture practices, avail subsidies and financial assistance provided under these schemes and enhance productivity through scientific methods. The gathering was also informed about the importance of sustainable water management through dug wells and sphere pumps, as well as protective measures such as warming compounds for better crop yield.

DC chairs NCORD meeting; reviews drug control measures in Udhampur

HT NEWS NETWORK

UDHAMPUR, FEB 19: Deputy Commissioner Udhampur, Saloni Rai today chaired a meeting of the District Level Committee under the Narco Coordination Centre NCORD to review and reinforce measures aimed at curbing drug abuse in the district.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner, Prem Singh and senior officers from concerned departments.

A detailed review was undertaken on key aspects of drug prevention and control, including identification and rehabilitation of addicts, cases registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, surveillance of educational institutions, inspection of de-addiction centres and awareness campaigns conducted under IEC and Nasha Mukta Panchayat initiatives.

The committee also deliberated on strengthening



inter-departmental coordination to effectively track and apprehend individuals involved in drug trafficking, identify drug abuse hotspots and promote community-level rehabilitation and awareness efforts.

The DC directed all departments to intensify counseling services and further enhance IEC activities to sensitize the public about the harmful effects of drug abuse. She instructed Principals of Colleges to organize regular awareness programmes within their institutions. The CMO was asked to conduct sensitization and counseling sessions for healthcare staff and to expand IEC campaigns across all health institutions in the district.

Stressing the need for strict enforcement, the DC called for intensified action to seize illicit substances and safeguard the youth from the menace of drug addiction. She emphasized a coordinated and collaborative approach among all line departments to dismantle drug supply chains and ensure a comprehensive, community-driven fight against substance abuse.

SDMs were also directed to organize awareness drives and sensitize the public about the ill effects of drug abuse within their respective jurisdictions.

Government of Jammu & Kashmir

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PW(R&B) DIVISION SHOPIAN

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NIT No: 82/8900-09/RnB/ SPN /e-Tendering/2025-26 | Dated: 19-02-2026

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor, UT J&K, e-tenders (In single cover system) are invited on Item rate/Percentage basis from approved and eligible Contractors registered with J&K Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Governments for the following works:

S.No	Name of Work	Adv. Cost (Rs. In Lacs)	E/M (Rs)	Class	Time	T.D Cost
1	Construction of Girls Toilet at Higher Secondary School Sedow	3.464	6928/-	DEE	30 Days	200/-
2	Construction of Girls Toilet at High School Rawalpora	3.464	6928/-	DEE	30 Days	200/-
3	Construction of Girls Toilet at Girls Middle School Ganowpora Arshi (SSA)	3.464	6928/-	DEE	30 Days	200/-
4	Construction of Girls and Boys Toilet at High School Bohrihalan Payeen	4.09	8180/-	DEE	30 Days	200/-

Major Head of Account: Smagra Shiksha

AAA No. Date: 423- CHIRAG of 2026, Dated: 13-02-2026

TS No. Date: 108-TS/RNB/SPN/2025-26, Dated: 19-02-2026

Position of funds: Committed

Project Authority: Project Director Samagra Shiksha, J&K.

1. The Bidding documents consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Drawings, bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the departmental website www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given below:

1	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	19-02-2026
2	Document downloading Start Date	20-02-2026 From 10:00 A.M
3	Document Downloading End Date	26-02-2026 upto 2:00 P.M
4	Bid submission Start Date	20-02-2026 From 10:00 A.M
5	Bid Submission End Date	26-02-2026 upto 2:00 P.M
6	Date & time of opening of Bids (Online)	27-02-2026 at 10:00 A.M

2. Bids must be accompanied with cost of Tender document (as mentioned above) in shape of e-Challan/treasury challan / Demand Draft deposited in M.H. 0059 in favour of Executive Engineer R&B Division Shopian.

Note: The Date of Treasury Challan must be between the date of start of bid and Bid Submission End date. Any deviation shall render the bidder as Non-responsive.

2.1 At the time of tendering, all bidders must upload earnest money/bid security equal to 2% of the Advertised Cost in the form of CDR/FDR/BG pledged to the tender receiving authority, i.e. Executive Engineer R&B Division Shopian. The successful bidder will have to provide Performance Security @ 5% at the time of contract award, strictly in accordance with the Government's circular instructions from time to time. The earnest money/bid security of 2% will be released to the successful bidder only after the submission of a Performance Security of 5% of the Bid cost, which will be released after successful completion of the DLP/Maintenance Period.

3. The date and time of opening of Financial Bids of a responsive bidder shall be notified on Web Site www.jktenders.gov.in and conveyed to the bidders automatically through an e-mail message on their e-mail address.

4. The bids for the work shall remain valid for a period of 120 days from the date of opening of Technical bids.

5. The earnest money shall be forfeited if:-

a) Any bidder/ tenderer withdraws his bid/ tender during the period of bid validity or makes any modifications in the terms and conditions of the bid.

b) Failure of Successful bidder to furnish the required performance security within the specified time limit.

c) Failure of Successful bidder to execute the agreement within 28 days after fixation of contract.

6(A). Instruction to bidders regarding e-tendering process.

6.1 Bidders are advised to download bid submission manual from the "Downloads" option as well as from "Bidders Manual Kit" on website www.jktenders.gov.in to acquaint bid submission process.

6.2 To participate in bidding process, bidders have to get 'Digital Signature Certificate (DSC)' as per information Technology Act-2000.

Bidders can get digital certificate from any approved Vendor.

6.3 The bidders have to submit their bids online in electronic format with digital Signature. No bid will be accepted in physical form.

6.4 Bids will be opened online as per time schedule mentioned in Para-1.

6.5 Bidders must ensure to upload scanned copy of all necessary documents with the bid. Besides, original documents related to the bid shall be submitted by L1 before issuance of Allotment in his favour.

6.6. Bidders must ensure to upload scanned copies of all necessary documents EMD, tender documents fee in terms of soft copies and all other documents required as per NIT with technical bid. No document (s) which has/have not been uploaded shall be entertained for technical evaluation in the form of hard copy. However in case of any clarification the bidders will have to produce original documents in support of soft copies if need arises.

Note: Scan all the documents on 100 dpi with black and white option.

6.6(a) Bidders should note that if the documents uploaded/submitted on the basis of which the contract has been awarded are found forged/fake/not genuine at any time, the contract shall be cancelled and the contractor/bidder shall be recommended for blacklisting and debarred from taking part in tendering in PWD/Other Departments for a period of one year in the first instance, besides the performance security deposited for the said work shall be forfeited.

7. The department will not be responsible for delay in online submission due to any reasons.

8. All bidders have to submit Bid Security money as per the circular of Finance. Non submission of bid security money/EMD shall render the bidder as Non-responsive.

9. For item rate method the unit rates and prices shall be quoted by the bidder entirely in Indian Rupees and the rates quoted shall be deemed to include price escalation and all taxes upto completion of the work. Deduction on account of taxes shall be made from the bills of the contractor on gross amount of the bill as per the rates prevailing at the time of recovery.

The %age rate method requires the bidder to quote a percentage above / below / at par at the bottom of the BOQ percentage template for the work. The percentage quoted by the bidder shall be deemed to include price escalation and all taxes upto completion of the work. Deduction on account of taxes shall be made from the bills of the contractor on gross amount of the bill as per the rates prevailing at the time of recovery.

NOTE: Bidders are advised to quote the rates without GST. GST @18% shall be added by the allotting authority at the time of allotment.

No: NIT/8900-09 | Dt: 19-02-2026

Sd/- Executive Engineer (R&B) Division Shopian

DIPK: 11115/25 | Dated: 19-02-2026

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Govt initiates liquidation of J&KSCARD Bank; assures protection of depositors' interests: Javid Dar

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU FEB 19 : Minister for Cooperatives, Javid Ahmad Dar, today informed the House that the J&K State Co-operative Agriculture & Rural Development Bank Ltd. (J&K SCARD Bank), established in 1962 under the Jammu and Kashmir Co-operative Societies Act, 1960, is not registered under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 and therefore does not fall under the purview of the Reserve Bank of India.

The Minister stated this while replying to a clubbed question raised by Legislators Dr. Rajeev Kumar Bhagat, Vikram Randhawa, Surjeet Singh Slathia and Vijay Kumar.

He said that the Bank is presently under the control of the UT Government through the Registrar of Co-operative Societies (RCS) and the Administrative Department of Cooperatives.

The Minister further said the Bank has not been declared bankrupt and the Government has initiated the process of liquidation in accordance with the provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Co-operative Societies Act, 1989 due to prolonged financial and operational distress.



The Minister explained that the Bank's financial stress developed gradually due to accumulated losses, weak governance and internal control systems, poor loan recovery and liquidity pressures. He added the situation worsened due to

inadequate refinance support from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and limited financial assistance from the UT Government, as the Bank was largely dependent on refinance and government support and as a result, liabilities exceeded

assets, severely affecting the Bank's ability to meet depositor obligations. The Minister said that the Bank has stopped payments of matured fixed deposits, including at Bishnah Branch, due to acute liquidity constraints, leaving several depositors awaiting disbursement.

He informed the House that the repayment of depositors forms part of the overall liquidation and depositor-protection framework approved by the Government. He also said that a comprehensive Know Your Customer (KYC) verification exercise covering all branches, including Bishnah has been completed to authenticate depositor claims.

The Minister said that upon issuance of winding-up order and appointment of Liquidator(s), duly verified claims will be settled in a phased manner strictly as per statutory provisions and the prescribed order of priority.

He further stated that the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) mechanism has not been invoked as it applies only to banking institutions registered under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, adding that J&K SCARD Bank is not covered under the Act.

Reaffirming the Government's commitment to safeguarding depositor interests, the Minister said that a detailed projection of depositor liabilities has been compiled and submitted to the Government for consideration, including provisioning through the budgetary process in accordance with law.

DIC Ramban organises awareness camp at Batote

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

RAMBAN, FEBRUARY 19: In line with the directives of Deputy Commissioner, Ramban Mohammad Alyas Khan and under the guidance of Director Industries and Commerce Jammu, Arun Manhas, the District Industries Centre Ramban today organized an awareness camp at Batote.

The programme held under the overall supervision of General Manager, District Industries Centre Ramban, Ravinder Kumar, was started with the welcome address by the Project Manager, District Industries Centre Ramban, Kuldeep Singh.

The students/aspirants were sensitised regarding Udyam Registrations under RAMP, PMEGP Scheme, PM Vishwakarma and various other schemes being implemented by Industries & Commerce Department/District Industries Centre, Ramban.



The Project Manager DIC highlighted the schemes being implemented by the District Industries Centre and formally registered the applications on the portal of PMEGP to encourage the youth to become an entrepreneur by taking the advantage of loan facility provided by the Government.

The educated unemployed youth were sensitized about various benefits/subsidies they can get to start their own ventures under PMEGP Scheme in manufacturing and service sectors and other schemes such as NCSS, a central sponsored scheme and State Packages provided by the UT Government under J&K Industrial Policy- 2021-30.

Awareness regarding PM Vishwakarma, a holistic and technically upgraded skill scheme was also created during the programme. Besides, the entrepreneurs were also motivated by the officials regarding the benefits of the MSME Health Clinic registration and urged to register their ventures in MSME Health Clinic Portal (<https://jkmsmehealthclinic.jk.gov.in>).

The aspiring unemployed youths were motivated by the schemes and expressed their willingness to avail benefit under the Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) and PM Vishwakarma implemented by the District Industries Centre and more than 150 aspiring youths and artisans were motivated by different schemes.

DC Shopian chairs District-Level Telecom Committee meeting

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

SHOPIAN, FEBRUARY 19: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shopian, Shishir Gupta today chaired a meeting of the District Level-Telecom Committee to review the status of telecom services and ensure seamless network connectivity across the district.

During the meeting, a detailed presentation was delivered on telecommunication services in the district. The presentation highlighted the role and functioning of the Licence service Area (LSA), including measures being taken to strengthen connectivity, improve network coverage and address public grievances.

Key insights regarding telecom infrastructure development and future expansion plans aimed at enhancing digital connectivity across the district was shared with the committee. During the meeting, a detailed discussion was held on strengthening mobile and internet services, particularly in far-flung and mountainous areas witnessing increased public footfall. The DC stressed upon all telecom service providers to enhance network speed and improve overall service quality to facilitate smooth communication and uninterrupted activities. The representatives of BSNL, Airtel, Jio and other service providers were directed to ensure saturation of network coverage in uncovered or weak signal areas. The DC instructed the concerned officers to immediately take up issues related to call drops, slow internet speed and poor connectivity, if any and resolve them in a time-bound manner. Emphasizing the importance of reliable communication infrastructure, the DC called for joint field visits by telecom companies to assess ground-level challenges and take corrective measures. The installation of additional towers, wherever required, was also discussed to ensure smooth and stable connectivity. The DC further directed the concerned agencies to conduct surveys in uncovered pockets including remote villages and tourist locations to identify gaps and strengthen telecom services for the convenience of residents and visitors alike.

ADC, Dr. Zakir Hussain Faaz; ACR, Shakoor Ahmed Dar, other officers of district administration and representatives from telecommunication department and other concerned were present.

Inspection of Mutton and Chicken Shops conducted in Doda town

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

DODA, FEBRUARY 19: On the directions of Deputy Commissioner Doda, Harvinder Singh, a joint inspection of mutton and chicken shops operating in Doda town was conducted today.

The drive was conducted by the team comprising the Chief Animal Husbandry Officer and the District Sheep Husbandry Officer, keeping in view the ongoing holy month of Ramzan and the increased public demand for safe and hygienic meat products.

The inspection aimed to assess the overall hygiene, quality of meat being sold, adherence to prescribed veterinary and public health guidelines and compliance with relevant rules governing the sale of livestock products. During the visit, shopkeepers were



advised to maintain proper sanitation, ensure safe handling and storage of meat and strictly follow government regulations to safeguard consumer health, especially during this sacred period.

The officers emphasized the importance of maintaining cleanliness in and around the shops, using clean

water for washing meat and disposing of waste in an environmentally responsible manner. Shop owners were also sensitized about the need for regular health checks of animals and obtaining necessary certifications from the concerned departments to ensure healthy meat supply to the public during Ramzan.

DC Budgam reviews progress on Demarcation of Hokarsar Wetland

Emphasizes time-bound measures, inter-departmental coordination & Precision in Wetland Demarcation

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

BUDGAM, FEBRUARY 19: Deputy Commissioner Budgam, Dr. Bilal Mohi-Ud-Din Bhat, today chaired a meeting to review the progress of demarcation of the Hokarsar Wetland, a designated Ramsar Site, being carried out by Revenue and allied departments.

The meeting was attended by the ACR Budgam, Afroza Bano; SDM (West) Srinagar, Irfan Bahadur; SDPO Magam, DFO Photo Interpretation Division J&K, DFO Settlement & Demarcation Srinagar, Range Officer Hokarsar, Naib Tehsildar Regional Director Survey & Land Records Srinagar, and Settlement Assistant, Regional

Director S&LR Srinagar.

During the meeting, the DC reviewed in detail the current status of field verification, boundary assessment, geo-referenced mapping, and availability of relevant records with each department. He stressed the importance of accurate, scientific, and dispute-free demarcation to ensure long-term conservation and legal protection of the wetland.

The DC emphasised strict adherence to the on directions, calling for enhanced coordination between Revenue, Forest, Police, and Survey & Land Records teams. He directed officers to remove any bottlenecks in the



ongoing process and maintain close inter-departmental communication for seamless progress.

The DC further instructed the concerned agencies to submit updated status reports, expedite pending tasks, and ensure that the demarcation exercise is completed in a transparent, time-bound, and technically sound manner.

He reiterated that Hokarsar Wetland, being a Ramsar Site of international ecological importance, must be protected through robust management and clear boundary identification to prevent encroachment and ensure its ecological sustainability.

District Admin Bandipora conducts IEC Awareness Programmes under Nasha Mukht JK Abhiyan in ULB areas

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

BANDIPORA, FEBRUARY 19: Continuing its intensified campaign under the Nasha Mukht JK Abhiyan, the District Administration Bandipora today organized a series of IEC (Information, Education and Communication) awareness programmes across various Urban Local Body (ULB) areas of the district.

The programmes were conducted at Bata Mohalla Sumbal, Ward No. 4 Partly Plan Bandipora, and 5-Khos/Syed Mohalla Hajjin.

A multi-departmental team comprising officials from Health, Police, Education, Social Welfare (DDAC), Youth Services & Sports, JKNRLM, and Excise & Taxation departments participated in the programmes.

During the sessions, medical officers elaborated on the adverse physical and psychological impacts of drug abuse and stressed the importance of early intervention and treatment.

Police officials sensitized participants about the legal implications of drug-related offences and urged community members to remain vigilant. Representatives from Education and Social Welfare departments highlighted the role of families, teachers, and community institutions in identifying vulnerable individuals and providing timely counselling and support.

The programmes witnessed enthusiastic participation from local residents, youth, and members of civil society, who actively engaged in discussions and reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the vision of a drug-free Bandipora.

CIPMC organizes Two-Day HRD Programme on Integrated Pest Management

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 19: A two-day Human Resource Development (HRD) Programme on Integrated Pest Management was inaugurated today at the Centre of Excellence, Zawoora, Srinagar.

The programme was organized by the Central Integrated Pest Management Centre (CIPMC), Srinagar, in collaboration with the State Horticulture Department, Kashmir. Abdul Hamid Bhat, Joint Director, Horticulture Kashmir, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. He was accompanied by Iqbal Ahmed Wafai, Farm Manager, ACHD Rajbagh. In his inaugural address, the Joint Director emphasized the importance of capacity building of field functionaries and farmers in promoting sustainable horticultural practices. He highlighted the need



to adopt eco-friendly pest management strategies to ensure safe food production and

environmental protection.

Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Arya, Deputy Director (PP), delivered a detailed

presentation on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and the safe and judicious use of pesticides. He elaborated on the principles of IPM, focusing on need-based pesticide application, biological control measures, and resistance management to minimize environmental and health hazards.

Dr. Haroon Rashid Hakla, Assistant Plant Protection Officer (PP), provided insights into the National Pest Surveillance System. He explained its role in real-time pest monitoring, early warning systems, and informed decision-making to mitigate crop losses.

The programme witnessed active participation from field officials and farmers, aiming to strengthen pest surveillance, promote responsible pesticide use, and enhance sustainable horticultural productivity in the region.

India 20,000 GPUs in the coming weeks, beyond existing 38,000 GPUs: Ashwini Vaishnaw

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, FEB 19: Union Minister for Electronics & Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, on Tuesday announced that India will scale its compute capacity beyond the existing 38,000 GPUs with the addition of 20,000 GPUs in the coming weeks.

While speaking at the second day of the India AI Impact Summit 2026, Vaishnaw highlighted that this marks the next phase of India's AI strategy, with a significant expansion of compute infrastructure and a focus on responsible AI deployment.

He also shared his optimism regarding the investment opportunity, stating that over the next two years, more than USD 200 billion worth of investment is likely to come.

The minister noted the commitment of venture capital firms to deep-tech startups and stated that investments are coming across all five layers of the AI stack, and added that venture capital firms and other players are committing



funds for large solutions and major applications.

"IT industry is one of India's biggest strengths and that every technology transition must be managed jointly by industry, academia, and government. Work is currently underway on three fronts: reskilling and upskilling the existing workforce, creating a new

talent pipeline, and ensuring that future generations are prepared for emerging technologies. All three efforts are progressing in parallel," he said.

Referring to energy capacity, the Minister noted that India is among the rare countries where more than 50 percent of power generation capacity comes from clean sources,

currently about 51 percent, which provides a significant advantage for the country. He further said that the Future Skills programme, launched three years ago, is now being deployed for AI-based reskilling.

The Ministry of Education and AICTE are working on revising course curricula to ensure that the talent pipeline remains updated and that youth are equipped with new opportunities, he said.

Regarding chip development, the Minister reaffirmed India's commitment to the Semiconductor Mission, emphasising that design will be the primary focus in Semiconductor 2.0. He projected that at least 50 deep-tech startups are expected to emerge from India in the coming years, driven by current innovation and development efforts.

Addressing sustainability, the Minister highlighted investments in clean energy to power AI data centres and ongoing research to reduce power and water consumption. Emerging innovations indicate the potential to reduce AI infrastructure energy use by up to 35 percent. UNI

DFS secy rolls out facilitation camps to promote 'Paripoorna Mediclaim Ayush Bima' for CGHS beneficiaries

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

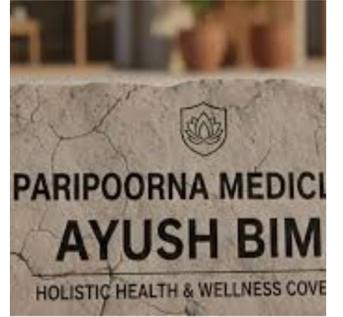
NEW DELHI, FEB 19: The Department of Financial Services (DFS) under the Ministry of Finance on Tuesday launched special facilitation camps to promote the newly introduced Paripoorna Mediclaim Ayush Bima policy for beneficiaries of the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS).

The initiative was inaugurated by Secretary, DFS, M Nagaraju, who said the camps are aimed at helping government employees and pensioners better understand the features and enrollment process of the optional health insurance product.

The camps are being organised in collaboration with The New India Assurance Company Limited across various ministries and departments.

Introduced earlier this year, Paripoorna Mediclaim Ayush Bima is a supplementary health insurance policy exclusively designed for CGHS beneficiaries.

The plan provides cashless hospitalisation benefits and offers broader treatment coverage beyond existing CGHS facilities. Beneficiaries can opt for coverage of Rs 10 lakh or Rs 20 lakh and select suitable co-payment options based on their preferences.



The policy integrates both modern medical treatments and AYUSH therapies under a single cover, offering greater flexibility in healthcare choices.

Under the policy, coverage extends to the policyholder and eligible family members, with a simplified enrollment process facilitated through the awareness camps.

With the rollout of these camps, the government aims to strengthen healthcare security for CGHS beneficiaries by providing an additional financial safety net, ensuring better access to quality treatment across an extensive hospital network. UNI

Reliance Inks partnership deal with TGI group to sell FMCG products in Nigeria

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

MUMBAI, FEB 19: Reliance Consumer Products Ltd (RCPL) officially announced here on Tuesday in a filing to the stock exchange that it has entered into a deal to form a majority-owned joint venture with Nigeria-based Tropical General Investments Group (TGI Group), which will give RCPL a stronger foothold in the Nigerian market.

Established in 1980, TGI Group is an international business conglomerate headquartered in Lagos, with operations spanning Africa, the Middle East as well as Asia.

The TGI Group has a diversified presence across food, consumer goods, agribusiness, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and distribution, managing a broad portfolio of leading brands. In Nigeria, its flagship brands like Big Bull Rice, Terra Seasoning Cubes, Golden Terra Soya Oil, Renew Starch and Supramult Multivitamins reach millions of consumers daily.

Under the proposed partnership, subject to customary regulatory and legal approvals, RCPL plans to sell a wide range of its fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) products to Nigerian consumers, leveraging TGI Group's established manufacturing capabilities and extensive distribution network across the region.

Commenting on the development, RCPL Director T Krishnakumar described the partnership as a pivotal milestone in the company's ambition to emerge as a global FMCG player from India.

"Nigeria represents a crucial market and that TGI's long-standing expertise in FMCG, culinary and agribusiness sectors will support RCPL's scale-up in the region," Krishnakumar said.

Rahul Savara, Group Managing Director of TGI Group's Managing Director Rahul Savara said, "The partnership combines complementary strengths in product development, manufacturing, marketing and distribution. Nigeria remains one of the most compelling growth markets globally and expressed confidence in building a long-term growth platform alongside RCPL across Nigeria and West Africa". UNI

Microsoft warns about growing global AI divide as it pledges \$50 billion for Global South

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, FEB 19: Microsoft is referencing the India AI Impact Summit within the broader context of the Global South while mentioning a \$50 billion investment by the end of the decade. To support this point, the tech giant cites its latest AI Diffusion Report, which indicates that the Global North uses artificial intelligence (AI) twice as much as countries in the southern hemisphere. The planned investments hinge on a five-part programme, including building AI infrastructure, providing technology and skills for schools and nonprofits, developing multilingual and multicultural AI capabilities, and fostering local AI innovations that address community needs.

"The India AI Impact Summit rightly placed this challenge at the centre of its agenda. For more than a century, unequal access to electricity exacerbated a growing economic gap between the Global North and South. Unless we act with urgency, a growing AI divide will perpetuate this disparity in the century ahead," says Brad Smith, vice chair and president of Microsoft. This alarm about usage

gaps underlines Microsoft's messaging at the summit.

Microsoft explicitly compares AI's diffusion to electrification, one of the defining infrastructure expansions of the 20th century. Just as unequal access to electricity entrenched economic gaps between the North and South, Microsoft warns that unequal access to AI could cement a new form of structural inequality for decades to come.

Comparisons between electricity and AI may be rhetorically effective messaging, but one is a utility while the other is not. The analogy also obscures key realities — AI access is not just a factor of infrastructure, but also of compute concentration. Secondly, most of today's AI footprint is concentrated among a few companies across the largest models, AI chips, and cloud platforms. Critical infrastructure for the masses is unlikely to be proprietary.

"We're investing in AI infrastructure with sensitivity to digital sovereignty needs. We recognise that in a fragmented world, we must offer customers attractive choices for the use of our offerings. This includes

sovereign controls in the public cloud, private sovereign offerings, and close collaboration with national partners," says Natasha Crampton, Vice President and Chief Responsible AI Officer of Microsoft. Infrastructure access has historically been one of the most durable predictors of long-run economic development, and the barriers to AI adoption include reliable power, connectivity, compute, skilled workers, and software in local languages.

The five-part program that Microsoft refers to includes \$8 billion in annual investments in cloud and AI data centres, including in India; Microsoft Elevate for Educators training for 2 million teachers in India; investments in language data and model capabilities, including LINGUA Africa; and co-designing AI Trek for agriculture support in East Africa and South Asia.

"As India's guiding sutras for the AI Impact Summit recognise, AI must be applied to address pressing challenges in collaboration with people and organisations in the Global South. Microsoft's increasing investments prioritise locally defined problems, locally grounded expertise, and real-world

impact," Smith notes.

Microsoft's commitment to invest \$50 billion through to the end of the decade may sound transformative for the position of the Global South relative to the Global North, but these investments will primarily flow into data centres, proprietary AI tools, and enterprise partnerships — and the likelihood of platform lock-in on a regional scale remains a possibility. There will have to be greater investments in open model ecosystems, local model training capabilities, and sovereign AI.

The skills and education pillar, anchored by the Microsoft Elevate program, targets 20 million AI credential earners by 2028, with a goal of equipping 20 million people in India with AI skills by 2030.

Microsoft insists that accelerating the availability of AI, or diffusion, will require a clear understanding of where AI is being used and how, as well as the gaps that persist. "At 24 million, the Indian developer community is the second largest national community on GitHub, where developers learn about and collaborate with the world on AI. The Indian community is

also the fastest growing among the top 30 largest economies, with growth at more than 26 percent each year since 2020 and a recent surge of over 36 percent in annual growth as of Q4 2025," the company says.

Microsoft's contribution to the forthcoming World Bank Global AI Adoption Index, built partly on privacy-preserving signals from GitHub and Azure Foundry, creates a shared empirical baseline that could guide more targeted interventions across the sector.

While the company commits to tracking AI diffusion, metrics for success on the \$50 billion investment remain vague for now. Data centre investments are measurable, but any impact on actual human development outcomes is far harder to attribute. Secondly, while there seems to be a commitment to digital sovereignty, the prospect that national AI infrastructures will be built on a single hyperscaler's cloud could create structural dependencies over time. This is also where questions about interoperability, reversibility, data localisation, and long-term pricing come into play. UNI

Demis Hassabis sees AGI on the horizon in 5-8 years, as 'we aren't there yet'

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, FEB 19: Technology isn't there yet in terms of Artificial General Intelligence, or AGI, but it's certainly on the horizon, Google DeepMind CEO Demis Hassabis said at the India AI Summit in New Delhi on Wednesday. "We are going to enter a golden era for scientific discovery,

almost a new era," Hassabis, who won the 2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his groundbreaking work on protein structure prediction using AI, said during a conversation with IIT Madras Professor B. Ravindran. As for AGI, "we are not there yet." "There are still things that systems can't do — things like continued learning still needs to happen," Hassabis said. One of the

biggest issues is consistency, long-term planning.

"Systems today can get international Math Olympiad medals, but can still make mistakes in elementary math. (AI) is still jagged that way," the DeepMind CEO said.

"It's been amazing to see the progress we have made in just over a decade. UNI

Adani Group to invest \$100 billion for AI data centres in India over next 10 years

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, FEB 19: The Adani Group, led by billionaire Gautam Adani, has announced plans to invest up to \$100 billion to build integrated, renewable-energy-powered AI data centres in India by 2035. The initiative aims to establish a "sovereign energy and compute platform," positioning India as a global exporter of intelligence rather than just a consumer.

The commitment is projected to catalyse an additional \$150 billion across the broader ecosystem, including server manufacturing, sovereign cloud services, and advanced electrical infrastructure, bringing the total economic impact to approximately \$250 billion over the next decade.



Departing from traditional data centre models, Adani's roadmap creates a unified architecture where green power generation and high-density processing are developed in parallel.

- Scale: The group is expanding its Adani ConneX platform from 2 GW to a 5 GW target, aiming for the world's largest integrated data center platform.

- Power: Compute clusters will be backed by Adani Green Energy's massive 30 GW Khavda project.

- Investment: An additional \$55 billion is earmarked to expand the group's renewable portfolio and build one of the world's largest battery storage systems (BESS). The vision is anchored by landmark collaborations with Google for a gigawatt-scale campus in Visakhapatnam and Microsoft for facilities in Hyderabad and Pune. Furthermore, Adani is deepening its tie-up with Flipkart to develop a second high-performance AI data centre. UNI

Sarvam rivals ChatGPT, Claude with AI models customised for India

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, FEB 19: Sarvam AI has unveiled an artificial-intelligence model that's more tailored for India than the likes of ChatGPT and Claude. The Bengaluru-based AI startup announced two models at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi — a showcase for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to make his country a leading player in the emerging technology. Sarvam's models are built to be used through voice commands and are accessible through 22 Indian languages, which the company says will be a competitive advantage in the country of 1.45 billion where the vast majority can't read, write or type in English.

"Today we show we can bring our own AI to a billion Indians," said Sarvam co-founder Pratyush Kumar during an event in Delhi.

Sarvam also offers what's known as Agentic AI models that



can carry out tasks like coding or meeting planning in large part autonomously and with minimal human intervention. The company says its agents could drive enterprise automation in one of the world's fastest growing economies.

The startup's unveiling of India-specific models trained from scratch comes as the AI race between the US and China is intensifying. The government is funding AI accelerators and pushing model makers to launch services

so the country, one of the largest reservoirs globally of technical talent, isn't left behind.

Sarvam has steep challenges in fending off global competitors. The startup has received more than \$50 million in funding, including from Lightspeed Ventures LLC and Khosla Ventures, and was last valued at about \$200 million. That's tiny compared with Silicon Valley leaders like OpenAI and Anthropic PBC, last valued at \$500 billion and \$380 billion, respectively.

It's also small next to companies like Mistral AI, a French pioneer in the technology that is valued at \$13.25 billion and is expanding in India with local languages.

Sarvam touts its India-first approach and the security it offers by running its AI models from inside the country. The startup's models are trained on trillions of Indian data sets, particularly those in Indian languages, making it suitable for real-time deployment at scale in the world's most populous country not just in local languages but also mixed languages such as Hinglish.

In recent benchmark tests, the startup said its models performed with superior accuracy on tasks like optical character recognition for Indian scripts. The Sarvam vision model achieved an accuracy of over 84% on document intelligence tasks, eclipsing global models hundreds of times larger in size.

"Sovereignty matters much

more in AI than building the biggest models," said Sarvam's other co-founder, Vivek Raghavan, at the same event.

India is hosting dozens of leading global chief executives, AI founders, country leaders, researchers and policy experts this week as it attempts to position itself as an alternative to the US and China, by leading in "democratising AI" and taking a cost-efficient, language-diverse route.

India's digital infrastructure has relied on foreign technologies for decades so the launch of the Sarvam models is seen as a step toward developing a "sovereign AI" ecosystem within the country.

Indian AI startups like Sarvam and BharatGen, which also released a series of India-made models this week, are looking to export their AI systems to other developing economies in the world where neither Chinese nor US models are favoured.

Dilshan Madushanka replaces injured Pathirana at T20 World Cup

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

PALLEKELE: Sri Lanka fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana has been ruled out of the T20 World Cup, after scans revealed a calf strain that may take several weeks to heal. His IPL availability is understood to not be under threat at this stage.

Dilshan Madushanka, 25, was named as his replacement on Wednesday, the eve of Sri Lanka's final group game against Zimbabwe. Both teams have already qualified for the Super Eight stage of the tournament.

Pathirana had gone down clutching his left leg after bowling his fourth delivery in Sri Lanka's match against Australia in Pallekele, before being helped off the field. He did not return to bowl in that innings. Vikram Rathour, Sri Lanka's batting consultant, confirmed the severity of Pathirana's injury on Wednesday, ahead of their final group match against Zimbabwe. "I think he's been declared unfit for the rest of the tournament. I think that news will be coming out, if it's ruling him out."

Pathirana is arguably Sri Lanka's best death bowler. He is also the fastest of the island's quicks. His replacement Madushanka has taken 15 wickets in T20Is at an average of

31.86. His economy rate in T20Is is 9.75.

Madushanka last played the last of his 15 T20Is in July 2024, a wayward showing against India in Pallekele, where he was carted for 45 runs in three overs. The performance came during an injury plagued year, in which he missed the start of the 2024 IPL and then struggled for form as he was eased back in to ODIs towards the end of the year.

Another leg injury in early 2025 kept him out for the better part of a year, before he was recalled for a home series against Bangladesh. He didn't play a single match but eventually did get game time on Sri Lanka's next assignment away to Zimbabwe. There, he picked up five wickets in two ODIs before once again suffering an injury, this time his knee.

A lack of match fitness meant he missed out on Sri Lanka's final set of tours prior to this T20 World Cup, but the current injury problems has given Madushanka another chance. It's not too long ago that he was among the top wicket-takers at the 2023 ODI World Cup in India with 21 scalps.

Sri Lanka play England in Pallekele, New Zealand at Khetarama, and Pakistan in Pallekele again, during the Super Eight stage of the 2026 T20 World Cup.



Cummins, Hazlewood Race Against Time for IPL Fitness

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

PALLEKELE: Australia supporters are likely to be left frustrated if injured duo Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins are fit for the IPL, after missing a disastrous T20 World Cup campaign, but selectors are pragmatic about the situation saying it has purely come down to timing.

There will be a full review into Australia's group stage exit once the team returns home. Hazlewood and Cummins were huge losses to Australia on the eve of the tournament. Hazlewood, who had provided a cutting edge to the attack as the team was taking shape last year, is still struggling to overcome Achilles and calf issues after initially suffering a hamstring injury on November 12.



Cummins, meanwhile, has not played since his lone appearance in the third Ashes Test in mid-December when he bowled superbly to take six wickets in 34 overs across two innings to help Australia secure the series 3-0. He was then shut down to protect the lumbar stress issue in his back with the T20 World Cup in mind but was withdrawn from the initial squad.

Despite playing one game between them in three months and missing the World Cup, it appears very likely that both will be fit for the IPL barring any further setbacks.

"It is what it is," selector Tony Dodemaide told reporters on a call on Wednesday. "It's a timing issue. If it was in reverse, the IPL was first and the World Cup was second, then they'd be missing the IPL to play in the World Cup. "It's not going to be frustrating for us at all. We know their commitment to want to play and succeed for Australia."

Australia took just four wickets, all by the all-rounders Marcus Stoinis and Cameron Green, across their two losses against Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka that saw them knocked out of the World Cup in embarrassing fashion. Meanwhile, the selectors have reiterated that Steven Smith is seen as a back-up opener only in Australia's T20I team. He was not selected in the initial squad and not picked for the Sri Lanka game having been flown at late notice, initially as cover for Mitchell Marsh before being officially included as Hazlewood's replacement.

Cricket Australia look at taking BBL opening match to India

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

SYDNEY: First reported by SEN, senior BBL executives Phil Rigby (head of business operations) and Margot Harley (head of competition development and strategy) were recently in India as part of fact-finding trip around taking a BBL match overseas. ESPNcricinfo understands they met with Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) officials and toured Chepauk stadium which is the home venue for Chennai Super Kings (CSK) in the IPL.

While the idea is being pushed seriously by CA, there remain significant hurdles to overcome before it becomes a reality, not least approval from the BCCI, but also host broadcasters and the clubs.

One of the key issues to resolve would be with the BBL



side that loses a home game from their season. It's understood that should a game be taken overseas, CA could effectively buy the game off the host club to take control of the fixture. There would also be a knock-on effect to the schedule given the distances involved,

and the need to give players enough preparation time beforehand. Then, players also need recovery time on their return home before their next game. Chennai is also prone to flooding in December due to the wet season. In Australian sport, the NRL takes matches

to Las Vegas to launch the rugby league season. However, that tournament is played over six months, while the BBL is completed in a seven-week window from mid-December to the end of January. Playing BBL matches overseas has been talked about in the past, but

the latest move comes at a significant time for the competition, which appears likely to open up for private investment in the near future. Indian money, and existing IPL owners, are expected to be heavily involved. There has been talk of Sydney Thunder and Melbourne Renegades - who are part of two-team cities - being sold off entirely to private investors.

R Ashwin, a former CSK player, was due to be the first India international to feature in the BBL this season, having signed for Thunder, but withdrew due to a knee injury. The BCCI do not allow active India men's players to appear in overseas T20 leagues. This summer's BBL was a significant success, capped off by a record crowd of 55,018 for the final at Optus Stadium, where Perth Scorchers claimed the title.

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