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# Threats Now Hide in Plain Sight, Constant Vigilance Essential: Manoj Sinha

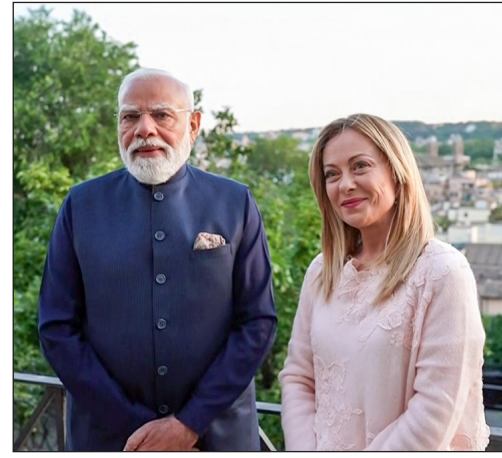
LG Hands Appointment Letters to Over 3,200 New Police Constables, Calls for United Fight Against Terror and Drug Networks



■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MAY 20:** Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Tuesday urged newly recruited constables of the Jammu and Kashmir Police to remain highly vigilant against evolving security threats, warning that terrorism and law-and-order challenges now often "hide in plain sight." Addressing a function in Jammu after handing over appointment letters to more than 3,200 newly inducted constables, Sinha said the changing nature of terrorism demands constant alertness, strong coordination among agencies, and a determined effort to dismantle terror-support systems. "We must remain constantly alert and vigilant. The nature of law and order" **Turn on Page 2**

# India And Italy To Build A Special Strategic Partnership: PM Narendra Modi



■ HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

**ROME, MAY 20:** India and Italy on Tuesday agreed to elevate bilateral relations to a "Special Strategic Partnership" as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni held extensive talks in Rome aimed at **Turn on Page 2**

## Reforms, Governance Review To Drive Council Of Ministers Meeting

■ HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair a significant meeting of the Union government's Council of Ministers on Thursday, with governance reforms, ministry performance and the economic impact of the ongoing West Asia crisis expected to dominate the agenda. The meeting, which will bring together all Cabinet ministers, Ministers of State with independent charge and other Ministers of State, will be the first full Council of Ministers meeting this year. It comes at a politically important **Turn on Page 2**

## "Remain Combat Ready Along LoC," : Lt Gen Pratik Sharma

■ HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

**JAMMU MAY 20 :** Lt Gen Pratik Sharma on Wednesday reviewed the security situation and operational preparedness of troops deployed along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district, with a focus on forward positions in the Sunderbani sector. According to the Northern Command, the Army Commander assessed the prevailing situation along the LoC and interacted with troops stationed in the forward areas. Personnel of the Border Security Force were also part of the interaction. The commander praised the troops for their "battle-hardened resilience, indomitable courage and unwavering commitment to duty," while urging them to remain prepared for evolving security challenges along the border. Lt Gen Sharma also emphasised the need for rapid absorption of emerging technologies to enhance operational capability and maintain constant combat readiness in sensitive frontier areas. Jammu and Kashmir shares a 740-km-long Line of Control spanning **Turn on Page 2**

# Police Intensify Anti-Drug Crackdown Across Kashmir Under 'Nasha Mukt J&K Abhiyan'

■ HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:** Jammu and Kashmir Police on Tuesday intensified the ongoing anti-drug campaign across Kashmir under the "Nasha Mukt J&K Abhiyan," carrying out a series of coordinated operations that led to the destruction of illegal poppy cultivation, arrest of suspected drug traffickers, demolition of properties allegedly linked to narcotics trade and seizure of vehicles used in drug-related activities. Officials said the operations were



conducted in multiple districts, including Anantnag, Baramulla, Handwara, Ganderbal, Srinagar and Pulwama, with support from civil administration and officials of the Excise, Revenue and Agriculture departments. In Anantnag, police destroyed illegally cultivated poppy crops in Batagund Verinag and registered a case at Dooru Police Station under relevant legal provisions. Similar operations were conducted in the Tangmarg and Kunzer areas of **Turn on Page 2**

## "Organised Gang" Behind NEET Leak: Court Observes

■ HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20:** A Delhi court on Wednesday observed that the allegations in the NEET-UG 2026 paper leak case pointed to the involvement of an "organised gang" engaged in leaking and circulating confidential examination papers for financial gain, while sending five accused to judicial custody till June 2. Special Judge Ajay Gupta allowed the Central Bureau of Investigation's plea seeking judicial custody of Mangilal Khatik, Vikas Biwal, Dinesh Biwal, Yash Yadav and Dhananjay Lokhande in connection with the alleged examination paper leak. The court also extended the CBI custody of **Turn on Page 2**

## No Genuine Houses Touched In Anti-Encroachment Drives: Ashok Koul

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:** Bharatiya Janata Party general secretary Ashok Koul on Wednesday said the ongoing anti-encroachment drives in Jammu are being carried out strictly against illegal occupation of government and forest land, asserting that no genuine residential houses have been affected during the exercise. **Turn on Page 2**

Addressing a party function in Srinagar, Koul said the operation was part of a lawful process aimed at reclaiming public land from unauthorised encroachments and ensuring protection of state resources. "No house of genuine residents has been touched. Action is being taken only against those who have illegally occupied government **Turn on Page 2**

## Panchayat Voter Count Crosses 72.24 Lakh After 3.39 Lakh New Enrolments

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MAY 20:** The State Election Commission, Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday finalized the Panchayat Electoral Rolls 2026, announcing that the voter count in the Union Territory has crossed 72.24 lakh following the enrolment of more than 3.39 lakh new voters during the annual revision



exercise. The Commission published the Final Panchayat Electoral Rolls after completing a comprehensive revision process carried out with April 1, 2026 as the qualifying date. The exercise began with the publication of draft rolls on March 27 and concluded after a scheduled period for claims, objections **Turn on Page 2**

## CS reviews sustainability plan for Industrial Biotech Parks in J&K

Calls for leveraging these parks to strengthen biotechnology ecosystem in J&K

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MAY 20:** Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo, today reviewed the readiness, operational framework and future sustainability plan for the Industrial Biotech Parks being established at Kathua and Handwara in Jammu and Kashmir, while stress-

ing the need to transform these facilities into vibrant centres of innovation, entrepreneurship and technology-driven industrial development.

The review meeting was attended by Commissioner Secretary, Science & Technology Department; Commissioner Secretary, Planning; Director,



CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine; CEO, Jammu and Kashmir Energy Development Agency; CEO, Centre for Innovation and Transformation in Governance; faculty members from different universities and other concerned officers. During the review, the Chief **Turn on Page 2**

## Govt committed to develop rural areas at par with urban areas: Dy CM

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**URI, MAY 20:** Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, today said that the government has accelerated facility creation and is committed to develop rural areas at par with urban areas and cities of Jammu and Kashmir. The Deputy Chief Minister said this while addressing at a public outreach programme at Bagna during daylong tour to border Constituency Uri of Baramulla district. During an extensive tour, he assessed the progress of developmental works, road connectivity projects, educational and health infrastructure and mining operations across Uri areas. The Deputy Chief Minister was accompanied by Chief Engineer PMGSY,



Chief Engineer R&B North Kashmir, ADC Baramulla, SDM Uri and other senior officers of the district administration. Addressing a public gathering, the Deputy Chief Minister said that, "the Government is committed to create **Turn on Page 2**

## Ensure quality of land record digitization: Shaleen Kabra

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**ANANTNAG, MAY 20:** Financial Commissioner Revenue (FCR) and Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Jal Shakti, Shaleen Kabra today visited Anantnag and chaired a comprehensive meeting at Dak Bungalow, Khanabal here to review the functioning of Revenue Department in the district. The meeting was attended by Commissioner Survey and Land Records, J&K, Inder Jeet; Deputy Commissioner, Dr. Bilal Mohiuddin Bhat; Regional Director, Survey and Land Records, Umar Shafi Pandith; Additional Deputy Commissioners, CPO,

ACR, SDMs, Tehsildars, Naib Tehsildars and other officials of the department. During the meeting, Shaleen Kabra conducted Tehsil-wise evaluation of the progress of uploading of backlog mutations on the portal and directed the officers to ensure quality of land records digitisation, noting that the same will be highly beneficial for the citizens in future. He praised the officials for making appreciable achievements in digitisation work and stressed on expediting it without compromising on data accuracy. The FCR emphasized that the digitization initiative is **Turn on Page 2**

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

**Threats Now.....**

threats and terrorism has evolved, demanding a constant, unyielding vigilance and alert to threats that hide in plain sight," the Lieutenant Governor said.

He asked the new recruits to dedicate themselves to protecting the unity and integrity of the nation and to strengthen the legacy of the police force through discipline, service, and commitment.

Highlighting the importance of teamwork in countering security challenges, Sinha said Jammu and Kashmir faces threats that require close cooperation between different security and intelligence agencies. He said sharing information and planning joint strategies would strengthen the overall security framework.

Referring to cross-border terrorism, the Lieutenant Governor said India continues to face challenges from a neighbouring country known globally for promoting terrorism. He urged the newly appointed constables to stand firmly on the front line of national security and work with resolve to eliminate terror threats.

Sinha also stressed the need to target terror financing and support systems, stating that terrorism survives through funding, networks, and logistical backing. He said law enforcement agencies must identify and dismantle every such structure using the full force of law.

Calling for a balance between technology-driven policing and traditional methods, the Lieutenant Governor underlined the significance of beat policing in maintaining law and order and preventing crime at the grassroots level.

He further reminded the recruits that the uniform of the Jammu and Kashmir Police symbolises courage, sacrifice, and service to the nation, and urged them to uphold the honour and responsibility attached to it.

The Lieutenant Governor also praised the police force for its intensified action against drug trafficking, saying authorities have prepared a comprehensive strategy to block drug smuggling routes and tighten the crackdown on peddlers in the coming days.

Among those present at the ceremony were Atal Dulloo, Nalin Prabhat, senior police officers, civil administration officials, and family members of the newly recruited constables.

**India And.....**

strengthening cooperation across key sectors, including trade, investment, artificial intelligence and strategic connectivity projects.

Addressing a joint press statement after the bilateral meeting, Modi said the two sides had deliberated extensively on deepening India-Italy ties and agreed to widen collaboration under a long-term framework for partnership. The leaders also reviewed the Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-2029, which outlines cooperation in areas such as innovation, clean energy, education, defence and technology.

Modi, who arrived in Rome on the final leg of his five-nation foreign tour, was accorded a ceremonial military welcome before holding delegation-level talks with Meloni.

Prior to the talks, the Prime Minister met Italian President Sergio Mattarella and discussed expanding collaboration in sectors including artificial intelligence, critical minerals, nuclear energy and space technology.

The Prime Minister said his visit would also focus on advancing cooperation under the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a major connectivity initiative intended to strengthen trade and infrastructure links between India, the Middle East and Europe.

In a gesture reflecting the growing warmth in bilateral relations, Meloni hosted Modi for dinner and accompanied him on a visit to the historic Colosseum ahead of the formal talks.

India and Italy have witnessed steady growth in economic engagement in recent years. Bilateral trade reached Euro 14.25 billion in 2025, with India's exports accounting for Euro 8.55 billion and Italian exports to India standing at Euro 5.70 billion, marking an increase of more than nine per cent over the previous year.

The two countries have set a target of raising annual bilateral trade to Euro 20 billion by 2029. Italy is currently India's fourth-largest trading partner within the European Union and has identified India as a priority nation under its global trade strategy.

The Indian community in Italy, estimated at more than 186,000 people, remains the largest Indian diaspora group in the European Union, while over 5,100 Indian students are presently studying in Italian universities.

**Reforms.....**

time amid speculation over a possible cabinet reshuffle and after the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's recent electoral gains in several states.

Official sources said ministries and departments are expected to present reports on their functioning, key policy decisions taken in recent months, achievements recorded and future priorities. Discussions are also likely to focus on improving the implementation of government schemes to ensure greater benefits reach citizens.

The Prime Minister is expected to review the potential economic consequences of the continuing West Asia conflict, particularly on sectors such as energy, agriculture, fertilisers, aviation, shipping and logistics. Sources indicated that directions may be issued to ministries to minimise disruptions and safeguard public interests.

Soon after tensions escalated in West Asia, Modi had directed ministries and departments concerned to take all possible measures to reduce the impact on citizens and vulnerable sectors of the economy. The meeting is also likely to underline the gov-

ernment's emphasis on long-term structural reforms. Modi has repeatedly stressed the need for sustained reforms over the coming decade, stating that systemic transformation remains central to the government's development agenda.

The Council of Ministers meeting follows the BJP's strong performance in recent Assembly elections in West Bengal and Assam, along with the return of the National Democratic Alliance government in Puducherry, adding political significance to Thursday's deliberations.

**"Remain....."**

the districts of Rajouri, Poonch and parts of Jammu in the Jammu division, besides Baramulla, Bandipora and Kupwara in the Kashmir Valley. The Army remains deployed along the LoC, while the International Border passes through Jammu, Samba and Kathua districts.

**Police Intensify.....**

Baramulla, where authorities identified and destroyed poppy cultivation spread across agricultural land. Cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act were registered and investigations initiated.

Police also arrested several persons during anti-drug operations carried out across the Valley. In Uri, an accused identified as Faisal Ahmed Khan was arrested after police recovered cannabis resin concealed in corn husk during checking at Zero Morh Daragutlian.

In a significant development, Anantnag Police installed a GPS-enabled tracking anklet on an accused released on bail in a narcotics case to monitor his movements and ensure compliance with court directions.

In Handwara, authorities destroyed illegal poppy cultivation in Mangwalpora Kralgund and registered a case against an accused identified as Reyaz Ahmad Wani. Police also secured cancellation of 14 driving licences and two vehicle registration certificates linked to persons allegedly involved in narcotics-related activities.

Officials said awareness campaigns, public rallies, checking drives and community outreach programmes were also organised in Handwara and Awantipora to encourage public participation in efforts to eliminate drug abuse and trafficking.

In Anantnag, police arrested a wanted heroin supplier identified as Imtiyaz Ahmad Dar alias Christian during checking at Chechripora bypass crossing in Dialgam and recovered a heroin-like substance from his possession.

Meanwhile, in Ganderbal, three persons travelling in a Scorpio vehicle were arrested after police recovered a heroin-like substance during checking at Dumkadal Chowk. The accused were identified as Jahangir Ahmad Jan alias Jana, Junaid Zahoore Bhat and Jahangir Ahmad Bhat. The vehicle used in the alleged offence was also seized.

In Srinagar, police demolished an alleged illegal two-storey structure built on state land in the Haka Bazar area of Lal Bazar, which officials said was linked to a wanted narcotics trafficker involved in multiple cases under the NDPS Act. The property, estimated to be worth around Rs 1.5 crore, was allegedly linked to Arshid Ahmed Sheikh. The demolition was carried out in the presence of an executive magistrate and officials of the Srinagar Municipal Corporation.

Police in Pulwama also attached a vehicle allegedly used in narcotics trafficking in connection with a case registered at Pulwama Police Station.

Officials said investigations are continuing as part of the broader campaign to dismantle narcotics networks and curb drug abuse across Jammu and Kashmir.

**"Organised....."**

another accused, Shubham Khairnar, by five days to enable investigators to probe the wider conspiracy and trace other individuals allegedly linked to the leak network.

According to the agency, Khairnar's custodial interrogation was required to identify and apprehend additional accused persons to whom the NEET-UG 2026 question paper was allegedly sold. The agency told the court that it was examining digital devices, communication records and financial transactions connected to the case.

The CBI said the investigation was focused on uncovering the source of the leaked paper and mapping the larger network involved in the circulation of confidential examination material. Investigators also informed the court that Khairnar would be taken to multiple locations, including Nasik in Maharashtra, as part of the probe.

The agency further stated that the accused needed to be questioned to identify places where examination questions were allegedly disclosed to selected candidates before the test.

Earlier on May 14, the court had remanded Mangilal Khatik, Vikas Biwal, Dinesh Biwal, Yash Yadav and Khairnar to seven days of CBI custody, observing that the allegations indicated the role of an organised network operating for monetary benefit.

Lokhande was remanded to six days of CBI custody on May 15, with the court stressing the need to uncover the entire conspiracy, recover evidence and prevent tampering with records.

The federal agency on Wednesday also sought specimen signatures of accused Manisha Mandhare and Shivraj Motegaonkar to further the investigation.

The CBI has so far arrested 10 persons in the case, including alleged kingpin Prahlad Vitalrao Kulkarni and Manisha Sanjay Waghmare, who were sent to 10 days of CBI custody on May 16.

Biology lecturer Manisha Mandhare, who was part of the National Testing Agency's paper-setting committee, was arrested the same day and later remanded to 14 days of CBI custody.

According to the CBI, Waghmare allegedly conspired with a public servant associated with the National Testing Agency and others to obtain the NEET examination paper and answer key before the examination and distribute them to several individuals for financial benefit.

Kulkarni, identified by investigators as the alleged mastermind and a subject expert, is accused of supplying confidential examination material to selected students in exchange for large sums of money.

The tenth accused arrested in the case was Shivraj Raghunath Motegaonkar, founder of the Renukai Career Centre coaching institute in Latur. The CBI alleged that he received chemistry questions and answers before the examination conducted on May 3.

The court on May 18 remanded him to nine days of CBI custody, noting that the investigation was still at an early stage.

The NEET-UG 2026 examination for admission to undergraduate medical courses was cancelled on May 5 following allegations of a paper leak. The Union Government subsequently handed over the investigation into the alleged irregularities to the CBI for a comprehensive inquiry.

**No Genuine.....**

or forest land," he said. Koul maintained that the drive was not arbitrary and was being implemented in accordance with judicial directions issued in 2020. He described the ongoing action as a structured effort to retrieve public land and prevent further illegal occupation.

"The court directions issued in 2020 are now being implemented on the ground," he said, adding that the administration was focused solely on unlawful constructions and encroachments while safeguarding the interests of legitimate residents.

The BJP leader also said the party was witnessing growing public support in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in the Kashmir region, with new members joining the organisation during recent outreach programmes.

"We welcome everyone joining the Bharatiya Janata Party. This reflects the party's growing presence in Jammu and Kashmir," he said, adding that similar outreach programmes would continue across the Valley in the coming days.

Referring to recent public appeals made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on reducing unnecessary expenditure and promoting conservation, Koul said such measures were intended for the long-term benefit of the country.

He also highlighted the Centre's welfare initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the continuation of free ration support, and said the Prime Minister's policies reflected a forward-looking approach aimed at economic stability and public welfare.

**Panchayat.....**

and verification. According to the Commission, the final electoral roll now contains 72,24,131 electors, including 36,62,502 men, 35,61,488 women and 141 third gender voters. The updated rolls reflect a net increase of 2,26,040 voters compared to the previous revision completed in January 2025, when the electorate stood at 69,98,091.

Officials said a total of 3,39,384 new voters were added during the revision process, while 1,13,344 names were removed due to death, migration, duplication and other valid reasons. In addition, corrections were made in the details of 17,664 voters and 31,590 voters were shifted within constituencies.

The Commission received more than 5.10 lakh forms during the revision period. All claims and objections filed between March 27 and May 5 were examined and disposed of by Electoral Registration Officers by May 14 before the publication of the final rolls.

To ensure wider public participation, the SEC carried out extensive voter awareness campaigns through newspapers, electronic media, radio broadcasts, public advertisements and mobile awareness drives across districts. Local authorities also conducted outreach programmes to encourage eligible citizens to register.

State Election Commissioner Shantmanu praised the coordinated efforts of election officials, district authorities, Panchayat Election Booth Officials, political representatives and the public for the successful completion of the exercise.

The Commission particularly highlighted the strong response from young voters, stating that large-scale youth participation played a significant role in the addition of new electors ahead of the forthcoming Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

**CS reviews....**

Secretary took stock of the infrastructure developed at the Industrial Biotech Park, Ghatti, Kathua, besides assessing the progress achieved on the Handwara Biotech Park project.

The Chief Secretary impressed upon the Science & Technology Department to address the governance gaps highlighted by the professionals, observing that an institutional structure in the form of a Society already exists for running these parks. He called for putting in place a professional management system for taking day-to-day operational decisions and ensuring optimum utilisation of these assets in line with the objectives envisioned for their establishment.

He further emphasised the need for clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the Science & Technology Department and CSIR-IIIM Jammu in creating a conducive ecosystem for startups, entrepreneurship and capacity building. He urged the IIIM to position the required professional manpower at these facilities in accordance with on-ground

requirements, noting that the institution possesses the expertise and capability to provide the necessary technical and scientific support.

The Chief Secretary also called for formulation of measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with defined timelines to achieve tangible outcomes and develop these parks into some of the best-performing innovation assets across the nation. He directed CITA to extend all possible assistance to the department in this endeavour.

Commissioner Secretary, Science & Technology Department, Babila Rakwal, apprised the meeting about the present status of infrastructure created at these parks. She informed that optimal utilisation and efficient functioning of these facilities would require professional management under the guidance of institutions like IIIM Jammu, supported through adequate funding from the department and convergence with relevant Government of India schemes.

During the meeting, Director, CSIR-IIIM, Dr Zabeer Ahmed, and CEO, CITA, Dr Sandeep Ananthanarayanan, gave detailed presentations regarding the present status, functionality and long-term operational strategy for the biotechnology parks at Kathua and Handwara.

The meeting was informed that the Kathua facility, spread over nearly 10 acres, has been equipped with advanced infrastructure including fermentation and enzyme production units, medicinal and aromatic plant cultivation facilities, micro-propagation laboratories, farmer and youth skill development centres and central instrumentation facilities. It was further informed that the park has already hosted several programmes and activities aimed at promoting innovation, entrepreneurship and capacity building in the biotechnology sector.

The meeting was informed that the Kathua Biotech Park presently houses a BIRAC-BioNEST Incubator established to support agri-based startups and innovation-driven enterprises in sectors such as agriculture, nutraceuticals, phytopharmaceuticals, aroma and food processing, fermentation and healthcare biotechnology. The facility has been envisioned as a major innovation hub for startups, researchers and entrepreneurs from across Jammu and Kashmir.

Director, CSIR-IIIM further informed the meeting that several initiatives including farmer-centric workshops, skill development programmes, awareness campaigns under Mission YUVA and scientific conferences on AI-driven innovations in drug discovery and agriculture have already been organised at the Kathua campus.

He further highlighted the park's significant potential in promoting medicinal and aromatic plant cultivation, essential oil processing, mushroom cultivation, herbal product development and bio-based industrial processes in the region.

Regarding the Handwara Biotech Park, the meeting was apprised that the project is progressing steadily and is being developed as another major biotechnology and innovation centre for Kashmir region.

The meeting was apprised that operationalisation of both the parks would help create a robust ecosystem for biotechnology-led industrial growth, startup incubation, employment generation and skill enhancement among youth, women and farmers.

The CEO, CITA, Dr Sandeep Ananthanarayanan, presented a comprehensive roadmap for ensuring optimum utilisation and future self-sufficiency of the biotech parks through a collaborative operational model involving government departments, scientific institutions, startups, entrepreneurs and private sector participation.

A three-bucket operationalisation strategy and collaborative framework were also discussed for ensuring sustainable functioning, professional management and long-term economic viability of these facilities.

The meeting also discussed manpower requirements, infrastructure readiness, industry linkages, startup support mechanisms and alignment of these biotech parks with the national BioE3 policy and emerging bio-economy initiatives of the Government of India.

The Chief Secretary stressed that these biotech parks should serve as engines of innovation, scientific research and market-oriented biotechnology enterprises in Jammu and Kashmir. He underlined the need for strengthening institutional collaborations and ensuring effective utilisation of the infrastructure created for generating tangible socio-economic outcomes and employment opportunities across the region.

**Govt committed.....**

facilities in rural areas at par with urban areas across Jammu and Kashmir so that the youth living in far-flung and border areas receive equal opportunities for growth and progress."

During the visit, the Deputy Chief Minister inspected various R&B works at Zehampora Uri, including construction of additional classrooms and library facilities at Government High School. He directed the concerned officers to ensure speedy completion of the projects and emphasized the need for strengthening educational infrastructure for the benefit of students.

Reviewing the ongoing developmental activities in the mining sector, the Deputy

Chief Minister inspected the Gypsum mining block at Bagna Dara Gudliyan Uri. He stressed transparency, proper regulation and strict adherence to safety and environmental norms in mining operations. He further directed the officials to submit complete details of all mining blocks so that effective measures can be taken to ensure welfare and socio-economic benefits for local communities associated with mining activities.

"Any mining operations should benefit the local population and enhance means of their livelihood first," he said.

As part of the infrastructure development initiatives, the Deputy Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for the Kushamarg PMGSY Road project at Bagna Uri.

He said that several important road projects have already been undertaken in Uri while many others are in the pipeline for the current year to ensure smooth and seamless connectivity across the border region.

He also laid the foundation stone for construction of the PMGSY Nambla-Rustom-Bilalabad road project in Uri and remarked that the project would significantly improve mobility and connectivity for residents living in border areas.

During the tour, the Deputy Chief Minister also inspected the PWD Rest House at Lagama Uri and called for its complete renovation. He directed the concerned departments to prepare plans for construction of a conference hall, development of parking facilities and landscaping of the lawn area so that the facility can serve as a better accommodation and meeting venue for official visitors and government engagements.

Later, the Deputy Chief Minister also addressed a public outreach programme at Officer's Club and listened to their issues and demands.

He assured robust development and prompt grievance redress as priority for the present government.

**Ensure quality.....**

aimed at enhancing transparency and ensuring that citizens have easy access to vital land-related information. He said that conducting digitization in a meticulous way is essential to streamline revenue-related services, adding that appropriate course of action be adopted on clerical as well as quasi-judicial reports.

He underscored the importance of comparing physical and scanned Jamabandis to check any differences, collection of grievances related to DILRMP and to ensure physical, scanned and digitised Jamabandis are similar. He impressed upon the officers to follow the due process while compiling revenue data and ensure that clear data is captured for any reference or record purpose.

Regarding Public Services Guarantee Act, Shaleen Kabra directed the officers that benefits of all revenue services that come under the ambit of the Act shall be extended to the eligible applicants in a fair, transparent and time bound manner. He laid emphasis on Fard, mutation copy, measurement/demarcation of land and other services and asked the DC to examine the data of reversions and submit an analytical report on the matter.

Reviewing the RCCMS, the FCR directed the officials that proper disposal of the revenue court cases be ensured and if necessary, the feasible ones may be transferred to the Regional Director, Survey and Land Records, Maraz.

Shaleen Kabra issued directions for streamlining land acquisition and transfer procedures and CLU cases besides expediting the expenditure on various ongoing schemes and works under Land Reforms. He further stressed on clearing pendency under section 27 of J&K LRA besides timely action on JK Samadhan, CPGRAMS and migrant grievances received through both online and offline modes.

The FCR emphasised the need of transparency and accuracy in revenue procedures to ensure reliability of land records for public convenience and efficient service delivery.

During the meeting, Deputy Commissioner delivered a detailed presentation on working of the department including administrative setup and infrastructure, digitisation of land records and Massavies, uploading of backlog mutations, SVAMITVA, status of online services, Change of Land Use, Revenue Court Cases Monitoring System, land acquisition and transfer cases, retrieval of State/Kahcharia land, expenditure under land reforms, JK Samadhan, CPGRAMS and migrant grievances and JK LRA Section 27 cases.

The DC briefed the FCR that owing to the implementation of DILRMP, Jamabandis of all 394 Revenue Villages of the district have been digitised and uploading of backlog mutations is about to be completed. Giving details, he said that 98% of total backlog mutations have been initiated, 98% verified and 97% approved on PM Gati Shakti Portal so far. He further informed that 391 out of a total of 394 Massavies (Maps), stand digitised till date.

On the occasion, the officials put forth their valuable suggestions for improving the functioning of the department in the district. They also raised certain issues pertaining to day to day working, service matters, etc before the chair.

Responding to the queries of the officials, the FCR assured them that the genuine concerns will be redressed in a time bound manner.



# Sakeena Itoo presides renaming ceremony of GHS Hapatnar as Shaheed Adil Hussain Shah Memorial GHS Hapatnar

Calls Shaheed Adil Hussain a National hero

HT NEWS NETWORK

**ANANTNAG, MAY 20:** Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo today presided the renaming ceremony of Government High School (GHS) Hapatnar as Shaheed Adil Hussain Shah Memorial High School Hapatnar.

MLA Pahalgam Altaf Ahmad Wani (Kaloo); Director Social Welfare Kashmir, Director School Education Kashmir, Director Health Services Kashmir, CMO, CEO, other senior officers of district administration, family members of Shaheed Adil Hussain and large number of locals were also present on the occasion.

Addressing a large gathering, the Minister paid rich tributes to Shaheed Adil and said that the renaming of the institution is a humble tribute to the courage, sacrifice and patriotism displayed by the martyr. She added that the sacrifice of brave son of the soil will not be forgot-



ten and Shaheed Adil will be remembered in our hearts, as this school is dedicated in his name to recognise his sacrifice.

Calling Shaheed Adil Hussain as national hero, Sakeena Itoo said that Government is committed to support the family in every possible manner.

"Everyone remembers martyr Adil Sahib. Along with Jammu and Kashmir, he has left his mark across the country. No one can ever forget the sacrifice he made," Sakeena Itoo said.

The Minister recalled that Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah

and former Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah had promised the family that the school would be renamed after the martyr, adding that the government fulfilled the promise within a year.

The Minister emphasized that educational institutions play a vital role in shaping the future of society and renaming the school after Shaheed Adil would serve as a constant source of inspiration for students and youth of the area. She urged the students to work hard with commitment, discipline and contribute posi-

tively towards nation-building and social progress. Highlighting the government's commitment towards strengthening the education sector across Jammu and Kashmir, the Minister said that several initiatives are being undertaken to improve educational infrastructure, enhance learning facilities and provide quality education to students, particularly in rural and far-flung areas.

She further said that the Omar Abdullah-led Government is focused on ensuring inclusive and equitable development across

all sectors with special attention towards education, healthcare and social welfare.

MLA Pahalgam, Altaf Ahmad Wani (Kaloo) also spoke on the occasion.

The Minister also interacted with students and teaching staff and appreciated the efforts of the school administration in promoting quality education in the region.

During the visit, the Minister also interacted with local residents and family members of Shaheed Adil Hussain, and paid rich tributes to the martyr.

The locals also raised various public issues before the Minister and sought their immediate redressal. She assured them that their genuine demands will be addressed.

On the occasion, a short movie was also played in the memory of Shaheed Adil Hussain highlighting his bravery, besides lectures were delivered, praising the boldness and his humane nature of Shaheed Adil Hussain.

## Secretary RDD&PR pushes labour-intensive works to boost MGNREGA employment generation

One Panchayat, One Playground initiative to cover all Gram Panchayats across J&K

HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:** Secretary, Rural Development Department and Panchayati Raj (RDD&PR), Mohammad Aijaz Asad, chaired a comprehensive review meeting on Wednesday to assess the progress of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), and ongoing UT Capex works for the financial year 2026-27.

The meeting reviewed the implementation of MGNREGA during FY 2026-27, including the status of estimates, person-day generation, geotagging of assets, irrigation works, pending material claims, and e-KYC of workers. Progress under the One Panchayat One Playground initiative, Yuktadhara planning, PMAY-G implementation, and ongoing UT Capex works was also discussed.

The meeting was attended by Director RDD



Kashmir Riyaz Ahmad Wani, Director RDD Jammu Shahnaz Akhtar, Additional Secretary Waseem Raja, Superintending Engineers (REW) Jammu/Kashmir, Assistant Commissioners Development (ACDs), Executive Engineers (REW), and other officers.

During the review, the Secretary directed all ACDs to place substantial emphasis on person-day generation under MGNREGA, reiterating that employment generation remains central to strengthening rural livelihoods and providing economic support to vulnerable households.

He stressed that field functionaries should expedite the execution of approved works, ensure timely opening of worksites, and facilitate demand-driven labour engagement at the grassroots level to achieve intended outcomes.

Aijaz Asad further directed both Directors of RDD to personally monitor person-day generation across all districts and ensure a significant acceleration in the pace of work execution.

The Secretary instructed officers to separately identify and prioritise desilting works and other labour-intensive activities so that labour-oriented works are taken up on priority to enhance employment generation under MGNREGA.

Reviewing the status of estimates under MGNREGA, he expressed concern over delays in technical approvals and directed district officers to expedite the process. Regarding the "One Panchayat, One Playground" initiative, officials informed that 2,402 Gram Panchayats already have playgrounds, while proposals for uncovered panchayats requiring new playgrounds have been incorporated in the Annual Action Plan (AAP) for 2026-27.

The Secretary directed that every Gram Panchayat should have at least one playground to promote sports and create recreational spaces for youth.

He asked the officers to coordinate with the Deputy Commissioners concerned to ensure availability of suitable land for development of playgrounds in Panchayats where such facilities are not available.

He also reviewed the progress of e-KYC of MGNREGA workers. It was informed that e-KYC of over 18.11 lakh workers has been completed out of 20.94 lakh registered workers across the UT.

While reviewing Yuktadhara planning, the Secretary directed districts to ensure swift conversion of planned works into active projects. The meeting noted that works from the Yuktadhara portal had been received from 79 percent of Gram Panchayats across the UT. Progress under Phase-I and Phase-II of GeoMGNREGA tagging was also assessed. Officials informed that over 6.13 lakh assets had been accepted, while around 20,535 cases remain pending for further action.

Special emphasis was laid on the desilting of irrigation khuls under MGNREGA and convergence with the Irrigation and Flood Control Department. It was reported that 805 irrigation-related works had been taken up across Kashmir division, while 89 works were under execution in Jammu division.

Reviewing PMAY-G, officials informed that out of 3.35 lakh sanctioned houses, over 3.24 lakh houses had been completed, achieving 97 percent completion across Jammu and Kashmir, with pending houses to be completed in a month.

The meeting also reviewed the progress of ongoing UT Capex works, including community development and Panchayat infrastructure projects, DDC and BDC office buildings, residential accommodations, and Panchayat Ghars.

## Dr Tasaduk selected for prestigious Chartered Scientist status

HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:** Dr. Tasaduk Hussain Itoo has been selected for the prestigious Chartered Scientist (CSci) status by the Royal Society of Biology and the Science Council, one of the highest professional recognitions for scientists in the United Kingdom.

The Chartered Scientist designation is awarded to professionals who demonstrate a high level of scientific expertise, leadership, professional integrity, and commitment to advancing science and innovation. The internationally recognized status reflects excellence in scientific practice and sustained contributions to research, education, and professional development.

According to official communication from the Royal Society of Biology, Dr Itoo will officially be added to the Chartered Scientist register in July 2026 and awarded a certificate.

The recognition is being viewed as a proud achievement for the medical and academic community of Jammu and Kashmir and an inspiration



for young healthcare professionals aspiring towards excellence in science, medicine, and research.

Dr. Itoo, a physician and public health fellow from Jammu and Kashmir, has been recognized for his contributions to medicine, scientific research, medical education, and public health. The honor further strengthens his growing international profile in healthcare and science.

A graduate in Biology from the University of Kashmir and medicine from the University of Jammu, Dr. Itoo holds several international professional distinctions and affiliations with leading global medical and scientific organizations. He continues to work towards advancing healthcare, education, and research through academic and professional engagement at national and international levels.

## River Rafting Officially Flagged Off at Yanned Rafting Point in Pahalgam

HT NEWS NETWORK

**PAHALGAM, MAY 20:** The much-awaited river rafting activity was officially flagged off today at the Yanned Rafting Point in Pahalgam by Assistant Director Tourism, Bilal Ahmad Mir, marking the commencement of the new rafting season in the scenic tourist destination.

The inauguration witnessed great enthusiasm among tourists, adventure enthusiasts, and local rafting operators, who welcomed the move and appreciated the Tourism Department for ensuring the timely start of rafting activities ahead of the peak tourist season.

Tourists expressed excitement and thrill after experiencing the adventurous rafting rides amid the breathtaking beauty of Pahalgam, stating that such adventure activities add immense charm to Kashmir tourism and provide visitors with memorable experiences.

Local rafting operators also thanked the authorities and the Tourism Department for the timely inauguration of rafting from the Yanned Rafting Point. They said the move would significantly benefit tourism stakeholders and create livelihood opportunities for many youth associated with the adventure



tourism sector.

Speaking with media persons, Assistant Director Tourism Pahalgam, Bilal Ahmad Mir, said that rafting activities were allowed only after proper inspection of all safety equip-

ment and completion of necessary safety arrangements. He added that trained and certified guides have been deployed to ensure the safety and security of tourists during rafting sessions.

## JKCCTU Delegation Visits Sando Achabal, Condoles Demise of Mohammad Abdullah Ganie

FAROOQ RATHER

**ACHABAL, MAY 20:** A delegation of the Jammu and Kashmir Casual and Contractual Workers Trade Union (JKCCTU) on Wednesday visited Sando Achabal village to express solidarity with the bereaved family of Mohammad Abdullah Ganie, who passed away recently after a brief illness.

The delegation was led by JKCCTU President Abdul Rashid Najar, along with several senior members and activists of the organisation.

During the visit, the delegation met the family members and conveyed heartfelt condolences on behalf of the entire organisation. The members prayed for eternal peace to the departed soul and



expressed sympathy with the bereaved family in this hour of grief.

Mohammad Abdullah Ganie was the brother of veteran trade union leader

and progressive political figure Late Ghulam Ahmad Ganie, who was widely respected for his lifelong struggle for the rights of workers and underprivi-

leged sections of society.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdul Rashid Najar recalled the contribution of the Ganie family towards strengthening pro-people and pro-worker movements in the area. He said the family has always remained committed to the cause of social justice and public welfare and has played a significant role in promoting progressive values in society.

"The contribution and sacrifices of the family in the struggle for workers' rights and social upliftment will always be remembered," Najar said while interacting with local residents and family members.

The JKCCTU delegation also prayed for strength and patience for the bereaved family to bear the irreparable loss.

## DC Srinagar reviews progress on construction of Migrant Transit Accommodation at Zewan; Emphasizes timely completion of project, reviews infrastructure, lift installation works

Also inspects new Tehsil Office Complex at Panthachowk

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:-** Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo today undertook a visit to Zewan area of District to oversee the progress of on-going works being executed on construction of Migrant Transit Accommodation for PM Package Employees.

He also inspected progress of works on the new Revenue Complex to house Tehsil Office Panthachowk.

During the visit, the DC was accompanied by Additional Deputy Commissioner, Aadil Fareed, IAS Probationer, Alfred Thomas, Chief Planning Officer,

Fayaz Ahmad Dar, Superintending Engineer R&B, Tatheer Manzoor, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Umar Gulzar, Executive Engineer R&B, Executive Engineer PDD, Executive Engineer PHE, Tehsildar Panthachowk and other concerned Officers.

While reviewing the status of works at the Migrant Transit Accommodation site at Zewan, the Deputy Commissioner was informed that the project comprises of 39 accommodation blocks with a total of 936 flats. Out of these, construction of 33 blocks has been completed, while finishing six



blocks are progressing steadily.

He was further apprised that allied infrastructure works including boundary wall, dormitory, security pickets, community hall, pipe culverts and interior roads has already been completed. In addition, installation of all 39 distribution transformers and related power infrastructure has been setup, while water supply to the accommodation facility has also been made functional.

On the occasion, the DC inspected the lifts installed in the accommodation blocks and was informed that 10 lifts have already been commissioned. He directed the concerned

executing agency to ensure completion of lift installation in 16 additional blocks in the shortest possible time.

The DC also instructed the R&B Department to initiate macadamization works on the approach roads and emphasized the need for close coordination among all departments and executing agencies to ensure timely completion of the project.

Later, the Deputy Commissioner visited Panthachowk to inspect the ongoing construction of the new Tehsil Office complex being executed by the R&B Department. He was informed that

nearly 90 percent of the work on the new Tehsil Office building has been completed. The complex comprises the Tehsildar's Courtroom, Naib Tehsildar Office, Establishment Section, Record Room and a Waiting area for visitors.

On the occasion, the DC directed the executing agency to further accelerate the pace of work to ensure completion of the project by the first week of June 2026 and hand over the building to the Tehsildar Panthachowk to significantly enhance delivery of revenue services to the public and provide an improved working environment for the staff.

## CME on World Hypertension Day held at SKIMS Medical College Srinagar

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:** Department of General Medicine, SKIMS Medical College Srinagar today organized a Continuing Medical Education (CME) programme in the College Auditorium to mark World Hypertension Day, observed globally on May 17. The CME programme was attended by Principal, SKIMS Medical College, Prof. Dr. Fazal Qadir Parry, Heads of various departments, senior and junior faculty members, Medical Superintendent, residents, nursing staff and students.

Addressing the gathering, the Principal appreciated the Department of General Medicine for organizing the programme on a significant public health issue. He described hypertension as a "silent killer" and stressed the importance of timely diagnosis and proper management to prevent complications.



Head, Department of General Medicine, Prof. Dr. Tariq Bhat, in his welcome address, highlighted the importance of conducting such academic activities and emphasized the clinical relevance of the topics discussed during the CME.

During the scientific sessions, Senior Resident Dr. Khalid Bin Mushtaq delivered a presentation on "Preoperative Management of Hypertension," while senior faculty member Dr. Naik Muzafar, who is also a co-author of the Indian Hypertension Society Guidelines for Home Blood Pressure Monitoring, spoke on "Home Blood Pressure Monitoring (HBPM)."

The scientific sessions were chaired by senior faculty members including Prof. Basharat, Prof. Shams Bari, Prof. Javed Malik, Prof. Tariq and Dr. Manzoor. A key highlight of the programme was the on-site hypertension screening of faculty members using automated blood pressure monitoring apparatus.

The CME concluded with an interactive discussion focusing on early detection of hypertension, lifestyle modification and adherence to evidence-based guidelines for effective blood pressure control.

## DC Budgam reviews Youth Engagement, Empowerment Plan

Directs coordinated efforts to channelize Youth Potential, Calls for "One Child, One Sport" initiative

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**BUDGAM, MAY 20:** Deputy Commissioner (DC) Budgam, Athar Aamir Khan today chaired a comprehensive review meeting regarding the Youth Engagement and Empowerment Plan at the Conference Hall of DC Office Budgam.

The Senior Superintendent of Police Budgam, Hari Prasad KK was also present on the occasion. Besides, ADC Budgam, CPO Budgam, all SDMs, Deputy Director Employment & Counselling Centre, District Information Officer, Assistant Labour Commissioner, District Youth Services & Sports Officer, Principal ITI Budgam, Functional Manager DIC and other concerned officers were present in the meeting.

During the meeting, the DC held detailed discussions on various initiatives aimed at youth engagement, skill devel-

opment, employment generation, sports promotion and awareness programmes across the district.

The DC stressed upon all departments to work in close coordination for effective implementation of youth-oriented programmes and schemes at the grassroots level. He emphasized the need to create meaningful opportunities for youth through education, skill development, sports and entrepreneurship initiatives.

The DC directed officers to intensify awareness campaigns among youth regarding various government schemes and ensure wider outreach in all blocks of the district.

He also called for organizing career counselling programmes, sports activities, motivational sessions and awareness drives to positively engage the youth.

The DC directed the Education Department and Youth Services



& Sports Department to jointly prepare a comprehensive plan for large-scale engagement of youth in sports activities across the district.

He emphasized that every child should be encouraged to adopt at least one sport for their

physical, mental and overall development.

The DC instructed the Education Department Budgam to formulate a structured plan under which "One Child, One Sport" could be promoted so that children across the district ac-

tively participate in sports and recreational activities.

The DC further directed concerned officers to ensure that specially-abled children are also meaningfully involved and encouraged in sports and other youth engagement programmes through inclusive planning and supportive initiatives.

He also instructed the concerned departments to identify talented and unemployed youth and facilitate their linkage with skill development programmes and self-employment opportunities.

The DC emphasized the importance of constructive youth engagement for the overall social and economic development of the district. He called for coordinated and sustained efforts from all departments towards successful implementation of the Youth Engagement and Empowerment Plan in the district.

## Mission Shakti Budgam organises Cyber Safety Awareness Programme at GDC Budgam

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**BUDGAM, MAY 20:** SANKALP Hub for Empowerment of Women (HEW), Mission Shakti Budgam, under the aegis of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), organised an awareness programme on cyber safety in collaboration with the Cyber Police Station Budgam at Government Degree College (GDC) Budgam.

The programme was conducted under the supervision of Bilal Ahmad Mir, District Social Welfare Officer Budgam. The awareness session aimed to educate students about cybercrime, online frauds, digital security, safe use of social media and preventive measures to ensure online safety. The programme witnessed enthusiastic participation from students and faculty members of the college.

During the event, Afroza Ahad, District Mission Coordinator, Mission Shakti Budgam, highlighted the objectives and initiatives of Mission



Shakti and stressed the importance of awareness among youth regarding the safe and responsible use of digital platforms.

PW (ASI) Humayoon Kabir from Cyber Police Station Budgam delivered an informative session on emerging cyber threats, cyber bullying, online scams, phishing attacks and methods to safeguard personal information while using the internet

and social media applications.

SI Suvaidd Bashir Wani from DTT DPL Budgam also addressed the participants and sensitised students about cyber laws, digital ethics, online safety practices and the importance of remaining vigilant against fraudulent online activities. He encouraged students to promptly report suspicious cyber incidents and use digital platforms responsibly.

## DLSA Ganderbal holds review meeting on Legal Services Activities

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**GANDERBAL, MAY 20:** District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Ganderbal today held a review meeting, in pursuance to the Plan of Activities for the month of May, 2026 issued by the J&K Legal Services Authority, with an aim to assess and strengthen the functioning and effectiveness of legal services activities in the district.

The meeting was chaired by the Secretary, DLSA Ganderbal and attended by officials, Legal Aid Defence Counsel System (LADCS), Para Legal Volunteers PLVs of DLSA Ganderbal/TLSC Gan-



derbal and TLSC Kangan.

During the meeting, detailed deliberations were held regarding the functioning and effectiveness of legal services programmes and activities being carried out in the district.

Emphasis was laid on improving coordination among PLVs, TLSCs and other functionaries for streamlining legal aid services and ensuring better outreach to the eligible beneficiaries.

The performance and progress of the Legal Aid Defence Counsel System (LADCS) was also reviewed. Various challenges faced during implementation of legal aid activities were discussed and suitable measures for improvement were deliberated upon.

The Secretary, DLSA Ganderbal stressed upon all stakeholders to work with dedication and coordination to ensure effective delivery of legal aid services and to strengthen access to justice for all across sections of society.

## One-Day Orientation cum Training Programme for PLVs of DLSA Srinagar, Budgam concludes

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:** In compliance with the directions of the J&K Legal Services Authority, the District Legal Services Authority Budgam, in collaboration with the District Legal Services Authority Srinagar, organized a one-day Orientation cum Training Programme for Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) of DLSA Srinagar and Budgam at the ADR Centre, DLSA Srinagar.

The programme was conducted under the guidance of Haq Nawaz Zargar, Principal District & Sessions Judge, (Chairman DLSA) Srinagar; O.P. Baghat, Principal District

& Sessions Judge, (Chairman DLSA) Budgam and under the supervision of Tabassum Qadir Parry, Secretary DLSA Srinagar/Budgam.

The initiative aimed at strengthening the role and functioning of Para Legal Volunteers at the grassroots level and enhancing their capacity in delivering legal aid and awareness services effectively.

Chairman DLSA Srinagar, while addressing the participants, emphasized the vital role played by PLVs in ensuring access to justice for all sections of society, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable.

Chairman DLSA Budgam,

joined the inaugural session virtually. In his keynote address, he directed the newly empanelled PLVs to work with dedication and stand for the constitutional values.

The welcome address was delivered by the Secretary DLSA Srinagar/Budgam.

During the technical sessions, distinguished speakers deliberated extensively on various important legal and social issues. Lateef Ahmad Khan, Chief LADC Budgam spoke on the role of Para Legal Volunteers in spreading legal awareness and facilitating access to justice for marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Similarly, Faheem, System

Officer elaborated on recent developments in the Legal Services Delivery System and the use of technology for efficient functioning of DLSAs. He demonstrated practically step by step operations of e-court services.

Advocate Suhaila Ali, Panel Lawyer highlighted the importance of professional and sensitive interaction with litigants, beneficiaries, and government departments.

Likewise, Nisar Ahmad Mir, PLV DLSA Budgam discussed the implementation of various NALSA schemes and outreach programmes at village and community levels.

Advocate Mir Naveed Gul delivered an insightful session on family laws, including marriage, maintenance, custody, guardianship, judicial separation, divorce, and inheritance matters. Minhaj, Assistant LADC Srinagar addressed criminal laws relating to bail, arrest, and the rights of prisoners.

The programme concluded with an interactive session involving active participation from the attendees. The participants appreciated the informative sessions and reaffirmed their commitment to serving society through legal awareness and assistance at the grassroots.

## Advisor to Chief Minister reviews New Assembly Complex construction, inspects dev works in Jammu

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MAY 20:** Advisor to Chief Minister, Nasir Aslam Wani, today conducted a comprehensive on-site review of the New Legislative Complex at Jammu besides inspecting the development works in the region.

The visit was aimed to inspect the ongoing construction work and ensure that all state-of-the-art infrastructural amenities aligned with global standards for Legislative efficiency are being adhered to by the executing agency.

The Executive Engineer PWD(R&B) Project Division-II presented the overview of the project, floor-wise facilities being constructed, details of enhanced seating capacity of Assembly Hall, construction of central hall, external finishing etc.

During the visit, the Advisor toured the central assembly hall, review the administrative chambers and the surrounding public utility spaces.

Emphasizing the government's commitment towards reinforcing democratic infrastructure in the Union Territory, the Advisor directed the executing agency to expedite the remaining finishing works and complete the project well within the specified time limit. He underscored that timely completion of the modern complex is vital for the smooth functioning of future democratic proceedings and convenience of public representatives.

"Robust infrastructure is the backbone of effective governance. This new complex is not



merely a building; it is a symbol of democratic ethos and must be completed promptly with uncompromising quality," said the Advisor during the inspection.

Nasir Aslam interacted with the senior engineers of PWD(R&B) Jammu and Mechanical Engineering Department, taking detailed stock of the structural and technical specifications of the project. He instructed the authorities to ensure seamless integration of advanced IT infrastructure, modern acoustics and enhanced security systems within the premises including e-Vidhan.

The upcoming New Legislative Complex is designed to provide a highly accessible, eco-friendly and technologically advanced environment for the lawmakers with facilities like e-Vidhan. With the expedited timeline, the administration aims to facilitate an enhanced working environment for the region's representatives.

The Advisor was accompanied by senior officials from the civil administration. Later, Nasir Aslam inspected various ongoing developmental works in Jammu along with Chief Engineer PWD (R&B), Jammu, Rajesh Augustam, Superintendent Engineer, Chief Medical Officer Jammu and other senior officers.

During the visit, the Advisor reviewed the permanent restoration work of the approach road to the 4th Tawi Bridge, Jammu. The senior officers informed that the project has been allotted at an estimated cost of 14.59 crore with a stipulated completion period of 12 months. The restoration work is aimed at improving the connectivity and ensuring smooth traffic movement in the area.

Nasir Aslam also inspected repair and renovation works being carried out at Yatri Niwas Bhagwati Nagar in view of the upcoming Shri Amarnath Yatra. The project included construction of temporary sheds and hangars for Yatris and langars besides laying of bitumen in

parking areas and internal roads. The works are being executed at an estimated cost of 1.59 crore with a completion period of one and a half months. The Advisor also inspected another major project envisaging construction of a 105-meter span prestressed RCC bridge over Balole Nalla at Gadi Garh. The Advisor was informed that the bridge work has been completed at an estimated cost of 7.2 crore within 24 months.

During the inspection, the Chief Engineer PWD (R&B), Jammu briefed the Advisor about the ongoing preparations and infrastructure works related to the Shri Amarnath Yatra, particularly the arrangements being undertaken by the PWD (R&B) Division Satwari.

While inspecting the arrangements at Yatri Niwas, Bhagwati Nagar base camp of Amarnath Yatra, the Advisor also visited the PHC there to assess the arrangements and preparedness for the forthcoming Shri Amarnath Yatra. He enquired about the healthcare facilities being provided to the Yatris at the Centre.

Chief Medical Officer, Jammu, Dr. Harbaksh Singh, briefed the Advisor regarding the necessary arrangements being put in place at the PHC for upcoming Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra.

## DC Reasi reviews proposed Annual Plan 2026-27 at District Steering Committee meeting

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**REASI, MAY 20:** Deputy Commissioner Reasi Kumar Abhishek today chaired a meeting of the District Steering Committee for the Green India Mission to review the proposed Annual Plan of



Operation for 2026-27.

The meeting focused on the implementation of the Green India Mission in the Mahore Forest Division, aimed at ecological restoration, enhancement of forest cover and improvement of ecosystem services. The meeting discussed the objectives and proposed activities aimed at ecological restoration, enhancement of forest cover and conservation of natural resources in the division. The meeting was informed about the proposed Annual Plan of Operation for the new financial year covering treatment and restoration works across identified forest areas. The Deputy Commissioner also reviewed activity-wise proposals submitted by Village Forest Committees of Manjikote, Sar, Malla Bathoie and Angralla villages under various sub-missions of the Green India Mission.

Reviewing proposals under Sub Mission-1, discussions centered on enhancement of forest quality and ecosystem services through eco-restoration of degraded forests, restoration of grasslands and maintenance activities. The proposals under Sub Mission-2, mostly related to restoration of scrublands and increasing forest cover, were also reviewed.

Among others the meeting was attended by Divisional Forest Officer Reasi, Divisional Forest Officer Mahore, District Tribal Welfare Officer and other concerned officers.

## Speaker JKLA inaugurates bridge at Chowdrigund, Chadoora

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**BUDGAM, MAY 20:** Marking a significant milestone for the regional infrastructure, Speaker Legislative Assembly, Abdul Rahim Rather, today officially inaugurated a newly constructed double lane 25-meter bridge with total width of 11.70 meter at Chowdrigund on Nallah Apzari, Chadoora. The bridge, constructed with an estimated cost of 474.65 lakh, is set to drastically improve the local connectivity, ease commutes and stimulate economic activity in the region. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, the Speaker emphasized that establishing a robust connectivity network is the cornerstone of sustainable growth. He reiterated the government's steadfast commitment to transform the regional landscape through strategic infrastructure projects. "Connectivity is absolutely crucial for holistic development of our region," Speaker Rather stated. "A bridge does more than connect two pieces of land; it links people to markets, healthcare, education and better opportunities. Our government is dedicated to ensure equitable development of all areas, ensuring that no region or community is left behind," he added.

The newly inaugurated double lane bridge addresses a long-standing demand of the local residents, promising to reduce travel time and provide all-weather access to essential services. During the event, Rather assured the public that the government would continue to prioritize under-developed pockets, focusing on balanced progress, fair resource allocation and the timely completion of vital public welfare projects.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by SE R&B Erim Lone along with senior officials from R&B and PMGSY besides local dignitaries, and members of the community, who welcomed the development as a major step forward for the area.

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**ANANTNAG, MAY 20:** Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Jal Shakti, Shaleen Kabra today visited Anantnag and chaired a comprehensive review meeting with the concerned officers at the DC Office to assess the progress of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and irrigation schemes in the district besides taking stock of the Jal Shakti Department's preparedness for the ensuing Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra-2026.

Deputy Commissioner, Dr. Bilal Mohiuddin Bhat, MD JJM, Director Planning, JSD, Chief Engineer, PHE/I&FC, Conservator of Forests South, ADC, CPO, Technical Officers, SE Hydraulics, Executive Engineers and Senior Officers of various engineering wings, DFOs, DMOs and other officers attended the meeting.

During the meeting, DC delivered a detailed presentation regarding the status of Water Supply Schemes under Jal Jeevan Mission in the district.

It was informed that against a total of 1,32,915 rural house-

## Shaleen Kabra reviews progress of JJM in Anantnag

Takes stock of Jal Shakti Department preparedness for SANJY-2026

holds in the district, Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTCs) have been provided to 1,23,516 households, achieving coverage of around 92.93 percent under the mission.

The meeting was informed that a total of 369 schemes comprising 573 works are being executed, out of which 380 works and 250 schemes have been completed so far. Component-wise progress regarding pipe networks, RSFPs, OHTs and dug wells was also provided to the chair.

ACS also reviewed sector-wise Capex and Revex works proposed under SANJY 2026 in Jal Shakti sector and stressed upon timely allotment, execution and completion of works. Special focus was laid on the arrangements being made for Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra along the Pahalgam axis.

The officers briefed the ACS regarding infrastructure created and proposed enroute the Holy Cave, including provision of toilets, baths, PSPs, water supply infrastructure, service reservoirs, filtration plants and pipe networks at various locations



including Nunwan, Chandanwari, Panchtarni, Pissu Top, Zojibal, Sheshnag and Reviewing the irrigation sec-

tor, the meeting discussed various bottlenecks affecting irrigation facilities in the district including siltation of canals, illegal mining, encroachments, pollution of water channels and tail-end deficits.

The officers also apprised the chair about interventions being undertaken for restoration and strengthening of irrigation infrastructure, including desilting works, repair of canals, maintenance of lift irrigation schemes and NABARD-supported projects.

Shaleen Kabra emphasized timely completion of all ongoing works, maintenance of quality standards and optimum utilization of resources.

He directed the concerned officers to strengthen monitoring mechanisms and ensure efficient implementation of schemes for the benefit of the public.

Appreciating the efforts of engineers and field functionaries, the ACS reiterated the department's commitment towards ensuring safe drinking water supply and improved irrigation facilities across the district.

## Ramban administration organises mega padyatra at Banihal; Commissioner Secretary leads events

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**RAMBAN, MAY 20:** Continuing the ongoing Nasha Mukta Jammu and Kashmir Abhiyan, the district administration Ramban today organised a mega awareness padyatra and awareness programme at Banihal to intensify the campaign against the drug abuse and spread awareness among the youth and general public regarding the harmful effects of narcotics.

The programme was presided over by Commissioner Secretary Science and Technology, Babila Rakwal, who is also the Mentor Secretary for implementation of the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan in Ramban. The event witnessed enthusiastic

participation from students, youth, civil society members, teachers, officials and local residents from all walks of life.

Deputy Commissioner Ramban Mohammad Alyas Khan, SSP Ramban Arun Gupta, ADC Ramban Varunjeet Singh Charak, SDM Banihal Mohammad Naseeb Bajraan, SDM Ramsoo Syed Mazahir Hussain Shah and other district officers were present on the occasion.

During the event held at the Government Model Higher Secondary School Boys Banihal the Commissioner Secretary administered Nasha Mukta pledge to the participants. He also inaugurated a Volleyball Match organised as part of the campaign

to promote sports and a healthy lifestyle among youth as an alternative to drug addiction. Meanwhile, the Commissioner Secretary flagged off a Bike Rally and Mega Padyatra from Government Model Higher Secondary School Boys Banihal, spreading the message against drug abuse.

The rally passed through the main market and culminated at Dak Bungalow Banihal. Addressing the gathering, Babila Rakwal said that the fight against drug abuse is a collective responsibility of society, administration, educational institutions and parents. She appreciated the active participation of students and highlighted that the district's

children are highly talented and such awareness activities provide them a constructive platform to showcase their abilities and spread social awareness.

The Commissioner Secretary stressed that cultural activities, plays, songs and presentations are effective tools to create awareness among people, especially youth. She said that the campaign aims not only to identify the problem of drug addiction but also to ensure treatment, counselling and rehabilitation of affected individuals.

She reiterated that the fight against drugs is a continuous process and sustained collective efforts are necessary to eliminate this social evil. UNI

## IASOWA conducts donation drive at Government Middle School, Dodhi Gujjar Colony

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**JAMMU, MAY 20:** IAS Officer Wives Association (IASOWA) organized a meaningful donation drive at Government Middle School, Dodhi Gujjar Colony, Jammu, with the objective of supporting the students and improving the educational environment for the children in the area. During the drive, several useful items, including sitting tables, floor mats, shoes, notebooks, stationery items and refreshments, were distributed among the students. In addition to the donated items, important developmental works in the school have also been undertaken with support from the government schemes. These included water-proofing and other infrastructure-related improvements, helping create a safer and more comfortable environment for the students.

The programme was conducted under the leadership of Monika Dulloo, wife of Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo.

Members present on the occasion included CA Geetanjali Singla, wife of Dr. Piyush Singla, Rekha Jain, wife of Parmod Jain, Neeru Goswami, wife of Anil Goswami and Kavaljeet Kaur, wife of Harvinder Singh.

Chief Education Officer Jammu, Ajeet Sharma, expressed his gratitude to the IASOWA members for their valuable support in strengthening the education system for the underprivileged children. He hoped that at least one High School and one Higher Secondary School from Jammu city would be mentored by the organization in the future.

The members interacted with the students and school staff and appreciated the enthusiasm and spirit of the children.

**HT EDITORIAL**

**Fill vacant positions of BDOs in Rural Development Department**

Ever since Narendra Modi has become the Prime Minister of the country the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj department has assumed significance across the country. The Government of India has launched several schemes for the rural people with the Rural Development Department (RDD) being the nodal agency in this regard. Huge volume of funds is being pumped through these schemes with the sole aim being that the people living in the countryside are entitled to all the benefits.

Given the fact that this department has assumed importance as well as significance it is imperative that all the things are in the proper place. Proper manpower is in place in the department and the vacant positions are filled at the earliest without any delay. In the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir scores of posts of Block Development Officers (BDOs) are vacant. This has resulted in a situation wherein policy matters are not being discussed in these blocks.

Important decisions related to the development of vacant blocks are not being taken since the concerned BDO is not in chair. One BDO is holding the charge of two or three blocks and as such the development of these blocks is badly hit. It is imperative that the concerned department takes steps to fill the vacant positions of BDOs across the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir. Steps should be taken to promote the personnel so that they assume the role of a BDO and at the same time direct appointment of BDOs by placing JKAS officers should also be done.

Once each and every block has its own BDO then the development in these blocks would get a real meaning. There would be an all-round development with the common masses being the ultimate beneficiaries at the end of the day. Since multiple schemes are being run by the department it is important that people are entitled to all the privileges. The same is possible only when the concerned BDO is at the place and ready to take all the decisions related to the particular block.

The visionary leaders of the country have always dreamt of an India where each and every soul irrespective of his or her status in the society is entitled to all the benefits and privileges. Since India lives in villages it is essential that the residents of the villages are involved in the decision making process. Same is possible only when the concerned BDOs involve them in matters of all round development.

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■ **RAYAZ MALIK BUDHALWI**

After the enactment of NMC Act 2019, the NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) Exam is conducted annually by NTA (National Testing Agency), an organization under the aegis of Ministry of Education, Government of India. NEET is conducted specifically for admission of candidates to medical courses in Undergraduate and Postgraduate level. They include MBBS, BUMS, BAMS, BHMS, BDS and other PG / Specialization Courses in all the medical colleges in India including AIIMS Delhi and Jawaharlal Institute of Post-graduate Medical Education & Research (JIPMER).

It is pertinent to mention that the aspiring candidates of NEET Exam visit various coaching centers and academies located there in different cities in the country for their stay. They include NCT of Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Kolkatta and many other metropolitan cities. The candidates alongwith their relatives, siblings and sometimes families move to these cities to get the coaching for NEET. They search for their residences and rent in the flats for a couple of years for their studies and get the coaching. They spend money in lakhs on online and offline coaching and other expenses on boarding, lodging and renting. They withstand and bear the harsh climate including intense heat of summer and chilling cold of winter and manage the hard-earned money of their parents for their expenses. All these hardships are born by them to see the day of night in order to qualify the NEET exam to become a doctor.

But juxtaposing the dilemma of this year, it is to say that the NEET Exam was conducted in pen and paper mode across all the centers in the country in May 2026. The candidates had to travel long distances to reach their centers and appear in the exam. Alongwith their parents and guardians they had to reach atleast one day prior to the date of conduct of test to the Centre and stay in hotels. A huge expense on travel to and fro the Centre and back and on food and lodging was incurred by them in order to appear in the exam. Despite the hot and humid climate, they faced a lot of problems. Some downtrodden families had to manage the money for these expenses by running from pillar to post. If not in lacs of rupees but they incurred in thousands which is very burdensome for the poor and needy families to manage in this



sky rocketing price era.

But all the expectations after facing these troubles by them including the families of hard-working candidates were dashed to ground when they learnt that the paper was already leaked. Those who had burnt their midnight oil for the studies and preparation for the said test became anxious as they had used their own mind and written the paper with their own gained knowledge. But those candidates who had managed to buy the paper after its leakage from the given source were much more contented and satisfied. They had already received the paper in advance and prepared accordingly those questions only which were expected in the paper.

One group who was dependent upon the own study and reading was shocked and other one which was the part of this conspiracy was joyful and expecting good marks in the test to be selected for Medical Courses.

But in one or other way, it came to the notice of authorities and police and other investigating agencies. Accordingly, the paper was cancelled by NTA in consultation with the Government of India. The investigation has been started and few culprits behind this crime have been arrested and after being interrogated by the agencies to explore the possibility of more accomplices involved in the paper leakage.

In view of this, following measures can be taken in order to prevent from such malpractices either by private or public individuals in future:

The acronym NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) does not specify any medical association for which it is explicitly conducted. It

can relate to any general entrance test but not the medical. It must include a letter which can relate to the medical science. Like MEET (Medical Eligibility cum Entrance Test) or any other such acronym or term can be used so as it suits the nomenclature for entrance test.

Since NTA conducts more or less dozen entrance tests of different disciplines the individual States / UTs Governments may be authorized to conduct the same. It will help the States more exercise of control on the conduct of test and all allied activities at local and regional level. If not, the central AIIMS Delhi may be entrusted with the job as they have conducted in past as well. Strict pre and post arrangements of security, safety and storage of such material and infrastructure for the paper may be put in place by the conducting agency.

CCTVs and all other means may be used to monitor the activities from the start of activities of printing paper till the declaration of final results.

Surprise visits by the Observers / Officers of other departments alongwith Police and Flying squad may be paid in all the centers during the day of its conduct.

Instead of Paper and pen mode / OMR based examinations, CBT (online / instant mode) of exam may be put in place from the next year as affirmed by the Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Since the scammers have put the future of lakhs of candidates at stake strict and deterrent punishment be given to them. They must be taught a lesson to avoid such activities in future.

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**Learning needs an environment**



■ **SAHIL MANZOOR BHATTI**

Libraries play a vital role in shaping the intellectual, moral, and professional growth of society. In today's fast-changing world, knowledge has become the strongest tool for personal development and national progress. To meet the growing educational demands, it is essential that all ten districts and tehsils of the Kashmir Valley have full fledged public libraries that function 24\*7, especially for aspirants preparing for competitive examinations. Such libraries should be equipped with modern books, digital resources, electronic gadgets, printing facilities, and expert librarians. A well developed public library system can become a strong foundation for learning, innovation, and success.

Nowadays, public libraries have become a pressing demand among students and aspirants. Many young people openly discuss the urgent need for such facilities. Libraries can serve as a common knowledge hub where students from different backgrounds gather under one roof with a shared purpose to learn and to achieve their goals. In a world where education is recognized as the key to empowerment, it is impossible to ignore the importance of libraries.

Today's world is full of advanced and incredible technologies. From artificial intelligence to digital learning platforms, technology has transformed how we gain knowledge. Giant machines, smart devices, and innovative tools surround us everywhere. The question arises: why

should education lag behind when every other sector is progressing rapidly? The reason for discussing these technological advancements here is clear education must move alongside modern innovations. From an educated person to an illiterate one, everyone now understands the value of education. As rightly said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which can change the world." Education never discriminates; it empowers everyone equally.

When we understand the demands of the present time, why should we hesitate to implement meaningful changes? Why should genuine demands like public libraries not be placed before higher authorities? Education plays a pivotal role not only in an individual's personal life but also in the overall development of a nation. Across the world, education is highly appreciated, and it has produced eminent scientists, doctors, engineers, and innovators. Every day, new discoveries and inventions take place, contributing to human welfare. All of this is possible because of strong educational foundations, where libraries act as silent contributors.

Public libraries are especially essential for youth preparing for competitive examinations such as civil services, banking, defense, and other national-level tests. Most aspirants face numerous challenges, including lack of study space, limited access to books, poor internet connectivity, and an unhealthy study environment at home. A well equipped library can solve many of these problems by providing a peaceful atmosphere, updated study material, and access to digital resources.

In the Kashmir Valley, the education sector has always played a crucial role in identifying and nurturing talent across all age groups. Educational institutions provide a platform where students can share ideas related to social, economic, educational, environmental, moral,

ethical, health, and technological issues. Such interaction helps in developing critical thinking and broad perspectives. Unfortunately, since 1989, the valley has been passing through difficult and uncertain circumstances due to ongoing tensions. These challenges have directly or indirectly affected the education sector.

Whenever uncertainty arises, educational institutions are often the first to face closures. Orders from state, district, or tehsil-level administrations frequently disrupt academic activities. As a result, students suffer academically and mentally. In such situations, public libraries can act as alternative learning spaces. Even if schools and colleges are closed, libraries can continue to function and ensure continuity in education.

Another major concern is that a large portion of the population in the Kashmir Valley lives in villages and small hamlets where basic facilities are still inadequate. While it is fortunate that the government provides the fundamental right to education, implementation remains challenging. The Right to Education Act, introduced through the 86th Constitutional Amendment in 2002, inserted Article 21-A, which guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged six to fourteen years. However, providing education under uncertain conditions and without proper infrastructure remains a serious challenge.

In the present era, we often talk about education, knowledge, moral values, and personality development, but we ignore essential support systems like libraries. Without proper facilities, it becomes difficult to achieve educational goals. Education does not only mean classroom teaching; it requires access to books, research materials, and a healthy learning environment.

Due to the lack of facilities, many

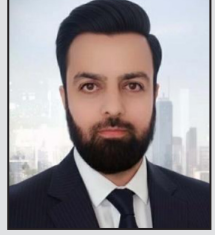
students from Kashmir prefer to move outside the state for competitive exam preparation. Delhi has emerged as a major hub for aspirants. Students leave their homeland and face numerous hardships related to accommodation, finances, and emotional well-being. The question is: why are they forced to leave? The answer is simple better facilities, cooperative administration, and a supportive environment.

If similar facilities were available within the state, students would not need to migrate. The government and society must work together to encourage local talent. Providing well-established libraries at district and tehsil levels would greatly reduce the burden on aspirants. These libraries should offer uninterrupted electricity, high-speed internet, updated books, newspapers, journals, online databases, and guidance from trained librarians.

A public library is not just a building filled with books; it is a center of enlightenment. It promotes self-study, discipline, and intellectual curiosity. It also encourages inclusivity, as students from different economic backgrounds can access the same resources. In this way, libraries contribute to social equality and national integration. In conclusion, libraries are a comprehensive way to learn, grow, and achieve life goals. For the youth of Kashmir, especially competitive exam aspirants, public libraries can become a ray of hope. Establishing 24\*7 libraries in every district and tehsil is not a luxury but a necessity. Such an initiative will strengthen the education system, empower youth, reduce migration, and contribute to nation-building. It is time for policymakers to recognize this need and take concrete steps toward building a knowledgeable and progressive society.

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■ **MOHAMMAD HANIEF**

# The growing isolation of elderly Parents

At a time when the world is witnessing rapid technological advancement, economic competition, social unrest, and changing lifestyles, one silent crisis is steadily emerging within families and societies across the globe — the neglect of elderly parents. Despite modern comforts and material progress, millions of senior citizens today are living in loneliness, emotional pain, insecurity, and neglect. This painful reality is no longer limited to distant societies or developed nations alone; it is increasingly becoming visible within our own communities, including Jammu and Kashmir, where respect for elders and strong family bonds have historically formed the foundation of social life.

The care of elderly parents is not merely a personal obligation or cultural tradition. It is a moral duty, a spiritual responsibility, and one of the truest measures of humanity. The way a society treats its elderly reflects the strength of its values, compassion, and moral conscience. Parents dedicate their entire lives to raising their children, sacrificing their comfort, ambitions, and happiness so the next generation can live with dignity and opportunity. Tragically, many parents today find themselves emotionally abandoned at the stage of life when they need support and companionship the most.

Traditionally, Kashmiri society was deeply rooted in collective living, mutual respect, and intergenerational harmony. Joint family systems ensured that elderly parents remained emotionally secure, socially respected, and actively involved in family affairs. Elders were regarded as the emotional and spiritual backbone of the household — a source of wisdom, guidance, experience, and blessings. Their advice was valued in important family decisions, and their presence brought stability, warmth, and unity to the home.

Children grew up under the affectionate care and supervision of grandparents and elderly family members, learning lessons of patience, discipline, compassion, and humanity. Caring for aging parents was never considered a burden; rather, it was viewed as an honor and a natural responsibility.

However, the social fabric of modern society has changed significantly over the years. The rise of nuclear families, migration for education and employment, increasing financial pressures, and the growing influence of materialistic lifestyles have weakened traditional family structures. Young people increasingly move to distant cities or foreign countries in search of opportunities, leaving their aging parents behind in villages, towns, and urban homes where silence and loneliness often replace companionship.

In Jammu and Kashmir, this issue carries even deeper emotional significance because the elderly generation has already spent decades enduring difficult social, political, and economic circumstances. Many aging parents in the region lived through years of uncertainty, emotional stress, conflict, and financial hardship. Despite these challenges, they struggled tirelessly to educate their children, support their families, and secure a better future for the next generation.

Today, many of these same parents are spending their old age in emotional isolation.

Some wait endlessly for a phone call or visit from their children. Others silently suppress their pain because they do not wish to become a burden on their families. Their suffering often remains hidden behind patience, prayers, and quiet endurance. Many elderly people continue to live with dignity despite carrying deep emotional wounds caused by neglect and loneliness.

One of the greatest tragedies of the modern age is that material success has increasingly replaced emotional responsibility. Children may provide financial support, medicines, or comfortable living arrangements, yet fail to provide what elderly parents truly need most — emotional presence, compassion, respect, and genuine human connection.

Old age is not merely a period of physical weakness; it is also a deeply sensitive emotional phase of life. As parents grow older, they become more vulnerable to loneliness, anxiety, fear, and emotional insecurity. They seek affection, companionship, reassurance, and the comforting feeling that they still matter within the family they once sacrificed everything for.

A few moments of sincere conversation, sitting beside them during meals, listening patiently to their stories, asking about their health, or involving them in family discussions can provide immense emotional comfort. Such gestures may appear small, yet for elderly parents they hold enormous emotional value. Emotional care cannot be replaced by money or expensive gifts; it requires time, patience, affection, and genuine concern.

The changing global situation further highlights the importance of family bonds and elder care. Across the world, societies are facing increasing mental health crises, loneliness, social fragmentation, and the collapse of traditional family systems. In many countries, elderly people spend their final years in care homes, separated from children and grandchildren. Economic progress has often failed to provide emotional peace and stable family relationships.

These realities should serve as a warning for societies like ours. When family values weaken, society itself begins to weaken from within.

In Jammu and Kashmir, where religion and culture strongly emphasize respect and compassion towards parents, neglecting elderly parents represents not only a social problem but also a moral and spiritual crisis. Islamic teachings repeatedly stress kindness, humility, and patience towards parents, especially during their old age. Serving one's parents is regarded among the greatest acts of virtue and a source of blessings in both this world and the hereafter. The prayers of parents hold immense value, and their satisfaction is considered a path toward divine mercy.

Unfortunately, modern lifestyles, social competition, and digital distractions have created emotional distance even among family members living under the same roof. Today, many people spend hours on mobile phones and social media while ignoring the emotional needs of elderly parents sitting quietly beside them. This silent neglect leaves deep psychological scars. Many elderly individuals suffer from depression, loneliness, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness, yet rarely express their pain openly.

Healthcare challenges further intensify the hardships of old age. Aging naturally brings physical complications such as arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, hearing problems, vision loss, and reduced mobility. In Jammu and Kashmir, harsh winters, difficult terrain, limited healthcare facilities in remote areas, and rising medical expenses make life even more difficult for senior citizens.

Therefore, caring for elderly parents requires far more than occasional financial support. It demands continuous emotional involvement, compassion, patience, and responsibility. Children must ensure proper healthcare, nutritious food, emotional companionship,

safe living conditions, and above all, dignity and respect for their parents.

Elderly parents do not seek luxury or sympathy. Most simply desire love, attention, inclusion, and reassurance that they are not forgotten. They are the same people who stayed awake during their children's illnesses, worked tirelessly during difficult times, sacrificed personal dreams, and silently endured hardships for the happiness and success of their families.

Society as a whole must also play its role. Educational institutions, religious centres, social organizations, and community leaders should actively promote awareness regarding elder care and family responsibilities. Schools must teach children the importance of respecting parents and valuing elderly family members from an early age. Governments and institutions should strengthen welfare systems for senior citizens through improved healthcare access, pension support, and community centers where elderly individuals can remain socially active and emotionally connected.

Technology, when used wisely, can help reduce emotional distance. Video calls, digital communication, and online healthcare consultations can help children living far away remain connected with their parents. However, technology should strengthen human relationships — not replace them.

A society that honours its elders preserves its humanity, culture, and moral identity. A society that neglects them gradually loses its soul.

In Jammu and Kashmir, where traditions of spirituality, compassion, and family honour still survive despite changing times, there remains hope that communities can revive and strengthen the culture of caring for elderly parents with sincerity, dignity, and responsibility.

Ultimately, every individual must remember one unavoidable reality: old age is the destiny of all human beings. The compassion, respect, and care we offer our parents today will shape the kind of society we ourselves will inherit tomorrow.

**The author is a senior analyst and environmentalist. Feedback can be sent to m.hanief@gmail.com. Twitter/X: @haniefmha**

# THE SILENT BETRAYAL: How Recurring Exam Irregularities Are Eroding Merit and Crushing India's Youth

"We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet." **(Swami Vivekananda)**



■ **MUZAMIL ARIF**

India's competitive examination system, long regarded as a cornerstone of meritocracy and social mobility, is facing a deepening crisis of credibility. Persistent allegations of irregularities and paper leaks in major exams continue to undermine the aspirations of millions of sincere students. While authorities investigate each case, the recurring controversies leave hardworking aspirants demoralised and the system's integrity under scrutiny. This article explores the human cost, the challenges for public service delivery, the mental health toll on youth, and the path forward.

## The Recurring Shadow of Exam Irregularities

In recent years, India has witnessed numerous controversies surrounding prestigious examinations such as NEET, JEE, UGC-NET, and various state-level recruitment tests. The latest flashpoint is NEET-UG 2026, held on May 3, where allegations have emerged of a "guess paper" or mock test circulating beforehand that reportedly showed striking similarities with a significant number of actual questions. Rajasthan Police's Special

Operations Group (SOG) is actively investigating the matter, having detained over 20 individuals for questioning. The National Testing Agency (NTA) has stated that the examination was conducted under strict security protocols and that the probe is underway, while some reports indicate the possibility of a re-examination.

Such incidents are not isolated. Over the past decade, multiple central and state exams have faced similar allegations, often involving organised networks of middlemen, insiders, and coaching hubs. Question sets allegedly surface on messaging platforms, raising serious concerns. While investigations lead to cancellations, re-exams, or probes by agencies like the CBI in some cases, the repeated controversies severely damage public confidence. Responsibility is shared across examination processes, enforcement gaps, and the high-stakes coaching ecosystem, underscoring the urgent need for systemic reforms.

## Merit Undermined: The Struggle of Hardworking Students

For crores of students, particularly from modest, rural, and small-town backgrounds, competitive exams remain the most promising route to upward mobility. These aspirants dedicate years to rigorous preparation, often at great personal and financial cost, under intense family and societal pressure. When irregularities occur, their sincere efforts risk being overshadowed, resulting in repeated attempts, backlogs, financial hardship, and delayed careers.

This situation deepens inequality. Students without access to expensive networks or resources feel the system is

unfairly tilted, breeding frustration and cynicism.

## The Human Cost: Depression, Suicides, and Mounting Pressure

The psychological toll is alarming. Intense academic stress, combined with fears of unfair competition, contributes significantly to anxiety and depression. According to the latest NCRB Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India 2024 report, student suicides reached a record 14,488 cases — an 8.5% share of total suicides and a 4.3% rise from the previous year. Academic pressure and perceived injustice are frequently cited as contributing factors, with coaching centres like Kota regularly witnessing tragic incidents.

Many students express a deep sense of betrayal: "Why prepare honestly if the system can be gamed?" This leads to diminished motivation, isolation, and, in extreme cases, loss of life. Family expectations further amplify the crisis. Although helplines and counselling initiatives exist, mental health support remains inadequate for the scale of the problem. The trend risks demoralising an entire generation and weakening India's demographic advantage.

## Beneficiaries of Irregularities: Competence and Public Duty Concerns

A critical question concerns the long-term suitability of candidates who may have benefited from unfair means for critical professional roles. Positions in medicine, engineering, administration, and policing require strong conceptual foundations, ethical judgement, and problem-solving abilities — attributes best developed through genuine prepara-

tion.

While some individuals may compensate through subsequent learning and experience, systemic concerns remain valid. Gaps in foundational knowledge can impact service quality, public safety, and institutional effectiveness. In public offices, where integrity is paramount, entry via shortcuts risks normalising ethical compromises and eroding public trust. Merit-based selection remains essential for maintaining competence and accountability in governance and essential services.

## Legal Framework and Ongoing Reforms

The Centre has responded with the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, which came into force in June 2024. It provides stringent penalties: 3-5 years imprisonment and fines for individuals, and harsher provisions (5-10 years and up to Rs.1 crore) for organised offences. The Act makes such crimes cognizable and non-bailable, aiming to deter the "education mafia."

Effective implementation, especially for state-level exams, along with technological solutions such as biometric authentication, AI proctoring, secure digital question banks, and stricter logistics, will be crucial. Fast-track investigations and greater regulation of the coaching industry are also needed.

## A Call for Collective Action: Safeguarding India's Future

India's youth constitute its greatest asset. Persistent exam controversies threaten to squander this potential by discouraging genuine merit, introducing risks of incompetence in vital services,

and triggering a mental health crisis. Hardworking students deserve a level playing field where diligence is fairly rewarded.

Restoring credibility demands coordinated efforts: rigorous enforcement of the 2024 Act with time-bound probes; nationwide adoption of transparent examination practices; expanded mental health infrastructure; responsible regulation of coaching centres; and a cultural shift that values honest effort over shortcuts. Governments, examination bodies, judiciary, media, educators, parents, and civil society must work together.

Reforming the examination ecosystem is not merely an administrative exercise — it is a national imperative for social justice, institutional strength, and inclusive development.

India's youth are watching. They deserve a system that honours their hard work and restores faith in merit. The time for decisive, collective action is now.

**The author is a well-known independent writer and columnist from Doda Bhalessa, Jammu and Kashmir. He actively writes on diverse issues including social justice, politics, education, health, environment, and youth affairs. Through his insightful articles, he highlights the challenges faced by common citizens, especially the youth, and advocates for systemic reforms and equitable policies. His writings aim to foster awareness, fairness, and positive change in society.**

# Compounds in Coffee May Help Lower Type 2 Diabetes Risk, Study Finds

The findings of a new study suggest that people who regularly drink caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee benefit from some of the beverage's naturally occurring polyphenols.

Experts say the amount of coffee a person can tolerate varies, and you should avoid adding sugar or cream or eating unhealthy breakfast foods with your coffee.

A new research analysis suggests that black coffee, whether caffeinated or decaffeinated, may help lower the chances of developing type 2 diabetes.

Researchers affiliated with universities in the Republic of Korea say people who drink 3 to 5 cups of black coffee per day benefit from natural compounds known as polyphenols.

The findings were recently published in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences.

For the study, the researchers compiled data from 149 publications to examine coffee's effects on the metabolic forces involved in the development of type 2 diabetes. They focused on five hydroxycinnamic acids found in coffee and analyzed the effects these polyphenols had on the small intestines, pancreas, liver, muscle, and tissue.

The analysis shows that daily consumption of black coffee can help modulate blood sugar levels, suppress inflammation, enhance insulin sensitivity, provide antioxidant properties, and improve glucose metabolism.

The results were similar for both caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee, so the benefits appeared to be derived from compounds other than caffeine. This included a 20-30% lower risk of type 2 diabetes incidence for regular coffee drinkers.

The scientists say further research is necessary, but the benefits of daily coffee consumption appear to be clear.

"Coffee and its bioactive compounds, including chlorogenic acid and its hydroxycinnamic acid derivatives... have significant potential in the prevention and management of (type 2 diabetes)," the researchers wrote.

Zhaoping Li, MD, a professor of medicine and the chief of the Division of Clinical Nutrition at the University of California, Los Angeles, agreed. Li wasn't involved in the study.

"Drinking coffee provides natural benefits," she told Healthline. "You can make coffee part of your healthy lifestyle."

Marilyn Tan, MD, a clinical associate professor of medicine at Stanford University in California, had some cautions about



the findings. Tan was likewise not involved in the study.

She said the findings are notable, but added that some of the research reviewed was conducted in lab settings. She said that observational studies don't always account for external factors such as coffee drinkers' overall health.

"(The research) is a very bold statement, as a 20-30% risk reduction is very large and meaningful," Tan told Healthline. "Interestingly, whether the coffee was caffeinated or not did not seem to make a difference, which suggests it's not the caffeine driving the benefit, but rather the other components of the coffee."

How does coffee impact type 2 diabetes risk?

Li explains that coffee is a natural product. If you drink it black, it's basically just coffee beans and hot water.

Li said coffee beans contain about 200 compounds, many of which have potential health benefits. In some cases, the mixture of compounds is beneficial.

Many of these compounds are also similar to the ones found in certain spices. "Humans can take advantage of what this (coffee) plant provides," Li said. "The health benefits of black coffee seem to be obvious."

Previous research has indicated that there are other health benefits to regular coffee drinking.

Another recent study reported that regular consumption of black coffee can reduce a person's overall mortality risk as well as their risk of death from cardiovascular disease.

Other studies have associated coffee with improved brain health, lowering the risk of depression, and protecting against certain liver conditions.

Our free weekly micro-lessons can empower you with wisdom you need to make healthy changes for your diabetes. Short and easy to follow tips for the week ahead.

Li cautioned people to be wary of their caffeine intake if they are drinking 3 to 5 cups of coffee per day.

She said 3 cups daily is probably fine for most people, but some folks may not be able to handle the caffeine load from 4 or 5 servings per day.

People with certain heart conditions should also carefully monitor their caffeine intake. "Everybody is different," Li said.

Tan shared similar concerns. "Three to five cups of coffee is a significant amount," she said. "If the coffee contains caffeine, excess caffeine may also have other unwanted symptoms, such as headaches, jitteriness, nausea, (and) insomnia. In addition, with certain health conditions (pregnancy, heart disease), this much caffeine may cause physical harm."

Li said those who can't tolerate a lot of caffeine can simply drink decaffeinated coffee. "You remove the caffeine, but the rest of the compounds are still there," she said.

People can also drink tea or use spices in their cooking instead of sugar and salt to obtain some of these health benefits, Li added.

Li said the most important way to derive health benefits from coffee is to drink it black without adding sugar or cream.

She advised against unhealthy breakfast foods with coffee, such as sugary donuts.

Li noted that coffee can be particularly helpful if it's a substitute for other types of liquids, particularly those high in sugar.

"Black coffee is beneficial, especially if you are replacing sugary drinks with it," she said.

Join our Type 2 Diabetes newsletter and get a free resource twice per week you'll get tips on nutrition, weight management, and the latest on condition breakthroughs.

Courtesy Healthline

## Highly infectious new Covid Stratus takes over UK with unique symptom

A new strain of Covid is rapidly spreading across the world and has been found in the UK - becoming dominant in weeks - with experts saying it is evading immunity. The Covid strain, formally known as XFG and nicknamed Stratus, is said to have one unique symptom that helps identify which variant you have. Stratus cases have boomed in just one month, thanks to its ability to infect people who have previously had Covid and those who had injections. Data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), shows Stratus has now become the dominant Covid strain in England.

In May 10 per cent of cases were Stratus, by the middle of June that was 40 per cent. There are two variants of Stratus circulating - XFG and XFG.3.

Dr Kaywaan Khan, Harley Street GP and Founder of Hannah London Clinic, told Cosmopolitan UK: "Unlike other variants, Stratus has certain mutations in the spike protein which could help it evade antibodies



developed from prior infections or vaccinations."

Dr Khan said Stratus does not appear to people 'more ill' than previous strains. But he said there is one unique symptom, adding: "One of the most noticeable symptoms of the Stratus variant is hoarseness, which includes a scratchy or raspy voice." Dr Khan said in general, the symptoms of Stratus tend to be 'mild to moderate'.

Dr Khan said: "If you test positive, Stratus is highly contagious, and it is advised to stay home and isolate to avoid spreading to others."

Professor Lawrence Young, a virologist at Warwick University, told MailOnline: "The increased competitiveness of XFG and XFG.3 is likely due to new spike mutations which make these variants more able to evade the immune response. Given that immunity to Covid is waning in the population due to a decline in uptake of the spring booster jab and the reduction of Covid infections in recent months, more people will be susceptible to infection with XFG and XFG.3."

Courtesy EMJ

## New Covid Variant 'Stratus' Spreads with Unique Symptom

It's been five years since the coronavirus outbreak, and while vaccines have made things safer for those more vulnerable, Covid is still something we ought to look out for and be made aware of.

The World Health Organisation has issued a statement saying the XFG variant, also dubbed 'Stratus', will likely become the dominant variant soon, with symptoms ever so slightly different to the classic heavy cough and tiredness we've come to associate with Covid.

Stratus is thought to have become the dominant strain in India and is spreading across the world.

GISAID, a global initiative which tracks variants, found a sharp increase in samples containing the Stratus variant when examining data from 38 countries. The company reported 22.7% of all samples tested were Stratus positive, up 7.4% from the week before.

"Unlike other variants, Stratus has certain mutations in the spike

protein which could help it evade antibodies developed from prior infections or vaccinations," Dr Kaywaan Khan, Harley Street GP and Founder of Hannah London Clinic, tells Cosmopolitan UK. "Despite this, it is important to mention that Stratus seems to be no worse than earlier Omicron variants in terms of illness, hospitalisations, or deaths."

And before anyone starts panicking, the WHO have also stated it believes "currently approved vaccines are still effective against any symptomatic or severe disease".

Here's what we know about Stratus Covid variant so far.

As Dr Khan explains: "Coronaviruses are a group of viruses, named after their crown-like appearance, where there are many strains including those that cause the common cold illness. Stratus Covid variant, also referred to as XFG, is a new subvariant of Omicron that has been circulating around the globe and now accounts



for 25% of COVID cases (as of May 2025)."

By now, we're likely all familiar with the more general Covid symptoms of a temperature, loss of taste or smell, and a cough.

However, there is one prominent new thing to look out for when it comes to Stratus.

"One of the most noticeable

symptoms of the Stratus variant is hoarseness, which includes a scratchy or raspy voice," explains Dr Khan. "Though the symptoms manifest differently and vary from person to person, the symptoms of Stratus tend to be mild to moderate. "Regardless of whether the symptoms mimic a cold or flu, testing continues to be the critical

step in eliminating the possibility of a coronavirus infection."

Things have certainly changed a lot since the days of lockdown - but if you're feeling unwell and experiencing any of the above symptoms, it's important to take a Covid test. They are no longer free, but you can pick them up from retailers such as Amazon and Boots.

"If you test positive, Stratus is highly contagious, and it is advised to stay home and isolate to avoid spreading to others," Dr Khan says. "During recovery, focus on getting plenty of rest and drinking fluids regularly."

He adds that if symptoms worsen after a few days or you are in a high-risk group, then it is important to book in for a consultation with your GP to get personalised medical advice. If your symptoms become severe, such as difficulty breathing or chest pain, it is important to seek urgent medical attention.

Courtesy EMJ

## Forever Chemicals May Disrupt Brain Development

Despite its reputation as a safer chemical, PFHxA—a short-chain PFAS—may cause long-term behavioral changes when exposure occurs early in development. Researchers found that male mice exposed to PFHxA in utero and through breastfeeding displayed increased anxiety, memory deficits, and lower activity levels.

These effects were not seen in female mice, echoing patterns found in male-biased neurodevelopmental disorders like autism and ADHD. The findings raise concerns about the neurodevelopmental risks of PFHxA, challenging assumptions that short-chain PFAS are harmless. "Forever chemicals" or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have been widely used in consumer and industrial products for the better part of a century, but do not break down in the natural environment.

One PFAS, perfluorohexanoic acid or PFHxA, is made up of a shorter chain of molecules and is thought to have less of an impact on human health.



New research from the Del Monte Institute for Neuroscience at the University of Rochester suggests otherwise, finding that early life exposure to PFHxA may increase anxiety-related behaviors and memory deficits in male mice.

"Although these effects were mild, finding behavioral effects only in males was reminiscent of the many neurodevelopmental disorders that are male-biased," said Ania Majewska, PhD, professor of Neuroscience and senior author of the study out today in the Euro-

pean Journal of Neuroscience. Research has shown, males are more often diagnosed with neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism and ADHD. "This finding suggests that the male brain might be more vulnerable to environmental insults during neurodevelopment."

Researchers exposed mice to PFHxA through a mealworm treat given to the mother during gestation and lactation. They found that the male mice exposed to higher doses of PFHxA in utero and through the mother's breastmilk showed mild developmental changes, including a decrease in activity levels, increased anxiety-like behaviors, and memory deficits. They did not find any behavioral effects in females that were exposed to PFHxA in the same way.

"Finding that developmental exposure to PFHxA has long-term behavioral consequences in a mammalian model is concerning when considering short-chain PFAS are thought to be safer alternatives to the legacy PFAS that have been phased-out of production," said Elizabeth Plunk, PhD ('25), an alumna of the Toxicology graduate program at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry and first author of the study.

"Understanding the impacts of PFHxA on the developing brain is critical when proposing regulations around this chemical. Hopefully, this is the first of many studies evaluating the neurotoxicity of PFHxA."

Courtesy Healthline

# KVIC Celebrates World Bee Day 2026, Highlights 'Sweet Revolution' Vision of PM Modi

■ FAROOQ RATHER

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20:** The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), celebrated World Bee Day 2026 across the country through a series of programmes organised in virtual mode on Wednesday.

The main event was held from KVIC's Gandhi Darshan office in New Delhi, where KVIC Chairman Manoj Kumar addressed beekeepers, beneficiaries, scientists, students, officers and employees connected through KVIC offices, divisional centres and the Central Bee Research and Training Institute (CBRTI), Pune.

On the occasion, a special "Honey Exhibition" organised at CBRTI Pune was also inaugurated virtually by the KVIC Chairman.

This year's World Bee Day theme, "Bee Inspired by Nature to Nourish Us All," focused on the critical role of bees in environmental conservation, agricultural productivity and strengthening rural livelihoods.

Addressing participants, Manoj Kumar said the programmes were organised in virtual mode in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of energy conservation, optimal utilisation of resources and effective governance with minimum expenditure. He said the initiative reduced unnecessary travel and fuel consumption while ensuring wider participation from different states of the country.

Highlighting the importance of beekeeping, the KVIC Chairman said bees are vital protectors of nature and the agricultural ecosystem. He added that Prime Minister Modi's vision of transforming the "White Revolution into a Sweet Revolution" has accelerated self-employment and self-reliance in rural India.



"Today, beekeeping has emerged as a powerful medium for strengthening agriculture, environment and the rural economy," he said.

Recalling the launch of the "Sweet Revolution" from Banaskantha in Gujarat in 2016, Manoj Kumar said the Prime Minister had envisioned a movement that would empower villages, farmers and rural entrepreneurs through honey production and allied activities.

Inspired by this vision, KVIC launched the "Honey Mission" in 2017, which has now become a major source of livelihood generation in rural areas.

According to KVIC, under the Honey Mission programme, a total of 2,46,099 bee boxes and bee colonies have been distributed across the country between 2017-18 and 2025-26, resulting in an increase of 24,269 metric tonnes in honey production.

During the financial year 2025-26 alone, honey production is estimated to have reached 5,12 metric tonnes. The Chairman further stated that honey worth nearly Rs 3 crore was exported during the same

period by beekeepers associated with KVIC.

Indian honey is being exported to several countries including the United States, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Singapore, Australia, Qatar and the Republic of Korea, reflecting its growing global demand and acceptance.

Calling upon people to support beekeeping, Manoj Kumar said bees should not be viewed merely as a source of honey production but also as an effective tool for environmental protection, agricultural growth and rural prosperity.

He urged citizens to take a pledge on World Bee Day to protect bees, encourage more people to adopt beekeeping and carry forward the Prime Minister's vision of a "Sweet Revolution" to every village in the country.

The programme also featured participation from experts, Khadi institutions, artisans, trainees, bank representatives and state government officials, who shared their experiences and success stories related to beekeeping and honey production.

## Ad Hoc Managing Body of Judicial Officers Association convenes Maiden Meeting

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:** First meeting of Judicial Officers Association (Ad Hoc Managing Body) was held virtually after court hours today.

The meeting was presided over by Naseer Ahmed Dar, President, who expressed gratitude and thanked the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh for constituting the ad-hoc body for interim functioning towards the establishment of the first Judicial Officers Association of the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

The President further thanked the High Court for reposing faith and confidence in the members of the ad-hoc body to undertake such an important responsibility.

J. S. Jamwal, Vice President, along with the senior members of the ad-hoc body including M. S. Manhas, Malik Shabir Ahmad, Yash Paul Sharma, Spalzes Angmo, Prem Sagar, and Mehreen Mushtaq, unanimously expressed that the Association shall work with utmost honesty, dedication, and commitment for the welfare of the Judicial Officers of the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

The meeting was also attended by Chemit Yurgyal, General Secretary; Babar Hussain, Treasurer; and the members viz. Rekha Kapoor, Mohammad Istiyaq Alam Baba, Smt Shama Sharma, Shri Towfeel Ahmad Mir and Arshad Aziz Qureshi. Lastly, the President thanked all the members for attending the maiden meeting of the Judicial Officers Association.

## Jammu sizzles above normal, rain alert issued for Kashmir

■ HT NEWS NETWORK / KNO

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:** Heatwave continued to sweep parts of Jammu division on Wednesday as the Meteorological Department forecast thunderstorms, gusty winds and hailstorms across Jammu and Kashmir over the next two days. According to the Meteorological Centre Srinagar, scattered to many places in both Kashmir and Jammu divisions are likely to witness light rain, thundershowers and gusty winds during the afternoon and evening hours on May 21.

The weather office also issued an advisory warning of thunder, lightning, hailstorm and gusty winds with speeds of 40-50 kmph, gusting to over 60 kmph, at a few places during the period. Officials informed the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that generally dry weather is expected between May 22 and 25, although isolated to scattered areas may receive brief afternoon showers. The weather is likely to remain hot and dry from May 26 to 28.

Jammu recorded a maximum temperature of 42 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, nearly four degrees above normal, while Kathua emerged as the hottest place in the Union Territory at 43.8 degrees Celsius, around 5.7 degrees above normal.

Samba also recorded intense heat with the mercury settling at 45.7 degrees Celsius. In Kashmir division, Srinagar recorded a maximum temperature of 30.7 degrees Celsius, 5.3 degrees above normal for this time of the season. Qazigund settled at 30.2 degrees Celsius, while Kupwara recorded 28.3 degrees Celsius.

## Office of the Chief Horticulture Officer Shopian

Tele/fax No: 01933-260280

### OPEN AUCTION NOTICE

Subject: Open Auction of Cherry fruit crop of Fruit Plant Nursery Shopian and Fruit Plant Nursery Haripora of district Shopian for the year 2026.

As a consequence of decision taken by the Directorate of Horticulture Kashmir Srinagar vide No. DHK/PROD/E-7885002/26/8389-8401, dated: -12-05-2026, the Cherry fruit crop of Departmental Fruit Plant Nursery Shopian & Haripora for the year 2026 is to be put on open auction as per the schedule given below.

S No.	Date	Time	Name of the nursery/ orchard	CDR Amount	Fruit crop for auction	Place of auction.
01	25-05-2026 (Monday)	10:30 AM	FPN Shopian	5000	Cherry	Office of the Chief Horticulture Officer Shopian
02			FPN Haripora	2000	Cherry	

#### Terms and Conditions

- The participating bidders shall have to deposit the earnest money as shown above in the form of CDR pledged to Chief Horticulture Officer Shopian before the commencement of auction proceedings.
- The fruit plants earmarked for studies/field trials shall be marked in advance as reserved (not for auction) by the concerned officers.
- The successful bidder shall have to deposit the auction amount in one installment in the office of Chief Horticulture Officer Shopian on the date of auction.
- Payments of auction money in the form of cheque will not be accepted.
- In case the committee is not convinced that the highest bid offered is genuine offer for the fruit crop, the committee reserves the right to cancel the offer. As such, the highest bid alone should not necessarily make the bidder eligible for the contract or considered as a successful bidder. The committee can make the appropriate arrangements for re-auction of fruit crop.
- On communicating the approval of bid/offer, if the successful bidder fails to deposit the auction amount and execute the agreement within the specified time limit, it shall be construed as backing out from contract by the concerned. The department in that case shall be within its rights to decide the matter on its merits or allot the contract to 2nd highest bidder or may re-auction the fruit crop of the respective orchard. Loss, if any, sustained by the Government on this account, shall have to be recovered from the defaulting contractor through the concerned Tehsildar Recoveries and the CDR will be forfeited to departmental revenue besides initiating action against the defaulter.
- On depositing the auction amount in the office of Chief Horticulture Officer, the successful bidder shall have to execute an agreement immediately with the Department on non-judicial paper of Rs.10/- as per the specimen of the Department where after only the approval of the offer and formal authority for taking possession for the fruit crop of concerned orchard/ nursery/ farm will be issued by concerned officer.
- In respect of Departmental orchards/ nurseries where the open auction takes place and full amount of auction money is deposited, a notarized document containing all the safety clauses (as per the specimen to be made available separately) will be obtained by the concerned officer from the on-spot auction bidders before award of the bid formally, to ensure safety of Departmental assets.
- Soon after the bid is allotted to final bidder, he will be responsible for maintaining the orchard which include irrigation and spraying as per the spray schedule of SKUAST (K).
- The concerned bidder will communicate the complete particulars of the representative/ Chowkidar/ Watcher, who will remain in the orchard till harvesting of fruit crops, alongwith photograph to concerned officer within two days of occupation of the place.
- In case the successful bidder does not follow the instructions/ terms/ conditions, the Department will be at liberty to take necessary action against the bidder shall be deemed to have been "Black Listed" for future auction process.
- For smooth implementation of the contract, instructions as may be deemed necessary and issued by the Department from time to time, will be binding on the successful bidder and deemed to be part of contract/ agreement.

Sd/-

Chief Horticulture Officer Shopian

DIPK: 1453/26 | Dated: 20-05-2026



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## Office of the Farm Manager Advanced Centre for Horticulture development Zainapora Shopian

### AUCTION NOTICE

It is hereby notified for the information of all concerned that the auction of perishable fruit crops due to early maturity namely, Cherry, Apricot and Peach shall be conducted on 25-05-2026, 10:00 AM at the Advanced Centre for Horticulture Development Zainapora Shopian.

Interested bidders/participants are hereby invited to attend the auction proceedings before the auction committee on the scheduled date and time. The auction shall be conducted strictly as per the prescribed terms and conditions of the department. All concerned are advised to remain present well before the scheduled time for completion of necessary formalities.

Sd/- (Ishfaq Ah Wani)  
Farm Manager  
Advanced Centre for Horticulture Development  
Zainapora PShopian

DIPK: 1489/26 | Dated: 20-05-2026

## Deputy Chief Minister reviews progress of developmental works, availability of essential services in Stresses quality, timely execution of projects in Uri

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**URI, MAY 20:** Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, today chaired a meeting of senior officers at Officer's Club Uri to review the availability of essential services, basic facilities and progress of developmental works across the Uri Sub Division.

The meeting was attended by MLA Uri Dr. Sajjad Shafi, Chief Engineer R&B North Kashmir, Chief Engineer PMGSY, Additional Deputy Commissioner Baramulla, Sub Divisional Magistrate Uri, Joint Director Mining and other senior officers of the district administration and line departments.

During the meeting, the Deputy Chief Minister stressed the need for prompt service delivery, robust development and seamless public outreach to ensure amicable redressal of genuine public grievances. He directed the officers to remain accessible to the people and ensure



time-bound disposal of developmental and welfare issues.

Reviewing the progress on ongoing infrastructure projects, the Deputy Chief Minister emphasized quality execution and timely completion of works. He instructed the officers to conduct regular and random inspection

of projects to ensure strict adherence to the prescribed guidelines and SOPs.

The Deputy Chief Minister also reviewed the status of road connectivity projects in Uri. He said that around 20 road projects have been undertaken in the area during the last one and a half years while addi-

tional projects are in the pipeline and will be taken up for execution soon.

He stressed that developmental initiatives should ensure better connectivity and improved living standards for the people living in remote villages. He said that the government is committed to ensure that villages are

provided facilities at par with cities so that local youth can realize their aspirations and dreams.

While reviewing the gypsum mining operations in the area, he stressed that mining activities should directly benefit the local communities and directed concerned officers to ensure transparency and environmental safeguards in all related operations.

The Deputy Chief Minister further instructed that the road works under SASCI and permanent restoration works should be expedited. He directed that mining funds be effectively utilized for road repairs and macadamization in the area.

He called for uninterrupted potable water and electricity supply to the local villages. Directions were given for holding labour card registration to ensure maximum coverage of local labourers under different schemes and welfare initiatives.

## Extensive awareness activities organised across Budgam under Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**BUDGAM, MAY 20:** A wide range of awareness programmes, pledge ceremonies, plantation drives and outreach activities were organised across district Budgam under the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan (NMBA) to spread awareness regarding the harmful effects of drug abuse and to promote a healthy, drug-free society.

At Higher Secondary School Chadoora, Higher Secondary School Bugam Chadoora and Government Higher Secondary School Zohama Budgam, various awareness activities were organised with active participation of students and staff.

The programmes included awareness sessions, rallies and pledge ceremonies aimed at sensitizing youth about the dangers of substance abuse and the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles.

Municipal Committee (MC) Budgam also organised awareness and outreach activities under NMBA to educate people about the social and health consequences of drug addiction. Participants reiterated their commitment towards building a safer and drug-free society.

Government Degree College (GDC) Budgam in collaboration with District Social Welfare Office (DSWO) Budgam organised a Cyber Awareness Session under NMBA. During the programme, students were educated about cyber safety, responsible digital behaviour and the ill effects of drug abuse.

In Block SK Pora, awareness programmes under NMBA were conducted at various NREGA work sites and Panchayats to ensure that people at the grassroots level are equipped with the right information to tackle the menace of drug abuse.

Workers and local residents were sensitized regarding preventive measures and the importance of community participation in combating substance abuse.

Meanwhile, under the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan, forest officials of Soil Range Budgam organised a pledge-cum-plantation and awareness programme at Boys Middle School Khanpora. Students and staff were sensitized about the harmful effects of drugs and pledged to spread awareness against substance abuse in society.

The activities witnessed enthusiastic participation from students, teachers, officials, Panchayat representatives and members of the local community, reflecting a collective commitment towards making Budgam a drug-free district.

The district administration is committed towards sustained awareness campaigns and collaborative initiatives under the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan to safeguard youth and strengthen community participation in the fight against drug abuse.

## DC Kathua reviews development scenario, implementation of Mission YUVA, HADP in Basohli

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**KATHUA, MAY 20:** Deputy Commissioner Kathua Rajesh Sharma on Wednesday visited Basohli and reviewed the implementation of Mission YUVA, Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), Census-related activities and developmental works being executed by the PWD (R&B) Department in the subdivision.

The officers from the concerned departments apprised the Deputy Commissioner about the implementation status and progress achieved under the developmental and welfare schemes in the subdivision.



Reviewing Mission YUVA, the DC stressed effective implementation of youth-oriented initiatives aimed at promoting skill development and self-employment opportunities. He directed the concerned departments to enhance outreach and ensure maximum coverage of eligible persons under the programme.

While reviewing HADP and other agriculture and allied sector schemes, the Deputy Commissioner emphasized timely delivery of benefits to the farmers. He called for generating mass awareness regarding the government interventions and support measures launched for promoting agriculture and allied sectors entrepreneurship.

The Deputy Commissioner also reviewed the status of ongoing PWD (R&B) works in the subdivision and directed the concerned officers to maintain quality standards and ensure completion of works within stipulated timelines.

The meeting further reviewed Census-related targets and preparedness, with the Deputy Commissioner instructing officers to work in close coordination for achieving the assigned targets in a time-bound manner.

Later, the Deputy Commissioner visited Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya and inspected the infrastructure and facilities at the institution. He interacted with the school authorities, reviewed the developmental requirements of the school and assured appropriate redressal of genuine issues raised by the administration.

The DC was accompanied by IAS Probationer Nidhi, CPO Ranjeet Thakur and officers and officials of various departments.

## DDC Rajouri chairs Public Outreach Camp at Panchayat Siot Upper

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**RAJOURI, MAY 20:** District Development Commissioner Rajouri Abhishek Sharma today chaired a Public Outreach Camp at Panchayat Siot Upper to listen to the public grievances and review developmental requirements of the area.

The outreach programme witnessed active participation from senior district officers, sectoral heads and a large number of local residents, who projected various issues and demands related to infrastructure, education, healthcare and basic amenities.

Among the major demands highlighted by the public were renovation of roads from Siot to Bajwal, Bakhar to Channi, Khui Teri and Peer Khana, bus service between Sunderbani to

Rajouri and vice versa besides the upgrading of Channi Mella road. The residents also demanded construction of check dams at Bakhar, augmentation of drinking water supply, upgradation of Higher Secondary School Siot, filling up of vacancies in medical and educational institutions and strict action against illegal mining activities in the area.

The DDC patiently listened to the grievances and demands projected by the people and issued on-the-spot directions to the concerned officers for prompt redressal of genuine issues. He assured the public that all legitimate concerns would be taken up in a phased manner and every effort would be made to ensure balanced and inclusive development of the area.

The DDC emphasized the impor-

ance of close coordination between the administration and the public for effective implementation of welfare and developmental initiatives. He also directed officers to undertake regular field visits and ensure timely disposal of public grievances.

On the occasion, different government departments installed awareness stalls showcasing various beneficiary-oriented schemes and programmes aimed at sensitizing the public about government welfare initiatives and services.

Concerned officers also responded one by one to the issues and demands raised by the public and apprised the gathering about the measures being taken for their resolution, ongoing developmental works and future action plans in their respective sectors.

## DC Reasi reviews road safety measures; directs comprehensive enforcement and safety audit

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**REASI, MAY 20:** Deputy Commissioner Reasi Kumar Abhishek today chaired a meeting of the District Road Safety Committee to review the status of road safety measures, enforcement mechanisms and related infrastructure across the district.

At the outset, the Superintending Engineer Public Works Department (R&B) gave a detailed briefing on initiatives undertaken to strengthen road safety infrastructure. It was informed that the District Road Safety Action Plan has already been formulated. "Accident-prone blackspots and blind curves have been identified and corrective measures including construction of parapets and installation of crash barriers have been initiated to minimise the road accidents and improve commuter safety," he informed.

Taking serious note of roadside encroachments, the Deputy Commissioner directed the concerned departments to submit division-wise Action Taken Reports on removal of encroach-

ments from footpaths and roads across the district.

Emphasising pedestrian safety, the Deputy Commissioner stressed the need for identifying locations where zebra crossings are required, particularly near health institutions and educational establishments. The Chief Medical Officer, Chief Education Officer and heads of colleges were directed to furnish identified locations for installation of zebra crossings. Regarding road safety audits, the Deputy Commissioner instructed the concerned departments to submit Action Taken Reports on the recommendations and corrective measures undertaken.

Highlighting the importance of awareness and preventive measures, he directed the Motor Vehicles Department to intensify IEC campaigns on road safety and submit a detailed report on activities conducted. The department was further asked to strengthen joint vehicle checking drives through nakka inspections and furnish details regarding action taken against violators and enforcement mea-



sures undertaken. The ARTO Reasi was directed to identify vulnerable road stretches and accident-prone locations across the district.

The ARTO was further asked to submit tehsil-wise reports on pending compensation claims with regard to deaths and injury cases in road mishaps. The Motor Vehicles Department was also directed to provide details of permits issued for newly connected roads.

Reviewing implementation of the Prevention of Ribbon Development Act, the Deputy Commissioner instructed the PWD and PMGSY authorities to initiate action against violators and

submit Action Taken Reports.

The Municipal Committees were directed to take effective measures to address the issue of stray animals, identify vulnerable areas and submit reports on the actions taken, including management measures and enforcement details. He also instructed the Municipalities to ensure the immediate clearance and maintenance of footpaths across all towns.

The Sub-Divisional Magistrates were instructed to coordinate with the District Disaster Management Committee for establishment and strengthening of Quick Response Teams in their respective jurisdictions.

Reviewing implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Sadak Suraksha Scheme and PM Rahat initiative under the principle of "treat first, formalities later," the Deputy Commissioner emphasised that no accident victim should be denied or delayed emergency medical care.

A detailed discussion was also held on establishment of a Trauma Centre in the district. The Health Department was directed to furnish the requirements and feasibility details for setting up the facility to strengthen emergency healthcare services and trauma response mechanisms in Reasi district.

The meeting was attended by Additional District Development Commissioner Krishan Lal; Additional Deputy Commissioner Rakesh Kumar; Chief Planning Officer Narinder Kumar; Assistant Commissioner Revenue Nitin Verma; Chief Education Officer, Chief Medical Officer, Executive Engineer, PMGSY, Reasi/Mahore, Executive Engineer, PWD (R&B), Mahore/Reasi/Katra and other concerned officers.

## Sakeena Itoo visits SKIMS Soura, reviews healthcare services, patient care facilities

■ HT NEWS NETWORK

**SRINAGAR, MAY 20:** Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo today visited Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) Soura and took assessment of healthcare services, patient care facilities and overall medical infrastructure at the premier tertiary care institution.

During the visit, the Minister undertook a comprehensive tour of various departments and wards of the hospital and inspected the quality of health-

care facilities being provided to patients. She assessed the functioning of emergency services, diagnostic units, specialized treatment facilities and patient support systems besides taking stock of the availability of medicines and essential medical equipment.

The Minister also interacted with doctors, healthcare professionals, nursing staff, paramedics and administrative officers regarding the overall functioning of the institution and sought feedback about the existing healthcare delivery mechanism. She appreciated

the dedication and commitment of the medical fraternity in providing quality treatment and care to patients despite increasing healthcare demands.

Interacting with patients and their attendants, the Minister enquired about the medical facilities being extended to them and listened to their concerns and suggestions. She assured them that the Government remains committed towards strengthening the healthcare sector and ensuring better patient care facilities across Jammu and Kashmir. Sakeena Itoo emphasized



the need for maintaining high standards of patient care, cleanliness, discipline and timely medical services within the institution. She directed the concerned authorities to ensure prompt redressal of public grievances and further improve healthcare infrastructure for the convenience of patients visiting the hospital from different parts of the Union Territory.

The Minister highlighted that the Government under the leadership of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah is committed to upgrading healthcare

institutions and enhancing accessibility to advanced and affordable medical treatment for the people. She also stressed upon the importance of coordinated efforts among doctors, administrators and support staff for ensuring efficient functioning of the institution and delivering patient-centric healthcare services.

Director SKIMS, Dr. Ashraf Ganig; Medical Superintendent, SKIMS, Dr. Farooq Jan; Heads of different specialities, senior doctors and other officers also accompanied the Minister during the visit.

# Indian scientists discover rare stellar system with one of shortest known orbital periods

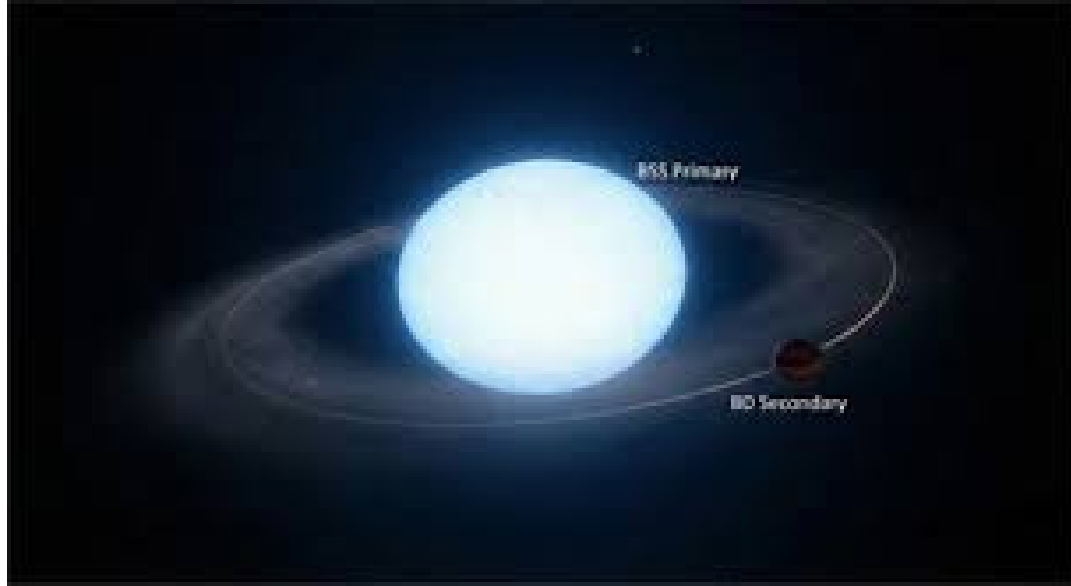
■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20:** Indian researchers have discovered a rare and unusually compact stellar system that could deepen scientific understanding of how stars evolve and interact under extreme conditions, the Ministry of Science and Technology statement said here on Tuesday.

The discovery marks the first confirmed detection of a blue straggler star hosting a brown dwarf companion in an exceptionally close binary system.

The study was carried out by scientists from Gauhati University, the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Bengaluru, Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), Nainital and Italy's INAF-Catania Astrophysical Observatory.

Blue straggler stars have long remained a mystery for astronomers because they appear brighter, hotter and younger than other stars in the same cluster, defying standard theories of stellar evolution.



The research team found that the newly discovered binary system has an orbital period of only around 5.6 hours, making it one of the shortest-period stellar systems ever observed.

Scientists said the compact nature of the system makes it particularly important for studying the behaviour and evolution of stars in tightly bound environ-

ments. The companion object was identified as a brown dwarf with a mass nearly 0.056 times that of the Sun, making it the lightest companion ever detected around a blue straggler star.

Brown dwarfs are often described as objects that are too massive to be planets but not massive enough to sustain hydrogen fusion like normal stars.

Researchers said the system lies within the so-called "brown dwarf desert", a region where such companions are considered extremely rare, making the discovery even more significant.

According to the scientists, the system likely evolved through a complex triple-star interaction. They proposed that the system originally consisted of an inner

binary containing the brown dwarf and another star orbiting farther away.

Over time, gravitational interactions and mass transfer between the stars caused two of the objects to merge, eventually giving rise to the blue straggler star now observed.

The researchers said tidal forces later stabilised the orbit, creating the compact binary system detected today.

The study, published in the journal Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society: Letters, is expected to improve theoretical models related to stellar evolution, binary star systems and substellar objects. Scientists noted that such discoveries are crucial for interpreting observations made through advanced telescopes and future space missions.

The researchers also highlighted that the breakthrough demonstrates the scientific value of carefully analysing archival astronomical data, showing that significant discoveries can be achieved even without expensive new observational infrastructure. UNI

## Grassroots innovators are India's silent nation builders: Jitendra Singh

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20:** Union Minister for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh on Tuesday described grassroots innovators as India's "silent nation builders," highlighting their crucial role in driving inclusive development.

He said that by integrating traditional skills with modern technology, these innovators have the potential to accelerate economic growth, reduce regional imbalances, and strengthen innovation-led progress across the country.

Addressing the inaugural session of a two-day national workshop on "Grassroots Innovation Pathways: From Local Resilience to National Advancements" in Ahmedabad, the minister described grassroots innovators as the country's "silent nation builders" whose contributions often remain outside formal institutional structures despite their immense social and economic significance.

The workshop was organised by NITI Aayog in collaboration with the National Innovation Foundation and the Gujarat Council of Science and Technology.

Dr Singh said innovation in India should not remain limited to metropolitan cities, elite laboratories and academic institutions, but must expand to villages and local communities where practical solutions are often developed from everyday challenges.

He stressed that traditional knowledge systems and local skills possess enormous potential for livelihood generation, entrepreneurship and sustainable economic growth.

Highlighting India's legacy of innovation under constrained resources, the minister referred to the early years of the country's space programme and said transformative ideas frequently emerge from necessity and local experiences.

He noted that startups are increasingly emerging from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, reflecting the growing spread of the innovation ecosystem beyond major urban centres.

The minister said grassroots innovation is a bottom-up process that requires strong institutional support to succeed.

He emphasised the need to connect local innovators with scientific institutions, modern technologies, incubation facilities, validation mechanisms and market opportunities so that their ideas can evolve into scalable products and services.

According to Dr Singh, India cannot achieve the goal of becoming a leading global economy unless rural economies are strengthened and growth becomes regionally balanced.

He said grassroots innovation can play a crucial role in reducing developmental disparities while generating employment and promoting self-reliance in rural areas.

He also highlighted the role of technology integration in strengthening traditional industries and local products.

Combining traditional knowledge with emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, food processing and digital platforms can significantly enhance the commercial potential of indigenous products and community-based enterprises, he said.

Referring to millet-based products and regional food items, the minister noted that scientific support and branding have helped improve market access and income generation for local communities.

Dr Singh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently encouraged grassroots innovation and community participation through initiatives such as "Mann Ki Baat" and PM Vishwakarma, which seek to connect traditional skills with entrepreneurship and modern technology.

The two-day workshop will deliberate on policy frameworks, institutional partnerships, incubation support and scalable innovation models aimed at strengthening the grassroots innovation ecosystem and contributing to the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047. UNI

## BLS E-Services FY26 income crosses Rs 1,100 crore; revenue up 110 pc

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20:** BLS E-Services Limited (BLSe), a tech-enabled digital service provider, recorded an income of Rs 1,142.8 crores in FY26 compared to Rs 545 crores in FY25, a BLS statement said here on Tuesday. Revenue increased by 109.7pc year-over-year (YoY), and Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization (EBITDA) of the company reached Rs 99.9 crores in FY26.

It was Rs 86.1 crores in the corresponding period last year (PLY), which shows growth of 16pc. Profit after taxes (PAT) also hit the mark of Rs 69.3 crores compared to Rs 58.8 crores in FY25.

Speaking on results, Shikhar Aggarwal, Chair-



man, BLS E-Services Ltd. said, "BLS E-Services reported a remarkable performance during Q4 & FY26, as Total Income grew by 34.1pc YoY in Q4FY26 and 109.7pc YoY in FY26, backed by a strong growth across its core businesses and increasing scale of its assisted digital & citizen service offerings."

"We are proud to have crossed the Rs 1,000 Crore annual revenue milestone, along with achieving EBITDA of approximately Rs 100 Crores, driven by a robust business performance, inorganic initiatives, and a strong gross transaction value of Rs 1.11 lakh Crores, during the year."

He said that this performance reflects the continued strength and scalability of our business model, as well as our ability to capture growth opportunities across markets.

Aggarwal credited the backing of a cash balance of over Rs 400 Crores that will pave the path for the company's next phase of growth through a balanced approach to organic and inorganic expansion. "Total Income for the quarter stood at Rs. 328.9 crores, marking a remarkable growth of 34.1pc YoY, supported by steady business performance across all the business verticals."

EBITDA stood at Rs. 26.0 Crores and PAT stood at Rs 18.2 Crores in Q4FY26, the company statement said. UNI

## Deccan Gold reports major nickel-copper-PGE discovery in Chhattisgarh

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**BENGALURU, MAY 20:** Deccan Gold Mines Limited on Tuesday announced a significant discovery of nickel-copper-platinum group elements (Ni-Cu-PGE) mineralisation at its Bhalukona Composite Licence area in Chhattisgarh, with the company saying the find could pave the way for India's first nickel-copper-PGE mine. The company said its maiden drilling campaign at the Bhalukona-Jamnidi licence area in Mahasamund district has confirmed extensive sulphide mineralisation hosted within a layered mafic intrusive complex spread across a prospective 700-metre strike zone.

According to the company, the first drill hole intersected three mineralised gabbroic layers with a combined width of more than 60 metres, including nearly 30 metres of potentially economic sulphide mineralisation grading above 0.2 per cent nickel equivalent (Ni<sub>Eq</sub>), with an average grade of around 0.4 per cent Ni<sub>Eq</sub>.

The highest-grade intersection reported so far was 2.6 metres grading 1.01 per cent nickel, 0.29 per cent copper and 0.2 grams per tonne palladium from a depth of 103.4



metres. Deccan Gold said around 1,200 metres of core drilling has been completed across seven drill holes, all of which intersected varying widths of disseminated and heavy-massive sulphide mineralisation. Microscopic analysis confirmed the presence of pentlandite, chalcopyrite and pyrrhotite sulphides, indicating the occurrence of nickel and copper-bearing mineralisation.

"The discovery of significant nickel-copper-PGE mineralisation at Bhalukona is an important milestone for Deccan Gold and a strong validation of the project's geological potential," Managing Director Dr Hanuma Prasad Modali said.

"Intersecting encouraging sulphide mineralisation in the very first phase of drilling reinforces our confidence in the asset and its strategic relevance for India's growing critical minerals ecosystem," he added.

The company said assay results from additional drill holes are awaited and the drilling programme would now be accelerated to establish a mineable resource and facilitate mining lease applications.

Dr Modali said the company was hopeful that, subject to continued drilling success, the project could evolve into India's first nickel-copper-PGE mine.

The Bhalukona-Jamnidi Composite Licence spans nearly 30 sq km and was among the first Ni-Cu-PGE licences granted in India following the Centre's push for critical minerals exploration.

Deccan Gold said low-impact exploration activities, including geophysical and soil sampling programmes, would continue during the monsoon season to identify additional mineralised targets across the licence area. UNI

## Hyd:VIYONA Fintech secures NPCI certification for technology, framework across key payment infrastructure layers

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, MAY 20:** Hyderabad-based VIYONA Fintech company on Monday said it has secured NPCI certification for its technology and certification framework across multiple critical payment infrastructure layers, including UPI Acquirer, UPI Issuer, IMPS and Interoperable Mobile Banking (iBMB) integrations. With this milestone,

VIYONA joins a select group of fintech infrastructure players building end-to-end payment orchestration capabilities aligned with standards of the National Payments Corporation of India.

The company has been steadily expanding its banking and payments infrastructure over the past two years, integrating with multiple banking institutions for collections, payouts and payment processing capabilities.

The certification is expected to accelerate its expansion in merchant acquiring, rural banking infrastructure, embedded finance and interoperable digital banking services, the company said in a release here.

The completion of both UPI Acquirer and UPI Issuer capabilities enables the company to participate across multiple layers of the UPI ecosystem from merchant acceptance and QR

acquiring to customer-side issuance infrastructure.

"The addition of IMPS and iBMB capabilities expands VIYONA's service portfolio across interoperable mobile banking, real-time fund transfers, merchant settlement systems and rural banking use cases," said Ravindranath Yarlagadda, Chairman of Viyona Fintech.

"We are preparing the rollout of our merchant acceptance

ecosystem under the ViyonaPay initiative, aimed at expanding digital payment acceptance and banking accessibility across underserved and rural markets," he added. The company is also expanding its product and services portfolio with six upcoming offerings across merchant payments, rural acceptance infrastructure, POS ecosystems and merchant enablement platforms. UNI

## Finance Ministry dismisses claims of monetisation of temple gold holdings

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20:** Finance Ministry on Tuesday dismissed reports and social media claims suggesting the government plans to monetise gold held by temples and religious institutions across the country, calling the allegations "completely false, misleading, and without any basis." It said that speculation about a proposed monetisation scheme for gold held by temples and any other religious institutions is entirely baseless.

"Speculation and rumours suggesting that the Government is planning to in-

roduce a monetisation scheme for gold held by temple trusts, or any religious institution across the country, are completely false, misleading, and without any basis," the ministry stated, firmly rejecting the claims. The ministry also clarified that assertions claiming gold plates on temple towers, doors, or other temple structures would be classified as "Strategic Gold Reserves of India" are false, misleading. The Ministry urged citizens not to believe or circulate such unverified information, noting that the spread of unverified rumours creates unnecessary confusion.

## Gland Pharma reports Record Revenue, Profit Growth in FY26; Recommends 20 Final Dividend

■ UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

**HYDERABAD, MAY 20:** Gland Pharma Limited on Monday reported strong financial performance for the fourth quarter and full financial year ended March 31, 2026, posting record revenues and profitability driven by growth in its CDMO business, new product launches and operational efficiencies.

The injectable-focused pharmaceutical company reported consolidated revenue from operations of Rs.17,428 million in Q4FY26, registering a 22 per cent year-on-year growth, while full-

year FY26 revenue rose 14.5 per cent to Rs.64,307 million.

Adjusted EBITDA for the quarter grew 51 per cent year-on-year to Rs.5,244 million, with margins improving to 30 per cent, the Hyderabad-based pharma company said in a release here.

Adjusted PAT nearly doubled, rising 97 per cent year-on-year to Rs.3,667 million.

For the full financial year FY26, adjusted EBITDA increased 33 per cent to Rs.16,826 million, while adjusted PAT rose 50 per cent to Rs.10,455 million.

The company's adjusted EBITDA margin improved to 26% for

FY26 compared to 23% in FY25.

The Board of Directors recommended a final dividend of Rs.20 per equity share for FY26, subject to shareholder approval.

Commenting on the performance, Srinivas Sadu, Executive Chairman of Gland Pharma, said the company's strong growth reflected progress across businesses, including Cenexi, supported by robust CDMO expansion, new product launches and improved profitability.

"Our strong FY26 performance, reflected in consolidated revenue growth of 14.5 per cent and an adjusted EBITDA margin of 26

percent, underscores the progress we are making across the businesses including Cenexi," he said.

The company said the CDMO business contributed 46 per cent of revenues and grew 36 per cent year-on-year during Q4 FY26. For the full year, the segment also contributed 46 per cent of revenue and expanded 28% year-on-year.

The United States remained the company's largest market, contributing Rs.9,807 million in Q4 FY26, up 24 per cent year-on-year, while Europe revenues surged 36% to Rs.3,814 million during the quarter. UNI

**IPL 2026 SCENARIOS:**

**Five Teams Fighting For One Playoffs Spot**



**UNITED NEWS OF INDIA**

Three of the four playoff spots in IPL 2026 have been taken, with Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) and Gujarat Titans (GT) securing qualification. Only one spot remains, and here's what the five contenders need to do to get it.

- **Rajasthan Royals**
- **Played: 12, Points: 12, NRR: 0.027**
- **Remaining matches: LSG (H) and MI (A)**

Among the five teams in contention for the last playoffs spot, only Rajasthan Royals (RR) can qualify without relying on other results. Their last two matches are against Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) and Mumbai Indians (MI), who are placed ninth and tenth, respectively.

RR will make it to the top four if they win both those matches. In fact, RR have a chance to finish second if they win

their remaining two games, and if GT and SRH lose their respective one remaining match.

But if RR drop one of the two matches, they will remain in contention for fourth place if Punjab Kings (PBKS) lose their last match, and Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) lose one of their remaining two games.

The net run rate will come into play if RR tie on 14 points with Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and Delhi Capitals (DC). RR are ahead of CSK by about ten runs, but the gap between RR and DC is more than 200 runs.

- **Punjab Kings**
- **Played: 13, Points: 13, NRR: 0.227**
- **Remaining match: LSG (A)**

Six consecutive defeats put PBKS campaign on the brink of elimination in the league stage. A win in their last game against LSG will keep PBKS alive in the competition, but they would also

need RR to lose one of their remaining two matches.

PBKS could then tie on 15 points with KKR, who are on 11 points and still have two matches left to play. But a better net run rate will take PBKS through. PBKS might not be out of the fray if they lose, but would need a string of results to fall in their favour.

The first of that would be RR losing to LSG on Tuesday, then KKR losing to MI on Wednesday, and followed by CSK not winning against GT on Thursday. On Sunday, the last day of the group games, PBKS will need RR to lose to MI, and for KKR to defeat DC. But KKR's win margin should not be big enough to surpass PBKS' net run rate.

- **Chennai Super Kings**
- **Played: 13, Points: 12, NRR: -0.016**
- **Remaining match: GT (A)**

Back-to-back defeats have left CSK hoping for a miracle to qualify for the

playoffs. CSK can reach a maximum of 14 points, which means they need PBKS to lose to LSG, while RR and KKR need to lose one of their remaining two matches.

CSK could end up tied with RR and DC on 14 points, but can finish higher on net run rate. Currently, RR have the best net run rate of the three teams, but are only 0.043 ahead of CSK, while DC are way behind both.

- **Kolkata Knight Riders**
- **Played: 12, Points: 11, NRR: -0.038**
- **Remaining matches: MI (H) and DC (H)**

Five wins in the last six matches have kept KKR's hopes of a playoffs spot alive. Wins in their last two matches will take them to 15 points. They will need RR, who are currently on 12 points, to lose one of their last two matches. If PBKS win their last match, it will come down to net run rate between them and KKR.

KKR have a chance to qualify with 13 points as well, but will need a lot of results to go their way. KKR can't move further if they lose to DC, but can afford to lose to MI only if RR, PBKS and CSK lose their remaining matches too. A win with a bigger margin against DC in the last game will put KKR ahead of PBKS on net run rate in this scenario.

- **Delhi Capitals**
- **Played: 13, Points: 12, NRR: -0.871**
- **Remaining match: KKR (A)**

With a net run rate of -0.871, the worst among all ten teams, the realistic chance for DC to make it to the playoffs will depend on hoping that PBKS, RR and CSK lose their remaining matches. Then, a win against KKR in the last league game will see them finish fourth in the table.

But if CSK defeat GT, and RR win one of their two matches, then DC go into their last game needing a 200-plus run win.

**MJK Smith, former England and Warwickshire captain, dies aged 92**

**UNITED NEWS OF INDIA**

**WARWICKSHIRE:** Smith captained England in 25 of his 50 Tests between 1958 and 1972, and scored 2,278 runs at 31.63, with three hundreds and 11 fifties, and was awarded an OBE for his services to cricket in 1976.

He was a stalwart at Warwickshire throughout that time, in a 19-year career from 1956 to 1975, including ten years as captain from 1957 to 1967. His best season came in 1959, when he scored a club-record 2,417 runs to be named as a Wisden Cricketer of the Year the following year. In all he scored 39,832 first-class runs in 637 matches, the 18th-highest total of all time. Mild-mannered and bespectacled, Smith was the product of Stamford School and Oxford University, but possessed an everyman quality that made him popular with his players at the tail-end of the era in which it was expected that a gentleman amateur would captain professional cricket teams.

His captaincy record reflected the cautious era in which he played. He won five, lost three and drew 17 of his Tests in charge, but lost only one of the six series that he led. This came against Garry Sobers' powerful West Indies team in 1966, after he had secured a creditable 1-1 draw in Australia the previous winter. Smith was also a rare dual international. As a fly-half, he played rugby union for Oxford University and Leicestershire, and claimed a one-off England cap against Wales in 1956.

In retirement, he stayed active in cricket, becoming chairman of Warwickshire and an ICC match referee, standing in four Tests and 17 ODIs. He also served as an England tour manager, including on the Ashes tour of 1994-95.

Mike Atherton, who captained that tour, paid tribute to Smith in The Times. "MJK's good humour and easygoing demeanour was a wonderful antidote to the occasional stress and pressure I felt as captain," he wrote. "He was utterly unpretentious and saw cricket for what it was -- which is to say not a matter of life and death."

Geoffrey Boycott, England's former opener who played alongside Smith in 18 Tests between 1964 and 1972, wrote in the Telegraph that he had "a great sense of humour, no edge and was never officious. He was just a good man, a good gentle guy and you wanted him to do well. He gave you freedom to play and was not a martinet."

His death was marked at Edgbaston on Monday morning, as players and officials from Warwickshire and Glamorgan lined up on the outfield to pay their respects before the start of the final day's play in their County Championship fixture.

**'It's going to take a little bit of time': Fleming**

**UNITED NEWS OF INDIA**

**CHENNAI:** Stephen Fleming has backed Rituraj Gaikwad as Chennai Super Kings (CSK) captain but concedes that he has been off the pace with bat in hand in IPL 2026. "I think Rituraj can do more," Fleming said. "He's done more in the past. He's been a fine player at the top. He hasn't produced the quantity of runs and the pace of runs [this season] that he's done in his career. And that's something that he will address."

Gaikwad has failed to get going almost without exception this

season. Of the 27 batters who have scored 300-plus runs so far, Gaikwad is the only one with a strike rate below 145. Not marginally below, he has gone at 120.67. He does have 321 runs from 13 innings, but just two half-centuries, which suggests that he hasn't been able to carry on despite going slowly and trying to build his innings.

Other numbers, too, don't paint a happy picture for Gaikwad. He has the lowest powerplay strike rate among 19 batters to have faced 100-plus balls in the phase: 124.65. And the slowest half-century of

the season is also in his name: in 49 balls against Gujarat Titans (GT).

CSK were beaten by Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) with five wickets and one over to spare on Monday in Chennai. With only one game left, the five-time champions are looking at a third straight season where they haven't made the playoffs. Although injuries have hampered the team every step of the way, there has been a concern that Gaikwad's batting does not measure up in this hyper-attacking era of the IPL, particularly in the powerplays. He was

9 off 11 at the end of the first six overs on Monday.

"This year, at least, he was here the whole time. Last year, he wasn't here at all," Fleming said referring to the injury that ruled Gaikwad out of IPL 2025. "So it would be unfair to judge that. But, yeah, there's been a lot of work done behind the scenes as we learn about this group of players."

"It's a big transition from having one of the best captains [MS Dhoni] in the cricket scene running the franchise for such a long time to a new captain. So it's going to take a little bit of time. But he's

doing a good job. He has a massive amount of respect for this group of players. And he's learning all the time and putting that into play. So going forward, I have no doubt he'll be a fine captain for this franchise."

Dhoni was at the ground for the first time on match day this season. Fleming said he hasn't had any talks with the 44-year-old about next season. "No, we're working through this one" was all he offered when asked the question. Fleming accepted that CSK hadn't done well this season and that his own future was up to the team's owners.

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