

Srinagar  
Wednesday  
March 18 | 2026  
28 Ramadan 1447 AH  
Issue No: 68  
Volume: 16  
Pages: 12  
Price: Rs 02/-

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## 'Heavy Price for Disruptors': LG Sinha Sends Strong Warning at J&K Police Passing-Out Parade

Urges new constables to uphold public trust, safeguard peace, and protect UT's recent gains

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, MAR 17: Manoj Sinha on Tuesday warned that any individual or group attempting to disturb peace, law and order, or the safety of civilians in Jammu and Kashmir would have to pay a "very heavy price," as he addressed the passing-out parade of constables at STC Talwara in Reasi.

Stressing zero tolerance towards terrorism and violence, the Lieutenant Governor said any attempt to disrupt public peace, hamper economic activity, or incite unrest would be dealt with firmly under the law. He asserted that the Jammu and Kashmir Police remain unwavering in their commitment to maintaining stability and

Turn on Page 2



## Operations Now Focused on Upper Reaches as Terrorists Attempt to Regroup : DGP

HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

REASI (JAMMU), MAR 17: Revealing that Jammu and Kashmir Police have changed tactics to counter terror, Director General of Police Nalin Prabhat on Tuesday said the force is now carrying out operations in dense forests and mountainous areas to neutralise terrorists operating in the region.

Addressing a passing out parade of the constables at the STC Talwara here, the DGP, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "Over the past two years the J&K Police altered its operational strategy and intensified action in remote forests and mountains where terrorists have attempted to regroup."

He said, "The battle has shifted to jungles and upper reaches. We are moving upwards into these areas to get them (terrorists) and destroy their hideouts."

DGP Prabhat said Police are now actively engaging terrorists in forests of Udhampur and



Kathua Districts.

In an apparent reference to Pakistan, the DGP said, "Our operations are aimed at countering terrorists who are sent by our nefarious neighbour. We are not allowing them to succeed in their evil plans."

Turn on Page 2

## Mudra Loans Near ₹40 Lakh Crore Mark, NPAs Stay Low at Around 2% : Nirmala Sitharaman

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, MAR 17: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said that nearly Rs. 39.48 lakh crore has been sanctioned under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana since its launch, underscoring the scheme's growing footprint among small and micro entrepreneurs.

Replying to supplementary



queries in the Rajya Sabha, Sitharaman said the flagship programme, launched by Prime

Minister Narendra Modi in April 2015, has emerged as one of the largest lending initiatives for those without collateral, significantly expanding financial inclusion.

She maintained that asset quality under the scheme remains stable, with non-performing assets (NPAs) hovering around 2 to 2.3 per cent. "It is not as if there are huge NPAs or that the problem is

Turn on Page 2

## Snowfall, rains continue for 3rd consecutive day in Kashmir

MeT predicts cloudy skies, precipitation for 2 more days

HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

SRINAGAR, MAR 17: Several upper reaches of Kashmir received fresh snowfall, while plains recorded rains for third consecutive day on Tuesday.

An official told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that areas including Gurez, Karnah and Razdan Top experienced fresh snowfall, while light rainfall was reported in Srinagar and other plains of the Valley.

The Meteorological Centre Srinagar said the sky is expected to remain partly cloudy with brief spells of light rain in plains and



light snowfall over higher elevations at a few places till March 20.

The MeT office said a few upper reaches of the Chenab Valley and parts of South Kashmir may receive moderate to heavy snowfall during this period.

After this spell, weather conditions are expected to improve for a few days. The department said the region is likely to remain generally dry from March 21 to March 25.

However, another spell of cloudy weather is expected between March 26 and March 28, with the possibility of light rain in

Turn on Page 2

## River Rescue Turns Tragic: MARCOS Commando Critically Injured in Uri

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

SRINAGAR, MAR 17: A high-risk rescue operation in the Jhelum River took a tragic turn on Tuesday after a Marine Commando (MARCOS) of the Indian Navy was critically injured while attempting to save a woman who had jumped into the river in Uri area of Baramulla district, officials said.

The incident occurred after a middle-aged woman, a resident of Lagama Uri, reportedly leapt into the river from a wooden footbridge at Chandanwari, triggering an immediate rescue response.

Teams from SDRF Baramulla and the Civil Defence Unit, Uri, launched initial search efforts, which were later intensified with the induction of the Navy's elite MARCOS unit.

During the operation, a commando identified as A.S. Badoria

Turn on Page 2

## Sluggish markets cast shadow over Eid-ul-Fitr in Kashmir

HT News Network / KNO

SRINAGAR, MAR 17: The festive buzz that traditionally sweeps Kashmir's markets in the days before Eid-ul-Fitr is missing this year, with traders across the Valley describing one of the slowest pre-Eid seasons in living memory. They say that the effects of the Pahalgam attack, a bad apple season, rising prices, and global oil problems have all made families spend much less money.

Turn on Page 2



## Multi-Layered Security Grid Rolled Out for Vaishno Devi Yatra Ahead of Navratri Rush

HT NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU, MAR 17: With a surge of pilgrims during the upcoming Navratri, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Udhampur-Reasi range, Sarah Rizvi on Tuesday reviewed security arrangements at the revered Vaishno Devi Shrine and along the yatra route, officials said.

The review meeting, held at Katra, the base camp of the pilgrimage, focused on ensuring a smooth and incident-free conduct of the festival, which begins on March 19 and is expected to witness a heavy influx of devotees from

Turn on Page 2

## Moderate increase in J&K's central assistance allocation for 2026-27: Parliamentary panel

HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

SRINAGAR, MAR 17: The Department-related Standing Committee on the Ministry of Home Affairs has observed that there has been a moderate increase in the allocation for

Jammu & Kashmir in the Budget Estimates for 2026-27 compared to the previous year.

In its report tabled in the Lok Sabha on Monday, a copy of which is in possession of news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the Commit-

tee stated that while the allocation for 2026-27 reflects a moderate increase over the previous year, greater alignment between projected requirements and approved allocations, improved planning of project-linked expenditure, and an enhanced

focus on capital formation would contribute to more effective and outcome-oriented utilisation of funds.

According to the report, the Union Territory was allocated Rs 43290.29

Turn on Page 2

## PDD Meter Reader Held In ₹30K Bribe Case, Rajouri

HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, MAR 17: The J&K Anti-Corruption Bureau on Tuesday said they have arrested, a meter reader posted in PDD Rajouri, after catching him red-handed while accepting a bribe of rupees 30,000 from a complainant in exchange for reducing an inflated electricity bill.

A spokesperson said the J&K Anti-Corruption Bureau registered a case against Arif Iqbal, presently posted as Meter Reader in PDD Rajouri vide FIR no. 03/2026 at PS ACB Rajouri u/s 7 of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018) on 17.03.2026 on the basis of a complaint alleging therein that complainant was running a Tyre Shop from the year 2019 to 2021, after which his

Turn on Page 2

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**CONTINUE FROM FRONT PAGE.....**

**'Heavy Price for.....'**

would take all necessary measures without exception. Congratulating 430 trainee constables on successfully completing their training, Sinha said the J&K Police has played a crucial role in shaping a terror-free and crime-free environment where citizens can live without fear. He credited the force for contributing to good governance, innovation, social unity, and the building of a just society. Calling upon the new recruits to protect the achievements made over the past five to six years, the Lieutenant Governor urged them to remain vigilant against elements seeking to divide society and derail development. He said such forces must be uprooted and warned that attempts to create instability would not be tolerated. Emphasising the importance of public trust, Sinha told the graduating constables that integrity, impartiality, and empathy must guide their service. He said their role goes beyond enforcing the law and involves upholding its spirit while ensuring dignity and protection for every citizen. Reaffirming the administration's commitment to peace and democratic values, he said a comprehensive strategy involving all stakeholders is underway to eliminate terrorism from the Union Territory. On the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor awarded trophies to several trainees for outstanding performance, while Director General of Police Nalin Prabhat and other senior officials were present.

**J&K Police.....**

Recalling last year's "Operation Mahadev," the DGP said security forces eliminated three Pakistani terrorists during the operation. "The terrorists were responsible for the killing of 26 civilians in the Baisaran (Pahalgam) area. Police had pursued them deep inside the forest before neutralising them." The J&K Police Chief also highlighted the force's outreach programmes and its engagement with local communities across the Union Territory. He said the police maintained close ties with society and had conducted around 5300 "Thana Diwas" programmes in the past year to strengthen interaction with the public and address local concerns. DGP Prabhat also spoke about the police campaign against drug trafficking in the Union Territory. He said, "Nearly 2,276 accused were arrested in the past year. As many as 226 cases were registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Police also attached 54 properties linked to illegal activities." The DGP said Jammu and Kashmir ranks among the top states in the country in action taken under NDPS laws. DGP Prabhat said the police were organising sports and youth-engagement programmes to channelise the energies of young people in the Union Territory. He said nine major events and 228 sports activities had been organised across districts to encourage youth participation and strengthen their connection with the police. He also congratulated the new recruits who were joining the Jammu and Kashmir Police and asked them to remain committed to their duties. He said the path ahead would be challenging but expressed confidence that the new personnel would contribute significantly to maintaining peace and security in the region—(KNO)

**Mudra Loans.....**

widespread," she said, adding that borrowers are generally in close contact with banks, aiding recovery efforts. The scheme offers loans under three categories—Shishu, Kishor and Tarun—based on the stage of business. As of March 31, 2025, outstanding loans stood at 12.4 per cent in Shishu, 9.48 per cent in Kishor and 7.92 per cent in Tarun, with NPAs in the Shishu segment at a low 1.83 per cent. The minister said banks are stepping up recovery measures through frequent follow-ups, customer engagement, rescheduling of instalments and one-time settlement options. In a written reply, Sitharaman said more than 18.37 crore loans amounting to Rs. 15.50 lakh crore were sanctioned during the last three years, with about 19 per cent going to new entrepreneurs and nearly 65 per cent to women, reflecting the scheme's widening social and economic reach.

**Snowfall, rains.....**

plains and light snowfall over higher reaches at scattered to many places. The Meteorological Department has issued an advisory for travellers and the general public, particularly those moving through mountainous areas and important passes. Travellers, transporters and people planning to move across higher reaches and key mountain passes have been advised to plan their journeys accordingly between March 18 and March 20 in view of the expected weather activity. The department also warned of the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied by

gusty winds with speeds of 40 to 50 kilometres per hour at a few places during the same period. It said isolated locations may also witness hailstorms.

Farmers have been advised to suspend agricultural operations between March 18 and March 20 due to the expected wet weather conditions.

Meanwhile, weather data released by the department showed Srinagar recorded a maximum temperature of 14.9 degrees Celsius on Monday, slightly below the normal of 16 degrees Celsius, while the minimum temperature settled at 4.4 degrees Celsius.

Jammu recorded a maximum temperature of 25.7 degrees Celsius, about 1.8 degrees below normal, while the minimum temperature was recorded at 11.5 degrees Celsius.

Among other stations, Gulmarg recorded a maximum temperature of 4.2 degrees Celsius and a minimum of minus 3.4 degrees Celsius, while Pahalgam recorded a maximum temperature of 12 degrees Celsius and a minimum of minus 2.2 degrees Celsius, the MeT department said—(KNO)

**River Rescue.....**

slipped into the fast-flowing river and was swept away by strong currents for several minutes before being pulled out by fellow rescuers.

Officials said the commando was critically injured and unconscious when rescued. He was rushed to the Army Hospital in Boniyar, where his condition remains critical.

Meanwhile, search operations to trace the woman were continuing at the time of filing this report.

**Sluggish.....**

"We have never seen such dullness before Eid. Usually, by this time, markets remain crowded till late evening, but now there are barely any customers," said Bashir Ahmad, a trader from Shopian. "Sales are at an all-time low, and it is becoming difficult to even cover daily expenses."

Traders told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that while Eid shopping traditionally centred on clothes, footwear and bakery items, this year people were buying only essentials. They said the decline has been building since autumn, with hopes of a pre-Eid recovery now fading.

Mohammad Shafi Ganaie, a trader from Anantnag, said the damage ran deep. "People suffered losses due to low tourism after the Pahalgam attack last year and low apple demand due to highway closures. They are just buying essential commodities," he said.

Rouf Ahmad, a member of the Traders Association in Pulwama, said sales had plummeted to a level where many were worried about sustaining their businesses. He cited global war tensions, rising crude oil prices and a shift in local investment towards high-density farming as compounding factors.

According to traders, tourism plays a crucial role in boosting local trade, and the lack of adequate tourist inflow has had a cascading effect on the overall economy.

"Last year's tourism was not as good as expected, and that has directly affected our earnings," said Ghulam Nabi, a garment shop owner in Anantnag. "People associated with tourism – cab drivers, hotel workers and guides – have less money this year, which means less spending in markets."

The horticulture sector also faced challenges. Apple growers said they faced a "punishing" season. They added that low demand and poor returns left an entire segment of Kashmir's economy with less to spend.

Inflation has emerged as another major concern. "Poor people are bearing the brunt of inflation," said Abdul Rashid, a grocery shop owner in Baramulla. "They are focusing only on essential items and cutting down on everything else, including Eid shopping."

Traders also noted a shift in spending patterns among those who do have resources. Rather than shopping, many are investing in high-density orchards. "People who have money are not spending in markets but are investing in agriculture. That is affecting retail businesses significantly," said a trader from Kupwara.

Business associations have urged authorities to improve tourist inflow, ensure better returns for horticulture produce and control inflation to restore market confidence. Traders remain hopeful that last-minute shopping may bring some relief, but the prevailing mood suggests this Eid may pass without the economic cheer Kashmir's markets are known for.

Senior trade leader and Kashmir Economic Alliance Chairman Mohammad Yaseen Khan said market activity in Kashmir has remained largely subdued ahead of Eid, with traders yet to witness the expected festive surge.

"So far, the market response has been quite dull. There is routine movement due to traffic, but the usual rush for Eid shopping, especially in clothing, is missing. Normally, we see a significant rise in sales a week before Eid, but that momentum is not visible this time," he said.

With just a couple of days left, Khan said they are still hopeful. However, as of now, there is no major pickup in trade," he said—

**(KNO) Multi-Layered.....**

across the country.

During the meeting, Rizvi directed the establishment of random naka points to intensify vehicle checking and called for round-the-clock joint long-range patrolling by the Jammu and Kashmir Police and the Central Reserve Police Force. She stressed the need for enhanced foot patrolling, deployment at strategic high points and activation of village defence guards to strengthen the overall security grid.

Officials said special emphasis was laid on crowd management to prevent untoward incidents, including stampedes or acts of sabotage, with instructions for continuous area domination and surveillance along the route and at the shrine.

The DIG also ordered strict verification drives, including background checks of migrants, construction workers, pony porters and others entering Katra town. Regular inspections of hotels, lodgings and homestays have also been directed to verify antecedents of visitors.

Senior Superintendent of Police Paramvir Singh presented a comprehensive security plan, detailing arrangements at the base camp, along the yatra track and at the shrine.

The meeting, attended by senior officials from multiple agencies including the Army, intelligence units, CID, Railways and traffic police, concluded with an emphasis on close coordination to ensure a safe and hassle-free pilgrimage during the nine-day Navratri festival ending March 27.

**Moderate.....**

crores against a projected requirement of Rs 50,640.02 crores.

The Committee observed that there is scope for enhancing capital support to facilitate asset creation and long-term growth.

"The Committee further notes that support for capital expenditure has remained constant at Rs 101.77 crores and has been fully utilised during 2025–26 (till 31st January 2026). In the Committee's view, given the infrastructure and developmental needs of the Union Territory, there is scope for enhancing capital support to facilitate asset creation and long-term growth," reads the report.

The Committee said that a significant portion of the allocation for the current fiscal was yet to be utilised.

"The Committee notes that as on 31st January 2026, expenditure stood at Rs 38349.77 crores against RE of Rs 41340.22 crores, indicating that a significant portion of funds was yet to be utilised in the last quarter. The Committee further observes that support for capital expenditure has been fully utilised, reflecting effective deployment of limited capital grants," the report reads.

The Committee recommended that project-linked allocations, particularly under hydropower and externally aided flood recovery projects, may be synchronised with realistic implementation timelines. "Efforts may be made to avoid bunching of expenditure in the last quarter. Periodic review mechanisms may be strengthened to ensure that allocations translate into tangible physical outcomes, especially in infrastructure and recovery projects," reads the report.

The Committee recommended close monitoring of the Jehlum Tawi Flood Recovery Project (JTFRP) so that financial releases are matched with timely physical progress. An allocation of Rs 259.25 crores has been provided in BE 2026–27 for JTFRP in line with the projection.

The Committee recommended adequate emphasis on disaster preparedness, mitigation, and resilience-building measures in addition to relief expenditure.

"The allocation under the Disaster Response Fund remains at Rs 279 crores, consistent with previous years. The Committee notes that utilisation under this head is demand-driven and contingent upon the occurrence of notified disasters. However, considering the vulnerability of the Union Territory to floods and other natural calamities, the Committee recommends that adequate emphasis be placed on preparedness, mitigation, and resilience-building measures in addition to relief expenditure," reads the report—(KNO)

**PDD Meter.....**

shop was closed. "He has an electricity connection and was regularly paying his electricity bill. He received an electricity bill for the period from 31.12.2025 to 31.01.2026 for an amount of Rs. 2497 in February 2026."

"In this connection, Arif Iqbal Meter Reader of PDD Rajouri met complainant and asked him to give Rs. 50,000 so that he can take care of his electricity bill on this complainant told him that he will pay bill according to the meter reading."

"After this, he threatened the complainant that his electricity bill will be increased. On 05.03.2026, Arif Iqbal came again and handed over an electricity bill for the period of 31.01.2026 to 28.02.2026 for an amount of Rs. 1,53,890 with due date for payment as 27.03.2026 and when complainant asked him

about such a high bill. Arif Iqbal (Meter Reader) demanded Rs. 50,000 as bribe to adjust the bill. Subsequently, the said demand was negotiated to Rs. 30,000," said the spokesperson.

He added, since the complainant did not want to give illegal gratification to the above named Meter Reader, he approached and lodged a written complaint in Police Station ACB Rajouri for taking legal action against the above named Arif Iqbal (Meter Reader).

"After registration of the case, a trap team of ACB PS Rajouri was constituted. The team caught red handed the accused Arif Iqbal, Meter Reader of PDD Rajouri while demanding and accepting bribe of Rs. 30,000 from the complainant. He was arrested on the spot. Subsequently, searches were also conducted in the residential house of accused at Rajouri.

Further investigation in the case is going on," spokesperson added. (KNO)

**DPS Jammu Empowers Educators with Workshop on "Writing Skills and Use of AI Tools in Teaching English"**



■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MAR 17:** Delhi Public School, Jammu organized an enriching and insightful workshop on "Writing Skills and Use of AI Tools in Teaching English" for teachers of Classes IV to VIII on 16 March 2026. The workshop aimed to equip educators with innovative strategies and modern technological tools to enhance the teaching-learning process and strengthen students' writing abilities.

The session was conducted by Ms. Shradha Anand, an eminent educationist and experienced resource person known for conducting school workshops across India. With over 22 years of experience in curriculum and materials development for CBSE, ICSE, and State Boards, she has authored several widely appreciated textbooks on English, General Knowledge, Value Education, Social Studies, and Pre-school education.

The workshop commenced with a warm felicitation of the Resource Person by the Vice Principal, Ms. Meenu Gupta. In her address, she highlighted the importance of nurturing strong writing skills among students and emphasized the growing role of technology and AI tools in modern education. She encouraged the teachers to make the most of the workshop and explore innovative strategies to enhance their classroom practices.

During the workshop, Ms. Shradha Anand introduced various innovative teaching methodologies and demonstrated how Artificial Intelligence tools such

as ChatGPT, Grammarly, Curipod, and Gemini can support teachers in lesson planning, content creation, and language learning activities. She also emphasized that creativity, clarity, and critical thinking are essential elements of effective writing.

The session was highly interactive and engaging, with teachers actively participating in discussions, activities, and demonstrations. The workshop provided valuable insights and practical techniques that teachers can implement in their classrooms to strengthen students' language proficiency and confidence in writing.

The workshop was attended by English teachers from the Primary and Middle Wings, who appreciated the practical strategies and interactive approach that made the session both meaningful and enriching.

Principal, DPS Jammu, Ms. Ruchi Chhabra, emphasized that developing strong writing skills along with the effective use of AI tools can help shape confident, creative, and competent learners. She encouraged teachers to integrate the strategies shared during the workshop to make English learning more engaging and meaningful for students.

The programme reflects the continued commitment of the esteemed management of DPS Jammu, under the visionary leadership of Sh. M. K. Ajatshatru Singh Ji (President-RCT), Kuwarani Dr. Ritu Singh Ji (Pro Vice Chairperson), and Sh. S. S. Sodhi Ji (Director) to promote continuous professional growth of educators and to foster excellence in teaching-learning practices.

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## KU concludes week-long entrepreneurship training on ornamental plants, mushroom cultivation

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, MAR 17:** The University of Kashmir (KU) on Monday concluded week-long entrepreneurship training programmes on "Nursery & Post-Harvest Management of Commercially Important Ornamental Plants" and "Cultivation & Commercialization of Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms in Kashmir" at the Main Campus.

Organised by the varsity's Department of Botany, the programmes aimed to equip participants with practical skills and technical knowledge in nursery management, mushroom cultivation and post-harvest handling, while encouraging entrepreneurship and livelihood generation in the floriculture and mushroom sectors.

Speaking at the valedictory session, Vice-Chancellor KU, Prof. Nilofar Khan, said that skill-oriented training programmes play a crucial role in linking academic knowledge with practical enterprise opportunities.

"Such initiatives help build entrepreneurial capacity among



participants and encourage them to explore sustainable livelihood avenues by applying scientific knowledge to local resources," she said.

Registrar KU, Prof. Naseer Iqbal, said that the University remains committed to promoting innovation, entrepreneurship and skill development through focused training programmes that address local needs and economic

opportunities.

Dean, School of Biological Sciences KU, Prof. Abdul Hamid Wani, highlighted the growing potential of floriculture and mushroom cultivation in the region and emphasised the importance of scientific training and capacity building in strengthening these sectors.

Earlier, Head, Department of Botany KU, Prof. Aijaz Ahmad Wani,

said the programme was designed to provide participants with practical exposure and scientific understanding necessary for developing entrepreneurial ventures in ornamental plant nurseries and mushroom production.

The training programme included 12 expert sessions and five practical training sessions, providing hands-on learning

opportunities for participants.

The sessions focused on nursery management, climate-controlled cultivation environments, floriculture systems suited to Kashmir's conditions, and post-harvest innovations aimed at extending the vase life and market value of flowers.

Participants also undertook field visits to the Division of Floriculture (SKUAST-K), Government Hi-Tech Nursery at Polo View, and several private nurseries to gain practical insights into commercial nursery management and cultivation practices.

Entrepreneurs from nursery management and mushroom cultivation programmes, along with participants, shared their feedback and expressed satisfaction with the training programme.

On the occasion, the 'Botanical Society Bulletin' was also released, and certificates were distributed among the participants.

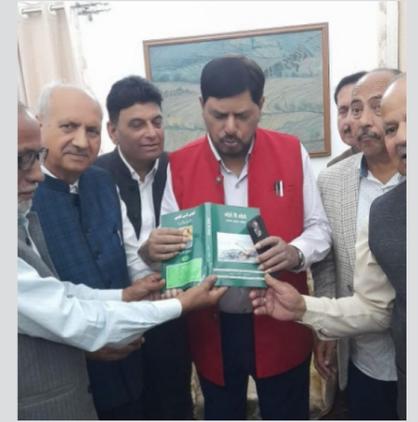
The formal vote of thanks was delivered by Prof. Manzoor Shah, faculty at the Department of Botany KU

## Poet Abdul Qudrir Kundria Meets Union Minister Ramdas Athawale, Presents His Book

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MAR 17:** Eminent Dogri and Urdu poet Abdul Qudrir Kundria met Ramdas Athawale, Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, and presented him with a copy of his recently published Dogri poetry collection "Gottey Ge Gottey."

During the meeting, Kundria briefly introduced the Union Minister to the themes and spirit of his book. He explained that "Gottey Ge Gottey" is a collection of poems that reflect the realities of society and highlight various social issues affecting people in everyday life. Through his poetry, Kundria has attempted to portray the struggles, emotions, and experiences of common people while drawing attention



to challenges that society continues to face.

The poet shared that many of the poems in the book revolve around social awareness and aim to inspire people to think about the issues that affect the moral and social fabric of society. The collection also seeks to give voice to the concerns of the marginalized and those who often remain unheard.

Kundria informed the Union Minister that literature and poetry have historically served as mirrors of society. According to him, poetry has the power to convey deep social messages in a simple yet powerful way, enabling readers to connect emotionally with the issues being raised. Through "Gottey Ge Gottey," he has tried to use the medium of poetry to reflect social realities and encourage constructive thinking among readers.

Union Minister Ramdas Athawale appreciated the literary effort and acknowledged the significance of such works that highlight social issues through creative expression. He remarked that literature has always played an important role in reflecting society and contributing to social awareness.

The meeting concluded on a cordial note, with Abdul Qudrir Kundria expressing gratitude to the Union Minister for his time and encouragement towards literary initiatives and creative expression in regional languages.

## Bear Captured in Kulgam Amid Operational Challenges

■ FAROOQ RATHER

**KULGAM, MAR 17:** Panic gripped parts of south Kashmir's Kulgam district on Monday evening after a massive wild bear strayed into densely populated areas, posing a serious threat to public safety. Acting swiftly, a joint team of the Wildlife Department, Forest Protection Force, and Police launched a coordinated operation to capture the animal.

According to sources, the bear was first spotted in the areas of Sangas, Kahroot, and Shooch, where it created fear among residents. It later moved towards Government Degree College Kulgam and the nearby Police Lines, prompting authorities to devise a strategy to contain the situation.

After strenuous efforts, the team successfully tranquilized the bear. However, the operation faced a major hurdle as no Wildlife Department vehicle was available on the spot. As a result, officials were forced to transport the sedated animal for nearly two kilometers on a handcart, exposing themselves to significant risk.

Eyewitnesses reported that the bear regained consciousness multiple times during the process, forcing the team to tranquilize it at least five times. This not only prolonged the operation but also put the lives of the personnel in danger.

Subsequently, a private load carrier was hired to shift the bear from Kulgam town to Qaimoh. Upon reaching Qaimoh, a Wildlife Department vehicle finally became available, and the animal was safely transported to a wildlife sanctuary, where it was released back into its natural habitat.

While locals appreciated the timely intervention of the joint team, concerns were raised over the non-availability of essential resources, particularly the absence of a departmental vehicle at the crucial moment. Residents emphasized the need for better preparedness to handle such sensitive situations effectively.

The operation involved Forester Wildlife Imtiyaz Ahmad, Forest Guard Jahangir Ahmad, SHO Police Station Kulgam Sabzar Ahmad, and Forest Protection Force personnel Muzaffar Ahmad, along with other staff members, who demonstrated professionalism in handling a potentially dangerous situation.

Sources further revealed that the delay in the arrival of the Wildlife Department vehicle was due to it being stuck in a prolonged traffic jam, which added to the challenges faced during the rescue operation.

## DIET Ganderbal Organizes Four-Day Capacity Building Program for Upper Primary Teachers at BHSS Kangan

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**GANDERBAL, MAR 17:** The District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) Ganderbal, through its CMDE Wing, successfully organized a four-day Capacity Building Training Program on the Transaction of Social Science Textbooks for Upper Primary School Teachers with innovative and learner-centric pedagogy in the light of NCF-2023 at BHSS Kangan, which concluded today.

A total of 47 teachers from Zones Kangan and Hariganiwan actively participated in the program.

The training aimed to strengthen teachers' understanding of effective textbook transaction, competency-based learning, activity-based teaching methods, and learner-centred pedagogical practices as envisioned in NEP 2020 and NCF 2023.

During the four-day training, several interactive sessions, group discussions, classroom-based



activities, and presentations were conducted.

The resource persons highlighted the importance of innovative teaching strategies, integration of local context in Social Science teaching, promotion of critical thinking among learners, and the use of assessment for learning to make classroom teaching more engaging and meaningful.

The participants expressed their appreciation for the initiative, stating that such professional development programs provide valuable opportunities for teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills and improve the overall teaching-learning process in schools.

The program concluded with a vote of thanks, appreciating the efforts of the organizing team of DIET Ganderbal, the resource persons, and the participating teachers for their active involvement and for making the training program successful.

## Anantnag hosts Gender Sensitisation Workshop to empower rural women

DDC Calls women "Leaders of Change", deserving due recognition

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**ANANTNAG, MARCH 17:** In continuation to International Women's Day celebrations aimed to promote inclusivity and empower rural women, the Agriculture Production Department Anantnag, on Monday organized a "Gender, Targeting & Inclusion Sensitization Workshop" at Town Hall Anantnag.

The workshop was held on the theme "Rights, Justice, Action for all Women and Girls," under the aegis of the IFAD-JKICP Project.

District Development Commissioner (DDC), Dr. Bilal Mohiud Din Bhat, graced the event as chief guest, which also witnessed

the participation by Chief Agriculture Officer, DD Fisheries, officers from agriculture and allied sectors, officials and women from different walks of life.

The main objective of the program was to sensitize officers and field functionaries on the importance of gender mainstreaming in agricultural projects. Discussions primarily centered on ensuring women farmers and girls have equitable access to resources, technology, and decision-making processes within the farming community.

Addressing the gathering, the DDC called women as leaders and drivers of change who are committed to excel in all sectors



including agriculture, adding they deserve due recognition for their gender specific and general roles in the society. He encouraged women to choose suitable lines of activity in agriculture and allied sectors and generate employment for themselves and others as well, through flagship initiatives like HADP, JKICP and Mission YUVA.

Dr. Bilal stressed that farmers and prospective beneficiaries must come forward and take full advantage of various government schemes aimed at strengthening the agriculture sector and improving livelihoods.

On the occasion, the CAO briefed participants about different schemes of the department, which

have been designed to enhance agricultural productivity and boost livelihood opportunities. These schemes can have a positive effect on economic upliftment and social empowerment of women associated with agriculture and allied sectors, he noted.

At the conclusion, women achievers were felicitated with mementoes and certificates for their outstanding contribution in different fields.

The initiative underscores the commitment of District Administration and Agriculture Department to Women Empowerment and effective implementation of HADP, JKICP and Mission YUVA schemes.

## DC Anantnag reviews progress of Land Record Digitization

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**ANANTNAG, MARCH 17:** Deputy Commissioner (DC) Anantnag, Dr. Bilal Mohiud Din Bhat, on Monday reviewed the status of the district on land record digitization during a meeting with the concerned officers at Dak Bungalow Khanabal.

The meeting was attended by the ADC, ACR, SDMs besides the Tehsildars, Naib Tehsildars and other officials of revenue department. At the outset, the DC conducted Tehsil-wise evaluation of the progress of

verification and uploading of Jamabandis on PM Gati Shakti Portal and issued specific directions to the Tehsils, showing pendency, to ensure the verification of the remaining Jamabandis immediately.

Dr. Bilal emphasized that the digitization initiative is aimed at enhancing transparency and directed the officers to take appropriate action on non-quasi judicial errors within the stipulated timeframe. Simultaneously the work on back log mutations be taken up so that maximum updation is achieved, he remarked.

## Langate Witnesses Grand Iftar Hosted by Indian Army, Fosters Goodwill Among Locals

■ DR. AB QAYOOM

**LANGATE, MAR 17:** In a significant gesture aimed at promoting communal harmony and strengthening ties with the local population, the Indian Army's Langate Army Camp organized a grand Iftar gathering in Langate area of North Kashmir's Kupwara district on Tuesday.

The event witnessed the participation of senior officers from the Army and Jammu and Kashmir Police, members of the

civil administration, media fraternity, political representatives, and prominent citizens from the area.

The gathering brought together people from different walks of life, reflecting a shared commitment towards peace and unity.

The Iftar commenced with collective prayers, where participants prayed for peace, prosperity, and well-being of the nation and its people.

The occasion, held during the holy month of Ramadan, symbolized

the spirit of compassion, brotherhood, and mutual respect. Speaking on the occasion, attendees appreciated the initiative by the Army, stating that such interactions play a vital role in bridging gaps and fostering trust between security forces and civilians. They emphasized the need for continued engagement to build a peaceful and cooperative environment in the region.

The evening was marked by a warm and cordial atmosphere as guests shared traditional Ramadan

delicacies and engaged in meaningful interactions.

The event also highlighted the rich cultural ethos of the region, where communal harmony and coexistence remain deeply rooted values.

The Indian Army, through such outreach programs, continues to make efforts towards strengthening its bond with the local populace, promoting goodwill, and encouraging a collective approach towards peace and development in Jammu and Kashmir.

HT EDITORIAL

## People need to apply wisdom while tackling LPG crisis

Both the central government and the union territory government have issued multiple statements about the stock and supply position of petroleum and LPG in the country but the ground situation suggests that there is panic among people in this regard. People as a whole are quite apprehensive about the LPG supply position and it is due to this reason that people can be seen lined up in order to get a single LPG cylinder.

The union territory government has said that the LPG stock would last for at least two weeks and there is no need for the people to panic in this regard. Despite this the people want to take a lead over one another and want to fill all the gas cylinders available with them. In this panic buying some of the genuine customers lose out and they are not able to get even a single gas cylinder. This creates chaos and confusion among the people with disorder becoming the order of the day.

It is imperative that the people give up on the unnecessary speculations and assumptions and take the things as they unfold. There is no need to be panicky as the same would only aggravate the situation and not solve any problem. Things go haywire when decisions are taken in a jiffy without any proper planning. People should understand that the crisis is not going to last for long and it will end sooner or later. By that time meticulous planning has to be carried out and people need to apply wisdom in carrying out daily chores of life.

The different oil companies supplying LPG cylinders have an added responsibility as on date and they need to ensure that no injustice is done. Some of the complaints that the delivery boys of these companies are charging extra bucks for a gas cylinder need to be probed in a proper manner. It has to be ensured that nobody takes law into their hands and make the people to suffer. The higher-ups of the oil companies need to take a call in this respect and it has to be done earlier.

On their part the consumers should not pay an extra amount for a gas cylinder and if anybody demands for the same then they should lodge a complaint about the same. Since a society comprises different sections of people it is necessary that all chip in and play their part to perfection so that there is justice for one and all.

# Middle East Crisis: India Walks the Diplomatic Tightrope



■ TUSHI DEB

Is India recalibrating its approach to the West Asia crisis? Every time a conflict erupts in West Asia, the same question echoes across television studios and editorial pages: whose side will India take? With tensions around Iran spiralling into an open confrontation, the debate has returned with predictable urgency. Should India back Iran? Stand with Israel and the West? Or remain neutral?

But the question itself is flawed. Foreign policy is not conducted through moral slogans or ideological sympathies. It is conducted through the far less romantic calculus of national interest. Judged by that standard, India's position in the unfolding Iran crisis is neither confused nor hesitant. It is deliberate, as India cannot afford to choose sides.

There was a time when New Delhi's West Asia policy appeared relatively straightforward. In the decades after independence, India instinctively leaned toward the Arab world while maintaining a deliberate distance from Israel. That posture reflected both domestic political considerations and the moral vocabulary of the Non-Aligned Movement. But geopolitics rarely stands still. Over the past three decades, India's engagement with the region has undergone a quiet yet profound transformation. Today, India maintains a deep strategic partnership with Israel. Cooperation spans defence technology, intelligence sharing, agriculture and homeland security. Israeli systems have become embedded in India's security architecture, from advanced surveillance technologies to missile defence platforms.

At the same time, India has carefully cultivated ties with Iran, fully aware of Tehran's geographic and strategic importance. Iran offers India a crucial gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia through the development of Chabahar Port — a project that allows New Delhi to bypass Pakistan and establish overland trade routes into Eurasia.

The third pillar of this equation is India's increasingly consequential partnership with the United States. Over the past two decades, New Delhi and Washington have moved from wary acquaintances to strategic collaborators. Defence agreements, joint military exercises and high-end technology cooperation now define the relationship.

The result is a diplomatic triangle: India must simultaneously engage Iran, Israel and the United States — three actors whose interests often collide. In such a landscape, the expectation that India will openly align with one side in a regional war reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of contemporary Indian diplomacy. The economic stakes alone make alignment risky.

India imports the overwhelming majority of its crude oil, and the stability of West Asian energy supplies remains critical to its economic health. Any large-scale disruption in the Persian Gulf reverberates instantly through global markets, pushing up energy prices and placing immediate pressure on India's economy.

For a country that must contain inflation, sustain growth and protect the purchasing power of millions, turmoil in West Asia is not a distant geopolitical drama. It is an economic fault line.

There is also a human dimension. Millions of Indians live and work across the Gulf region, sending home billions of dollars each year. India remains the world's largest recipient of remittances, receiving a record \$135 billion. Roughly 38 per cent of these inflows originate from the Gulf Cooperation Council economies. The safety, employment and livelihoods of those millions form a central component of India's national interest. Any diplomatic stance that jeopardises relations with Gulf states carries immediate and tangible risks. These realities explain why New Delhi has consistently resisted the temptation of ideological alignment in West Asia.

Instead, India has embraced what policymakers increasingly describe as strategic autonomy — the ability to maintain productive relations with multiple competing powers without becoming tethered to any single geopolitical camp. This doctrine marks a departure from the rhetorical non-alignment of the Cold War era. While non-alignment often carried moralistic overtones, strategic autonomy is unapologetically pragmatic. It recognises that the global order is no longer defined by rigid blocs but by shifting coalitions and overlapping interests.

Under this framework, diplomacy is not a choice between friends and enemies. It is the art of managing multiple partnerships simultaneously.

Critics occasionally dismiss this posture as diplomatic hedging. They argue that a rising power should demonstrate clearer ideological leadership. Yet such criticism ignores a simple truth: the first responsibility of any government is to safeguard its national interests.

Grand declarations may satisfy domestic audiences. They rarely produce strategic advantage.

India's cautious approach has, in fact, often given it a unique advantage — the ability to maintain lines of communication even when rival powers refuse to speak to one another. In a volatile region like West Asia, that ability can itself become a source of influence.

There is also a broader geopolitical shift underway. The world is gradually moving away from rigid alliances toward a more fragmented and multipolar order. In such an environment, flexibility becomes a strategic asset. Countries that tie themselves too rigidly to one camp risk losing room for manoeuvre as alliances evolve. India's diplomatic tradition has therefore evolved toward preserving maximum strategic space.

Seen in this light, the question of whether India will take sides in the Iran conflict begins to appear misplaced.

New Delhi will engage all stakeholders. It will call for restraint, encourage diplomatic solutions and safeguard its economic interests. It will coordinate with partners when necessary while maintaining dialogue with adversaries when useful.

But it will resist being drawn into the simplistic binary of 'us versus them'.

For Indian diplomacy, the real challenge is not choosing between Tehran and Tel Aviv or between Iran and Washington. It is navigating a turbulent region while preserving India's autonomy and influence.

That requires patience, prudence and occasionally the willingness to disappoint those who prefer dramatic gestures over careful statecraft.

Over the decades, India's Middle East policy was framed around two broad binaries: the United States versus the region, and Israel versus the Arab world. Far less attention was paid to the region's internal rivalries — between Arabia and Persia, between monarchies and revolutionary republics.

Today, New Delhi approaches the region with greater realism. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly emphasised, "We believe in the ideology of 'India First'. India supports the resolution of all disputes through dialogue and diplomacy."

That principle remains the anchor of India's West Asia policy. Engage with all. Align with none. In an increasingly polarised world that constantly demands loyalty tests, such restraint may appear unspectacular. But it is precisely this strategic sobriety that allows India to protect its interests while expanding its diplomatic room to manoeuvre.

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# The Importance of Libraries in Schools and the Need for Digitalization



■ DR. SURINDERPAL SINGH

Libraries have always been considered the heart of an educational institution. In schools, libraries provide students with access to knowledge, information and resources that support their academic growth and intellectual development. Traditionally, libraries consisted mainly of printed books, journals and reference materials. However, in the modern digital age, the concept of libraries is rapidly evolving. With the rise of technology, digital libraries, e-books and electronic media are becoming increasingly important in enhancing learning. A well-equipped school library not only supports the curriculum but also encourages curiosity, creativity and independent learning among students. As education systems become more technology-driven, the digitalization of school libraries is becoming a necessity rather than a luxury.

A school library is a structured collection of books, reference materials, digital resources and learning tools that support the educational activities of students and teachers. It serves as a learning hub where students can explore subjects beyond classroom teaching. A good school library includes textbooks and reference books, encyclopedias and dictionaries, newspapers and magazines, academic journals, digital databases and e-books, as well as multimedia resources such as videos and audio

materials. These resources help students develop reading habits and improve their understanding of various subjects.

Libraries play a vital role in enhancing knowledge and learning by providing students with access to a wide range of educational materials. Students can explore subjects in greater depth than what is taught in classrooms, which strengthens their academic foundation. They also encourage reading habits, which improve vocabulary, language skills, imagination and creativity. Moreover, libraries support research and critical thinking by teaching students how to search for information, evaluate sources and analyze knowledge — skills that are essential for higher education. Libraries also promote independent learning, allowing students to study on their own and build confidence. Importantly, they provide equal access to information, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, can benefit from educational resources.

In the 21st century, education is closely linked with digital technology, making the digitalization of libraries increasingly important. Digitalization involves converting traditional library resources into digital formats and making them accessible through computers, tablets or the internet. Digital libraries offer easy and quick access to vast amounts of information, allowing students to find books, articles and research papers within seconds. They also support remote learning, enabling students to access study materials from home during exams, holidays or emergencies such as pandemics. Unlike physical libraries, digital libraries have a large storage capacity and can hold millions of documents without requiring physical space. Additionally, digital platforms can be updated regularly, ensuring

access to the latest information and research.

Digital libraries significantly support students in their curriculum and revision. They allow quick searching of topics, keywords or chapters, saving time and improving efficiency. Students can highlight text, bookmark important pages and create digital notes, which helps in effective revision. Furthermore, digital libraries provide access to multimedia learning resources such as videos, animations and audio lectures, making complex topics easier to understand. They also offer multiple resources on the same subject, enabling students to gain broader perspectives and deeper insights.

School libraries offer numerous advantages, including improved reading habits and literacy skills, access to diverse educational resources, support for research and academic projects, encouragement of independent learning, promotion of curiosity and creativity, and a quiet environment for study and concentration. However, they also face certain challenges. Traditional libraries require large physical space, and maintaining books can be costly. Printed materials may become outdated, and limited copies of books can restrict access during peak times like examinations. Additionally, without proper guidance, some students may not fully utilize library resources.

Upgrading school libraries with e-books and electronic media is essential in modern education. Digital resources such as online journals, educational videos and databases enhance the learning experience by providing instant access to global knowledge and interactive content. However, digitalization should not completely replace traditional libraries. Printed books still

hold significant value, especially for deep reading and focus. Therefore, a balanced approach that combines physical books with digital resources is the most effective solution. A hybrid library system allows students to benefit from both traditional and modern forms of learning.

The future of school libraries lies in smart and technology-driven environments. Modern libraries are likely to include e-book collections, online academic databases, AI-based search systems, virtual learning platforms, multimedia learning stations and collaborative study spaces. These advancements will transform libraries into dynamic knowledge centers rather than mere storage spaces for books.

School libraries play a crucial role in shaping the academic and intellectual development of students. They provide access to knowledge, encourage reading habits and support research and independent learning. In today's technology-driven world, digitalization has become essential to meet evolving educational needs. While traditional libraries remain important, integrating them with digital resources can greatly enhance their effectiveness. A balanced combination of both will ensure comprehensive and accessible education for students. Investing in modernized school libraries is, therefore, an investment in the intellectual growth and success of future generations.

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



# Ashok Koul reviews BJP structure in Kishtwar, stresses cadre training and outreach

HT NEWS NETWORK

**KISHTWAR, MARCH 17** : Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Jammu & Kashmir General Secretary (Organization), Ashok Koul, chaired an organizational meeting of the District Kishtwar at the party office, Kishtwar.

The meeting was attended by District President Ravi Kumar Parihar, MLA Kishtwar Shagun Parihar, along with senior party leaders and office bearers.

The meeting focused on reviewing the ongoing party programmes and chalking out a comprehensive strategy for the effective implementation of forthcoming organizational activities across the district. Detailed discussions were held on strengthening the party structure at the booth and Mandal levels, ensuring better coordination among party activists, and enhancing outreach among the masses.



Addressing the meeting, Ashok Koul stressed the importance of a strengthened and well-structured organization as the backbone of the party's success.

He highlighted that the BJP is continuously working to expand its base through systematic organizational efforts and people-

centric programmes. He laid special emphasis on the ongoing Prashikshan Workshops being conducted at various levels under the party's training programme.

He stated that these workshops are aimed at creating ideologically strong, well-informed, and capable party activists who can

effectively communicate the party's vision and policies at the grassroots level.

Koul further remarked that an empowered and trained activist is the biggest strength of the BJP. He said that the party's focus is not only on expanding the organization but also on

strengthening the quality and efficiency of party cadre. A well informed and empowered activist can act as a bridge between the party and the people, ensuring that government schemes and party programmes reach every household, he added.

Ravi Kumar Parihar assured that the district unit is fully committed to implementing the directions given by the leadership. He emphasized that special efforts are being made to ensure maximum participation in the training workshops and to energize party workers at every level.

Shagun Parihar highlighted the importance of strong coordination between elected representatives and organizational leaders.

She said that a well-structured organization at the grassroots level is essential for addressing public issues effectively and strengthening the party's connect with the people.

# Bali Bhagat exposes Congress 'False Narrative' on India's energy security

HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MARCH 17** : Senior BJP leader and former Health Minister Bali Bhagat today intensified his attack on the Congress party, accusing it of running a "deliberate misinformation campaign" to mislead the public and create panic over a critical national development.

Referring to recent Congress statements questioning and casting doubts over the LPG supply operation, Bhagat said such remarks are factually incorrect, misleading, and aimed at creating fear among citizens at a time when the country is successfully managing energy security.

He highlighted that India's second LPG carrier Nanda Devi has safely docked at Vadinar Port in Gujarat with 46,500 metric tonnes of LPG, after navigating the sensitive Strait of Hormuz amid the ongoing West Asia conflict—an achievement that reflects India's strong diplomatic coordination and logistical capability.

Bhagat further noted that this comes immediately after the successful arrival of Shivalik at Mundra Port, clearly demonstrating that the government has ensured continuous and uninterrupted fuel supply lines despite global disruptions.

Providing operational details, he said the LPG consignment is being transferred at Vadinar to the vessel BW Birch, which will distribute the cargo to Ennore in Tamil Nadu and Haldia in West Bengal. The transfer is progressing at a rate of 1,000 tonnes per hour and is expected to be completed within two days.

Launching a hard-hitting counterattack, Bhagat said "Congress tried to cast doubts, spread confusion, and misrepresent facts about this entire operation. This is nothing but a calculated attempt to create panic among countrymen and undermine confidence in the system."

He accused Congress of spreading half-truths and false narratives to mislead the public; ignoring official facts and ground realities for political gain; attempting to create fear over fuel supply despite clear evidence of successful operations and habitually opposing every national achievement out of political frustration.

"Even when the facts are clear and the operation is successful, Congress chooses to manufacture controversy and confusion. This reflects a deeply irresponsible mindset that prioritizes politics over the nation," Bhagat said.

He further added that such statements from Congress are not merely political criticism but harmful attempts that can trigger unnecessary concern among citizens, especially during sensitive geopolitical conditions.

Bhagat asserted that the BJP-led government remains firmly committed to ensuring energy security, transparency, and stability, and said that the people of the country can clearly see through Congress' "agenda of misinformation."

He urged Congress leaders to stop misleading the public, verify facts before making statements, and act responsibly in the interest of the nation, warning that such repeated attempts to create panic will be strongly countered.

# Ex-Minister Gharu Ram re-joins congress before PCC President

HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MARCH 16** : Former Minister Ch. Gharu Ram along with his supporters has rejoined Congress party in the presence of PCC President Shri Tariq Hameed Karra heretoday.

PCC Working President Shri Raman Bhalla and President DCC Jammu Rural Shri Neeraj Kundan and several supporters of Ch. Gharu Ram were present on the occasion.

He was welcomed in to the party by PCC Chief and other senior leaders. He had joined DPAP on the eve of last Assembly Elections in 2024. They described his joining Congress party as a home coming and announced to work for strengthening the congress party, which alone can ensure justice to all sections of the society and maintain unity and harmony in the society.



Speaking on the occasion PCC President Tariq Hameed Karra said that Congress Party is an instrument of service to the people, which has remained dedicated to the cause of serving the people. The Congress Party is duty bound to address the urges and aspirations of the people, for the fact, it is the Congress Party alone which has always taken care of the urges and aspirations of the common man. Congress has been pioneer in implementing revolutionary programmes aimed at improving the conditions of the people, especially those living in remote and backward areas.

He said Congress party believes in strengthening the people and is committed to equitable development of the State. He described BJP dispensation as anti-poor, anti Youth, anti Kissan and due to its wrong policies the sufferings of the people increased manifold. The insensitive government pushed people to the wall, as unemployment has increased, prices have risen and developmental activities have suffered a lot. He claimed that BJP Government pushed back State in all sectors during last more than ten years.

Raman Bhalla-Working President PCC said that people who want to contribute to the political discourse and development of the state must become part of the Congress's growth story. The doors are open for the people who want to contribute in the party's efforts to see the state out of the present mess and fight for restoration of statehood. He said Congress is committed for the people's cause and will always uphold their aspirations and sentiments. Without statehood, the people of the J&K suffer on multiple fronts, he added.

Bhalla said that communal and divisive politics of BJP has caused great harm to Jammu and Kashmir and all secular forces must unite and come on common platform to fight divisive forces.

Other prominent who joined congress party along with Ch. Gharu Ram include S/Shri G. L. Chanda, Prakash Chandel Diger, Bachan Singh, Ch. Janak Raj, Charan Jeet, Dr. Manohar Lal Sher Singh, Durga Dass Khokhri, Omkarlal Sharma, Rajinder Sharma, Sanjeev Choudhary Dr. Bikram Dev, Des Raj Chauhan, Mintu Raina, Bachan Choudhary, Neelam Choudhary, Subash Choudhary, Ismail Khan, Vineet, Satpal Mandi.

# Mini Ayodhya spirit marks Hanumant Katha culmination at Resham Ghar Colony

HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MARCH 17** : The fifth day of the Shri Hanumant Katha Gyan Yajna at Shri Shiv Durga Temple, Resham Ghar Colony, witnessed an extraordinary outpouring of devotion as hundreds of devotees from Jammu city and surrounding villages gathered to participate in the spiritually uplifting event, turning the entire premises into a vibrant centre of faith often likened to a "Mini Ayodhya". The temple premises were beautifully decorated, with devotional music and continuous recitation of hymns creating an atmosphere of divine bliss. The air resonated with chants of "Jai Shri Ram" and "Jai Hanuman," as devotees immersed themselves in prayer, bhajans, and katha, reflecting deep spiritual engagement and collective devotion.

Katha Vyas Swami Umeshanand Ji Maharaj enthralled the gathering with his melodious rendering of bhajans and vivid narration of episodes from the life of Lord Hanuman. Through his discourse, he not only highlighted the virtues of devotion, courage, and selfless service embodied by Hanuman but



also connected these teachings to modern-day life, making the message relevant for all sections of society. Elaborating on the "triveni" of seva, smiran, and satsang, Swami Ji explained that these three principles act as guiding forces in overcoming worldly challenges and achieving spiritual balance. He stressed that engaging in selfless service, maintaining constant remembrance of the divine, and keeping the company of the wise are essential for leading a meaningful and disciplined life.

He also called upon devotees to cultivate compassion, forgiveness, and humility, stating that these virtues naturally emerge through participation in spiritual gatherings like katha. Emphasizing the importance of human birth, he remarked that life should be

utilized for higher purposes, including service to humanity and protection of sacred duties. The discourse also shed light on the timeless relevance of katha traditions, with Swami Ji noting that saints across generations have advocated listening to and reflecting on divine narratives as a simple yet powerful path towards inner peace and liberation. The programme was attended by members of the organizing committee, prominent citizens, local scholars, and noted Acharya Pravine Shastri, who lauded the organizers for fostering spiritual awareness and social harmony. Organisers expressed satisfaction over the overwhelming participation and smooth conduct of the multi-day event. The five-day yajna concluded with a grand aarti, where devotees collectively offered prayers, followed by a bhandara in which a large number of attendees partook in the community feast, symbolizing unity, devotion, and shared spiritual joy. The event left a lasting impression on participants, reinforcing the importance of faith, cultural traditions, and community bonding.

# MLA Jasrotia inaugurates first-ever Faral-Chafadeyan road since independence

HT NEWS NETWORK

**JASROTA, MARCH 17** : In a major step towards strengthening rural infrastructure and improving connectivity in far-flung areas, Rajiv Jasrotia today inaugurated the construction of a crucial link road from Faral to Chafadeyan via Bhourth in Jasrota constituency. The 3-kilometre-long road project, being developed at an estimated cost of Rs 80 lakh, marks a historic milestone as it is the first road to be constructed in the area since Independence.

The project will be executed by the Public Works Department (R&B) Division Kathua under the UT Capex Budget 2025-26. Once completed, the road is expected to significantly enhance connectivity for several remote villages, reducing travel time, facilitating easier movement of goods and services, and providing

better access to essential services such as healthcare and education.

Locals described the initiative as a long-awaited development, stating that the absence of proper road connectivity had posed serious challenges for decades, particularly during medical emergencies and adverse weather conditions. The new road is anticipated to not only ease daily commuting but also unlock economic opportunities by linking rural pockets with nearby markets. On the same occasion, the MLA also inaugurated macadamization work on the PMGSY Link Road to Mohalla Shaheed Chaggar Link at Jakhole. The project, undertaken under the Cities and Towns (C&T) Sector Capex Budget 2025-26, has been sanctioned at a cost of Rs 15 lakh and aims to improve road surface quality, ensuring smoother and safer transportation for residents.

Addressing the gathering,

Jasrotia reiterated the government's firm commitment to holistic and inclusive development. He emphasized that infrastructure development, particularly road connectivity, is the backbone of progress and plays a pivotal role in transforming the socio-economic landscape of rural areas. He added that better roads not only ensure seamless mobility but also strengthen access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Highlighting the significance of the Faral-Chafadeyan road, he said that the project fulfills a long-pending demand of the people and reflects the administration's resolve to bridge developmental disparities in neglected regions. He assured that similar initiatives will continue to be prioritized to uplift rural communities.

Later, the MLA held a Public Darbar at Faral, providing a platform

for direct interaction between the administration and the people. Residents actively participated, raising issues related to basic amenities and local development. Officials from various departments, including PWD, PDD, PHE, REW, PMGSY, Revenue, Police, Food & Supplies, Flood Control, Irrigation, Agriculture, and Rural Development, were present to address grievances and ensure prompt redressal.

The public darbar witnessed enthusiastic participation, with locals appreciating the government's outreach efforts and the opportunity to have their concerns heard directly. Several issues were resolved on the spot, while others were taken up for time-bound action. During his address, Jasrotia emphasized that the inaugurated projects symbolize the government's focus on last-mile connectivity and inclusive growth.

Jasrotia assured the public that all genuine demands would be addressed in a transparent and time-bound manner. Urging officials to work with dedication and accountability, he stressed the importance of responsive governance. He further reiterated that such public darbars will continue to be organized regularly to strengthen communication between the administration and the people, ensuring that governance remains accessible, participatory, and effective.

Prominent among those present on the occasion included Mandal Pradhan Jasrota & Sarpanch Balwant Singh, Sarpanch Shiv Dev, Randeep Singh Pappi, Bhavishan Sharma, Panch Vinod Kumar, Sanjay, Sunit Singh, Chaggar Singh, Gandharb Singh, Bhajan Singh, Kawla Singh, Chain Singh, Karan Singh, Raghubir, Shibu, Vijay besides others.

# Dharmarth Trust holds Council Meeting

HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MARCH 17** : The Jammu & Kashmir Dharmarth Trust convened an important meeting of its Trustees, Members of the Council, and senior office bearers in Jammu today. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman Trustee, J&K Dharmarth Trust. The meeting was attended by Trustees Vikramaditya Singh, Ajatshatru Singh, Martand Singh, and Ranvijay Singh.

During the session, Dr. P.S. Pathania, President of the Dharmarth Trust, presented a comprehensive overview of the major renovation and restoration works undertaken by the Trust across various temples in Jammu and Kashmir. The progress and future plans

for the development of Sri Raghunath Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Birpur, as well as the Ranbir Sanskrit Research Library at Raghunath Mandir, Jammu, were also discussed in detail. The proposed budget for the financial year 2026-27 was presented by Dr. Pathania and deliberated upon by the Trustees and Members of the Council. Ashok Sharma, Secretary of the Dharmarth Trust, briefed the gathering on ongoing employee welfare initiatives and key administrative reforms being implemented at the organizational level. Chairman Trustee Dr. Karan Singh appreciated the sustained efforts of the Trust, particularly in the restoration of temples damaged in regions such as Gulmarg, Pahalgam, and Srinagar.

# ARMY ORGANIZED A GENERAL HEALTH AND EYE CHECK-UP CAMP AT AMBARAM, AKHNOOR

HT NEWS NETWORK

**AKHNOOR, MARCH 17** : Indian Army organized a general health and eye check-up camp at Ambaram village benefiting 150 local villagers. A total of nine medical professionals, including general physicians, ENT specialists and military doctors were present during the event. The camp provided essential medical consultations and eye examinations, along with free medicines for all beneficiaries. This initiative aimed not only to offer early detection of health issues but also to raise awareness about preventive healthcare. It highlighted the importance of maintaining good health

and taking timely action to address health concerns. In addition to basic medical services, the camp facilitated discussions on lifestyle changes and preventive practices, helping the villagers make informed decisions about their health.

By extending these services to rural communities, the Indian Army strives to bridge the healthcare gap and enhance the overall well-being of those living in remote areas.

Such outreach programs are instrumental in strengthening the bonds between the Indian Army and local communities while contributing significantly to their welfare and socio-economic development.

# IndiGo inks deal with Adani Airports to reward BluChips Duty-Free Shoppers

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**MUMBAI, MARCH 17:** Private airlines player IndiGo has announced a partnership with Adani Group's Adani Airport Holdings Ltd (AAHL) to allow its loyalty programme members to earn IndiGo BluChips on duty-free purchases at select airports in India aimed to make airport shopping more convenient for travellers while offering rewards for their spending.

"The partnership will integrate IndiGo BluChip with the Adani platform, enabling travellers to pre-order duty-free products and collect them at the airport," both the companies announced here today, in a joint statement.

IndiGo has announced that its IndiGo BluChip members can now earn rewards on duty-free shopping at select airports managed by AAHL. IndiGo customers can log in through a dedicated portal, link their membership ID and receive their earnings within 24 to 48 hours based on their spending.

Currently, participating duty-free stores are at Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Mangaluru and Lucknow



airports. The programme will soon expand to Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati and the new Navi Mumbai International Airport, the statement informed.

Under the partnership, IndiGo BluChip members will earn five BluChips for every Rs 100 spent on duty-free products booked through the Adani platform. IndiGo BluChip is IndiGo's loyalty programme which

rewards frequent flyers. Under this programme, members earn BluChips on every flight based on their spending.

Commenting on the development, IndiGo Chief Digital and Information Officer Neetan Chopra said, "At IndiGo, we are continuously striving to enhance the value proposition of our loyalty programme. This partnership with Adani Duty Free strengthens our commitment to offering meaningful rewards beyond flights, making every step of the journey more beneficial for our customers. By combining IndiGo's extensive network with Adani's premium duty-free experience, we are delighted to bring greater convenience, choice and value to millions of travellers across India."

AAHL CEO Suchit Bansal said, "We are transforming how travellers shop at airports by integrating digital discovery, pre-order convenience and seamless collection through the Adani platform. Our partnership with IndiGo brings together India's largest airline and the country's largest private airport operator to deliver a more connected and rewarding travel retail experience."

## Regaal Resources Promoter buys 9 lakh shares via open market, stake rises to 25.39pc

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, MAR 17:** Promoter and Chairperson & Managing Director of Regaal Resources Limited, Anil Kishorepuria, has increased his stake in the company through open market purchases, acquiring 9 lakh equity shares during the week ended March 6, 2026, according to regulatory disclosures filed with the stock exchanges.

The shares were purchased on the National Stock Exchange of India through a series of transactions comprising 3,50,000 shares, followed by 4,00,000 shares and 1,50,000 shares. Following the acquisition, Kishorepuria's individual shareholding in the company rose from 24.51-25.39pc. With the latest purchase, the total promoter holding in Regaal Resources has increased to 65.62pc.

The stake increase is seen as a signal of promoter confidence in the company's long-term growth prospects and its strategic positioning in India's expanding agro-processing sector, particularly in maize-based value-added products.

"India's agro-processing sector, particularly maize-based value-added products, is witnessing strong growth driven by rising demand from industries such as food processing, paper, textiles and animal nutrition," said Kishorepuria. "With increasing focus on value addition in agriculture and expanding market opportunities both domestically and globally, we believe the industry is entering a strong

growth phase. Our continued investment in Regaal Resources reflects my confidence in the company's long-term strategy, operational capabilities and its ability to capture emerging opportunities in this evolving sector."

Regaal Resources is among India's prominent maize processing companies, manufacturing maize starch and a range of specialty starch derivatives used across several industries. The company operates a large-scale maize wet milling facility with a processing capacity of around 825 tonnes per day, supplying products to sectors including food and beverages, pharmaceuticals, paper, textiles and animal nutrition.

Over the years, the company has expanded its portfolio of value-added maize products and strengthened its presence in both domestic and export markets, supported by rising demand for processed agricultural products and increasing emphasis on agricultural value addition in India.

The disclosure of the share purchase was made in compliance with Regulation 7(2) of the SEBI (Prohibition of Insider Trading) Regulations, 2015, which requires promoters, directors and designated persons to report acquisitions or disposals of securities exceeding a specified threshold within two trading days. The regulation mandates disclosure if the traded value of securities exceeds Rs 10 lakh in a single transaction or through a series of transactions in a calendar quarter. UNI

## Interio targets Rs 150 Cr Mattress revenue by FY29 amid India's growing sleep wellness market

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, MARCH 17:** Interio by Godrej, the furniture and lifestyle brand of Godrej Enterprises Group, is expanding its mattress portfolio to capture India's fast-growing sleep wellness market.

In a release, the company said it is planning to appoint 25 new distributors and expand to 300 retail outlets, covering Tier-I, Tier-II, and Tier-III cities, aiming for Rs 150 crore revenue in the mattress segment by FY29.



The expansion includes orthopaedic, foam, and premium pocket spring mattresses, with flagship offerings such as the Orthomatic series, Sleepsy, and Sleep Grande, designed for posture support, comfort, and spinal alignment.

India's mattress market, currently valued at USD 2.4 billion, is projected to reach USD 3.89 billion by 2031, driven by rising consumer awareness, urbanisation, and higher disposable incomes.

Interio will leverage its 50 company outlets, 600 dealer outlets, and 1,000 retail partners, strengthening its omnichannel presence and premium positioning to tap into the country's expanding aspirational consumer base.

Dev Sarkar, Senior Vice President and Head of Consumer Business, Interio by Godrej said, "Urbanisation, rising incomes and improving housing conditions are influencing how people invest in their homes, including their sleep environment. Our mattresses are designed to support different sleep preferences, from pressure-relieving foam and pocket spring cores to breathable mesh layers. We are also strengthening our distribution network so that consumers across markets have easier access to these solutions." UNI

## India's trade deficit widens Y-O-Y in Feb 2026 with imports touching USD 80.09 bn

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 17:** As per trade data for February 2026, total imports during the month increased by 21.64 per cent to USD 80.09 billion, resulting in an overall trade deficit of USD 3.96 billion in February compared with a surplus of USD 2.72 billion in the same month last year.

On the contrary, India's total exports, including merchandise and services, rose by 11.05 per cent year-on-year to an estimated USD 76.13 billion in February 2026, reflecting strong growth in services exports and several key sectors.

According to the data, merchandise exports stood at USD 36.61 billion in February 2026, slightly lower than USD 36.91 billion recorded in February 2025. On the other hand, merchandise imports rose significantly to USD 63.71 billion, compared to USD 51.33 billion in the same month last year.

The services sector continued to drive overall export growth, with services exports estimated

at USD 39.53 billion in February, registering a sharp increase from USD 31.65 billion in February 2025. Services imports during the month were estimated at USD 16.38 billion, compared with USD 14.51 billion a year earlier.

For the period April-February of the current financial year (2025-26), India's total exports (merchandise and services combined) are estimated at USD 790.86 billion, recording a growth of 5.79 per cent compared with USD 747.58 billion in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Total imports during the same period were estimated at USD 900.51 billion, showing an increase of 7.37 per cent over USD 838.69 billion recorded during April-February of the previous financial year. As a result, the overall trade deficit widened to USD 109.64 billion during the period, compared with USD 91.11 billion in the corresponding period last year.

Merchandise exports during April-February 2025-26 stood at USD 402.93 billion, compared with



USD 395.66 billion in the same period of the previous fiscal, registering a growth of 1.84 per cent.

Merchandise imports during the period increased to USD 713.53 billion, up from USD 657.46 billion a year earlier, pushing the merchandise trade deficit to USD 310.60 billion, compared with USD 261.80 billion in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Non-petroleum exports during

April-February were valued at USD 354.12 billion, registering a growth of 5.03 per cent over USD 337.17 billion in the same period last year.

Among key sectors, engineering goods exports increased by 12.9 per cent to USD 10.36 billion in February, while electronic goods exports rose by 10.37 per cent to USD 4.18 billion. Exports of organic and inorganic chemicals grew by 6.85 per cent to USD 2.38 billion,

and gems and jewellery exports increased by 4.08 per cent to USD 2.64 billion.

Other sectors that recorded positive export growth included drugs and pharmaceuticals, marine products, handicrafts, coffee, fruits and vegetables, ceramic products and glassware, and cereal preparations.

Services exports continued to remain a key driver of India's trade performance. During April-February 2025-26, services exports were estimated at USD 387.93 billion, compared with USD 351.93 billion in the same period of the previous financial year.

Services imports during the period stood at USD 186.98 billion, resulting in a services trade surplus of about USD 200.96 billion, higher than USD 170.69 billion recorded in the corresponding period last year.

The data indicates that while services exports remain robust and continue to support overall export growth, higher imports have widened India's trade deficit during the current financial year. UNI

## EBG Group partners Hard Rock to launch premium coffee machines in India

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, MARCH 17:** EBG Group on Monday announced a strategic brand licensing partnership with Hard Rock International to introduce a premium range of Hard Rock-branded coffee machines and small kitchen appliances in the Indian market.

As part of its India market entry strategy, the initiative will be backed by a planned investment of Rs. 100 crore, with a projected revenue target of Rs. 500 crore over the next five years, the company said in a release.

The collaboration aims to tap India's

rapidly growing premium home appliance segment, currently valued at around Rs. 29,000 crore and expanding at an estimated compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of about nine per cent. Globally, Hard Rock operates across hospitality, entertainment, retail and licensed lifestyle categories and is regarded as one of the world's most recognisable music-led brands. The partnership will mark Hard Rock's entry into India's premium home appliance segment, bringing its design-led identity into modern kitchens. Under the licensing agreement, EBG Group will design,

develop, manufacture and distribute a curated portfolio of Hard Rock-branded products aligned with the brand's contemporary lifestyle positioning. The companies are aiming to capture around five per cent of the market within the first few years of operations. The initial product rollout will focus on key metropolitan markets, followed by a phased expansion into other major cities across the country.

Commenting on the development, EBG Group Founder and Chief Executive Officer Dr Irfan Khan said partnering with Hard Rock marked an important milestone for the company.

## OXMIQ Partners with AM Intelligence Labs to Build 1 GW AI Compute Hub in India

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, MAR 17:** OXMIQ Labs, headquartered in Campbell, California, a GPU architecture and AI Technology company, on Monday announced a strategic partnership with AM Intelligence Labs (AMI Labs), a division of AM Group (promoted by founders of Greenko Group), to develop cutting-edge AI infrastructure in India. The collaboration will support AMI Labs' 2 GW AI compute capability by 2030, beginning with a 1 GW AI Compute Hub in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, the company said in a release here.

AMI Labs, part of India's largest renewable energy producer Greenko, leverages 50 GW of solar, wind, and hydro capacity, backed by 100 GWh of intelligent energy storage, providing carbon-free energy at 50-70% lower costs than conventional power. This enables one of the world's most sustainable and cost-efficient AI compute platforms.

India's rapidly growing AI market, fueled by a vast developer ecosystem and enterprise adoption, positions the country as a critical global AI hub.

AM Group has begun Phase 1 of the Noida Compute Hub, aiming to bring the first compute capacity online by the end of 2027. Under the partnership, OXMIQ will provide architecture and engineering expertise across the entire compute stack—from GPU design, advanced packaging, and rack-scale systems, to high-performance interconnects and orchestration software—optimizing the platform for scale, speed, and efficiency. The integrated approach will unlock industry-leading electrons-to-tokens economics, making zettascale AI compute more accessible and cost-effective. Anil Chalamalasetty, Group Chairman, AM Group, said "OXMIQ gives AMI Labs access to some of the deepest hardware and systems expertise in the industry. Together, we are laying the foundation for AMI Labs to become a full-stack AI compute platform."

## PHDCCI urges RBI to resolve LC discrepancies, boost MSME credit flow

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 17:** The PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) has urged the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to address several operational and credit-related challenges faced by industry, including inconsistent handling of discrepancies in Letters of Credit (LCs), constraints in credit flow to MSMEs, and alleged unfair practices by rating agencies.

A delegation from the chamber met the Reserve Bank of India Governor and submitted a set of recommendations aimed at improving financial processes and easing access to credit for businesses, particularly micro,

small and medium enterprises. Raising concerns over the treatment of discrepancies in LC documents, Rajeev Juneja, President of PHDCCI, said banks sometimes refuse payment even when discrepancies are minor and have been formally waived by the LC applicant.

"Banks sometimes refuse payment even when discrepancies are minor and have been formally waived by the LC applicant. This undermines the reliability of Letters of Credit as payment instruments. Arbitrary use of discretion by banks in accepting or rejecting discrepancy waivers creates uncertainty for suppliers and exporters," he said. Juneja urged the central bank

to issue clear operational guidelines requiring banks to honour LC documents where discrepancies have been formally waived by the applicant, except in cases involving fraud or material risk.

"We request the RBI to issue clear operational guidelines requiring banks to honour LC documents where discrepancies have been formally waived by the applicant. The RBI may also prescribe uniform procedures and standardised documentation practices for discrepancy waivers, ensuring consistency across banks," he added.

The chamber also called for greater credit flow to MSMEs through Non-Banking Financial

Companies (NBFCs) and suggested revisiting the existing cap on loans eligible under priority sector classification.

Ranjeet Mehta, CEO and Secretary General of PHDCCI, noted that while the RBI had restored the classification of credit to MSMEs through NBFCs under priority sector lending, it was limited to 20 lakh per borrower, which he said is inadequate in the current economic context.

"With the revision in the classification criteria of MSMEs announced in the Budget 2025, almost 99 per cent of enterprises in India are now MSMEs, with their turnover limit increasing up to 500 crore. Therefore, this 20

lakh loan limit is insufficient," Mehta said.

He suggested that credit extended by banks to NBFCs for on-lending to MSMEs should be treated as indirect finance eligible under priority sector lending norms, and the existing cap should either be removed or raised significantly.

"It is earnestly desired that the credit given by banks to NBFCs for the purpose of on-lending to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises be treated as indirect finance to MSMEs eligible for classification under banks' priority sector lending. The ceiling of 20 lakh per borrower should either be removed or increased to at least 1 crore per borrower," Mehta added.

# Gill: 2027 ODI World Cup is the 'ultimate goal'

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI:** India ODI captain Shubman Gill has identified winning the 2027 ODI World Cup as the "ultimate goal", especially after coming "so close" to lifting the trophy in 2023. India had lost in the final of the 2023 World Cup to Australia after an unbeaten run in the tournament.

"Definitely, it does. That is the ultimate goal," Gill said on Star Sports during the BCCI awards. "We felt like we were so close last time when we were here in [the final] in India. To be able to get another crack at it in South Africa, it's going to be a great opportunity for us."

"Winning a World Cup in any format for the country is the ultimate goal. So obviously, that is something that sometimes runs in my mind."

The 2027 ODI World Cup will be played between 14 teams in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, and is scheduled for October-November.

India's T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav, who recently led them to the T20 World Cup title, said if there was a game that he would want to replay, it was the 2023 ODI World Cup final, and win it. "Definitely, 2023 World Cup final at Ahmedabad. [I would] love to replay that and win it," he said.

Suryakumar further said

India's 2024 T20 World Cup triumph acted as a spark, leading to various Indian teams across genders and age groups winning ICC titles in recent years.

"I think we just needed that one spark, or one step, which we actually crossed in 2024, and post that, 2025 Champions Trophy, then [the] women's team winning that ODI World Cup back in 2025, and then [men winning in] 2026," he said.

"That one step was important, that taste was important for everyone to understand what it takes to win an ICC trophy. Now, there is no looking back. If this wonderful thing has started, let's try and collect as many [trophies] as possible."



## Chinnaswamy stadium receives government clearance to host IPL 2026 final

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**BENGALURU:** Bengaluru's M Chinnaswamy Stadium has been cleared to host IPL 2026 after a government-appointed Expert Committee approved the venue for use on Monday. The immediate implication is that Chinnaswamy - scheduled to host the season opener between Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and Sunrisers Hyderabad on March 28 - will also stage one playoff game and the final, in keeping with the tradition of the defending champions hosting the title clash.

A committee, appointed by Karnataka's home minister G Parameshwara, conducted a thorough review of the stadium premises on Friday. The day-long audit involved several checks for structural compliance as well as measures taken to enhance crowd control around the venue.

On Monday, the final nod was given following a meeting between the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) officials, RCB's top brass as well as members of the expert committee, chaired



by G Maheshwar Rao. The Chinnaswamy will host five RCB home games, while two others will be played at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Stadium in Raipur, as per a pre-arranged agreement between the franchise and the Chhattisgarh government.

RCB has committed to engaging with KSCA to roll out digital QR coded tickets as one of several measures to tackle overcrowding around the venue. They have also partnered with the Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation (BMRL) to ensure hassle-free travel. The metro services will be extended until 1am on match days, while ticketing formalities are being worked out. It's likely those with match tickets can travel free of cost. BMRL is also likely to increase frequency of trains on all routes to prevent overcrowding. As for structural measures, the KSCA have increased the number of entry points by constructing six new gates around the Chinnaswamy, while widening existing entry gates. The old NCA premises had also been equipped with ramps and tarpaulin sheets to become a holding area for fans, as they make their way towards their respective stands.

The Bengaluru police and the KSCA are working to ensure Cubbon Road - which runs alongside the main entrance of the venue - will be cleared for vehicular movement at specific intervals on match days. The IPL has announced the schedule only for the first two weeks of the competition in 2026. In the first leg, KSCA will host one more game (apart from the opener) on April 5, involving RCB and Chennai Super Kings.

Chinnaswamy last hosted a competitive fixture during IPL 2025. Since then, the venue has been mired in controversy following the death of 11 fans during RCB's victory celebrations on June 3.

# For the longest time, I wanted Indian cricket to dominate, time has come: Mithali Raj

AGENCIES

**NEW DELHI:** Mithali Raj said her dream of seeing Indian cricket dominate the global stage is finally becoming a reality with the men's, women's and junior teams winning major world titles in recent years.

In the past couple of years, the Indian men's side ended over a decade-long title drought by winning the 2024 T20 World Cup while the women's team followed it up by clinching their maiden ICC trophy-- the ODI World Cup crown last year.

India's dominance extended to the junior circuit as well, with the under-19 teams also lifting world titles in recent years, reinforcing the country's status as the powerhouse.

"For the longest time, I want-

ed Indian cricket to dominate and the time has come," Mithali said at the BCCI Naman awards. "The last two-three years, Indian cricket -- men, women and the under-19 girls or boys, they've been doing immensely well. It's a proud moment as a former cricketer to see the growth of Indian cricket." Mithali, along with former players Rahul Dravid and Roger Binny, was honoured with the Col CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award during the BCCI's annual function on Sunday.

She credited former BCCI secretary and current ICC Chief Jay Shah for playing a key role in the transformation of Indian cricket, particularly the women's game. "I have seen the evolution of women's cricket and I need to acknowledge the support of BCCI and Jay sir. In the last four-



five years, there has been a huge transformation of the Indian women's cricket team and that is because of that one person.

"His vision and commitment towards it... globally also he has put in so much effort to enhance and promote women's cricket's profile. It shows that he is a visionary and committed to the

cause," she said.

Shah's tenure at the BCCI saw the introduction of equal match fee for men and women cricketers and the launch of the fully professional Women's Premier League. A trailblazer of the women's game, Mithali also acknowledged the inspiration she drew from legendary male cricketers like Sachin Tendulkar and Dravid during her career.

"Women's cricket had its own journey, so did men's cricket. But we've taken a lot of inspiration from the men cricketers. "I've taken inspiration from Rahul and Sachin because whenever I've bumped into them, they've always had a lot to chat about, about batting and the advice and suggestions really worked for me when I was playing." She said such interactions are important as women crick-

eters look up to their male counterparts who have achieved so much success.

"This interaction between the men and women, I think, helps the women cricketers greatly because we're always trying to catch up with the standards of men's cricket. In that context, both of them have been doing well." Former BCCI President and 1983 World Cup winning team member Binny, reflected on his journey over the years first as player and coach and then as an administrator.

"I was fortunate to be one of the players to play for India. Coming from a country whose population is so big, not many of us get a chance to represent the country. So, for me, representing the country was the biggest goal I achieved in cricket."

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