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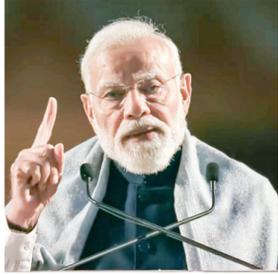
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# ₹ 1,677-Crore Civil Enclave Cleared for Srinagar Airport, PM Modi Hails 'Major Boost' for J&K

New terminal to handle 10 million passengers annually; LG Sinha says move heralds bold new aviation era

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

NEW DELHI/SRINAGAR, FEB 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday described the Cabinet approval for a civil enclave at Srinagar International Airport as a transformative step for Jammu and Kashmir, saying the expansion will accelerate economic growth, improve connectivity and give a fillip to tourism. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by the Prime Minister, cleared the project at an estimated cost of Rs.1,677 crore. The announcement was made after the Cabinet meeting by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who said the development of the civil enclave would significantly upgrade aviation infrastructure in the Valley. In a post on X, the Prime Minister said the decision to expand Srinagar



airport would boost J&K's economy, strengthen air connectivity and encourage greater tourist inflow. According to the official release, the project will be developed over 73.18 acres, with a new terminal building covering 71,500 square metres. The proposed terminal is

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## Cabinet Clears Rs.1,677-Crore Expansion of Srinagar Airport, Rajnath Calls It 'Landmark Step'

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, FEB 24: The Union Cabinet has approved a major expansion of the Civil Enclave at Srinagar International Airport, a move Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday described as a landmark step for Jammu and Kashmir. In a post on X, Singh credited the decision to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's continued emphasis on infrastructure-led growth, saying the project would significantly enhance passenger capacity, modernise aviation facilities and strengthen connectivity in the Valley. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs

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# Vice-President to visit J&K today

Traffic restrictions announced in Sgr for tomorrow



HT NEWS NETWORK

NEW DELHI, FEB 24: The Vice-President of India, C. P. Radhakrishnan, will undertake his maiden visit to Jammu & Kashmir on 25-26 February, 2026. During the visit, the Vice-President will grace the Convocation Ceremony of University of Kashmir in Srinagar as the Chief Guest on 26th February 2026. Meanwhile, the Traffic Police Srinagar has issued a detailed traffic advisory for February 26 in view of a proposed VIP visit to the city, announcing temporary restrictions and diversions on several key routes. According to the advisory, no motorist

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## Security Grid Tightened Across Kashmir Ahead of VP Radhakrishnan's Maiden Visit

HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 24: An extensive security blanket has been thrown across Kashmir ahead of Vice President C. P. Radhakrishnan's first official visit to the Valley on February 26, with authorities activating a multi-layered security grid to ensure a smooth and incident-free event. The Vice President is scheduled to attend the 21st convocation of the University of Kashmir at its Hazratbal campus, where more than 59,000 degrees will be awarded to students across various disciplines. Officials said security has been significantly intensified in Srinagar and other parts of the Valley, particularly around

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## February Turns Unseasonably Warm Across Kashmir, Temperatures Soar Up to 11°C Above Normal

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

SRINAGAR, FEB 24: Kashmir continued to witness an unusual February heatwave on Tuesday, with maximum temperatures across the Valley hovering 9 to 11 degrees Celsius above the seasonal average, raising concerns over the prolonged dry spell. According to data accessed by Kashmir News Observer (KNO), several stations in the Valley recorded significant departures from normal, even as parts of Ladakh showed a

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## CM Omar Abdullah rolls out Rs.84.41 crore multi-sector development works to transform Ganderbal

HT NEWS NETWORK

GANDERBAL, FEB 24: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of major development projects worth Rs.84.41 crore in Ganderbal Constituency, marking a significant stride towards strengthening infrastructure, healthcare, water supply, sanitation, education and road connectivity across the district. The projects, spanning multiple departments, were inaugurated and e-launched at different locations, underscoring the Government's commitment to balanced and inclusive development. At Beehama, the Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for the Rs.770 lakh Beautification



& Development Project of Ganderbal Town under the Housing & Urban Development Department (H&UD-ULB), to be executed by PWD. The project envisages construction of a grand entry

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## Cabinet okays proposal to rename Kerala as 'Keralam'

HT NEWS NETWORK

NEW DELHI, FEB 24: The Union Cabinet has reportedly given its approval to a proposal seeking to officially change the name of the state of Kerala to "Keralam," according to sources familiar with the development. The move follows a unanimous resolution passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly on June 24, 2024, requesting the Centre to initiate the constitutional process required for the name change. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had introduced the resolution, underscoring that "Keralam" is the name traditionally used in Malayalam and better represents the linguistic and cultural identity of the state.

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## Crack Down Without Pause: DGP Orders Relentless Hunt for Pak-Backed Terrorists in Kashmir

HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 24: Director General of Police (DGP) Jammu and Kashmir, Nalin Prabhat, on Tuesday directed security forces to intensify and sustain operations against Pakistan-backed terrorists, calling for a relentless offensive to dismantle militant networks across the Valley. Chairing a high-level secu-



rity review meeting in north Kashmir's Bandipora district, the DGP underscored the need for generating precise and actionable intelligence to neutralise terrorists and break their support structures. He said consistent pressure and well-coordinated action were essential to maintaining peace and stability in the region. Prabhat was accompanied

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## 152 Dead, Nearly 21,000 Structures Damaged In 2025 Rain Fury In J&K

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

JAMMU, FEB 24: The rain fury in Jammu and Kashmir last year claimed 152 lives, injured 179 people, damaged nearly 21,000 structures — mostly residential houses — while 1515 livestock perished, official data revealed. Of the total fatalities, 151 were reported from the worst-hit Jammu division and one from Kashmir valley, the data compiled by the Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Department (DMRRRD) said.

Official sources said the dead included about 100 pilgrims who lost their lives in a cloudburst and a landslide enroute to Machail Mata shrine in Kishtwar district and Vaishno Devi shrine in Reasi district in August. A devastating cloudburst struck Chisoti village — the gateway to Machail Mata shrine — in Kishtwar on August 14, killing 63 people and injuring scores of others, while 30 went missing. The incident was followed by a landslide triggered by relentless rains on Vaishno Devi route on August 26 that left 32 dead and 20 others injured.

The government said compensation for loss of lives, injuries and house damages has been disbursed as per norms under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). The DMRRRD said that Rs 289.39 crore has been released under SDRF during FY 2025-26, including Rs 200.39 crore for Jammu division and Rs 89 crore for Kashmir division to support relief and restoration measures. The Jammu division bore the brunt, with 3,304 houses fully damaged, 1,818 severely damaged and 11,622 partially damaged.

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## Jammu—Srinagar Vande Bharat Launch Put on Hold After Announcement

Railway Board postpones March 1 extension of 20-coach service until further notice citing unavoidable circumstances

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

JAMMU, FEB 24: The much-anticipated extension of the Vande Bharat Express between Jammu Tawi and Srinagar has been postponed, with the Railway Board putting the March 1 launch on hold until further notice.

In an updated communication issued on Tuesday evening, the Railways said that "due to unavoidable circumstances, the notification programme for the extension of the Vande Bharat service scheduled from March 1 has been put on hold by the Railway Board until further advice."

Officials added that further information will be shared as and when received. The premium train service, currently operating between Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra and Srinagar, was slated to be upgraded to a 20-coach rake and extended up to Jammu Tawi,

significantly enhancing connectivity between the twin capital cities. The service was originally flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 6 following the inauguration of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link project, which

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## J&K Liquor Sales Cross 5.63 Cr; IMFL, Beer Lead

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, FEB 24: Jammu and Kashmir has recorded the sale of over 5.63 crore bottles of liquor during the current financial year up to January 2026, with Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and beer accounting for the major share. According to official data, a total of over 5.63 crore bottles were sold across civil and canteen services department (CSD) off-shops and paramilitary forces' (PMF) outlets during the 2025-26 fiscal. The figures include over 1.90 crore bottles of IMFL sold in the civil sector and 20.85 lakh bottles through CSD and PMF, taking the total IMFL sales to more than 2.11 crore bottles. Beer sales stood at over 1.61 crore bottles

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**Rs.1,677-Crore Civil.....**

designed to handle 2,900 passengers during peak hours and will have an annual capacity of 10 million passengers, positioning Srinagar among key high-capacity airports in the region.

The government said the project is expected to create employment opportunities and attract fresh investments, giving a push to allied sectors such as hospitality, trade and services.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for approving what he termed a landmark expansion. Calling it the "dawn of a bold aviation era," Sinha said the Rs.1,677-crore civil enclave would mark a defining leap in connectivity for the Valley and help transform Srinagar into a thriving economic destination.

He also noted that the new terminal at Jammu Airport is slated for completion by the end of the year, further strengthening air links and catalysing economic advancement across the Union Territory.

**Cabinet Clears.....**

(CEA), chaired by the Prime Minister, approved the development at an estimated cost of Rs.1,677 crore. According to an official release, the project marks a major milestone in strengthening aviation infrastructure in the Kashmir Valley.

The new Civil Enclave, to be developed over 73.18 acres, will include a state-of-the-art terminal building spanning 71,500 square metres — including 20,659 square metres of existing structure. It is designed to handle 2,900 passengers during peak hours and cater to an annual capacity of 10 million passengers.

The expanded apron will accommodate 15 aircraft parking bays, including one widebody (Code E) aircraft. The 3,658-metre runway will continue to be operated by the Indian Air Force, as the airport functions within the Budgam Airbase. The project also provides for construction of barracks for security personnel and a multi-level car parking facility with space for 1,000 vehicles.

Operated by the Airports Authority of India, the airport — designated as an international airport in 2005 — is located about 12 kilometres from Srinagar city.

Architecturally, the new terminal will blend modern design with Kashmir's cultural heritage, incorporating traditional woodwork and locally inspired craftsmanship. The facility will feature streamlined passenger processing areas, spacious lounges, and advanced security and check-in systems.

Sustainability measures form a key component of the development, including advanced water harvesting systems, maximum use of natural lighting to reduce energy consumption, and eco-friendly construction materials. The project is targeted to achieve a 5-star GRIHA rating.

Officials said the expansion is expected to boost tourism and economic growth by improving connectivity to key attractions such as Dal Lake, Shankaracharya Temple, and the Mughal Gardens, generating employment opportunities and reinforcing Srinagar's position as a premier tourist and economic destination. (Agencies)

**Vice-President.....**

will be allowed to ply towards Nishat, Shalimar, Harwan and adjacent areas via Badyari Chowk and Gupkar. Similarly, traffic movement from Ram Munshibagh towards Grand Place will remain suspended and vehicles will be diverted towards Dalgate, Sangermal and Ikhwan Chowk for onward movement.

Authorities said that no traffic will be allowed on the Dalgate, Khayam, Khanyar, Rainawari, Saidkadal and Hazratbal road stretch during the restriction period.

Motorists intending to travel from Harwan, Shalimar, Nishat, Ganderbal and adjoining areas towards Lal Chowk have been advised to adopt the Burzahama route via Chandpora, Tailbal, Zakoora, Malbagh, Illahibagh and 90 Feet Road and vice versa.

Those travelling from Dalgate, Lal Chowk and nearby areas towards Harwan, Shalimar and Nishat have been directed to use the Sangermal, Ikhwan Chowk, Nowhatta, 90 Feet and Malbagh road route to reach their destinations.

Motorists heading towards Srinagar Airport from Harwan, Shalimar and Nishat will be permitted to move through Burzahama, Chandpora, Tailbal, Zakoora, Malbagh, Illahibagh and 90 Feet Road.

Vehicles travelling from Panthachowk and Pandrethan towards R M Bagh will be allowed via Peaks, Nowgam and the Bypass.

Officials said that medical emergency cases will be facilitated after due verification. Citizens requiring assistance may contact the Traffic Police Control Room at 103.

**Security Grid.....**

the university campus and key installations. Additional checkpoints have been

established at strategic entry and exit points of the city, and vehicles are being subjected to random checks, especially along routes leading to the university.

Security forces have increased patrolling, area domination exercises and surprise inspections along vital roadways to counter any potential threat. Counterinsurgency units and quick reaction teams have been strategically deployed to ensure immediate response in case of any exigency, while surveillance and intelligence gathering mechanisms have also been strengthened.

Last week, Inspector General of Police (Kashmir) V K Birdi chaired a high-level security review meeting at PCR Kashmir to assess preparedness for the VVIP visit. He directed officers to intensify round-the-clock patrolling in both urban and rural areas, strengthen monitoring at sensitive locations, and ensure strict adherence to Standard Operating Procedures.

Vice President Radhakrishnan will be the chief guest at the convocation and deliver the address during his maiden visit to the region since assuming office. Manoj Sinha, Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir and Chancellor of the university, will preside over the ceremony, while Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who serves as Pro-Chancellor, will attend as Guest of Honour.

According to officials, a total of 59,558 degrees—including undergraduate, postgraduate, MD/MSc, MCh, M.Phil and Ph.D qualifications—will be conferred during the convocation ceremony. (Agencies)

**February Turns.....**

slight cooling trend compared to the previous day.

In Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, the maximum temperature settled at 21.0°C, remaining 10°C above normal and unchanged from Monday. Qazigund recorded 21.2°C, marking one of the highest positive departures in the region at 11.1°C above average.

Among other stations, Pahalgam registered 17.6°C, slightly up from the previous day, while Kupwara recorded 20.4°C. Kokernag settled at 18.4°C despite a marginal dip, remaining nearly 10°C above normal. Ski resort Gulmarg recorded 11.2°C, about 9.2°C above the seasonal average.

In the Jammu division, Jammu city recorded 25.3°C, around 3°C above normal. Banihal saw a sharp rise to 21.4°C, while Batote climbed to 19.9°C. However, Baderwah registered a noticeable drop to 18.2°C, and Katra slipped slightly to 24.5°C.

In the Union Territory of Ladakh, Leh remained steady at 7.0°C, while Kargil recorded a significant fall to 7.0°C from 9.3°C a day earlier. The Nubra Valley also witnessed a decline, settling at 10.1°C.

Meteorological officials have predicted that dry weather conditions will prevail across Jammu and Kashmir in the coming days, indicating that the ongoing warm spell is likely to persist.

**CM Omar.....**

gate and a municipal guest house, upgradation of the MC Terminal building into a Smart Library, development of playing areas and club facilities, and comprehensive improvement of streets and pathways through cobble stone and tiling works. It also includes installation of street lights and garbage bins, along with façade improvements, murals and colour-coding of the market to enhance the town's aesthetic appeal.

He laid the foundation stone for the Rs.750.78 lakh road project connecting Bus Adda to District Hospital, including widening of Mirani Chowk, aimed at easing traffic congestion and improving connectivity.

Similarly, at District Hospital Ganderbal, the Chief Minister inaugurated a CT Scan Machine installed at a cost of Rs.840 lakh under the Health & Medical Education Department through DHSK, significantly augmenting diagnostic facilities for patients.

Likewise, at Rakhi Harraan, he laid the foundation stone for a 4.5 MLD capacity Sewage Treatment Plant under the Used Water Management Project of Municipal Council Ganderbal (SBM 2.0), costing Rs.1,999.20 lakh under H&UD (UEED). The plant is expected to substantially improve sanitation standards and environmental sustainability in the town.

From Dak Bungalow, Ganderbal, the Chief Minister, who represents Ganderbal Constituency, e-inaugurated several key projects. These included the Water Supply Scheme (WSS) at Urpash Naderbagh, constructed at a cost of Rs.679.14 lakh, WSS Buderkund at Rs.399 lakh, and WSS Manasbal at Rs.130 lakh, all executed by the Rural Water Supply Division, Ganderbal under the Jal Shakti Department and Jal Jeevan Mission.

He also laid e-foundation of works of various roads in the Ganderbal constituency costing Rs.1,288.40 lakh under PWD, and improvement of various infrastructure

in schools in the district at a cost of Rs.902.69 lakh under the School Education Department.

The Chief Minister further laid e-foundation stones for upgradation of inner link roads of Treesa Safapora, including link roads at Check Yangaroo in Lar, Ganderbal, at a cost of Rs.302.11 lakh, as well as improvement and upgradation of Kohistan Colony Canal Roads along with allied works amounting to Rs.379.62 lakh, both under PWD.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister reiterated that development must translate into tangible improvements in the daily lives of people.

"From healthcare and sanitation to roads, schools and drinking water, these projects reflect our resolve to ensure comprehensive development of Ganderbal. Our focus is not merely on announcements but on timely execution and quality outcomes," he said.

He emphasized that investments in urban beautification, clean water supply, modern healthcare infrastructure and road connectivity would not only strengthen public services but also create economic opportunities and raise the overall quality of life.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister also distributed Mission Yuva disbursement letters worth Rs.55 lakh among beneficiaries.

Later, the Chief Minister held a public interaction at the Dak Bungalow Ganderbal, where he listened to the demands and grievances of people from various areas of the district. Delegations from Phekh, Safapora, Manigam, Batwina, Nunar, Wakura, Lar, Sherpathri, Yangoora, the Traders Federation Ganderbal, the Health Employees Confederation Ganderbal and other groups apprised him of issues relating to drinking water supply, lift irrigation, upgradation of sports infrastructure, establishment of a fire service station, and improvement of schools, among other demands.

Minister for Health & Medical Education Sakina Itoo, Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani, Deputy Commissioner Ganderbal Jatin Kishore, Director Urban Local Bodies Kashmir Qazi Sarwar, Senior Superintendent of Police Ganderbal Khalil Poswal and other concerned officers accompanied the Chief Minister during the tour. Minister for Jal Shakti Javed Ahmed Rana participated in the foundation laying ceremony through virtual mode.

**Cabinet okays.....**

Sources indicated that the proposal was cleared during a recent Cabinet meeting held at the newly inaugurated Seva Teerth complex, which now houses the Prime Minister's Office. The meeting marked the first Cabinet session conducted at the new premises.

This was not the first time the Kerala Assembly had taken up the issue. A similar unanimous resolution was adopted in August 2023 and subsequently forwarded to the Union Government. However, the Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly advised certain procedural and technical revisions. Following those recommendations, the state government introduced and passed the resolution again with the required modifications.

Under the existing constitutional framework, the name "Kerala" is listed in the First Schedule of the Constitution of India. Any alteration requires parliamentary approval under Article 3 of the Constitution. The state government has sought not only an amendment to reflect "Keralam" in the First Schedule but also its adoption across all languages recognized in the Eighth Schedule.

Supporters of the change argue that aligning the official name with its Malayalam usage corrects a historical inconsistency and affirms the state's cultural heritage. The proposal will now move through the necessary legislative processes before a final notification can be issued.

Further official confirmation and procedural details are awaited.

**Crack Down.....**

by Special Director General (Coordination) Syed Javed Mujtaba Geelani and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Kashmir Zone V K Birdi. Senior officers briefed him on the prevailing security situation, counter-terror strategies and preventive measures being undertaken in the district.

Reiterating the importance of synergy among security agencies, the DGP called for strengthened coordination, enhanced community engagement and proactive policing to thwart any attempt aimed at disturbing peace. He maintained that sustained operations, backed by credible intelligence inputs, would remain central to the force's strategy in tackling terrorism.

**152 Dead, Nearly.....**

besides destruction of 3,531 huts and cattle sheds, death of 1,461 livestock and loss of 1,035 tin sheds.

In Kashmir division, 12 houses were fully damaged, 44 severely and 597 partially damaged, besides damage to 71 huts and

cattle sheds and loss of 54 livestock, the government said.

The DMRRRD said the Ministry of Home Affairs deputed Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) for assessment of damages to J&K from September 3 to September 7, 2025 and the team visited various affected districts of the UT.

Memorandum of loss and damages stands submitted to the ministry on November 6, 2025.

On the request of the UT government, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) deputed team of experts for the post disaster need assessment which conducted a detailed exercise and assessment from November 17 to 25, 2025. The report of the same has been submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Based on the report of IMCT, the centre under SASCI (Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment) has allocated Rs 1,431 crore for J&K, the government said, adding that this will be further released to implementing departments once the detailed proposals for flood restoration works are received from the departments committee for examination, consolidation and submission has been constituted by the Government on February 3.

In addition of Rs 289.39 crore under SDRF, an amount of Rs 100 crore (5 crore earmarked for each district) has been released under the Capex Budget 2025-26 under the activities "Flood Relief Measures" to address the immediate impact of the calamity, the DMRRRD said.

Besides this under the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF), over Rs 207 Lakhs was provided in Kishtwar for Chishoti flood victims, Rs 45 lakh was provided in district Poonch for landslide-affected houses in villages Surothi and Kala-ban, Rs 95 lakh in district Reasi for landslide victims at Mata Vaishno Devi, Rs 253.25 lakh in district Ramban, and Rs 21.50 lakh in district Kathua towards relief for deaths and injuries.

Under the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF), an amount of Rs 141 lakh was directly transferred online in respect of 63 deaths and 29 injured persons during the Chishoti cloudburst incident, the government said. (Agencies)

**Jammu-Srinagar.....**

provided the Kashmir Valley with all-weather rail connectivity.

Railway officials had earlier stated that the direct Jammu-Srinagar service would mark a major step forward in passenger convenience and capacity augmentation. However, with the latest update from the Railway Board, the launch now awaits fresh directions.

Passengers and residents of the region are expected to await a revised schedule as the Railways prepares to issue further clarification.

**J&K Liquor.....**

in the civil sector and 1.26 lakh bottles in CSD and PMF outlets, aggregating to more than 1.62 crore

bottles, it added.

Besides, over 2.08 crore bottles of JK Special Whisky were sold in the civil segment during the current fiscal, while ready-to-drink (RTD) beverages accounted for 2.68 lakh bottles in civil and 7,071 bottles in CSD and PMF outlets, data revealed.

In comparison, the total sale during 2024-25 was nearly 6.94 crore bottles, indicating that the current year's figures are lower, with data available only up to January 26.

Official data further revealed that total liquor sales in 2023-24 stood at more than 6.72 crore bottles, while in 2022-23, over 6.59 crore bottles were sold, reflecting fluctuations in overall consumption trends over the past years.

However, liquor sales in Jammu and Kashmir across channels over the last eight years reflect a clear cycle of stability, disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a strong recovery culminating in record sales in 2024-25, official data reveals.

According to the data, 2018-19 set a strong pre-disruption baseline with total sales of 6.83 crore bottles, driven almost evenly by IMFL at 2.52 crore bottles and JK Special Whisky at 2.47 crore bottles, while beer accounted for 1.81 crore bottles, indicating a balanced consumption pattern.

In 2019-20, overall sales slipped marginally to 6.63 crore bottles, a decline of around 2.9 per cent. While IMFL sales fell by nearly five per cent, JK Special Whisky bucked the trend, rising to 2.64 crore bottles, partially offsetting the decline, the data said.

The data showed a significant downturn recorded in 2020-21, when total sales plunged to 4.71 crore bottles, marking a steep 29 per cent decline year-on-year. "All segments were impacted, with beer witnessing the sharpest contraction — falling from 1.57 crore bottles to just 71 lakh, a drop of over 54 per cent." The declines were due to lockdowns, mobility restrictions and curtailed social activity, making it the lowest point in the series.

A recovery began in 2021-22, with the total sales rebounding to 5.64 crore bottles, an increase of nearly 20 per cent over the pandemic low. IMFL volumes improved, while beer sales climbed to 1.08 crore bottles, it said.

By 2022-23, sales had risen further to 6.59 crore bottles, almost matching pre-COVID figures. JK Special Whisky peaked at 2.70 crore bottles, emerging as the largest contributor to total volumes, while beer consumption more than doubled compared to 2020-21 levels, it added.

The upward trend continued in 2023-24, with total sales increasing to 6.72 crore bottles. "Beer volumes rose to 1.64 crore bottles, supported by renewed tourism, social events and urban consumption." Sales touched a new high in 2024-25, with 6.93 crore bottles sold, the highest during the eight-year period and surpassing the pre-pandemic peak, with beer reaching a record 1.97 crore bottles and JK Special Whisky remaining robust at 2.68 crore bottles, it said.

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# DC Srinagar visits Shahr-e-Khaas areas

Takes onsite review of planned fencing & allied works along Old Zaina Kadal, Aali Kadal, new Zaina Kadal bridges & development of connecting road at Bulbulanker

HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, FEB 24:** Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo on Tuesday undertook an extensive onsite visit to various areas of Shahr-e-Khaas (Old City) to review the progress of ongoing developmental works and inspected the fencing works & allied strengthening works along the sides of historic Old City Bridges.

The visit was aimed at assessing the works being undertaken to enhance public safety and local infrastructure in old City areas of Srinagar district while ensuring that the heritage value of the Shahr-e-Khaas is preserved.

The DC also inspected the progress of ongoing works of the key connecting road and inner lanes at Bulbul Lanker.

During the visit, the DC was accompanied by Additional Deputy Commissioner, Mir Imtiaz Ul Aziz, Chief Planning Officer Fayaz Ahmad Dar, Superintending Engineer R&B Shabir Ahmad, Executive Engineer R&B, Farid Khan, Executive Engineer R&B,



Arif Hazari, Tehsildar South, Sajad Rasool Shah, Tehsildar Khanyar, Syed Shahid and other concerned. At Bulbul Lanker, the DC assessed ongoing developmental works undertaken to improve

civic infrastructure and public amenities in the historic Shahr-e-Khaas area. He also inspected progress of upgradation of inner lanes being executed by the R&B department under District Capex plan.

On the occasion, the DC was informed that the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) have been formulated for fencing the sides of these bridges. He was briefed on the status of the works, project timelines, and measures being undertaken to ensure public safety.

While reviewing the plan of fencing of the bridges, the DC emphasized quality execution, durability and timely completion of the projects. He directed the concerned departments to ensure that the fencing not only enhances public safety but also preserves the heritage character of these historic structures.

He instructed executing agencies to incorporate all required safety measures in the project and complete the works within stipulated timelines while minimizing inconvenience to commuters and local residents.

## Grand Farewell Accorded to DC Kulgam Athar Aamir Shafi Khan; Stellar Public Service Lauded

FAROOQ RATHER

**KULGAM, FEB 24:** A dignified and well-attended farewell ceremony was organized today in honour of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kulgam, Athar Aamir Shafi Khan (IAS) marking the end of his tenure in the district. The event witnessed the participation of senior civil and police officers,



representatives of fruit growers' associations, members of civil society, media personnel, and other prominent citizens from across the district. The ceremony was marked by emotional moments and heartfelt tributes, as speakers highlighted the Deputy Commissioner's leadership, integrity, and unwavering commitment to public service.

District Development Council (DDC) Chairperson Mohammad Afzal Parray was present as the chief guest. In his address, he praised Athar Aamir Shafi Khan for accelerating developmental initiatives and ensuring transparency, accountability, and accessibility in governance during his tenure in Kulgam. He noted that significant progress was achieved in strengthening rural infrastructure, improving road connectivity, enhancing drinking water supply, streamlining healthcare services, monitoring educational institutions, and effectively implementing various welfare schemes.

He further stated that the Deputy Commissioner institutionalized regular public grievance redressal forums, providing citizens with direct access to the administration. "His proactive approach and responsive governance have left a lasting impact on the district," he remarked, adding that his style of leadership would remain an inspiration for young officers. Senior civil and police officials also shared their experiences of working under his leadership, describing him as an organized, visionary, and people-friendly officer. They emphasized that his emphasis on teamwork and inter-departmental coordination strengthened administrative efficiency and ensured smooth functioning even during challenging circumstances. His balanced decision-making and calm demeanor were credited with maintaining stability while sustaining developmental momentum.

Representatives of the fruit growers and horticulture sector acknowledged the Deputy Commissioner's special focus on addressing issues faced by orchardists. They highlighted initiatives related to strengthening cold storage facilities, improving market linkages, facilitating transportation logistics, and connecting farmers with government schemes. These measures, they said, provided tangible support to the horticulture community, a vital sector of the district's economy.

Members of civil society described him as approachable and empathetic, noting that he consistently prioritized public concerns and treated all sections of society with equal importance. Media representatives also appreciated his transparent engagement with the press and timely dissemination of information in matters of public interest, which fostered trust and openness in governance.

In his farewell address, Athar Aamir Shafi Khan expressed gratitude to the people of Kulgam, elected representatives, officers, and members of the media for their cooperation and support. He termed his tenure in Kulgam as one of the most significant and memorable chapters of his career. "Whatever progress we achieved was the result of collective effort and teamwork," he said, adding that the affection and support of the people of Kulgam would always remain close to his heart. He reaffirmed his commitment to public service in his future assignments.

The ceremony concluded with the presentation of mementos and tokens of appreciation by various departments and organizations. Participants extended their best wishes for his future responsibilities. The event ended on an emotional yet celebratory note, with attendees giving him a standing ovation and offering prayers for his continued success.

## 241 Galandar Families Await Inclusion in Block Pampore; Lateef Bhat Meets Divisional Commissioner Kashmir

HT NEWS NETWORK

**PAMPORE, FEB 24:** Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and former district president Pulwama, Mohammad Lateef Bhat, has highlighted the long-pending demand for inclusion of 241 families from a hamlet near Patalbagh in Galandar area of Pampore into Block Pampore, stating that residents have suffered due to administrative ambiguity for nearly two decades.

Speaking to the media, Bhat said the families remain caught between municipal and rural administrative jurisdictions, resulting in denial of essential civic amenities and development works. He noted that despite repeated representations by residents and official correspondence from the Tehsildar Pampore to the Assistant Commissioner Revenue Pulwama recommending inclusion of the locality in Block Pampore, no concrete action has been taken so far.

He further said that Kadlabal C (Part No. 55) has 695 registered voters, out of which 141 residents have formally applied for inclusion of the area under the Rural Development Department. Bhat pointed out that as per SRO 45 dated February 18, 2003, Ward No. 17 covers only Molvi Mohalla and Litterbal New Colony, while the affected hamlet does not fall within the notified jurisdiction of the Municipal Committee Pampore. As a result, the area has remained outside the scope of both municipal services and panchayat-level development.

Describing the situation as a "serious administrative lapse," Bhat urged Deputy Commissioner Pulwama, Dr. Basharat Qayoom, to intervene and ensure immediate inclusion of the locality in Block Pampore.

Meanwhile, Bhat also met the Divisional Commissioner Kashmir and discussed the issue in detail. The Divisional Commissioner assured him that the matter would be personally examined and appropriate steps would be taken to resolve the long-pending grievance of the affected families.

## STATE BANK OF INDIA CONDUCTS PAN-INDIA UNIFORM CSR ACTIVITY

SBI Kupwara & Handwara Distribute Sanitary Napkin Incinerators and Hygiene Kits to Empower Girl Students

HT NEWS NETWORK

**KUPWARA, FEB 24:** In line with its pan-India uniform Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, State Bank of India (SBI), through its Handwara and Kupwara branches, today undertook a significant step towards promoting menstrual hygiene, women's health, and dignity by distributing sanitary napkin incinerators and hygiene kits to government educational and healthcare institutions in the district. Under the initiative, a total of 10 sanitary napkin incinerators along with 2,000 sanitary hygiene kits were distributed, aimed at ensuring safe disposal of sanitary waste and improving hygiene infrastructure for adolescent girls and women at Government Sub-District Hospital (SDH), Kupwara, 4 sanitary napkin incinerators and 800 sanitary hygiene kits, Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Handwara, 2 sanitary napkin incinerators and 400 sanitary hygiene kits, Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Langate, 2 sanitary napkin incinerators and 400 sanitary hygiene kits & Government Girls High School, Super Naghama, Qaziabad 2 sanitary napkin incinerators and 400 sanitary hygiene kits.

Branch Managers and staff members of SBI Handwara and SBI Kupwara were present during the distribution programme and interacted with students, healthcare staff, and faculty members. They emphasized the importance of menstrual hygiene awareness, environment-friendly



disposal mechanisms, and the role of proper sanitation facilities in ensuring the health, confidence, and continued education of girl students.

The initiative forms part of SBI's national CSR framework, being implemented uniformly across the country to generate consistent and large-scale social impact. By focusing on menstrual hygiene management, the programme addresses a critical yet often overlooked aspect of public health and gender equality.

State Bank of India reaffirmed its commitment to community development, public health, and education, and stated that such CSR interventions are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to health, education, gender equality, and sanitation.

Through sustained and need-based initiatives, SBI continues to play a proactive role in empowering communities and strengthening social infrastructure at the grassroots level.

## Inter-state drug supply bid foiled in twin operations

ANTF arrests 2 Punjab residents in Sgr, Budgam

HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, FEB 24:** The Anti-Narcotics Task Force Kashmir on Monday arrested two Punjab-based drug peddlers in separate operations conducted in Srinagar and Budgam districts, recovering a total of 79 grams of heroin.

Officials said that in the first operation, acting on specific intelligence inputs, ANTF apprehended one Ajay Kumar, son of Joginder and a resident of Mustafabad Jattan Gurdaspur Punjab, from

the Gangbugh area of Srinagar. During the search, 42 grams of heroin were recovered from his possession. Preliminary investigation suggests that the accused had allegedly procured the contraband from Punjab and intended to distribute it in the Gangbugh locality. In connection with the seizure, FIR No. 02/2026 under Sections 8 and 21 of the NDPS Act has been registered at Police Station ANTF Kashmir.

In a separate operation in Budgam district, ANTF arrested



another Punjab resident identified as Jhon Masih, son of Bal

winder Masih of Mustafabad Jattan Gurdaspur Punjab. Officials

said 37 grams of heroin were recovered from his possession. Accordingly, FIR No. 03/2026 under Sections 8 and 21 of the NDPS Act has been registered at Police Station ANTF Kashmir.

Police sources said both arrests were made on the basis of developed intelligence regarding inter-state narcotics trafficking. The accused have been taken into custody and further investigation is underway to establish forward and backward linkages of the supply chain.

# Sakeena Itoo Leads Plantation Drive at DH Ganderbal

HT NEWS NETWORK

**GANDERBAL, FEBRUARY 24:** Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo today led a plantation drive at District Hospital Ganderbal to promote eco-friendly practices and reinforce quality healthcare standards under the Kayakalp and National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS) programmes.

The Minister planted saplings within the hospital premises and emphasized on the importance of creating green, clean and patient-friendly environment in the healthcare institutions. "Environmental protection is not only a social responsibility but an essential component of quality healthcare delivery", the Minister stated.

She highlighted that the plantation drives in healthcare facilities serve a dual purpose of enhancing the aesthetic appeal of hospitals and contributing to environmental conservation. "These kind initiatives help in improving air quality, reducing pollution and fostering a healing



atmosphere for patients, attendants, and healthcare workers", she said.

The Minister reiterated the commitment of the Omar Abdullah Government to strength-

en healthcare infrastructure across Jammu and Kashmir in adherence to national quality

standards.

She noted that under the Kayakalp and NQAS initiatives, special emphasis is being laid on cleanliness, sanitation, waste management, infection control and environmental sustainability across all healthcare institutions of J&K.

The Minister appreciated the efforts of the hospital administration and staff for actively participating in the plantation drive and maintaining high standards of hygiene and patient care. She urged healthcare workers to adopt eco-friendly measures like proper biomedical waste management, energy conservation and maintaining green hospital campuses for efficient and effective patient care.

On the occasion, Medical Superintendent, DH Ganderbal, Dr. Farah Shafi informed the Minister that the plantation drive will be followed by regular environmental awareness activities, cleanliness drives and implementation of green practices to further enhance the District Hospital's compliance with Kayakalp and NQAS benchmarks.

## 2-Day Trainee Products' Sale from Feb 25 at Numaish Gah Srinagar

HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 24:** The Department of Handicrafts & Handloom is organizing a two-day Trainee Products' Sale at Kashmir Haat, popularly known as Numaish Gah, commencing from February 25, 2026.

Craft products made by trainees in 432 Training Centres across 10 districts of Kashmir Division will be showcased, including hand-knotted woollen carpets, GI-tagged Pashmina & Kani shawls and stoles, Crewel curtains, Sozni-embroidered shawls, Zari & Aari embroidered suits, tweed cloth, Chain-stitch rugs and cushion covers, Tapestry, Gabba and Namda products, Papier Mâché, and Willow Wicker souvenir and décor items.



A spokesman of the Department stated that the products are being offered at extremely affordable rates, with pricing calculated only on the material component used. "No labour cost is added, thereby ensuring cost-to-cost availability of authentic handmade products to buyers while simultaneously providing a platform for trainees to exhibit their skills," he said.

He further stated that in the last three trainee products' exhibitions, a cumulative revenue of 57 lakh has been generated, reflecting the overwhelming public response and demand for Kashmir's handmade products.

District stalls are expected to record encouraging sales during the current exhibition, with particular interest anticipated in Pashmina, Crewel, papier mache and willow wicker products.

## Poonch: DLIC approves 153 cases under Mission YUVA

HT NEWS NETWORK

**POONCH, FEB 24:** The District Level Implementation Committee (DLIC) for Mission YUVA met today under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner, Ashok Kumar Sharma.

During the meeting, the committee approved 153 new cases, marking another major milestone in promoting entrepreneurship, self-employment and youth empowerment under the Mission YUVA initiative.



The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner, Tahir Mustafa Malik; GM DIC, Naheem Un Nissa Bhatti; Chief Agriculture officer, Jograj Salathia; Medical Superintendent, LDM, District Sheep Husbandry Officer, AD Handicraft/Handloom besides members of the Small Business Development Unit (SBDU) of Mission YUVA.

The meeting held detailed deliberations, while the participating committee members shared valuable inputs to enhance transparency and efficiency in the implementation process.

The Deputy Commissioner emphasized the importance of coordinated efforts among all stakeholders for the timely processing and disbursement of approved cases. He reiterated that Mission YUVA is not merely a financial support program but a transformative initiative aimed at empowering youth and fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem in the district.

The Deputy Commissioner directed Lead District Manager (LDM) to ensure speedy disbursement of approved cases to facilitate the early start of beneficiary ventures.

## Inter-Block U-17, U-19 Football & Volleyball Tournament gains momentum in Baramulla

HT NEWS NETWORK

**BARAMULLA, FEB 24:** Inter-Block District Level Volleyball and Football Tournament for Under-17 and Under-19 Boys is progressing with great enthusiasm and competitive spirit across various clusters of District Baramulla.

The prestigious tournament is being organized by the Directorate of Youth Services and Sports (DYSS) District Baramulla under its ongoing

youth engagement initiative aimed at channelizing the energy of young athletes towards constructive sporting platforms.

In Cluster Baramulla, the Under-19 Boys Volleyball and Football competitions were conducted successfully amidst high excitement and vibrant participation. In the Volleyball final, Block Wagoora emerged victorious, displaying remarkable coordination, skill, and sportsmanship throughout the tournament. In Football, Block

Nadihal clinched the championship title after a thrilling final encounter, showcasing tactical brilliance and team spirit. Meanwhile, Cluster Dargpora successfully conducted the Under-19 Boys Inter-Block Football and Volleyball competitions at the iconic Habasahab Sports Stadium Hathlango. The football competition witnessed the participation of 7 teams comprising 112 players, reflecting the growing popularity of the sport among the youth.

## Vibrant Village Programme: Kathua Admin holds participatory planning camps at border villages Bobiya, Karol Krishna

HT NEWS NETWORK

**KATHUA, FEBRUARY 24:** District Administration Kathua today organised Special Gram Sabhas and awareness programmes to discuss and finalize village-level development plans under the Government of India's Vibrant Village Programme.

A programme was held at village Bobiya amid enthusiastic participation of local residents. Member Legislative Assembly Hiranagar, Vijay Kumar Sharma presided over the event in the presence of Deputy Commissioner Rajesh Sharma.

The Gram Sabhas were con-

vened to formulate village plans for border villages Bobiya and Karol Krishna. The proceedings focused on participatory planning and preparation of robust, need-based development plans aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of the inhabitants.

The designated Nodal Officers of the twin villages read out the draft development plans prepared after incorporating inputs from the local populace. The participants were invited to offer suggestions and flag issues for further inclusion in the final plan document.

Several locals, including former Panchayati Raj Institution

members, highlighted demands pertaining to civic amenities and infrastructure gaps. They demanded development of a tourist circuit along the border belt and projected other border-specific concerns. The Nodal Officers took note of the demands for the incorporation in the final draft plans.

Addressing the gathering, MLA Vijay Kumar Sharma urged the participants to bring forth any issue not reflected in the draft plans so that the same could be duly incorporated, ensuring comprehensive and inclusive planning.

Interacting with the residents,

the Deputy Commissioner stated that the objective of organising awareness-cum-Gram Sabhas was to take every stakeholder on board and ensure holistic development planning. He stressed the need for saturation of eligible beneficiaries under various government schemes and augmentation of infrastructure in border villages in a phased and sustainable manner.

He further informed that similar awareness camps would be organised in other border areas to sensitise the public about government schemes and services, with the aim of transforming these villages into model habita-

tions under the Vibrant Village Programme.

Earlier, district and sectoral officers briefed the Gram Sabhas about the welfare schemes and services being implemented by their respective departments and encouraged the public to avail the benefits within stipulated timelines.

Among others, General Manager DIC Mushtaq Chaudhary, Programme Officer ICDS Mohammed Syed, Chief Planning Officer Ranjeet Thakur, Tehsildar Hiranagar Anup Kumar, Tehsildar Marheen Lekh Raj and other district and sectoral officers were present on the occasion.

## Kumar Abhishek assumes office as Deputy Commissioner Reasi

HT NEWS NETWORK

**REASI, FEBRUARY 24:** Kumar Abhishek today formally assumed office as the Deputy Commissioner of Reasi district.

The district officers briefed him on the overall administrative functioning and ongoing developmental projects in the

district during an introductory meeting held in the VC Room of the DC Office Complex.

Kumar Abhishek stressed the importance of close coordination among departments to ensure efficient governance, timely execution of development initiatives and better public service delivery.

## Shopian gears up for Swachh Survekshan 2025

HT NEWS NETWORK

**SHOPIAN, FEBRUARY 24:** Deputy Commissioner Shopian, Shishir Gupta today interacted with sanitation workers of MC Shopian at Town Hall Shopian and lauded their relentless dedication and invaluable contribution towards maintaining cleanliness and hygiene across the district.

He emphasized that sanitation workers are the backbone of urban management

and play a pivotal role in shaping the district's performance in the upcoming Swachh Survekshan rankings.

While appreciating their tireless efforts, the Deputy Commissioner stated that the success of cleanliness initiatives and improved civic standards largely depends on the commitment and discipline of frontline sanitation staff and urged them to continue working with the same zeal.

## One-Day Workshop on Academic Writing, Research Methodology held at GCW Parade

HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 24:** The Research Studies Committee of Government College for Women Parade on Tuesday organized a one-day workshop on Academic Writing and Research Methodology to enhance research aptitude and academic writing skills among students and early career faculty members. The programme featured eminent resource persons, Dr Rekha Choudhary, former Dean of Research, University of Jammu and Dr Kanika Singh, Director Centre for Writing and Communication, Ashoka University, Haryana.

Dr Choudhary deliberated on the fundamentals, significance and interdisciplinary nature of research, highlighting various quantitative and qualitative approaches. Dr Singh conducted an engaging and interactive session on academic writing, focusing on summarizing, critical



analysis and rewriting through practical exercises. The workshop witnessed enthusiastic participation from Fourth-Year and Postgraduate students, DYD Research Project scholars and Book Club members. The participants appreciated the insightful sessions and expert guidance. E-certificates were awarded to registered participants who attended both sessions.

The smooth conduct of the workshop was assured by the dedicated efforts of the organizing team comprising Dr Randeher Kour, Dr Sonam, Dr Anoop Singh, Dr Anju Devi, Dr Ramesh Chander, Dr Deep-ti Gupta and Dr Sukriti Sharma. UNI

## H&H Department Shopian conducts capacity building workshop for Graphical indication, ODOP

HT NEWS NETWORK

**SHOPIAN, FEBRUARY 24:** A one day capacity building program on design, packaging and branding for artisans, weavers and other producer groups engaged in Geographical Indication, One District One Product (ODOP) and District as export hub products of Kashmir division was today organised at Gagren Shopian under RAMP (Raising & Accelerating MSME Performance) Scheme by Handicrafts and Handloom department Shopian.

The program witnessed enthusiastic participation of more than 100 artisans/weavers and other producer



groups from across the Shopian district.

Experts in design and marketing from JKEDI Shopian delivered detailed presentations on the importance of product value addition through improved eco-friendly packaging, labelling standards and brand creation.

Participants were sensitized about the role of social media platforms, e-commerce opportunities in promoting traditional Kashmiri crafts.

Interactive session was held wherein the participants shared their experience, challenges and suggestions about marketing and packaging of products. UNI

# J&K Kisan Khidmat Ghar Ecosystem garners praise at Maharashtra Govt's AI4Agri 2026 Summit

HT NEWS NETWORK

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 24: The Kisan Khidmat Ghar (KKG) ecosystem of Jammu and Kashmir garnered significant praise at the Government of Maharashtra's Global Conference on AI in Agriculture and Investor Summit (AI4Agri 2026).

Presented as a model for inclusive, AI-enabled agricultural service delivery, KKG impressed organisers and panelists with its innovative approach.

Mission Director, Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), Sandeep Kumar, participated as a panelist in the plenary session on "AI Across the Value Chain: Unlocking Inclusivity, Sustainability and Efficiency". He highlighted how Jammu and Kashmir has embedded digital intelligence into a structured public delivery architecture, rather than treating AI as a stand-alone pilot.

At the centre of the presentation was the KKG ecosystem, an entrepreneur-enabled, IT-driven network of physical single-window centres at the panchayat level, designed to convert the digital services into walk-in, assisted public support for farmers. These centres provide assisted applications, advisory access,



execution support and handholding, ensuring that the farmers who are not digitally fluent are not excluded from modern agri-services.

The Mission Director explained that HADP's inclusion pathway is built as a full institutional stack, starting with Kisan Sampark Abhiyan for field mobilisation and assisted onboarding, moving through the Kisan Sathi portal as the digital backbone for registra-

tion, applications and tracking, supported by Daksh Kisan for structured skilling and stabilised through KKG handholding on the ground. This is reinforced by OTA tracking for geo- and time-stamped field verification and by Kisan Sathi 360 for a unified farmer-level view of services accessed, skilling received, advisories issued and outcomes tracked.

The panelists and delegates

particularly noted the value of linking the physical facilitation centres with digital advisory and monitoring systems. They described the model as a practical pathway to ensure inclusivity while scaling technology across dispersed rural geographies.

On the technology front, the presentation also outlined how AI/ML is being positioned within this delivery stack to reduce risk and improve efficiency across the

value chain. Predictive models for apple disease risks such as scab and alternaria and pest forecasting modules under validation, are integrated into the KKG digital ecosystem so that early warnings and advisories translate into preventive field action.

The Mission Director also referred to sensor-based Smart Agriculture pilots under HADP, including LoRa-enabled monitoring frameworks across agro-climatic zones and the extension of digital decision-support beyond horticulture into wider crop and livestock contexts.

The AI4Agri 2026 summit—designed to advance responsible AI adoption in agriculture and catalyse collaboration among governments, institutions and investors—provided a national and global platform for showcasing such field-grounded models.

The officials noted that the summit's appreciation underscores the growing relevance of HADP's "assisted digital governance" approach, where AI tools are delivered through physical service points, backed by skilling and verified through outcome tracking. This approach ensures technology enhances farmer decisions rather than remaining confined to dashboards.

## SWD Srinagar conducts Nukad Natak to promote valuing of Girl Child under BBBP

HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 24: Social Welfare Department (SWD) Srinagar, SANKALP-Hub for Empowerment of Women (Mission Shakti), successfully organized a theme based Nukad Natak/Street Play at General Bus Stand Parimpora as part of its ongoing awareness and outreach initiatives under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP).

The street play served as a powerful medium to address pressing social concerns, including the declining child sex ratio, gender discrimination, the importance of educating the girl child, prevention of child marriage, and the elimination of gender-based violence and discrimination. The performance emphasized the need to ensure equal rights, dignity, and opportunities for women and girls in all spheres of life.

Through impactful dialogues, emotionally compelling storytelling, and engaging performances, the artists effectively communicated the message of building a safe, inclusive, and gender-equitable society. The dramatization portrayed real-life challenges faced by girls and highlighted the collective responsibility of families, communities, and institutions in safeguarding their rights and promoting their well-being.

The event attracted significant public attention, with passersby, shopkeepers, commuters, and local residents gathering in large numbers to witness the awareness campaign. The interactive format of the Nukad Natak encouraged active audience participation, prompting discussions and reflections on deeply rooted social norms and attitudes. Many members of the public appreciated the initiative and expressed support for promoting girl child education and ending discriminatory practices.

Officials from the department reiterated their commitment to spreading awareness at the grassroots level through innovative community-based platforms. They emphasized that such outreach programmes play a crucial role in sensitizing society, strengthening community engagement, and fostering a culture of respect, equality, and empowerment for women and girls.

The programme concluded with an appeal to the public to actively support initiatives aimed at protecting the rights of the girl child and to contribute towards building a more just and progressive society.

## SWD Srinagar organizes assessment program for vocational trainees

HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 24: Department of Social Welfare (SWD) Srinagar successfully organized an assessment program for vocational trainees at the PRAYAS Training Centre under the banner of SANKALP-Hub for Empowerment of Women (Mission Shakti).

The assessment marked the successful completion of a structured six-month vocational training course in Cutting and Tailoring, aimed at equipping women with practical skills and enhancing opportunities for self-employment and financial independence.

A total of 30 trainees appeared for the assessment, which evaluated both theoretical understanding and practical competencies acquired during the training period. The evaluation covered fabric cutting techniques, garment construction, measurement accuracy, stitching quality, finishing standards, and overall design presentation.

The Evaluation Committee conducted the assessment in accordance with industry standards, focusing on the trainees' technical proficiency and practical capabilities. The assessor commended the participants for their creativity, precision, and confidence in handling sewing equipment and garment construction processes.

On the occasion, the District Mission Coordinator, SANKALP-HEW, Srinagar congratulated the trainees on successfully completing the course and encouraged them to utilize their newly acquired skills for income generation, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance. She reiterated the department's continued commitment to promoting skill-based education and women empowerment through vocational initiatives.

The event concluded with an interactive session where trainees shared their learning experiences and future aspirations. The department reaffirmed its resolve to continue organizing such vocational training programmes to promote skill development, financial inclusion, and holistic empowerment of women across the district.

## SWD Srinagar organizes Vocational Training Programme

HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 24: Social Welfare Department (SWD), Srinagar, through SANKALP-Hub for Empowerment of Women (Mission Shakti), successfully organized Vocational Training Programme at Srinagar Women's College Batpora. The program aimed

to equip students with essential knowledge and career insights to help them make informed academic and professional decisions. The training session witnessed enthusiastic participation from students across various departments. The program focused on emerging career opportunities, skill development pathways,

entrepreneurship prospects, and industry expectations in today's competitive job market. The Resource Persons from the Department of District Industries and Commerce and Government Women Polytechnic College Bemina shared valuable insights on career planning, industry readiness.

## DLSA Budgam organizes awareness programme on Lokpal

HT NEWS NETWORK

BUDGAM, FEBRUARY 24: District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Budgam, under the aegis of the J&K Legal Services Authority, organized an awareness programme on the Lokpal at Alasma Educational Institute, Budgam.

The programme was held under the chairmanship of O.P. Baghat, Chairman, District Legal Services Authority (Principal District & Sessions Judge), Budgam, and was supervised by Tabassum Qadir Parry, Secretary, DLSA Budgam.

The primary objective of the programme was to create awareness among the students and general public regarding the significance of the Lokpal institution in promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity in public administration.

Addressing the large gathering, Nazir Ahmad Wagay, Deputy LADC, DLSA Budgam, gave a detailed overview of the programme and apprised the audience about the provisions of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, which mandates inquiry into allegations of corruption against specified public functionaries and related matters. He highlighted the role of the Lokpal in strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms and ensuring good governance.



On the occasion, a short documentary film on anti-corruption measures and Lokpal awareness was screened to enhance understanding and awareness among the masses.

Zahoor Ahmad Malik, Assistant LADC, also spoke on the occasion and emphasized the importance of public participation in combating corruption and upholding ethical standards in society.

## Director Agriculture inaugurates Sale of Vegetable Seedlings at Kitchen Garden Lalmandi

HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 24: Director Agriculture, Sartaj Ahmad Shah today inaugurated the sale of high-quality vegetable seedlings at the Kitchen Garden Scheme, Lalmandi, Srinagar.

The initiative aims to promote kitchen gardening, encourage self-sufficiency in fresh vegetables among urban and peri-urban households, and support sustainable agricultural practices in the region.

The event underscores the department's ongoing efforts to make quality planting material accessible to the public at subsidized rates, enabling residents to cultivate nutritious vegetables in their home gardens.

The distribution and sale drive is part of the broader Kitchen Garden Scheme, which has been instrumental in boosting household vegetable production and reducing reliance on market supplies.

On the occasion senior officers of the Agriculture Production and Farmers Welfare Department were present. Their participation highlighted the collaborative approach of the department in implementing farmer-centric and community-oriented programs.

Speaking on the occasion, the Joint Director Agriculture Inputs emphasized the importance of such initiatives in promoting urban agriculture and healthy



eating habits. He urged the public, particularly kitchen garden holders from Srinagar and adjoining areas, to actively participate and avail the opportunity to procure certified seedlings for timely planting.

## DCC & DLRC Meeting reviews Banking Performance for Q3 FY 2025-26 in Bandipora

HT NEWS NETWORK

BANDIPORA, FEB 24: District Consultative Committee (DCC) and District Level Review Committee (DLRC) meeting for the 3rd quarter ending December 2025 was held virtually under the chairpersonship of Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, to review the performance of banks and line departments under the Annual Credit Plan (ACP) 2025-26 and other flagship schemes.

As per the data presented, the district recorded an overall achievement of 63 percent under ACP (Priority + Non-Priority Sector), with disbursement of 1003.69 crore against a target of 1603.66 crore. The Priority Sector registered 58 percent

achievement (494.03 crore against 850.93 crore), while the Non-Priority Sector achieved 68 percent (509.66 crore against 752.73 crore).

The Deputy Commissioner expressed concern over the dismal performance of PNB and SBI and directed the concerned banks to improve their performance in the ensuing quarter.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner directed that reporting be shifted to a weekly review mechanism for closer monitoring. She urged the Chief Agriculture Officer (CAO) to forward cases of Krishi Udyamis to the LDM for facilitation of timely credit linkage.

She directed NRLM to furnish detailed lists of Bank Sakhis to all

banks within two days to strengthen financial inclusion. She further urged the LDM and Chief Planning Officer (CPO) to jointly conduct meetings to resolve banking and credit-related issues in remote areas of the district. Banks were also asked to organize regular awareness camps to enhance public outreach and improve uptake under various schemes.

On the occasion, she reiterated that bankers must be sincere and dedicated towards their responsibilities and ensure timely data reporting, clearance of pendency, and proactive sponsorship of cases under government schemes.

The meeting also reviewed progress under Social Security Schemes (SSS), status of unclaimed deposits, R-KYC pendency in Jan Dhan accounts.

## SKUAST-K organises Agrithon 1.0 under JKCIP

HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, FEB 24: Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-K) organised Seed Capital Fund Challenge (Agrithon 1.0) under the Competitiveness Improvement of Agriculture and Allied Sectors Project for Jammu & Kashmir (JKCIP), funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) at Shalimar campus.

The Seed Capital Fund Challenge was conducted with the objective of identifying, supporting, and nurturing innovative and viable startups across the agriculture and allied sectors in the Kashmir Valley. The initiative aimed to provide critical seed grant support to budding entrepreneurs, enabling them to transform their ideas into scalable and sustain-



able business ventures.

The challenge witnessed enthusiastic pitching by over 40 emerging startups, agripreneurs, and young innovators who presented their business models before an expert evaluation committee comprising domain specialists, incubation experts, and financial professionals.

The proposals were rigorously assessed based on innovation, feasibility, scalability, market potential, and socio-economic impact.

Through this initiative, selected startups will receive seed funding support of Rs 5 Lakh each along with mentorship and incubation assistance to strengthen their business operations and market readiness. The program aligns with the broader vision of JKCIP to enhance competitiveness, promote entrepreneurship, generate employment, and strengthen value chains in agriculture and allied sectors in Jammu & Kashmir.

The Seed Capital Fund Challenge reflects SKUAST-K's continued commitment to fostering innovation-driven entrepreneurship and creating a robust startup ecosystem in the region.

HT EDITORIAL

## Artificial snow; the new buzzword

Jammu & Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah seems to have understood that the people have to live with the challenges posed by climate change and that solutions have to be found out to such challenges. It was in this context Omar while taking part in the inaugural function of the Khelo India games at Gulmarg on February 23 (Monday) made some remarks with respect to snow.

Omar said that time has come when the people should think of exploring means of getting artificial snow instead of the natural one. While analyzing the remarks made by the chief minister it comes out that artificial snow has to be developed by the people to make the winter meaningful. This becomes more important at places like Gulmarg and Sonamarg that play host to the winter sports activities. Snow is also an attraction at other tourist places with people coming from different parts of the country and globe to witness the same.

The impact of the climate change in the form of less snowfall was quite visible at Gulmarg as the famous health resort is hosting the Khelo India winter games. The games that were kicked off on February 23 will end on February 26. Had the day temperature been normal the impact of snow would have been quite visible at Gulmarg but it was not to be. The abnormal day temperatures have led to the melting of snow at a fast pace and there is hardly any snow visible there.

Day in and day out the scientists warn the people about the consequences of climate change but very few among them have come out with solutions to the same. The people as a whole more so those who are sensitive and care about the environment are quite worried over the future following challenges thrown up by the concept of climate change. At the same time these people want solutions from the scientists so that there are no problems for them in future.

Kashmir is a tourist destination with Gulmarg being the favourite place to visit during the winters. In the recent past some more winter tourism destinations have come up and as such more options have been added to the tourist itinerary. In such a scenario it is important that the concept of artificial snow is given serious thought so that the people visiting the Kashmir valley are not disappointed with no snow around.

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# Addressing Student Absenteeism in Gujjar Bakarwal Hostels: A Biometric Solution



■ REYAZ BADANA

Education plays a vital role in the social and economic development of any community. For marginalized and nomadic communities such as the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes, hostel facilities established by the government are a crucial initiative to promote education, reduce dropout rates, and provide equal learning opportunities. However, despite the noble objectives behind Gujjar Bakarwal hostels, a serious issue has emerged in recent years: the frequent absence of students from hostels while official records show full attendance. This gap between reality and reported data not only undermines the purpose of these hostels but also leads to misuse of public resources. In this context, the introduction of a biometric attendance system has become an urgent necessity to ensure transparency, accountability, and genuine student welfare.

One of the major challenges faced by Gujjar Bakarwal hostels is that a large number of enrolled students do not regularly stay in the hostels. Many students remain absent for extended periods, while some visit the hostel only occasionally. Despite this, hostel administrations often show hundred percent attendance in official records in order to continue receiving government funds, food supplies, and other facilities. This practice creates a false image of success and efficiency, while the actual condition of the hostels remains far from satisfactory.

The absence of a proper attendance monitoring system is a key reason behind this issue. At present, most hostels rely on manual attendance registers, which are easy to manipulate. These registers do not provide real-time data and cannot accurately



reflect whether a student is actually residing in the hostel or merely enrolled on paper. As a result, hostel authorities are able to claim facilities for students who are not present, leading to financial losses for the government and deprivation for genuinely needy students.

Moreover, the lack of student presence in hostels negatively affects academic performance and discipline. Hostels are designed to provide a structured environment where students can focus on their studies, receive guidance, and develop good habits. When students do not stay in hostels regularly, they miss out on academic support, mentoring, and access to basic facilities such as libraries, study rooms, and regular meals. This defeats the very purpose of establishing hostels for educational upliftment.

To address these problems, the introduction of a biometric attendance system is the need of the hour. A biometric system, based on fingerprints or facial recognition, ensures that attendance is recorded accurately and cannot be forged. By implementing daily biometric attendance twice a day once in the morning and once in the evening—hostel admin-

istrations can ensure that students are physically present in the hostel.

A morning biometric attendance would confirm that students have spent the night in the hostel, while an evening attendance would ensure their return after school or college hours. This dual-check system would significantly reduce absenteeism and discourage students from staying away without valid reasons. At the same time, it would prevent hostel authorities from falsely reporting attendance, as biometric data is automatically recorded and stored in a centralized system.

The benefits of a biometric attendance system extend beyond attendance monitoring. It would promote transparency and accountability at all administrative levels. Government departments would be able to access accurate attendance data in real time, making it easier to audit hostels and allocate resources fairly. Funds, food supplies, could then be distributed based on actual student presence rather than inflated numbers.

Furthermore, such a system would help identify genuine issues faced by students. If a significant number of students are frequently absent, authorities could investigate the rea-

sons behind it. These reasons might include poor living conditions, lack of security, inadequate food, or emotional discomfort. Addressing these concerns would lead to overall improvement in hostel facilities and student satisfaction.

Another important advantage of biometric attendance is the protection of students' rights. Many deserving students from Gujjar Bakarwal communities are deprived of hostel facilities because seats are shown as occupied by students who are not actually present. An accurate attendance system would ensure that only genuine residents benefit from hostel services, allowing more needy students to be accommodated.

Critics may argue that implementing biometric systems in remote areas could be challenging due to lack of infrastructure or technical expertise. However, with advancements in technology and increased digital penetration, these challenges are no longer insurmountable. Solar-powered devices, offline data storage, and periodic data synchronization can make biometric systems feasible even in remote regions. Additionally, training hostel staff to operate these systems would not require extensive resources.

In conclusion, Gujjar Bakarwal hostels are a vital instrument for promoting education among marginalized communities, but their effectiveness is currently compromised by poor attendance monitoring and lack of transparency. The introduction of a daily biometric attendance system in the morning and evening is an effective and practical solution to ensure genuine student presence, prevent misuse of government resources, and improve the overall functioning of hostels. By adopting this system, authorities can take a significant step toward accountability, fairness, and the true educational upliftment of Gujjar Bakarwal students. Ensuring accurate attendance is not merely an administrative reform; it is a moral responsibility toward the future of these communities.

## Doda — The Winter Capital Of Kishtwar Rajahs

■ MOOL RAJ

In any kingdom, the capital city was not merely a political headquarters; it was the symbolic heart of sovereignty, administration, culture, and economic control. From the capital, rulers dispensed justice, collected revenue, managed military affairs, and patronized religion and the arts. The choice of a capital was therefore strategic — influenced by geography, climate, security, trade routes, and accessibility.

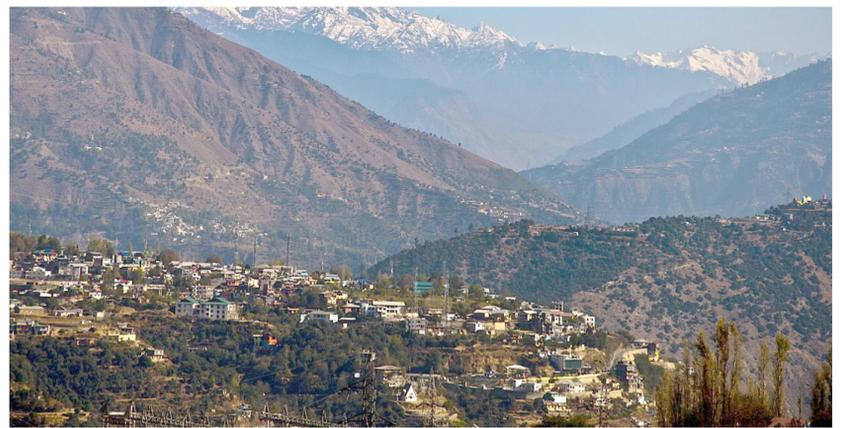
In mountainous regions especially, several principalities adopted a seasonal administrative shift between two capitals — one for summer and another for winter. This was not a modern innovation but a practical response to environmental realities. Harsh winters in high-altitude regions often made governance difficult due to heavy snowfall, blocked passes, and limited communication. Therefore, rulers relocated to lower-altitude towns during the winter months to ensure smoother administration, military mobility, and economic continuity.

Since 1872, Jammu and Kashmir followed a seasonal capital system, with Jammu serving as the winter capital and Srinagar as the summer capital. Instituted during Dogra rule under Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the Darbar began shifting between the two cities — a practice later known as the "Darbar Move."

Some may assume that this practice began during the British period or that it is a modern administrative concept. However, in Kashmir, its roots are much older. References in classical texts such as the Rajatarangini by Kalhana and the Nilamata Purana indicate that seasonal shifts in political centers were known in early Kashmir.

Kalhana writes that in ancient times, Poonch functioned as the winter capital of Kashmir during the reign of King Abhimanyu. Some scholars suggest that his winter seat may have been located in Rajouri instead, but the broader idea of seasonal relocation remains evident.

Winter Capital of Kishtwar  
It is said that Doda's ancient name was Nagri, and it once served as the capital of the Saraz region.



Saraz later lost its separate political identity after it was annexed by Kishtwar, and the area subsequently came under the control of the Kishtwar rulers.

According to historian D. C. Sharma, "Doda used to be the winter capital of the Kishtwar Rajahs." Similarly, Mohan Lal Aash, in his book Cultural History of Doda, J&K, writes:

"DODA: WINTER CAPITAL FOR KINGS OF KISHTWAR, PRINCIPAL CITY OF SIRAJ."

He further mentions that Raja Sujjan Singh (1778–81) constructed a fort at Doda specifically for use as his winter capital.

Why Was Doda Chosen?  
The reason lies primarily in geography and altitude. Much of Kishtwar consists of high-altitude terrain. Kishtwar town itself stands at approximately 1,600 meters above sea level — comparable to the altitude of the Kashmir Valley plains. Doda, however, lies at around 1,100 meters, creating a difference of nearly 500 meters.

This relatively lower elevation meant milder winters, reduced snowfall, and better accessibility.

For a ruler, this ensured uninterrupted governance, easier movement of troops, and continued communication with surrounding regions. Thus, climatic and topographical factors directly influenced the decision to designate Doda as the winter capital.

Aftermath  
In 1821, Kishtwar was annexed by the Dogra rulers, and its last ruler, Mohammad Tegh Bahadur, was taken into custody and imprisoned in Lahore. Following its incorporation into the Dogra state, Kishtwar was reorganized administratively as a tehsil under Udhampur. It later became part of Doda district in 1948 and was finally elevated to the status of a separate district in 2007–08.

Therefore, the practice of maintaining separate summer and winter capitals in the region is not merely a colonial or modern administrative device — it is deeply rooted in the historical and geographical realities of the Himalayan polity.

THE CO AUTHOR IS A REGULAR COLUMNISTS AND FREELANCE WRITER

# Pran Kishore — A Living Symbol of Kashmir's Cultural Legacy



■ **GULFAM BARJI**

In the cultural history of the Indian subcontinent certain individuals transcend the boundaries of their professions and become emblems of an era. Pran Kishore Koul stands among those rare figures. Broadcaster, writer, playwright, filmmaker, and cultural visionary, Koul represents not merely artistic excellence but the living continuity of Kashmir's composite heritage.

Having completed 101 years of life in January 2026, he remains intellectually vibrant and remarkably articulate — a testament to a lifetime devoted to creativity and cultural service.

Pran Kishore Born on January 23, 1925, in Habba Kadal, a historic locality of Srinagar, Koul grew up in an environment steeped in tradition, literature, and aesthetic sensibility. The cultural rhythms of old Srinagar — its waterways, narrow lanes, and syncretic ethos — profoundly shaped his artistic imagination.

After receiving his early education in Srinagar, he studied at S.P. College Srinagar and later graduated from University of the Punjab in Lahore. Originally named Pran Nath Koul he adopted the name "Pran Kishore" in 1943 during his participation in a stage play titled Neelam, a name that would later become synonymous with Kashmiri cultural expression.

In 1948 when Radio Kashmir Srinagar

was established Pran Kishore became one of its pioneering members. Over a distinguished career spanning 37 years, he served as broadcaster, producer, and director.

His voice became the defining identity of the iconic radio program "Wadi Ki Awaaz" (Voice of the Valley). At a time when radio was the primary medium of mass communication, Pran Kishore's dignified presentation style, cultural sensitivity and intellectual depth captivated listeners across the region. He helped transform Radio Kashmir into a respected cultural institution.

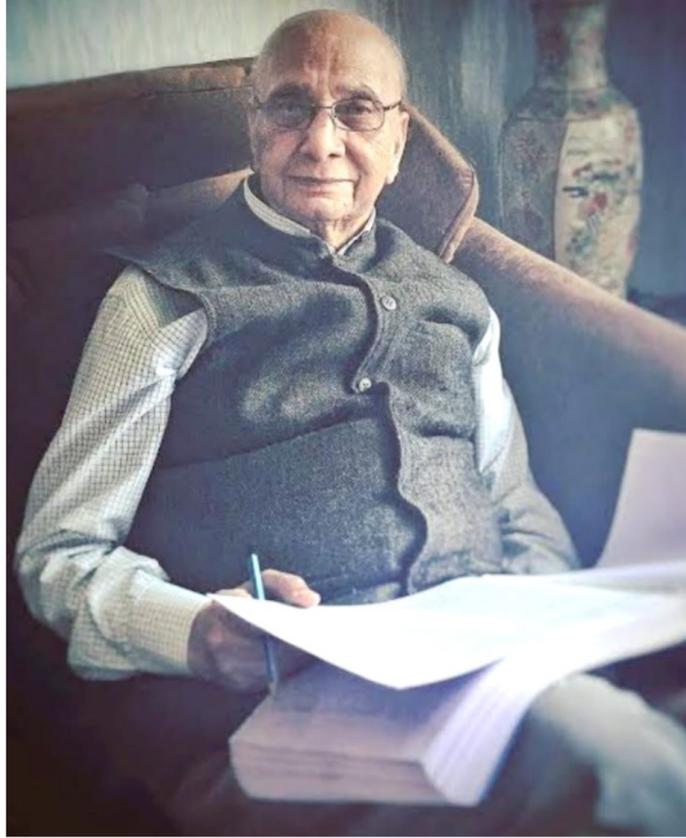
In 1978 he achieved international recognition when he was appointed as a jury member of the prestigious Prix Italia in Milan — becoming the first Indian to receive this honor. This milestone signified global acknowledgment not only of his personal achievements but also of Kashmiri broadcasting.

## ■ National Recognition Through Television

Pran Kishore gained nationwide acclaim with his landmark television serial Gul Gulshan Gulfam, telecast from 1987 to 1991 on Doordarshan.

Set against the backdrop of a Kashmiri houseboat and centered on the life of its owner and family the serial delicately portrayed the language, traditions, family values, and natural beauty of Kashmir. At a time when television ownership in India was still limited, the immense popularity of the series reportedly encouraged many households to purchase TV sets. Even decades later, the show retains its classic status.

Beyond broadcasting Pran Kishore established himself as a formidable literary figure. His novel "Sheen Te Wate Poud" (Snow and the Footpath) is widely regard-



ed as a masterpiece of Kashmiri prose. Through evocative imagery and nuanced storytelling, he explored human emotions,

social tensions, and nature's symbolism with remarkable finesse. For this work he was awarded the Sah-

itya Akademi Award in 1989. In 2024 he was further honored with the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, the highest distinction conferred by India's National Academy of Letters. He is the second Kashmiri writer to receive this honor after the eminent poet Rahman Rahi.

## ■ Pioneer of Kashmiri Cinema

In 1964, Pran Kishore directed and wrote the screenplay for Meanz Raat, the first Kashmiri feature film. The film received the President's Silver Medal in 1965, marking a historic milestone in regional cinema.

He was also associated with the film Shayar-e-Kashmir Mahjoor, based on the life of the celebrated poet Mahjoor. Through these pioneering efforts, Kishore laid the foundation of Kashmiri cinema.

In recognition of his lifelong contribution to arts and literature, Pran Kishore was awarded the prestigious civilian honor Padma Shri in 2018. Today he resides in Pune with his family yet remains intellectually engaged.

In March 2025 he attended a screening of the documentary "Padma Shri Pran Kishore Koul" reflecting on his extraordinary journey. Even at 101 his conversations radiate wisdom, humor, and clarity — qualities that have inspired generations.

Pran Kishore is not merely a writer or broadcaster; he is a custodian of Kashmir's cultural harmony and creative continuity. He gave voice to the Valley through radio, dignity to literature, identity to television and foundation to cinema.

His life affirms a timeless truth: authentic art transcends time. In honoring him we honor an era — and a living embodiment of Kashmir's enduring cultural spirit.

The author from Harwan Srinagar

# Lt Gen Pratik Sharma Inspires Grand Sports Initiative by Chinar Corps



■ **M S NAZKI**

Winter sports has taught me one thing!

There's a way of playing safe, there's a way of using tricks and there's the way I like to play which is dangerously where you're going to take a chance on making mistakes in order to create something you haven't created before. If you want to live your life through to the end, you have to live dangerously.....!

More than most sports, skiing is handed down through the generations... The true skier does not follow where others lead. He is an artist who creates a pattern of lovely lines from virgin and uncorrupted snow!

Because skiers depend on planetary forces much larger than themselves — and, like surfers, must work in harmony with them — a kind of otherworldly euphoria overtakes them when they do it well!

Winter sports capture a unique blend of freedom, adrenaline, and resilience. As Robert Redford famously noted, skiing "removes the machinery and puts you one step closer to the elements," serving as a "complete physical expression of freedom". Whether you are chasing podiums or simply enjoying the slopes, these sports emphasize personal perseverance and the joy of the journey. Remember that "a bad day skiing is better than a good day working".

Lt Gen Pratik Sharma, SYSM, PVSM, AVSM, SM, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Command by looking at his personality seems to be a true sportsman and thus Chinar Corps has decided to take a grand initiative!

You have only seen the least of what I can do.....! A winter sportsman!

The Chinar Open Winter Games 2026, a flagship initiative of the Indian Army, concluded successfully amidst the breathtaking snow clad landscapes of Gulmarg on 20 February 2026. Organised under the aegis of Dagger Division of Chinar Corps, the event was a vibrant celebration of sportsmanship, community spirit and youth empowerment.

The Games provided a versatile platform for the youth of Kashmir to showcase their talents and channelise their energy into competitive and constructive pursuits. This edition witnessed record-breaking participation, with a total of 660 participants competing across eight events. Among them were 166 girls and 494 boys, reflecting the growing enthusiasm for winter sports across the region and the steady rise in women participation.

Exciting but dangerous: There is excitement when you play with dangers!

Winter sports are thrilling due to high speeds (often >90 mph), intense G-forces, and breathtaking, fast-paced action, offering a unique, adrenaline-fueled experience. However, they are dangerous because these same speeds, combined with hard, icy surfaces, trees, and limited safety equipment, create high-impact risks for severe injuries like traumatic brain injuries, spinal damage, and bone fractures.

High-Speed Adrenaline: Sports like luge, bobsleigh, and downhill skiing reach dangerous speeds, sometimes exceeding 90 mph (145 kph), simulating, or exceeding, the feeling of driving a car without a safety cage.

Extreme G-Forces: Athletes navigate sharp, icy, narrow tracks, experiencing intense physical forces that test human endurance.

Freedom and Environment: Skiing and snowboarding offer a sense of empowerment, letting individuals navigate mountain terrain and "fly" off jumps.

Why They Are Dangerous:

Hard Surfaces: Despite being played on snow, slopes and half-pipes are often composed of packed, frozen, or icy surfaces that behave more like concrete upon impact.

High-Impact Collisions: Skiers and boarders risk colliding with trees, rocks, or other participants, which can lead to catastrophic injuries.

Equipment Factors: Skiers have legs fixed into boots, increasing risks for knee injuries like ACL/MCL tears, while snowboarders may face high-velocity falls on wrists and shoulders.

Environmental Hazards: The uncontrolled, wild nature of mountainous terrain brings risks such as avalanches or sudden, sharp, hidden obstacles.

Equipment Risks: Sliding sports (luge,

skeleton) involve narrow, icy tracks where any loss of control results in high-speed crashes.

Common, severe injuries include traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), concussions, cervical spine damage, and broken bones.

The history:

Winter sports originated as essential survival methods in cold climates, with evidence of skiing and skating dating back over 4,000 years. They evolved into organized competitions in the late 19th century, culminating in the first Olympic Winter Games in Chamonix in 1924, which solidified sports like skiing, skating, and ice hockey.

Ancient Roots: The oldest skis, discovered in Swedish bogs, date to 2500 BC, while the oldest ice skates (made from animal bones) were found in Switzerland, dating to 3000 BC.

19th Century Rise: Organized winter sports emerged, with the first ski jump competition in Norway in 1879 and the growth of figure skating.

The Nordic Games (1901–1926): Considered the precursor to the Winter Olympics, this competition was held in Sweden, largely featuring Scandinavian participants.

Olympic Inclusion: Figure skating debuted at the 1908 Summer Olympics, and ice hockey appeared in 1920.

First Winter Olympics (1924): Held in Chamonix, France, this event marked the official start of the Winter Games, featuring 16 nations and 250 athletes.

Evolution of Disciplines: Originally featuring six core sports (cross-country skiing, figure skating, ice hockey, Nordic combined, ski jumping, and speed skating), the Games expanded significantly, adding events like bobsleigh, luge, and, more recently, freestyle skiing and snowboarding.

Modern Era: The Winter Olympics now include 116 medal events, with new disciplines like ski mountaineering making their debut in 2026.

Key Sporting Milestones  
Skating: Used for travel in Russia and Scandinavia, later developing into speed skating on Dutch canals in the 14th century.

Skiing: Originally for transport, alpine skiing gained popularity only after the invention of ski lifts in the 1950s.

Bobsleigh: Originated from riders using sleds, with the name derived from the rocking motion used to gain speed.

Biathlon: Originated in Scandinavia, combining cross-country skiing with rifle shooting, and was added to the Olympics in 1960.

The Winter Olympics have grown into a major international event, fostering global participation and advancements in specialized equipment and training techniques.

For the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics, there are 16 distinct disciplines grouped under eight core sports: Alpine Skiing, Biathlon, Bobsleigh (including Skeleton), Curling, Ice Hockey, Luge, Skating (Figure, Short Track, Speed), Ski Mountaineering, and Skiing (Freestyle, Cross-Country, Nordic Combined, Ski Jumping, Snowboard).

Top Athletes:

Top winter sports athletes often showcase extreme dedication and resilience, illustrated by Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo's historic six-gold performance at the 2026 Winter Games, and Lindsey Jacobellis' redemption after a 16-year wait for Olympic gold. Stories of perseverance include Shiva Keshavan, who trained on dangerous, makeshift tracks, and Elana Meyers Taylor's triumphant comeback as a mother.

Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo (Cross-Country Skiing): At the 2026 Milano Cortina Games, Norwegian Klaebo became the first athlete to win 6 gold medals in a single Winter Olympics, cementing his legacy as a "machine" in the sport.

Elana Meyers Taylor (Bobsled): After competing in five Olympics without a gold, the 41-year-old American mother achieved victory in the women's monobob at the 2026 Games, overcoming personal hurdles as a disability advocate.

Lindsey Jacobellis (Snowboarding): After a famous 2006 mistake cost her gold, she finally earned redemption at 36 by winning the 2022 snowboard cross, adding another in the mixed team event.

Shiva Keshavan (Luge): Representing India, he competed in six consecutive Olympics (1998–2018), often self-funding his training, which involved riding on dangerous, makeshift Himalayan roads.

Eric Heiden (Speed Skating): At the 1980 Lake Placid Games, he won all five individual speed skating events, a feat unmatched to this day.

Ester Ledecka (Snowboarding/Skiing): At the 2018 Olympics, she made history by winning gold in two different disci-

plines (Super-G skiing and parallel giant slalom snowboarding).

Francis Jobin (Snowboarding): At the 2026 Winter Olympics, he showcased incredible resilience by finishing 7th in the big air final despite suffering a dislocated shoulder during training.

These stories highlight the incredible physical and mental strength required to excel in winter sports, from the icy tracks to the snow-covered mountains.

But this is a story from Chinar Corps:

The event featured an exhilarating line up of winter sports competitions, ranging from high adrenaline skiing races and thrilling snowboarding events to graceful skating performances. Participants tested their abilities against some of the region's finest athletes, drawing large and enthusiastic crowds of locals, tourists and sports enthusiasts.

Highlight of the event was the visit of Lt Gen Pratik Sharma, SYSM, PVSM, AVSM, SM, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Command, who graced the occasion and interacted with participants, organisers and members of the local community. He lauded the exceptional organisation of the Games and commended the high standard of sportsmanship displayed by the young athletes. He appreciated the initiative as a meaningful endeavour to channelise the aspirations of Kashmir's youth towards constructive Nation building activities and reaffirmed the Army's steadfast commitment to fostering peace, progress and opportunity through sports.

Beyond the excitement of the competitions, the Games reinforced the Indian Army's enduring bond with the people. These initiatives highlighted Indian Army's contribution towards promoting sports, nurturing young talent and developing Gulmarg as a premier winter sports destination.

As the curtains fell on this successful edition of the Chinar Open Winter Games, the event stood as a testament to Kashmir's rising sporting culture and growing prominence of Gulmarg as a hub of winter sports in India.

And finally the final lines: Snowboarding is about living, not about dying. You go up into the mountains empty, even with no lunch, you come home full. A pair of skis are the ultimate transformation to freedom.....Kindly remember that.....!

# Holi Skin and Hair Care Tips



SHAHNAZ HUSAIN

Holi Hai!! The vibrant festival of colors of happiness is just around the corner. Barely a few days are left before you head to play joyfully and get soaked in colour game. The Holi fever has set it and it is the time of the year when you are excited about looking like a multi-coloured canvas. The festival brings with itself, a whiff of mishmash of dry gulal and buckets of water.

When you decide to indulge in a burst of colours, what bothers people most is how to deal with skin and hair issues caused by the rampant use of harmful toxin colours that can make your skin, hair dry and frizzy. While you've zeroed in on where you're going to be celebrating Holi with splashes of harmful toxins, make sure to follow these Holi skin care tips to give your hair and skin that extra protection from chemical laden harsh colors to counter ill effects on colour stained faces, parched hair and irritated skin.

Holi is celebrated at a time when Nature renews and refreshes herself. With a little care, we can do the same and also sustain our youth and beauty.

The dry "Gulal" and the wet colours of today are not derived from natural sources. They contain chemicals, shiny particles of mica and even lead, which not only irritate the skin, but collect on the scalp. Since Holi is played out of doors, sun-

exposure can also have a detrimental effect on the skin. Apart from harmful UV radiation, sun-exposure makes the skin dry by causing depletion of moisture and also tans the skin. The skin can become dry and dull after playing holi.

Remember to apply a sunscreen 20 minutes before going out to in the sun. Use a sunscreen of SPF 20 and above. If your skin is prone to pigmented patches, select one with a higher SPF. Most sunscreens have built-in moisturizers. If your skin is very dry, first apply the sunscreen, wait for a few minutes and then apply a moisturizer. Light daytime make-up may be used. Touch up your eyes with eye pencil or kaajal and use a lip gloss.

The real problem is removal of colours after playing holi. Do not wash your face with soap immediately, because soap is alkaline and causes further dryness. Instead, use a cleansing cream, or lotion. Apply and massage it on the face. Then wipe off with moist cotton wool. Remember to cleanse the area around the eyes too, using a light touch. A cleansing gel helps to dissolve the colours and facilitates their removal.

To make your own cleanser, take half a cup of cold milk and add one teaspoon of any vegetable oil, like "til," olive or sunflower oil. Mix well. Dip cotton wool into this mixture and use it to cleanse the skin.

Sesame seed (til) oil can be used to remove colours from the body, massaging it on the skin. This not only helps to remove the colours, but gives added protection to the skin. Sesame seed (til) oil actually helps to counteract sun-damage. While bathing, scrub the body gently with a loofah or wash cloth. Immediately after your bath, apply a moisturizer on the face and body, while the skin is still damp. This helps to seal in moisture.



The day after holi, you may have to deal with the effects of sun-exposure, like dryness or tanned skin. Mix two tablespoons of honey with half a cup of curd. Add a pinch of turmeric. Apply this on the face, neck and arms. Leave it on for 20 minutes and wash off with water. Honey is a powerful natural moisturizer and helps to soften the skin, while curd will nourish and restore the normal acid-alkaline balance. It also removes tan.

### Hair Care

The dry "Gulal" and the wet colours of today are not derived from natural sources. They contain chemicals, shiny particles of mica and even lead, which collect on the scalp and irritate it. Apply a protective leave-on conditioner or hair serum before playing Holi. They coat the hair and protect it from chemical colours, pollutants and sun-exposure. They also add shine to the hair.

While washing the hair, first rinse with plenty of plain water to wash away the dry

colours and tiny particles of mica. Then apply a mild herbal shampoo, working it into the hair with the fingers. Massage the scalp gently and rinse thoroughly with water again. Add the juice of a lemon to a mug of water and use it as a last rinse. This helps to restore the acid-alkaline balance of the scalp.

Beer can also be used as a last rinse. In fact, it will soften and condition the hair. Add the juice of a lemon to the beer. Pour over the hair after shampoo. Leave on for a few minutes and rinse off with plain water.

If there is itching, add two tablespoons of vinegar to a mug of water and use it as a last rinse. This helps to reduce itching. However, if the itching continues, and there is rash and redness, there may be an allergy to the colour. Consult a doctor as soon as possible.

Within the next few days give your hair a nourishing treatment. Mix egg yolk with almond oil or olive oil and massage it

lightly into the hair and scalp. Then dip a towel in hot water, squeeze out the water and wrap the hot towel around the head, like a turban. Keep it on for 5 minutes. Repeat the hot towel wrap 3 or 4 times. This helps the hair and scalp absorb the oil better. Wash your hair after an hour.

Next day give your hair a nourishing treatment. Mix one tablespoon of pure coconut oil with one teaspoon castor oil. Heat and apply on the hair. Then dip a towel in hot water, squeeze out the water and wrap the hot towel around the head, like a turban. Keep it on for 5 minutes. Repeat the hot towel wrap 3 or 4 times. This helps the hair and scalp absorb the oil better. Wash your hair after an hour.

Conditioning with henna would help to restore damage to the hair, adding shine and body. To the henna powder, add four teaspoons each of lemon juice and coffee, two eggs, two teaspoons oil and enough curd to mix into a paste. Apply on the hair and wash your hair after an hour.

**Make your own natural colours for Holi**  
Simmer Tesu flowers in water. Leave overnight. Strain and use the water to play Holi. Tesu flowers leave a yellow colour. The botanical name of Tesu is Butea monosperma. Henna powder can be mixed with gram flour (besan) or maize flour (makki) and used as dry green colour.

Turmeric (haldi) can be used both as dry and wet colour. Turmeric can be mixed with gram flour for dry colour. Or, it can be added to water and boiled. Leave overnight and then use. Boil beetroot in water. This leaves a bright magenta colour. Cool and use the water. Or extract beetroot juice, add a little water and then use it.

The author is an internationally famous beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India

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## PUCA Hosts International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Chandigarh

Rajya Sabha MP S. Satnam Singh graces the occasion; PUCA President Dr. Anshu Kataria presided over

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**CHANDIGARH, FEB 24:** Punjab Unaided Colleges Association (PUCA) in collaboration with Futred Innovation Studios organized a conference on "Accelerating Research Translation & AI-Driven Innovation Ecosystems aligned to Viksit Bharat Vision" at PHD Chamber, Chandigarh.

The event was graced by Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) S. Satnam Singh as the Chief Guest, while the programme was presided over by Dr. Anshu Kataria, President, PUCA; Chairman, Aryans Group of Colleges, Rajpura near Chandigarh.

Among the prominent persons present were Prof (Dr.) Manpreet Singh Manna, Dr. Manish Malhotra, Mr. Russell Merz, Emeritus Professor Michael Clements, Mr. Kamal Chabra along with representatives from leading universities, institutions and industry bodies. The conference witnessed participation from academicians, industry experts, institutional leaders and students from various colleges across Punjab.

Dr. Anshu Kataria, while addressing the gathering, emphasized that India is moving rapidly towards becoming a global knowledge hub and institutions must focus on innovation, research commercialization and industry partnerships to contribute to the Viksit Bharat Vision. He highlighted the role of private educational institutions in skill development, entrepreneurship promotion and youth empowerment.

Mr. Russell Merz, Founder, Brisbane Strategy Ventures, Australia, delivered an insightful address highlighting global innovation trends, startup ecosystems and the need for Indian institutions to create industry-ready graduates through applied research and entrepreneurship. He appreciated India's demographic strength and encouraged institutions to collaborate internationally for technology-driven growth.

Emeritus Professor Michael Clements from College of Practice Professors, Australia, spoke about transforming higher education through experiential learning, practice-based education models and AI-enabled teaching methodologies. He emphasized that institutions must move beyond theoretical learning and focus on real-world problem solving to enhance employability and innovation outcomes.

On the occasion, renowned Punjabi Actor & Comedian Binu Dhillon and Actor & Singer Ammy Virk attended as Special Guests and interacted with the audience regarding their upcoming movie Bambukat-2, releasing on 20th February. They shared that the movie is a must-watch for youth and carries a strong message that "Dignity is the greatest invention and one should always protect his or her roots." They encouraged young people to value substance over status and to stand up for justice in society.

During the programme, Abhishek College, Jain College, Meera College, Guru Ramdas Group of Colleges, Desh Bhagat College, Sant Kabir College, ISF College, SBS College, SFC College, Ferozepur College of Engineering, Amritsar College of Nursing, Mai Bhago College and Aryans Group of Colleges were also honored for their dedicated contribution during the Punjab Governor Anti-Drug Awareness March organized from 9th to 12th February across Tarn Taran, Ferozepur, Abohar and Fazilka. The institutions were appreciated for actively supporting the social cause and spreading awareness among youth against drug abuse.

# Secretary RDD reviews draft DPR for 'Viksit Village' initiative in J&K

90 villages to be transformed into model growth centres: Aijaz Asad

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 24:** Secretary, Rural Development Department (RDD) and Panchayati Raj, Mohammad Aijaz Asad, chaired a meeting to review the Draft Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the proposed 'Viksit Village' initiative, envisaging holistic development of one village in each Assembly constituency across Jammu and Kashmir.

With a proposed allocation of ₹2 crore per village and an outlay of ₹1,800 lakh under the 2026-27 capital expenditure budget, the programme aims to transform 90 villages into model growth centres.

The initiative seeks to create self-reliant, economically productive and environmentally sustainable villages through comprehensive development covering infrastructure, digital smart libraries, modern crèche facilities, well-equipped youth gymnasiums, dedicated recreation centres for senior citizens, advanced solar power infrastructure facilities, skill empowerment & career development facilities, community sports excellence hubs, solid and liquid waste management and livelihood generation opportunities.

Emphasising alignment with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, the Secretary stressed scientific



planning, community participation, convergence across departments and adherence to technical standards. He directed that DPRs

incorporate sustainability components such as solar lighting, rainwater harvesting, DEWATS and Plastic Waste Management Units, while ensuring geo-tagging, third-party inspections and ODF Plus standards.

He directed that villages be identified in coordination with elected representatives, with DPRs to be finalised within two days of identification. Implementation is to be planned over two years, with the selection process to be completed by March.

Senior officers, including Director of RDD Jammu and Kashmir, Director Finance and Joint Director Planning attended the meeting.

## LG Kavinder Gupta Grants Notional Annual Increments To SRO-202 Employees In Ladakh

### HT NEWS NETWORK

**LEH, FEB 24:** The Lieutenant Governor of the Union Territory of Ladakh, Kavinder Gupta, has approved the grant of Notional Annual Increments for the probation period to employees appointed under the Jammu & Kashmir Special Recruitment Rules, 2015 (SRO-202).

This significant decision marks a progressive step towards ensuring fairness and service parity among government employees in the Union Territory. By recognizing notional increments for the probation period, the



Administration has addressed a long-pending concern affecting employees appointed under SRO-202, thereby acknowledging their rightful service entitlements.

The approval reinforces the commitment of the UT Administration to create a transparent, equitable, and employee-friendly governance framework. The move will ensure a level playing field for employees of Ladakh and align their service benefits with established principles of administrative justice.

In his message, the Lieutenant Governor emphasized that the Administration remains dedicated to safeguarding the legitimate rights of employees and strengthening institutional fairness. He noted that this decision reflects the government's resolve to promote morale, enhance efficiency, and uphold equity in public service. He directed the concerned departments to issue necessary orders and implement the decision in a time-bound manner.

This measure is expected to benefit a significant number of employees appointed under SRO-202 and further streamline service conditions within the Union Territory.

## GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR Office of the Executive Engineer Mechanical & Hospitals Division Baramulla

e-mail, id, xenmhd.bla@jk.gov.in

### TENDER NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

**NIT NO: M&HDB/TS/2025-26/103/4649-54 | DATE: 24-02-2026**

For and on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, Executive Engineer, Mechanical & Hospitals Division Baramulla, invites online e-bids in Two Cover system on percentage wise basis from Authorized Service Providers of OEMs /Registered / Listed Contractors for the below mentioned works:

S.No	Name of Work	Est. Cost (in lacs)	T.D Cost	E/M	Time
01.	Different Repairs of Snow Tractor (Sonalika 90 HP) of GDA Gulmarg.	1.028	200.00	2056/-	05 days

#### Note:

AAA: Administrative Approval accorded by Chief Executive Officer Gulmarg Development Authority vide No. 142 GDA of 2026 Dated: - 20-02-2026.

Technical Sanction: Technical Sanction Accorded by Executive Engineer Mechanical & Hospitals Division Baramulla vide No. M&HDB/TS/66 of 02/2026; Dated: - 24-02-2026.

Executing Agency: - Executive Engineer, Mechanical & Hospitals Division Baramulla.

1.	Date of issue of Tender Notice	24-02-2026
2.	Period of downloading of the bidding document	From 24-02-2026 to 02-03-2026
3.	Bid Submission Start Date	From 24-02-2026 (18:15 HRS)
4.	Bid Submission End Date	02-03-2026 (18:55 HRS)
5.	Date of Opening of Cover 1st	03-03-2026 (13:00 HRS)

The bidders are required to submit their offers in two (02) covers.

Cover-I shall contain: Scanned copies of following documents:

1.	Tender Fee	Rs. 200.00 (Rupees Two hundred only) in shape of e-Challan / e-receipt / online Bank transfer acknowledgement including m-Pay Delight+, to be uploaded with each online bid pledged to Executive Engineer Mechanical & Hospitals Division Baramulla. Tender ID to be written also on the voucher. Bank: J&K Bank. Branch: T.P Baramulla. IFSC Code: JAKAOTHEHSIL Account No.: 021301020000051.
2.	EMD	Scanned copy of Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) in the shape of CDR/FDR equivalent to 02% of value of the advertised cost pledged to Executive Engineer Mechanical & Hospitals Division Baramulla. EMD of successful bidder shall be released on receipt of 03% to 10% Performance Guarantee from (L1) and execution of agreement with the Department. EMD of un-successful bidders shall be also released as per rules provided in J&K PWD Engineering Manual 2020.
3.	Terms & Conditions	Scanned copy of the Annexure- "A" & "B" duly accepted by the bidder.
4.	Tax Clearance	Registration Certificate of Sales Tax Department quoting GST Number.
5.	GST	Scanned copies of PAN Card / GST Registration / Latest GST clearance certificate or acknowledgement of latest returns.
6.	Undertaking	Undertaking as per format at Annexure "C" that the bidder has not been blacklisted or debarred by any Govt./Semi Govt. Department.
7.	Contractor Registration	Scanned copy of valid Contractor Registration on JKPWDOMS of PWD J&K.
8.	Eligibility / Work Experience Certificate	The Bidder Shall submit documentary proof of having successfully executed similar nature of work amounting to 80% of the estimated cost in single contract or 50% of the estimated cost in two contracts each or 40% of the estimated cost in three contracts each in last 07 years in any Govt. / Semi Govt./Autonomous institutions alongwith satisfactory performance certificate issued by a competent authority not below the rank of Assistant Executive Engineer.

#### Note:

The successful bidder has to furnish EMD document physically to the Divisional office alongwith fee receipt within three days from the date of opening price bid, without which his bid shall not be accepted for further processing of contract in his favour.

No EMD exemption shall be given to bidders.

Bidders / Firms shall refrain from uploading irrelevant documents.

Contractor / Firm shall upload the contact / communication details separately on single page.

A. Cover-II shall contain:

01. Price bid, as per BOQ uploaded by this department. In no case, financial bid will be accepted in physical form.

02. The bids for the work shall remain valid for 180 days and the contract shall be valid for one complete year, starting from the date of allotment of the said contract.

03. The complete bidding process will be online.

04. The Financial bid of only qualifying bidders shall be opened online in the Office of the Executive Engineer M&HD Baramulla after evaluation of technical bid and decision thereof.

05. Bidder shall be penalized as per tender conditions if they withdraw their bid during the period of bid validity or make any modifications in the terms and conditions of the bid.

06. Bidders are advised not to make any change in BOQ (Bill of Quantities) contents. In no case they should attempt to create similar BOQ manually. The BOQ downloaded should be used for filling the rate below %age inclusive of all taxes and it should be saved with the same name as it contains.

07. The cost of tender documents is non-refundable and the tender shall in no case be accepted if submitted by any firm other than the purchaser.

08. Any tender found to have been submitted by the firm by furnishing false information to the department shall be cancelled and the firm shall be penalized as and when it comes to the notice of the Department even during the currency of the contract. The department reserves the right to debar /blacklist such firm(s).

09. Conditional tenders shall not be entertained.

10. Unbalanced Bid: In case bid of the lowest bidder is found unbalanced, the successful bidder shall have to produce additional performance security in shape of CDR/FDR/ Bank Guarantee within 07 days after opening of price bid as per the Circular directives of the J&K U.T Finance Department issued vide No. FD-Code/441/2021-22-158; Dated: - 08.08.2025 and relevant clauses of J&K (PWD) Engineering Manual 2020.

11. The tenders should be addressed to the Executive Engineer M&HD Baramulla.

**No: M&HDB/TS/e-tender-103/4649-54**

**Dated: 24-02-2026**

**Sd/- Executive Engineer  
Mechanical & Hospitals Division Baramulla**

**DIPK: 11290/25 | Dated: 24-02-2026**

## 'J&K teachers may face compulsory retirement if TET not cleared'

SED mandates JKBOSE as nodal agency to conduct TET

### HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

**SRINAGAR, FEB 24:** The Department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, UT of J&K has advised the School Education Department that the in-service teachers with more than five years of service left must have to clear the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) within two years failing which they may face to quit their service or shall be liable for a compulsory retirement.

The department has however clarified that the in-service teachers who have less than five years' service left, as on date, may continue in service till they attain the age of superannuation without qualifying the TET.

"However, we make it clear that if any such teacher having less than five years' service left aspires for promotion, he will not be considered eligible without he/she having qualified the TET," it reads.

According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Secretary to School Education Department (SED) has said that in exercise of the powers vested in the Government and in compliance with the directions of the Supreme Court of India, JKBOSE, State School Standards Authority (SSA) is designated as Nodal Agency for conducting TET for the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, with immediate

effect.

"The JKBOSE, SSA shall take immediate necessary steps for operationalization of the TET examination framework in accordance with the Action Plan formulated in the meeting held in October-2025," it reads.

SED has also said that JKBOSE shall develop and notify a detailed schedule for conduct of TET.

"The board shall coordinate with NIC, School Education Department, Higher Education Department, Home Department, and other concerned authorities for logistical, technical and security arrangements," it reads.

It also said that the board shall ensure alignment of syllabus and examination standards with the guidelines of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), with suitable contextual modifications.

"The secretary, J&K BOSE/SSA shall furnish a comprehensive action plan including timelines and preparatory status, to the School Education Department within the shortest possible time," reads the order.

Meanwhile, SED in the order while referring the returned and the findings with advice that was sought from the Department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, UT of J&K said that if any of such teachers fail to qualify the TET within the time that we have

allowed, they shall have to quit service. They may be compulsorily retired; and paid whatever terminal benefits they are entitled to.

In query whether TET qualifications are mandatory for teachers in both government and private schools, including those registered and unregistered, the department had responded with, "If we are to accept the contention of the in-service teachers, the above said proviso would be rendered nugatory obtaining the TET qualification under the RTE Act is mandatory and the consequence of non-obtaining such qualification flowing from the scheme of the RTE Act is that the in-service teachers would cease to have any right to continue in service."

"Reference may also be made to letter dated 3rd August, 2017 (discussed in Paragraph 69 above) issued by the MHRD which provided a deadline beyond which the in-service teachers, having not qualified the TET, would not be permitted to continue in service," it reads. It also said, "As such in view of the above, the TET qualifications are mandatory for teachers in both government and private schools, including registered schools. Apposite to mention that the School Education Department requires to proceed against the unregistered institutions in accordance with law."

# DC Ramban reviews progress of Power Sector Schemes

HT NEWS NETWORK

**RAMBAN, FEB 24:** Deputy Commissioner Ramban, Mohammad Alyas Khan reviewed the implementation of the power sector schemes in a meeting held here today.

The meeting was attended by CPO Dr. Shakeeb Ahmed Rather, Executive Engineer, Jammu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (JPDL), along with representatives of executing agencies and vendors engaged in the implementation of flagship power sector initiatives.

The Deputy Commissioner reviewed the progress of works undertaken under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS), installation of Smart Meters and Rooftop Solar projects in the district.

The Deputy Commissioner directed the concerned agencies to fast-track the RDSS works to achieve desired objectives. He also resolved the bottlenecks high-



lighted by the executing agencies by issuing necessary directions to

the concerned officers. Assuring full administrative support, he stressed timely completion of all projects to strengthen the power distribution infrastructure, enhance operational efficiency and improve overall consumer satisfaction in the Ramban district.

While reviewing the status of Smart Meter installation, the Deputy Commissioner directed the executing agencies to expedite the process and ensure completion within the prescribed timelines. Further, the Deputy Commissioner laid special emphasis on the effective implementation and wider promotion of PMSuryaGhar: Muft Bijli Yojana by encouraging households to adopt Rooftop Solar systems to reduce electricity bills and ensure a sustainable and reliable power supply. He directed the Engineers and concerned agencies to accelerate the pace of installations to achieve the prescribed targets while strictly adhering to quality standards. UNI

# DDC Poonch reviews implementation of Capex Budget, Central Schemes

HT NEWS NETWORK

**POONCH, FEB 24:** District Development Commissioner Poonch, Ashok Kumar Sharma today chaired a comprehensive review meeting to assess the physical and financial progress under the District Capex Budget 2025-26, along with Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and UT Sector Schemes in the district.

The DDC took a detailed sector-wise review of ongoing and upcoming developmental projects.

Superintending Engineer Hydraulic Circle, Executive Engineer PWD (R&B) and Executive Engineer I&FC presented detailed briefings on the physical and financial status of works approved under different heads, including PWD, DDC Grants, Health, Secondary Education, NFB, Untied Funds, ULB, CDF, TSP Roads, YSS and other sectors.

The DDC also reviewed progress of NABARD funded Roads, Samagra projects, PMAAGY, BADP, NABARD-AH, among other developmental initiatives and stressed the need for early completion of all works.

The meeting also discussed major infrastructure projects including construction of Administrative Complexes at Mendhar and Poonch, motorable bridges and other key works.



While assessing the status of roads, bridges and other developmental works, the DDC stressed adherence to timelines.

The meeting was attended by CPO Shama Un Ahmed, Superintending Engineer Hydraulic Circle Poonch, Executive Engineer PWD (R&B) Poonch, Mendhar & Surankote, CEO Mukhtar Ahmed Manhas and other concerned officers.

# College of Education organises Road Safety Enforcement at M. A Road Srinagar

HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, FEB 24:** With an aim to promote traffic discipline and sensitize the public about responsible road behaviour, a Road Enforcement and Awareness Activity was today organised on the historic M. A. Road outside the Government College of Education Srinagar premises.

The programme, organised by Nodal Principal, Kashmir Division Colleges and Principal of Government College of Education, IASE Srinagar in collaboration with Traffic Police Srinagar commenced with a message from the Nodal Principal, Prof. Seema Naz.

In her speech, Dr Seema highlighted the rising concern of road accidents and emphasized the crucial role of educational institutions in fostering public awareness and responsible citizenship. She underscored that awareness, combined with community participation, is essential for ensuring safer roads.

The objectives and operational backdrop of the programme were presented by the Convener of the Road Safety Club, Prof. Aijaz Ahmad Dar, who addressed participants from the college gate and emphasized the importance of experiential learning and community outreach in building a culture of road safety.

In a coordinated effort, students of the college actively engaged with commuters and provided on-the-spot counselling and mentoring regarding adherence to traffic rules, use of helmets and seat belts, pedestrian safety, and responsible driving practices.

The activity highlighted the proactive role of higher educational institutions in addressing social challenges through community engagement. It also provided students with meaningful exposure to civic responsibility and public service while reinforcing the message that road safety is a shared social commitment.

The programme concluded successfully with active participation from students, faculty, and traffic authorities, marking an important step towards strengthening public awareness and promoting safer road practices in the community.

# Director Panchayati Raj pushes for timely completion of Panchayat Ghars across UT Status of PLCs, GPDP, 'Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar' discussed in detail

HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, FEB 24:** Director Panchayati Raj, Sham Lal chaired a comprehensive review meeting today to assess the progress of Panchayat infrastructure and key grassroots governance initiatives across the Union Territory.

The meeting evaluated the construction status of Panchayat Ghars, functioning of Panchayat Learning Centres (PLCs), progress of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) and the implementation of the Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar initiative.

The meeting was informed that against a target of 640 Pan-

chayat Ghars, land has been identified for 579, work has been allotted in 435 cases, while 204 units stand completed to date.

The Director conducted a detailed review of division-wise performance, fund expenditure, land identification challenges and overall operational efficiency.

Emphasizing the need for timeline execution, the Director instructed district officers to ensure completion of all remaining Panchayat Ghars strictly by March 31.

He described Panchayat Ghars as vital public assets at the Gram Panchayat level under the Panchayati Raj system, stating that

these must function as hubs for Gram Sabha meetings.

He further instructed that Panchayat Secretaries and other staff should operate from these buildings as their official workplaces. Reviewing the status of 32 Panchayat Learning Centres established across Jammu and Kashmir, Sham Lal directed Assistant Commissioners Panchayats (ACPs) to institutionalise and fully operationalise these centres to strengthen training and capacity-building programmes.

He also asked ACPs to prepare short documentary films showcasing achievements of villages where PLCs are functional, to

create awareness and facilitate exposure visits by representatives and officials.

The Director stressed that preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans should be undertaken with full momentum and uploaded on the e-GramSwaraj portal immediately upon issuance of formal instructions.

Speaking on the Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar initiative, he described it as a dedicated portal aimed at documenting and showcasing the unique identity of selected villages.

Officers were instructed to upload not only photographs but

also concise narratives highlighting ancient heritage, historical structures, notable personalities and other distinctive features of each village, along with relevant data.

Regarding the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan Yojana, the Director informed that in coordination with the Labour Department, registration of eligible labourers must be completed by March 15.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Secretary RD&PR, Tahir Ahmad Magray; Assistant Commissioners Panchayats; Executive Engineers and other senior officers.

# DC Kishtwar discusses funding of FPOs through CSR framework

HT NEWS NETWORK

**KISHTWAR, FEB 24:** In a major push to strengthen the agricultural economy and empower local farmer collectives, District Administration Kishtwar is mulling to explore funding of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR-1) framework.

Deputy Commissioner (DC), Pan-kaj Kumar Sharma today convened a meeting with active Farmer Producer Organizations of the district and concerned HODs of the line departments.

The session focused on unlocking new funding avenues for FPOs through the Corporate Social Responsibility framework.

Addressing the stakeholders, the DC emphasized the necessity of bridg-



ing the funding gap in the farm sector by tapping corporate partnerships and central agricultural schemes.

To streamline this process, the DC advised the FPOs to register on the Ministry of Corporate Affairs portal and generate their CSR-1 certificates. "This critical compliance step will legally authorize the FPOs to receive and execute CSR funds from corporate

entities and PSUs operating in the region," he informed.

Further, the Deputy Commissioner instructed the FPOs to prepare and submit Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) to secure financial support.

During the session, the allied department heads, including Chief Agriculture Officer Kushal Chandel, assured the FPOs of full technical and administrative handholding.

"The departments will assist the farmer collectives in fulfilling these regulatory compliances and drafting viable project proposals that align with the district's developmental goals," he assured.

The meeting was attended by ADC, Pawan Kotwal; CHO, Sajid Mustafa; DSHO; LDM; DDM NABARD; besides other officers from concerned departments.

# 137 CRPF Bn hosts 5-day Volleyball tournament at Udhampur

HT NEWS NETWORK

**UDHAMPUR, FEB 24:** A five day Volleyball Tournament, organised by 137 Bn, CRPF under the Civic Action Programme commenced today here at the SRTC campus, Udhampur.

Six teams are participating in the event. CRPF personnel and local coaches conducted the first match between Veer Volleyball Club and C.V.C. Volleyball Club, featuring high-energy plays, skill demonstrations and team-building drills.



M.K. Sicon, Commandant; Kartar Singh, Second-in-command; R.L. Meena, Dy. Comdt; Suresh, Dy. Comdt; Dr. Manish Rundra, Medical Officer of 137 Bn, CRPF; Ashok Padha, President, Volleyball Association, Udhampur cum Executive Member-J&K Volleyball Association; Naveen Kumar, PEM, Dy. SSO, Sanjay Sharma, PEM, Dy. SSO, Manik Nargotra, PEM, Dy. SSO; Amit Sharma, PET, Dy. SSO; Vinod Sharma, Dy. SSO & Kuldeep Sharma, J&K, Jt. Secretary-Volleyball Association of Udhampur and media personnel along with players, CRPF jawans and locals were present on this occasion.

Local coaches and officials provided guidance to local youth, especially on fitness, teamwork and sports discipline. They also motivated participants to adopt healthy habits, build physical strength and overcome limiting mindsets for overall well-being.

Prizes and sports equipment were distributed among Volleyball Players to promote sports and fitness.

# DC Reasi reviews implementation of Social Welfare Schemes; Calls for enhanced outreach and convergence

HT NEWS NETWORK

**REASI, FEB 24:** Deputy Commissioner Reasi, Kumar Abhishek, today chaired a meeting to review the implementation of Social Welfare schemes in the district.

During the meeting, District Social Welfare Officer Sachin Sharma presented a detailed overview of the department's functioning. He informed the chair about the status of key schemes, including the Integrated Social Assistance Scheme, National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Pre and Post Matric Scholarship Schemes, Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana, Marriage Assistance Scheme and Beti



Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative.

The Deputy Commissioner directed the department to ensure 100 per cent coverage of all eligible students under the Pre and Post Matric Scholarship Schemes. He stressed the need for generating mass awareness to maximise coverage of eligible beneficiaries. He also instructed the District Social Welfare Officer to verify the availability and functioning of sanitary vending machines installed in schools in the district.

Emphasising skill development and capacity building, the Deputy Commissioner called for exploring convergence with Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) to facilitate issuance of nation-

ally recognised certificates to students, thereby enhancing their employability.

The Deputy Commissioner further reviewed the functioning of Mission Shakti-Sankalp-Hub for Empowerment of Women, Mission Vatsalya-Child Helpline, District Hub for Empowerment of Women (DHEW) and One Stop Centre (OSC), which provide critical support services to women and children in distress. He also took stock of awareness camps conducted under the Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan across the district.

Chief Planning Officer Narinder Kumar along with other concerned officers of the Social Welfare Department attended the meeting.

# USD 70 billion India bet: Amazon opens mega Bengaluru campus

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**BENGALURU, FEB 24:** With a cumulative investment commitment of nearly USD 70 billion in India, Amazon on Monday opened its second-largest office campus in Asia in Bengaluru, underscoring the country's growing role in its global technology and business operations.

The company said it has already invested over USD 40 billion in India and has committed an additional USD 35 billion by 2030, taking its total planned investment to about USD 75 billion as part of its long-term expansion strategy.

The newly inaugurated 1.1 million square feet, 12-storey campus has been built on a five-acre site around 15 kilometres from Kempegowda International Airport.

The facility will house more than 7,000 employees working across e-commerce, operations, payments, technology and seller services.

The campus was inaugurated by MB Patil, Karnataka Minister for Large and Medium Industries



and Infrastructure Development, who said Amazon's continued investments reflect India's emergence as a global technology and innovation hub. He noted that such large-scale projects create high-quality jobs, strengthen the local ecosystem and accelerate the digital economy.

Amazon India Country Manager Samir Kumar said India remains a long-term priority for the

company and Bengaluru has been central to its India journey. He expressed gratitude to the Government of Karnataka for its continued support and said Amazon would continue to invest in infrastructure, technology and talent to serve customers in India and globally.

Designed to foster collaboration, flexibility and employee wellbeing, the campus features

adaptable workspaces organised into self-sustaining neighbourhoods with meeting rooms, huddle spaces, breakout areas and event spaces capable of hosting more than 200 people.

Employees will also have access to recreation facilities including basketball and pickleball courts, an amphitheatre, landscaped lawns and outdoor community spaces. Cafeterias across two floors will offer a range of global cuisines.

Amazon said the new campus aligns with its Climate Pledge commitment to achieve net-zero carbon by 2040, incorporating responsible material sourcing, reuse of office assets and high-efficiency systems aimed at reducing embodied and operational carbon.

In Karnataka, Amazon operates ten corporate offices, seven fulfilment centres, three sort centres and over 130 last-mile delivery stations, besides a network of micro-fulfilment centres for Amazon Now in Bengaluru. More than 80,000 sellers from the state are currently selling on Amazon.in.UNI

## India, France sign protocol amending 'double taxation', provide full taxing rights on capital gains

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, FEB 24:** India and France have signed a Protocol amending the India-France Double Taxation Avoidance Convention, providing full taxing rights in respect of capital gains arising from the sale of shares of a company, to the jurisdiction where such company is a resident.

The protocol was signed during the recent visit of the President of France to India. The Amending Protocol also deletes the so-called Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) Clause from the Protocol to the DTAC, thereby bringing to rest all issues relating to it. The Amending Protocol also modifies the taxation of income from dividends by replacing a single rate of 10 percent of tax with a split rate of 5 percent for those holding at least ten percent of capital and 15 percent of tax for all other cases, as per the information shared by the Ministry of Finance.

"It also modifies the definition of 'Fees for Technical Services' by aligning it with the definition in India US Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement, and expands the scope of 'Permanent Establishment' by adding Service PE," it added.

The Amending Protocol also updates the provisions on Exchange of Information and introduces a new Article on Assistance in Collection of Taxes, as per

international standards. This would enable and facilitate the seamless exchange of information and strengthen mutual tax cooperation between India and France.

The Amending Protocol also incorporates within the DTAC, the applicable provisions of the BEPS Multilateral Instrument (MLI), which had already become applicable consequent to the signing and ratification of MLI by India and France.

The changes introduced through the Amending Protocol shall enter into effect subsequent to the completion of internal procedures under the laws of both countries and subject to the terms agreed between the two countries.

The Amending Protocol will provide greater tax certainty to the taxpayers and boost the flow of investment, technology, and personnel between India and France, and thereby strengthen the economic relationship between the two countries.

The Amending Protocol was signed by Ravi Agrawal, Chairperson, Central Board of Direct Taxes, Government of India, and Thierry Mathou, Ambassador of France to India, on behalf of their respective Governments.

The Protocol amends the India-France Double Taxation Avoidance Convention, signed on 29 September 1992 ('India-France DTAC').UNI

## Elite Matrimony launches first Elite Experience Centre in Hyderabad

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, FEB 24:** Elite Matrimony, the premium matchmaking service from Matrimony.com, on Monday launched its first-ever Elite Experience Centre at Jubilee Hills here, marking a new milestone in personalised matrimonial services for high-net-worth individuals.

The Centre was inaugurated by Murugavel Janakiraman, Founder and CEO of Matrimony.com, popularly known for BharatMatrimony.

Speaking on the occasion, he said Elite Matrimony was launched nearly 18 years ago to cater exclusively to Indian elites across the globe and has since helped thousands of members find suitable life partners.

He said the Hyderabad Experience Centre has been designed to offer a private, personalised and confidential matchmaking experience. Unlike online platforms, Elite Matrimony operates through a highly curated and verified database accessible only to dedicated relationship managers.

Each member is assigned a personal relationship manager who handles profile search, shortlisting and introductions based on individual preferences. The service also includes setting up meetings with prospective matches, ensuring a discreet and end-to-end assisted process.

Janakiraman said Elite Matrimony currently has a database of over two lakh elite members and has emerged as a preferred destination for elite individuals seeking serious and genuine matrimonial alliances. He added that stringent validation processes are followed to ensure authenticity and seriousness of profiles.

"With the launch of our first Elite Experience Centre, we look forward to helping many more elite members find their life partners through a trusted and curated service," he added.UNI

## 'Quality must define India's manufacturing future,' says Piyush Goyal

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, FEB 24:** Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday asserted that quality must become the cornerstone of India's manufacturing and export strategy, stating that the country's ambition to become a USD 30-35 trillion economy by 2047 hinges on embedding world-class standards across sectors.

Addressing the first National Quality Conclave organised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade in collaboration with the Quality Council of India, Goyal said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "Zero Defect, Zero Effect" must guide India's industrial transformation.

"Quality must define India's

manufacturing push. If we aspire to become a USD 30-35 trillion economy by 2047, we must ensure that every product made in India meets the highest global standards while causing minimal environmental impact," Goyal said.

He emphasised that India's target of achieving USD 2 trillion in exports in the coming years — with a balanced contribution from merchandise and services — would require strict adherence to international benchmarks.

While India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing major economies, its share in global trade remains relatively modest, particularly in labour-intensive and competitive sectors, he noted.

Highlighting the opportunities created by Free Trade Agree-

ments concluded in recent years, Goyal said these agreements have opened access to major developed markets covering a significant share of global GDP and trade.

However, he cautioned that market access alone would not guarantee success unless Indian manufacturers consistently deliver high-quality products.

"Market access gives us opportunity, but quality will determine whether we can sustain and expand our presence globally," he said.

Calling for a fundamental mindset shift, the Minister said India must move away from the earlier culture where "export quality" was perceived as superior to products sold domestically.

"There cannot be two stan-

dards — one for exports and another for domestic consumption. One nation must follow one high standard of quality," he asserted.

Outlining a structured roadmap to institutionalise quality, Goyal proposed a five-pillar action plan.

This includes clear and transparent standard operating procedures across sectors, regular inspection and compliance mechanisms throughout the value chain, continuous skilling and reskilling of the workforce, benchmarking against global best practices, and streamlining testing and certification processes to reduce cost and delays.

He also stressed the importance of building modern shared testing infrastructure across

manufacturing clusters and assured industry that financial resources would not be a constraint in strengthening quality ecosystems, particularly for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

"Quality is not a slogan. It has to become a culture — from promoters and directors to the shop floor worker and laboratory technician," Goyal said, urging industry stakeholders to shed the "chalta hai" attitude and embrace excellence as a non-negotiable principle.

The Conclave brought together policymakers, industry leaders, MSMEs and quality experts to deliberate on strengthening India's manufacturing competitiveness and positioning the country as a trusted, high-quality global supplier.UNI

## The Hartford Opens Global Tech Hub in Telangana, Plans 1,200 Jobs

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, FEB 24:** In a significant boost to Telangana's growing Global Capability Centre ecosystem, US-based insurer The Hartford on Monday launched its first India operations with the inauguration of a 160,000 sq. ft. Global Technology Centre in Hyderabad's Financial District. The facility was inaugu-

rated by Telangana IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu. It marks The Hartford's formal entry into the Indian market and underscores Hyderabad's position as a preferred destination for multinational corporations setting up high-value technology and engineering hubs. The centre is expected to scale up to nearly 1,200 employees over the next few years, focusing on ad-

vanced digital engineering, artificial intelligence and enterprise-wide technology transformation initiatives for The Hartford's global operations. Speaking on the occasion, Sridhar Babu said, "In Hyderabad, we measure our success by the impact we help global institutions create. We welcome The Hartford as a partner in building the next chapter of digital innovation."UNI

## Stock market ends on positive note, Nifty closes above 25,700

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, FEB 24:** The Indian stock market ended on a positive note, extending gains for a second consecutive session. Nifty closed above 25,700 amid volatility.

At close, the Sensex was up 479.95 points or 0.58 per cent at 83,294.66, and the Nifty was up 141.75 points or 0.55 per cent at 25,713.

The Nifty Midcap index declined 0.4 per cent, while the Nifty Smallcap index edged up 0.3 per cent. The overall market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms rose to Rs 469 lakh crore from Rs 467 lakh crore in the previous session.

Among the sectors, most of the indices ended higher. Those on the gaining side were Nifty PSU Bank up by 1.36 per cent, Financial Services up by 0.87 per cent, Auto up by 0.83 per cent, and FMCG up by 0.70 per cent. Nifty Bank rose by 0.15 per cent. The key ones on the losing end were Nifty IT down by 1.42 per cent, Metal down by 0.23 per cent, and Realty down by 0.19 per cent.

On Nifty, around 35 stocks ended higher. The ones on high were Adani Ports (2.93 per cent), Kotak Mahindra Bank (2.22 per cent), and HDFC Life Insurance Company (1.89 per cent).

Further on the losing end were Hindalco Industries down by 2.08 per cent, Wipro down by 1.89 per cent, and Infosys down by 1.90 per cent. The advance-decline ratio remained in favour of decliners as over 1,900 stocks advanced while nearly 2,400 declined on the BSE.

On the BSE, around 124 stocks hit their 52-week highs while 238 stocks hit their 52-week lows in intra-day trade on the BSE. Those on the highs were SBI, Larsen & Toubro, and NTPC, while on the lows were Wipro, Suzlon Energy, Info Edge (India), Mankind Pharma, and L&T Technology Services. IDFC First Bank shares fell 16 per cent on reporting Rs 590-crore fraud in government accounts. Share price of oil refiners gained as crude oil prices rose amid a rise in global geopolitical tensions.

Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) jumped 4.5 per cent, while Oil India shares surged more than 7 per cent.UNI

## AI Strengthening Governance, Service Delivery in Rural India: Govt

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, FEB 24:** Artificial Intelligence is emerging as a key driver of inclusive rural development in India, with the country's AI governance frameworks prioritising fairness, accountability, transparency and context-specific risk mitigation to prevent exclusion and administrative harm, the Centre said in a statement on Monday.

Highlighting AI's expanding role in decentralised administration, it noted that integration within Panchayati Raj Institutions, Digital Public Infrastructure and welfare systems is improving transparency, efficiency, planning and grassroots participation.

The statement emphasised the role of multilingual and voice-enabled platforms such as BHASHINI, BharatGen and Adi Vaani in reducing linguistic and literacy barriers, thereby expanding access to governance and services in rural and remote regions.

It further underlined that national missions, sectoral initiatives and state-led innovations, along with the India AI Impact Summit 2026, reflect a coordinated shift towards scalable and people-centric AI aligned with inclusive growth

and the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

According to the release, AI tools are strengthening rural e-governance. SabhaSaar, an AI-enabled solution, is generating structured minutes of Gram Sabha and Panchayat meetings from audio or video inputs, improving documentation accuracy and administrative efficiency.

The Centre also highlighted progress on digital governance platforms. As per data, over 2.53 lakh Gram Panchayats, 6,409 Block Panchayats and 650 Zila Panchayats were onboarded on the eGramSwaraj platform in FY 2024-25.

Further, 2.44 lakh Gram Panchayats have prepared and uploaded Gram Panchayat Development Plans, 2.06 lakh completed online transactions under the 15th Finance Commission grants, and 2.32 lakh Gram Sabha meetings were conducted online.

AIKosh, described as a national repository of AI datasets and models, now hosts more than 7,500 datasets and 273 AI models across 20 sectors. As of February 9, 2026, the platform recorded over 69.80 lakh visits, 17,500 registered users and 5,004 model downloads, the statement said.UNI

## Aparna Enterprises Vitero Tiles opens state-of-the-Art Manufacturing Plant in Gujarat

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, FEB 24:** Aparna Enterprises' Vitero Tiles, one of India's leading tile manufacturers, on Monday announced the inauguration of its state-of-the-art manufacturing plant in Morbi, Gujarat.

The new unit will primarily cater to the diverse needs of customers in North and West India, offering competitive pricing and an extensive range of designs and elements, the company said in a release here.

This strategic expansion marked by an investment of INR 150 crores solidifies Aparna Enterprise's commitment to strengthen its market presence and become a major player in the national tile market.

The new Morbi plant has a total manufacturing capacity of 7.2 million square meters per annum and will contribute nearly 40 percent of Vitero Tiles' overall production, substantially strengthening its manufacturing scale and regional supply capabilities.

The ultramodern Morbi facility manufactures Vitero's complete portfolio

including vitrified tiles, full body tiles, and all major ceramic tile categories under one roof.

Combined with the company's existing manufacturing facility in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, Vitero Tiles' total annual production now stands at approximately 18 million square meters per annum, positioning brand as one of the largest tile manufacturer of the country and significantly enhancing its ability to cater to growing market demand across regions. India ranks as the world's second largest producer, consumer, and exporter of ceramic tiles after China, accounting for nearly 11-15% of global production and about 10.9% of worldwide consumption, while the Indian ceramic industry overall holds an estimated 14% share of global ceramic tile production.

Domestically, the tiles market reached 531 billion in FY25, growing from 360 billion in FY19 at a CAGR of 6.7%, and is projected to expand further to 769 billion by FY29, registering a CAGR of 9.7%.

With its expanded manufacturing capacity and strengthened regional presence, Vitero Tiles is well positioned to leverage this growth momentum.UNI



## David Miller: India Beatable, SA Hungry for More

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**AHMEDABAD:** After breaking India's winning streak at T20 World Cups, which had stretched back 12 matches to their opening fixture of the 2024 tournament, South Africa have proved the defending champions are "beatable".

On a winning run of five matches at this tournament themselves, South Africa could consider having one foot in the semi-finals after winning their first Super Eight match against the toughest opposition in their group. But they are not allowing themselves to get that far ahead. What they have learnt so far is that even the team considered favourites can slip up, which means anyone can, and they have to stay focused as they get deeper in the competition.

"They are beatable," David Miller, South Africa's most experienced batter and top-scorer on the night, said at the post-match press conference. "India come with an incredible team. For us, in a tournament like this, it's about making sure that we do simple things [right] and get the job done. We're a mature team. A lot of guys have played together and that goes a long way under pressure. It's just staying in your lane, making sure that you get the job done and

keep wanting more."

The "more" that South Africa wants doesn't need much explaining. Obviously, it's a major white-ball trophy. It will be even more desirable a target after they fell short of winning it in the last final. They have backed their recent quality up, albeit in a different format, by winning the World Test Championship mace at Lord's last year.

The mace win, against Australia, proved that they could come back from situations where they are all but out of the contest, and finish on top. The more they have won tense matches, the more they have begun to believe in white-ball cricket as well. The double Super Over victory over Afghanistan was another example of this.

The tension of that win, compared with the ease with which they got past New Zealand, and now India, may make you think things are getting less pressured as the tournament goes on. Not so, said Miller. "It wasn't easy. Playing against India is always really difficult. We've played a lot against them and with them as well, but beyond that - and when it's two big teams like that - it's about making sure that you do the simple things for a longer period of time. When the pressure does come, you kind of absorb it, get through that. It takes

a team effort."

While South Africa's total of 187 in Ahmedabad was "fair", as Miller put it, they were actually "pushing for 200" and fell short, but made up for it with their bowling. "Getting three wickets in the powerplay got us back phenomenally well, and we backed it up with good fielding. It was an all-round great performance. We put them under pressure and, yeah, it was good to get a win over this."

He singled out Lungi Ngidi's execution of the slower ball and Keshav Maharaj's three wickets in an over, all caught by Tristan Stubbs at long-on, as game-changing.

"The guys executed really, really well. They changed up quite a lot with Lungi Ngidi coming in and bowling a lot of slow balls. In the lineup that was really dangerous, and that hit a lot of sixes and a lot of boundaries, it's just accepting the fact that they're really good and making sure that you kind of put that aside and come up with plans that might be different," Miller said. "And Keshav Maharaj, he's an experienced player, he's bowled a lot of overs in his life in pressure situations. The guys bowled phenomenally well."

South Africa's next match is against West Indies on Thursday, at the same venue.

## BCB bans Manjurul Islam from all activities under its jurisdiction

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**GOEBERHA:** The BCB has banned former fast bowler Manjurul Islam from all activities under its jurisdiction after the board's independent inquiry committee completed an investigation and found that some of his actions "fell within the definition of misconduct and harassment".

The inquiry was set up after former Bangladesh women's captain Jahanara Alam had lodged an



official complaint against Manjurul over an incident during the 2022 Women's ODI World Cup, where he was the team's chief selector and manager.

In an interview in November last year, Jahanara alleged that Manjurul had behaved inappropriately towards her by asking lewd questions. Jahanara also alleged that a couple of BCB officials had acted inappropriately.

The board appointed Justice Tariq Ul Hakim as the chairman of the inquiry committee, which comprised Dr Naima Huq, barrister Muhammed Mustafizur Rahman Khan, barrister Sarwat Siraj Shukla and BCB director Rubaba Dowla. The report was completed on January 31, and formally handed over to BCB president Aminul Islam on February 2.

Following the board directors meeting on Sunday, the BCB formally announced the measures against Manjurul, who is currently working as the China women's team head coach.

## Shimron Hetmyer: No More Second-Guessing at This Stage

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**LONDON:** Shimron Hetmyer says that once a player reaches a certain stage in his career, it becomes less about second-guessing and more about trusting his own ability and preparation. Having been part of West Indies' T20I set-up for over eight years, Hetmyer is playing only his second T20 World Cup and has once again found himself adapting to a new role, this time returning to No. 3 in the batting order after spending a long period as a finisher.

The move up the order, he explains, was not pre-planned but came about during a series in South Africa earlier this year

when the team management felt the need for a reliable option at No. 3. After a brief conversation and a few hours to mentally adjust, Hetmyer embraced the role. He believes that having the full backing of captain Shai Hope and coach Daren Sammy has made the transition smoother. Having started his career batting at the top, he feels comfortable facing the new ball again and insists that once his mind is in the right place, batting at No. 3 or No. 6 does not make much difference.

Preparation, he says, is largely mental. Off the field, he continues to train against the new ball, even during the IPL with Rajasthan Royals, ensuring he



maintains balance and shape whether finishing games or building innings. Technically, little changes apart from minor adjustments when bowlers go wide. Reflecting on criticism over his numbers against spin in 2023 and 2024, Hetmyer attributes the dip more to his finishing role, where he often faced limited overs of spin. In 2025, with more time at the crease, his returns against spin improved significantly as he consciously looked to rotate strike and selectively attack.

One of the toughest aspects of his T20 journey, he admits, has been moving constantly between positions in the order. From batting at No. 3 to as low as No. 7, the inconsistency in

role sometimes made it difficult to settle. Over time, however, he learned to focus only on the job at hand rather than the number of overs available. That shift in mindset, supported strongly by his family, has helped him rediscover joy in the game.

Addressing the label of inconsistency, Hetmyer remains pragmatic. He points out that no batter scores in every match and believes the key lies in repetition at training and blocking out outside noise. Social media criticism and public scrutiny, especially in high-profile leagues like the IPL, can be intense, but he now chooses not to dwell on negative commentary.

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