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HEADLINES TODAY
Voice To The Voiceless



P:12 Iyer backs in-form openers as Sooryavanshi waits for chance

PM Modi Calls for Unity, Self-Reliance to Realise Developed India Vision by 2047

At Chinmaya Mission's 75th Anniversary Summit, PM Highlights Spiritual Heritage, Youth Engagement and National Responsibility



HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday called for greater social unity, self-reliance and collective commitment to achieve the vision of a developed India by 2047 while inaugurating the three-day Chinmaya

Amrit Mahotsav Global Sammelan at Bharat Mandapam. Marking 75 years of the Chinmaya Mission, Modi urged the organisation to mobilise its spiritual, educational and cultural network to address emerging social challenges, strengthen national responsibility and preserve India's philosophical heritage.

He also emphasised the importance of integrating traditional knowledge and mother tongues with modern science and technology, highlighting the role of young people and educational institutions in shaping the country's future.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday called for greater social unity, self-reliance and a renewed commitment to India's spiritual and philosophical heritage, saying the ambition of building a developed nation by 2047 required collective effort and a stronger sense of national responsibility.

Inaugurating the three-day Chinmaya Amrit Mahotsav Global Sammelan at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, marking the culmination of year-long celebrations commemorating 75 years of the Chinmaya Mission, Modi urged the organisation to use its spiritual, educational and cultural network to address emerging social challenges

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12 Million Blossoms to Paint Srinagar in Autumn Hues as Omar Abdullah Opens Bagh-e-Gul-Dawood

Chrysanthemum Show-2026 showcases 3.5 lakh plants across 70-plus varieties; CM eyes longer tourism season with a new floral attraction



HT NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR, OCTOBER 23: Kashmir's autumn landscape has gained a vibrant new attraction with Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday inaugurating the Chrysanthemum Show-2026 at the Botanical Garden, Chashma Shahi, and opening the Chrysanthemum Theme Garden, popularly known as Bagh-e-Gul-Dawood, for the public. The spectacular floral display, developed and curated by the

Department of Floriculture, Parks and Gardens, features nearly 12 million blossoms spread across 3.5 lakh plants representing more than 70 varieties of chrysanthemums. Extending over 100 kanals, the garden presents a colourful landscape of yellow, red, pink and purple blooms against the backdrop of Srinagar's surrounding mountains. Titled "Enriching Autumn with New Colours," the show is aimed at strengthening Kashmir's tourism calendar by

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CM Inaugurates ₹25 Crore Important Projects in Beerwah

Bridge over Nallah Sukhnag Opens; Power Infrastructure, Town Beautification Projects Get Push

HT NEWS NETWORK

BEERWAH (BUDGAM), OCTOBER 23: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday inaugurated and laid foundation stones for development projects worth ₹25 crore in Beerwah, including a bridge over Nallah Sukhnag, riverfront and town beautification works, a transformer repairing workshop, a receiving

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J&K to Link Budgetary Spending With Sustainable Development Goals

Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo Directs Departments to Expedite SDG-Aligned Budgeting Framework



HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

SRINAGAR, OCTOBER 23: Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo on Friday directed administrative departments to expedite preparations for integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their budgetary proposals for the next financial year. Chairing an interdepartmental meeting, he stressed the need to integrate the proposed SDG Monitoring Dashboard with the Public Financial Management System and the Budget Estimation, Allocation and Monitoring System to strengthen transparency, accountability and real-time expenditure tracking. The Higher Education Department will pilot the initiative during the Revised

Estimates exercise for 2026-27 before its proposed extension to other departments. Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo, today chaired an interdepartmental coordination meeting to sensitise administrative departments about integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their budgetary proposals for the forthcoming financial year, while addressing issues and concerns relating to the implementation of the proposed SDG-aligned budgeting framework.

The meeting was attended by the Additional Chief Secretary, Finance; Secretary, Planning, Development & Monitoring; and other concerned administrative heads; SIO, NIC;

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Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather Inaugurates ₹9 Crore Projects in Dreygam, Palpora

Bridge Over Shali Ganga Nallah, Road Project to Improve Connectivity Across Several Villages

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

BUDGAM, OCTOBER 23: Speaker Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather on Friday inaugurated development projects worth around ₹9 crore at Dreygam and Palpora in Budgam district, including a bridge over Shali Ganga Nallah and a road project at Palpora. The projects are expected to improve connectivity and ease transportation for residents of several villages, particularly students, patients, farmers, traders and daily commuters.

Emphasising the importance of basic infrastructure in rural development, Rather said improved road connectivity was essential for strengthening economic activity and ensuring better access to essential services. Speaker



Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather today inaugurated major development projects worth around ₹9 crore in Dreygam, Palpora.

The ambitious projects included a bridge at Shali Ganga Nallah in Dreygam and a road project at Palpora, marking a significant step towards strengthening the road connectivity and improving transportation facilities for people.

The newly inaugurated bridge is expected to provide a major relief to the residents of dozens of villages, as it will establish an important connectivity link and reduce the difficulties faced

MORE ON P 02

Over 30 Kashmiri Umrah pilgrims stranded in Saudi amid flight suspensions

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

SRINAGAR, OCT 23: At least 34 pilgrims from Jammu and Kashmir who travelled to Saudi Arabia for

Umrah have been stranded following the suspension of flights, prompting appeals for urgent government intervention to facilitate their safe and early return home.

According to the affected pilgrims, they were scheduled to return to Kashmir on October 13 but were unable to travel after airlines suspended services amid security

concerns in the region.

The stranded pilgrims, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), have urged Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to intervene and coordinate with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and airlines to arrange their return.

Some passengers have managed to return through alternative routes and connecting flights, but the high cost of such travel has made it unaffordable for many, they said.

With their stay in Saudi Arabia extending beyond schedule, several pilgrims said their financial resources were running

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HT BOTTOM NEWS

Ghulam Hassan Mir Seeks Immediate Release of Pending Social Security Pensions

Apni Party Leader Says Government Yet to Fulfil Promise of Raising Monthly Assistance to 3,000

HT NEWS DESK / AGENCIES

SRINAGAR, OCTOBER 23: Apni Party Senior Vice President Ghulam Hassan Mir on Friday demanded the immediate release of pending monthly pensions for elderly people, widows and persons with disabilities across Jammu and Kashmir. Alleging that beneficiaries had gone without financial assistance for several months, Mir criticised the government for failing to fulfil its election promise of increasing the monthly pension from 1,000 to 3,000. He urged the authorities to clear all outstanding payments without further delay and ensure timely assistance to economically vulnerable sections. Apni Party Senior Vice President and former Cabinet Minister Ghulam Hassan Mir on Friday demanded the immediate release of pending

monthly pensions for elderly people, widows and persons with disabilities across Jammu and Kashmir.

In a statement issued here, Mir said reports from the ground suggest



that beneficiaries belonging to these vulnerable sections have not received their monthly pensions for several months, causing hardship to people dependent on the financial assistance. He criticised the

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Fresh Snowfall Blankets Pir Ki Gali, Mughal Road Remains Open

Season's First Snowfall Triggers Temperature Drop; Commuters Advised Caution Amid Slippery Conditions

MS NAZKI HT CORRESPONDENT

POONCH, OCTOBER 23: Higher reaches of Pir Ki Gali along the historic Mughal Road received fresh snowfall on Friday evening, marking the first snowfall of the season in the area and intensifying the cold across the upper reaches of Poonch district. Officials told GNS that light snowfall was recorded at Pir Ki Gali and adjoining higher areas. Despite the snowfall, the Mughal Road, connecting Poonch and Rajouri districts with Shopian in south Kashmir, remains open for traffic. The drop in temperature has prompted people to switch to warmer clothing as chilly conditions intensify. Officials said the weather situation is being closely monitored



cautiously, particularly in higher reaches where roads may become slippery due to snowfall. The Meteorological

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Div Com Kashmir reviews Preparations for J&K UT Foundation Day, Run for Unity on October 31

Directs departments to ensure coordinated arrangements for celebrations at SKICC

HT News Network

SRINAGAR, OCTOBER 23: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg today chaired a meeting of officers to review arrangements for the celebration of the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory Foundation Day and the conduct of the Run for Unity on the occasion of Rashtriya Ekta Diwas, scheduled to be held on October 31 at SKICC.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Director Information, SSP Traffic, Director School Education, Secretary JKAACL, and representatives of Police, Youth Services and Sports (YSS), colleges, Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), Roads and Buildings (R&B), and other concerned departments.

During the meeting, the Divisional Commissioner reviewed the mobilisation plan for participants for the Run for Unity. Various departments and institutions, including Colleges, School Education, YSS, Sports Council, University of Kashmir, SKUAST-K, Skill Development Department, J&K Bank, NIT, R&B, Agriculture, Zila Sainik Welfare and ICDS, were assigned responsibilities for a smooth conduct of the event.



The Divisional Commissioner directed all stakeholder departments to assess and communicate their transportation requirements at the earliest. Deputy Director Planning was tasked with coordinating the transport plan, while SSCIL and RTC were directed to ensure the availability of an adequate number of buses for ferrying participants to the venue.

Emphasising the need for effective interdepartmental coordination, the Divisional Commissioner directed all departments to nominate Nodal Officers for the event. ADC Srinagar and Joint Commissioner, SMC, were designated as Nodal Officers for overall coordination.

The Deputy Commissioner Srinagar was

directed to oversee arrangements relating to invitation cards, VVIP seating as per warrant of precedence, nameplates, deployment of duty magistrates, and sound and audio-visual facilities.

The Director Information was directed to ensure the installation of public address systems at the back lawns and auditorium, besides making arrangements for hoardings, standees, video display screens, backdrop design and documentary screening. The department was also tasked with nominating anchors for the respective programmes.

SMC was directed to install hoardings in the back lawns, from where the Run for Unity will be flagged off, and facilitate the advance distribution of theme-based T-shirts among participants. J&K Bank was assigned the responsibility of distributing caps among the participants.

JKAACL was entrusted with organising two cultural programmes aligned with the theme and spirit of the occasion.

The Hospitality and Protocol Department was asked to make adequate refreshment arrangements for participants attending the Run for Unity and the UT Foundation Day celebrations.

ADC Sopore inspects ongoing repair Work on Sopore Bypass Bridge



BARAMULLA, OCTOBER 23: Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Sopore, S.A. Raina, today inspected the ongoing repair work on the Sopore Bypass Bridge to assess the progress of the work and review the measures being undertaken for its timely completion.

During the inspection, the ADC took stock of the ongoing repair activities and emphasised the need to ensure quality and timely completion of the work, keeping in view the importance of the bridge for daily commuters, transport operators and the movement of vehicles towards various destinations, including Sopore Fruit Mandi.

The ADC also issued an advisory for commuters and transport operators, urging them to cooperate with the concerned authorities during the repair work and follow traffic advisories and instructions issued from time to time. Commuters were advised to plan their journeys accordingly, exercise caution while passing through the affected stretch and avoid unnecessary inconvenience by adhering to traffic regulations.

The inspection was aimed at reviewing the progress of the repair work and ensuring that necessary measures are taken for the safety and convenience of the general public, particularly traders, fruit growers and transporters associated with Sopore Fruit Mandi.

Kashmiri doctors' research selected for oral presentation at ESC Congress 2026

HT News Network

Srinagar, Oct 23 (KNS): Two doctors of Kashmiri origin working at a hospital in the United Kingdom have earned international recognition after their research was selected for an oral presentation at the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) Congress 2026 in Munich, Germany.

Details available with News Agency Kashmir News Service (KNS), Dr Saalis Maqbool and Dr Abir Ajaz, associated with the Acute Medicine Department at Weston General Hospital, Bristol, were among a select group of researchers whose work was chosen for presentation at the prestigious international cardiology congress. According to the information provided, their research paper was among only eight selected worldwide for the distinction, highlighting the significance of their work in medical research. The ESC Congress is a major international platform for researchers and medical professionals to share scientific findings and discuss advances in cardiovascular medicine.

Bristol NHS Foundation Trust also congratulated the two doctors on their achievement, describing it as a reflection of the talent, innovation and expertise within its medical teams. The foundation said their recognition has brought pride to the medical fraternity in Kashmir, highlighting the contributions of doctors of Kashmiri origin working in international healthcare institutions.

Committee on Petitions reviews food adulteration; calls for state-of-the-art labs

HT News Network

SRINAGAR, OCTOBER 23: The Committee on Petitions of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly today convened its meeting in the Legislative Assembly Secretariat, Srinagar, under the Chairmanship of Pirzada Farooq Ahmad Shah, to deliberate upon adulteration of essential food commodities within Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting was attended by legislators Mir Mohammad Fayaz, Javid Riyaz (Bedar), Dr. Sajjad Shafi.

Chairman Pirzada Farooq Ahmad Shah said that adulteration of essential food commodities is a grave public health concern linked to daily lives of citizens. He directed the department to maintain zero tolerance, scale up inspections, ensure timely testing, fill up vacant posts, strengthen laboratories,



expedite disposal of cases through Adjudicating Authorities and intensify IEC activities under Mission Safe Food. He called for establishment of a state of the art laboratory both in Jammu and Kashmir regions for effective enforcement and timely testing of food samples.

The Commissioner, Food and Drugs Authority J&K, Khalid Jahangir presented a comprehensive Status Report comprising overview of organization, staff strength, updated ATR on recommendations of the

Committee, ATR on directions issued on 03.08.2026, IEC activities and key highlights of enforcement as per FSSAI mandate.

On enforcement, it was informed that 11,720 inspections have been conducted with 6,259 enforcement and 2,508 surveillance samples lifted and 5,179 samples tested through MFTVs during 2026-27 till October. Besides, special enforcement drives from April to October 2026 were conducted on fresh vegetables, packaged drinking water, nutraceuticals.

DC Kulgam reviews progress on installation of smart meters Directs expediting of pending works

Farooq Rather

KULGAM, OCTOBER 23: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kulgam, Shahzad Alam, today reviewed the progress achieved in the installation of smart meters across the district during a meeting held at Mini-Secretariat, Kulgam, and directed the concerned departments and executing agencies to expedite pending works and ensure timely completion of the prescribed targets.

During the meeting, progress on smart meter installation, feeder-wise achievements, pending installations and issues requiring intervention were discussed. The DC directed RECPDCL and Techno Electric (AMISP) to expedite the execution of pending works on ongoing and completed feeders, covering a total of 51 feeders, with a focus on achieving feeder saturation across the district.

He further instructed the concerned agencies to include the Nilow feeder and take necessary measures to complete the pending works in a time-bound manner.

Representing RECPDCL, Assistant Executive



Engineer (AEE) assured that all feasible works, including those pertaining to the newly included Nilow feeder, would be taken up within the scope, provisions and limitations of the project.

The meeting emphasized effective coordination among all stakeholders, expediting pending installations and achieving the prescribed targets under the Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP) and the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) to strengthen electricity distribution infrastructure and improve power supply services across Kulgam district.

DC Budgam tours Beerwah, reviews functioning of revenue offices

HT News Network

BUDGAM, OCTOBER 23: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Budgam, Jatin Kishore, today conducted an extensive tour of Beerwah to review the functioning of key offices and assess the delivery of public services.

During the visit, the Deputy Commissioner inspected the SDM Office Complex, Sub-Registrar and Tehsil Office Beerwah, taking stock of administrative functioning, infrastructure, public amenities and the status of services being provided to the general public.

At the Tehsil Office, he inspected various sections, including the SQ Section, MM Section and Establishment Section, and reviewed the disposal of public cases, maintenance of official records and progress in revenue-related matters.

The DC reviewed key revenue services, including the issuance of revenue extracts and certificates, mutation cases, land record verification and demarcation-related matters. He stressed the timely disposal of applications, expeditious processing of pending cases and proper



maintenance and digitisation of revenue records. At the SDM Office Complex, he assessed public facilities and reviewed the functioning of the concerned offices,

including arrangements for the smooth processing of registration-related matters. Emphasising transparency, accountability and efficiency, the Deputy

Commissioner directed the concerned officers to strengthen monitoring, ensure effective grievance redressal and provide prompt assistance to the public. He stressed that unnecessary delays in the disposal of cases must be avoided and all services should be delivered within the prescribed timelines.

The DC also inspected the Sub-Registrar Office, Beerwah, and took stock of the registration services being provided to the public. He stressed the timely processing of registration cases, transparency in procedures and efficient delivery of services. He directed the concerned officials to ensure hassle-free public access and prompt redressal of issues related to registration services.

He also interacted with applicants to obtain feedback on the services being provided and directed the officers to address public grievances promptly.

The Deputy Commissioner was accompanied by Joint Director Planning, Javed Ahmad; SDM Beerwah, Taufeeq Ahmad Gazi; Sub-Registrar Beerwah; Tehsildar Beerwah; Tehsildar Khag and other senior officers.

DC Budgam inspects SDH Beerwah, reviews healthcare facilities

HT News Network

BUDGAM, OCTOBER 23: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Budgam, Jatin Kishore, today visited Sub-District Hospital (SDH) Beerwah to assess healthcare infrastructure, review patient care arrangements and take stock of the availability of essential medical facilities.

During the visit, the Deputy Commissioner inspected various hospital wards and units, including the Emergency and Dental Units, gynaecology, along with other clinical and diagnostic sections. He reviewed their functioning, availability of medical equipment and arrangements for efficient patient management.

The DC also inspected the hospital pharmacy and reviewed the availability of essential medicines, directing the concerned authorities to maintain adequate stocks and ensure timely availability of medicines to patients. He further assessed laboratory and diagnostic services, staffing arrangements and other essential healthcare facilities.

Interacting with the Block Medical Officer and other hospital officials, the Deputy Commissioner stressed the need to ensure quality healthcare, proper cleanliness and hygiene, functional medical equipment and



improved patient facilitation.

He directed the hospital authorities to strengthen coordination among different units, ensure timely medical attention and maintain efficient patient management systems for the smooth delivery of essential healthcare services.

The Deputy Commissioner also interacted with patients and their attendants to obtain feedback on the availability and quality of medical facilities. He emphasised that patient welfare, accessibility and quality care must remain the foremost priorities of the hospital administration.

The DC was accompanied by Joint Director Planning, Javed Ahmad; SDM Beerwah, Taufeeq Ahmad Gazi; Chief Medical Officer and other senior officers.

HT EDITORIAL

Winter Yet to Arrive, But Kashmir Is Already Grappling With Power Crisis

Unscheduled cuts, voltage fluctuations expose gaps in government's winter preparedness. The announcement of scheduled power shutdowns across several areas of Srinagar from October 25 to November 15 for tree lopping and preventive maintenance has once again brought the worsening electricity scenario in Kashmir into sharp focus. While maintenance is essential, the timing and frequency of these outages raise serious questions about the government's preparedness for the approaching winter.

Winter has not yet set in, but the hardships associated with it have already begun. Unscheduled power cuts, sudden voltage drops and prolonged interruptions are troubling consumers, including those in metered areas. With temperatures falling, households, students, traders and small businesses are struggling to cope with an unreliable electricity supply. The situation is particularly alarming when the harshest winter conditions are still ahead.

The government cannot continue to rely on routine maintenance schedules and technical explanations while people bear the brunt of inadequate planning. If tree lopping and preventive maintenance are necessary, why are these works not completed well before winter? Consumers have every right to question why avoidable disruptions continue to affect daily life year after year.

The popular government must also explain the widening gap between its assurances and the ground reality. Consumers are expected to pay electricity bills and comply with metering requirements, but they deserve a dependable service in return. Metering alone cannot be considered an achievement if unscheduled cuts and voltage fluctuations continue unabated.

Electricity is not a luxury in Kashmir; it is an essential service, particularly during the long and harsh winter months. The administration must ensure that maintenance work is completed within stipulated deadlines, unnecessary shutdowns are avoided and the distribution network is strengthened to meet rising demand. The power department must also be held accountable for persistent disruptions and poor voltage regulation. October has already offered a troubling preview of the winter ahead. The government must act before the situation deteriorates further. People are not asking for favours; they are demanding reliable electricity for which they pay. Another winter of darkness, uncertainty and unanswered questions would reflect a serious failure of planning and governance.

Restore Old Pension Scheme : Employees Deserve Dignity and Financial Security After Retirement;



By - Mushtaq Ahmad Bhat

A government employee spends the best years of his life serving the people and fulfilling his official responsibilities. During this period, he works hard to support his family, educate his children and contribute to society. But a question continues to trouble thousands of employees: what will happen when they retire and their regular salary stops?

For an employee, pension is not an additional luxury. It is the only dependable source of income in old age for many retired employees. When physical strength declines, medical expenses increase and opportunities to earn become limited, a regular pension becomes essential for a respectable life.

It is unfortunate that employees who have dedicated decades to public service are still worried about their financial future after retirement. This uncertainty has become one of the major concerns among government employees, particularly those covered under the National Pension System (NPS).

The Old Pension Scheme (OPS) provided eligible employees with a defined pension based on their last drawn salary and qualifying service. It gave them a sense of security that, after retirement, they would not be left entirely uncertain about their monthly income. NPS, on the other hand, is a contributory system in which retirement benefits depend on accumulated contributions, investment returns and the applicable withdrawal and annuity rules. This difference has created genuine apprehensions among employees about whether



their retirement income will be sufficient to meet their needs.

The demand for restoring OPS is not about seeking any special favour from the government. Employees are asking for a secure future after spending their entire working lives serving public institutions. They want to meet their household expenses, pay for medicines and live with dignity without depending on their children or other family members.

The matter deserves particular attention in the education sector. A teacher may spend thirty years or more educating children, working in remote areas and carrying responsibilities that extend well beyond the classroom. After retirement, that teacher deserves peace of mind, not the constant worry of managing daily expenses with an uncertain income.

The government must also understand that financial security after retirement has a direct bearing on the morale of serving

employees. An employee who remains worried about his future cannot be expected to remain free from anxiety throughout his working life. A fair pension policy can strengthen employees' confidence in the system and help them serve with greater satisfaction.

It is often argued that restoring the Old Pension Scheme may place an additional burden on government finances. Financial considerations cannot be ignored, but the issue should not be reduced to a calculation of expenditure alone. The welfare of employees who have devoted their lives to public service must also form an important part of the government's priorities. A balanced and sustainable solution can be discussed, but the genuine concerns of employees should not be brushed aside.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the government should give serious consideration to the demand raised by employee organisations for the restoration of OPS. It should also address the

concerns of Rehbar-e-Taleem teachers, contractual employees and others who were appointed before 2010 but regularised after the introduction of NPS, subject to the applicable rules and the need for a fair and equitable policy.

The government needs to sit across the table with employee representatives and find a solution that provides real retirement security. Mere assurances cannot remove the anxiety of employees who are approaching retirement or those who have many years of service ahead of them.

The question is simple: after serving the government and the people for decades, should an employee have to worry about how he will survive after retirement?

The government should scrap NPS and restore the Old Pension Scheme for eligible employees. Employees are not asking for a reward beyond their rights; they are asking for protection during the most vulnerable stage of their lives.

A government employee may retire from service, but his needs do not retire with him. His responsibilities continue, his family still depends on him, and his medical and household expenses remain. A secure pension can make the difference between a life of dignity and a life of constant financial struggle.

The government must recognise this reality. Restoring OPS would be a meaningful step towards rebuilding employees' confidence and ensuring that years of dedicated service are followed by a peaceful and dignified retirement.

Pension is not charity. It is a matter of security, dignity and justice for those who have devoted their lives to public service.

The author is an educator and a prominent Trade Union Leader and can be contacted at mushtaqhat1312@gmail.com

When Seasons Change, Health Suffers

Understanding Seasonal Infections in Kashmir



Dr. Uzma Naqash

Kashmir is admired for its breathtaking landscapes and changing seasons. Yet, as autumn gives way to winter, the region also faces a familiar health concern: a rise in seasonal illnesses. Falling temperatures, sudden weather changes and more time spent indoors can make it easier for respiratory viruses to spread, especially in crowded or poorly ventilated places. For families, schools and workplaces, this is a timely reminder that protecting health requires awareness as well as care.

Common illnesses during this period include the common cold, influenza (flu), sore throat and other respiratory infections. Symptoms may include coughing, sneezing, a runny or blocked nose, fever, body aches and tiredness. Many cases improve with rest and supportive care, but some infections can become serious, particularly for young children, older adults, pregnant people and individuals with chronic illnesses or weakened immune systems.

Why Do Infections Spread More Easily?
Cold weather itself does not cause a viral infection; viruses do. However, colder months often bring people closer together indoors, where viruses can pass from person to person through respiratory particles and, in some cases, contaminated hands or surfaces. Poor ventilation



and close contact can increase the chance of transmission. Cold, dry air may also aggravate some breathing problems, making it important to recognise symptoms early and seek advice when needed.

In Kashmir, winter conditions can also make travel to healthcare facilities difficult for some families. Older people living alone, children and those with existing health conditions may need additional support. Checking on vulnerable neighbours and relatives, sharing reliable health information and avoiding the spread of misinformation are simple ways communities can help.

Prevention Begins with Everyday Habits
A few practical measures can lower the risk of infection and help protect others:

- Wash hands regularly with soap and water, especially after coughing, sneezing or returning home.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a

tissue or your elbow, and dispose of tissues safely.

- Keep rooms ventilated whenever possible, even during colder weather.
- Avoid close contact with others when unwell; consider a well-fitting mask in crowded indoor settings or when advised.
- Drink enough fluids, eat balanced meals and get adequate sleep to support general health.
- Ask a healthcare professional whether seasonal influenza vaccination is recommended for you or your family members.
- Do not take antibiotics or other medicines without appropriate medical advice.
- Warm clothing can help people remain comfortable in cold weather, but it does not prevent every infection. Good hygiene, ventilation, vaccination where appropriate and staying home when ill are important complementary steps.
- Protecting Children and Older Adults
Children may catch infections at school and

bring them home, while older adults and people with chronic conditions may face a greater risk of complications. Families and schools can encourage hand hygiene, keep frequently touched surfaces clean and ensure that indoor spaces receive fresh air. If a child or older adult becomes unwell, monitor their condition and seek medical advice when symptoms are concerning or do not improve.

Difficulty breathing, persistent chest pain, confusion, bluish lips, severe dehydration or a sudden worsening of symptoms requires urgent medical attention. People at higher risk should contact a healthcare professional early, as timely assessment can be important for some respiratory infections.

Awareness Is a Community Responsibility
Seasonal infections affect more than individual health. They can lead to missed school days, absence from work, added family expenses and pressure on healthcare services. Local awareness efforts by schools, community groups and health workers can help people identify symptoms, understand prevention and seek care at the right time. Information should come from qualified healthcare professionals and trusted public-health sources.

Kashmir's autumn and winter have their own beauty, but seasonal health challenges should not be overlooked. With practical precautions, timely medical care and concern for vulnerable members of society, communities can reduce the impact of common infections. Protecting health is a shared responsibility, and small actions taken consistently can make a meaningful difference.

Home Libraries



Sahil Manzoor Bhatti

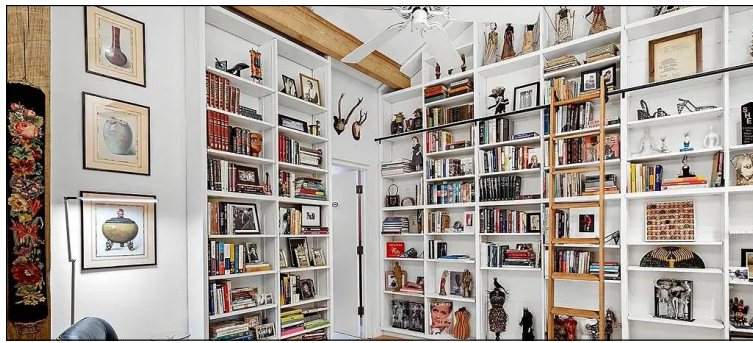
Today, we often see books being sold on footpaths, while shoes and other things are displayed in beautifully decorated shops. This makes us think: Is this progress or destruction of our society?

Books are not ordinary things. They are a source of knowledge, wisdom, and education. Whatever the world has achieved today is largely because of knowledge and education. Educated people have contributed greatly to the development of society.

Therefore, books deserve respect and a special place in our homes. We should encourage people to buy books and develop home libraries for themselves and their children. We can keep a separate space for books with proper shelves, good lighting, and comfortable furniture. A beautiful home library can attract children and encourage them to read books instead of spending too much time playing games or using smartphones.

I have seen many people who have a strong interest in learning. They study at home whenever they get free time and also encourage their children to study. Home libraries can bring a positive change in our families and may even start a revolution in our reading habits.

We should keep different types of books, such as religious books, storybooks, books on reasoning, poetry, economics, geography, history, science, and other subjects. In this way, every family member can find something interesting to read instead of wasting time.



The Importance of Public Libraries
The public can also play an important role in changing society. Libraries play a vital role in the intellectual, moral, and professional development of society.

In today's fast-changing world, knowledge has become one of the most important tools for personal development and national progress. Therefore, it is important to establish well-equipped public libraries at the district and tehsil levels across the Kashmir Valley. These libraries should ideally provide long working hours, including 24x7 access where practical and feasible, especially for students preparing for competitive examinations.

Modern libraries should have updated books, digital resources, computers, internet facilities, printing services, newspapers, journals, and trained librarians. A good public library can become a strong center for learning, innovation, and success.

Nowadays, public libraries have become an important demand among students and competitive-exam aspirants. Many young people are asking for better study facilities. Libraries can provide a common place where students from different backgrounds can sit together, study, share ideas, and work towards their goals.

Education is the key to empowerment, and libraries support education by making knowledge accessible to everyone.

Education and Modern Technology
Today's world is full of advanced technology. Artificial intelligence, digital learning platforms, smartphones, computers, and modern machines have changed the way we learn and work.

When almost every sector is moving forward with technology, education should also keep pace with modern developments. Libraries should therefore combine traditional books with digital learning facilities.

As the famous saying goes, "Education is the most powerful weapon which can change the world."

Education does not discriminate between rich and poor. It gives everyone an opportunity to learn, grow, and improve their lives.

If we understand the needs of the present time, we should not hesitate to introduce meaningful changes. The demand for better public libraries should be seriously considered by the authorities.

Education is important not only for an individual's personal development but also for the progress of a nation. Strong education systems have helped the world produce scientists, doctors,

engineers, teachers, writers, and innovators. Libraries have always been silent but important supporters of this progress.

Libraries for Competitive-Exam Aspirants
Public libraries are especially important for young people preparing for competitive examinations such as civil services, banking, defence, teaching, and other national-level examinations.

Many students face problems such as a lack of proper study space, limited access to books, poor internet connectivity, and an unsuitable study environment at home. A well-equipped library can solve many of these problems by providing a peaceful place to study, updated books, internet access, and digital resources.

In the Kashmir Valley, there is a large amount of talent among students and young people. Educational institutions help students develop ideas about social, economic, educational, environmental, moral, health, and technological issues.

However, difficult circumstances and disruptions in educational activities can sometimes affect students. Whenever schools and colleges remain closed for any reason, public libraries can provide an alternative learning space. They can help students continue their studies and reduce the loss of valuable learning time.

The Need in Rural Areas
A large part of the population of the Kashmir Valley lives in villages and small hamlets where educational facilities are sometimes limited.

The government has taken important steps to provide education to children. The Right to Education Act, introduced through the 86th Constitutional Amendment in 2002, added Article 21-A to the Constitution and provides for free and compulsory education for children between six and fourteen years of age.

Sahil Manzoor Bhatti
sahilmanzoor411990@gmail.com

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HT SATURDAY- GOSSIP ---



By YOUSUF MIR, Bandipora

(A symbolic story of freedom, injustice, and accountability for one's deeds.)

There was a vast and beautiful valley. High mountains, dense forests, clear streams and green meadows added to its charm. Some places were filled with fruit-laden orchards, others with flourishing fields and pastures covered in soft grass. The chirping of birds and the cool breeze seemed to fill the entire valley with life.

The valley had an owner who had settled horses of different colours, sizes and breeds there. White, black, red and brown horses lived in their own ways. Some were tall and strong, some small in size, some swift runners and others slow walkers.

The owner had allotted separate grazing areas to every horse and its group. Some were given land near the streams, others near the orchards, and still others in open fields. There was enough space, water and freedom for everyone to live in the valley.

One day, the owner gathered all the horses and addressed them.

"This valley is for all of you. You are free to live in your own areas, graze, drink water and run. But remember, freedom does not mean forgetting the rights of others. No horse shall enter another's pasture and eat its share. No strong horse shall suppress a weaker one. No one shall be injured or treated unjustly. Each of you has been given an opportunity to live your life. Do not turn that opportunity into a source of suffering for others."

All the horses knew these rules. Each had been told where its territory lay and which pasture belonged to it. They understood that there was no need to occupy another's land to live comfortably in the valley. Yet every horse chose its own way of life according to its nature and character.

In one part of the valley lived a large group of white horses. They followed a simple principle. They stayed within their allotted boundaries, ate their own grass and drank from their own streams. If grass became scarce in their pasture, they remained patient or searched for it elsewhere within their own territory.

One white horse once said to its companions, "The place given to us by the owner is enough for us. If we begin taking away the rights of others to satisfy our needs, what difference will remain between us and them?"

The other white horses followed the same principle.

But there was also a group of red horses in the valley. Many of them were strong and swift. They took pride in their strength and often crossed the boundaries of their own territory. Whenever they saw greener grass in another area, they went there without hesitation and occupied someone else's pasture. They did not care that the grass they were eating had been allotted to another

that, they raided the black horses' pasture more frequently. They ate the grass, drank the water and tried to drive the black horses away from their own land.

An old black horse tried to stop them. "This is our pasture. The owner allotted this place to us. Who gave you the right to eat our grass?"



group.

One day, some red horses approached the white horses. "Come with us," one of them said. "There is no shortage of grass in this valley. Go wherever you like and eat as much as you want."

The next day, the red horses led them towards the pasture of the black horses. The grass there was thick and fresh. As soon as the red horses arrived, they began grazing, but the white horses stood aside.

The red horses called out to them. "Come on, eat as well. There is no shortage of anything here." One of them spoke mockingly. "You are strange horses! You do not even realise your own strength. In this valley, only those survive who know how to take what they want from others. These rules and restrictions will get you nowhere."

The white horses said nothing. They returned to their own pasture. The red horses took their refusal as a sign of weakness. After

The leader of the red horses glared at him and replied, "Rights belong to those who have the strength to claim them. If you are weak, how is it that our fault?"

The old horse fell silent. He did not have the strength to resist their oppression.

Time passed, and the seasons changed in the valley. Sometimes it rained, sometimes the sun shone, new grass grew in some places and old grass withered in others. The white horses continued to live within their allotted boundaries. The red horses, intoxicated by their strength, continued to violate the rights of others. The black horses endured injustice but did not surrender their rightful claims.

Then, one day, the owner ordered all the horses to assemble. No one knew why they had been called. They left their respective areas and gathered in an open field.

The owner looked at them and said, "Now you must go to the Second Valley." Whispers spread among the horses. Some appeared calm, others frightened, while a few believed that, as always, their

strength would help them overcome any difficulty.

One by one, all the horses were brought before the owner. A record lay before him, containing the deeds of every horse in the First Valley. When it was opened, scene after scene came to light. It showed who had respected the boundaries, who had occupied another's pasture, who had pushed the weak aside, and who had refused to take another's rights despite suffering injustice. Every deed was recorded in its true form.

The leader of the red horses stepped forward confidently. He believed that, as before, he could use his words to turn the situation in his favour.

The owner asked him, "Did you violate the rights of others in the First Valley?"

"Master, whatever we did was out of necessity. There was plenty of grass in the valley. What harm did we cause anyone?"

The owner pointed to the record. It showed every occasion when the red horses had driven the black horses away from their pasture, eaten their share of grass and mocked their helplessness. The leader lowered his eyes.

"Master, forgive us. We will not do it again."

The owner replied, "In the First Valley, you were given opportunities to correct your mistakes. You had both time and freedom of choice, but you wasted those opportunities. Here, no one will be treated unjustly. Those who did good will receive their reward, and those who oppressed others will face the consequences of their deeds."

Then the owner pointed towards the scales of justice. "This is the Valley of Justice. No one's strength, claim or denial can change the truth here. Everyone will be given a place according to their deeds."

The leader of the red horses tried to say something, but the owner showed him the deeds preserved in the record. He had neither an argument left nor any room to deny what he had done. Next, the white horses were called forward. They stood quietly before the owner.

He asked them, "When you had the opportunity to take grass from the pastures of others, why did you refrain from doing so?"

One of the white horses replied, "Master, we believed that you had given everyone enough space according to their needs. If we had used our strength or opportunity to take away the rights of others, we would have done exactly what the red horses did."

The owner said, "You too had freedom of choice. You could have entered the pastures of others, but you did not use your freedom to cause them suffering."

Then the black horses were called forward. Their elderly leader bowed his head before the owner. His eyes held memories of all those days of deprivation and helplessness when he had been made a stranger in his own pasture.

The owner asked him, "Have you forgotten what happened to you?"

"No, Master," the old horse replied. "We endured much. Our grass was taken away, and we were driven from our own place. Yet we did not surrender our rights. We believed that one day

justice would prevail."

The owner said, "The suffering you endured and the injustice done to you are also recorded. You will receive what is rightfully yours."

Then the gates of the Second Valley were opened. The white and black horses were allowed to enter a green valley where fresh grass, clear water and peace awaited them. The black horses no longer had to abandon their pasture or feel helpless in defending their rights. Their faces showed relief, as if a long wait had finally come to an end.

But an entirely different place had been assigned to the red horses. They were taken to a desolate place resembling a scorching desert, where nothing but sand stretched as far as the eye could see. There was no green grass, no shade of trees and no stream of water. The sand was burning under the fierce heat of the sun. As soon as the red horses stepped onto the sand, their hooves began to burn. They lifted one leg and then another, but nowhere could they find cool ground. The hot sand clung to their bodies, scorching their skin. They ran here and there in search of shade and water, but all around them lay nothing but sand.

Soon, thirst weakened them. Their tongues began to dry, and they repeatedly licked their lips, but not a single drop of water was available to quench their thirst. Their breathing grew heavy. Their legs trembled with exhaustion, and they began collapsing onto the burning sand.

The horses who had once laughed at the helplessness of others while occupying their pastures were now helpless themselves. Those who had deprived others of their share of water were now longing for a single drop.

A change had also come over their leader. The horse who had once boasted of his strength and mocked the weak now stood silently, watching the suffering of his companions. His eyes repeatedly turned towards the green valley. For the first time, he was beginning to understand the deprivation he had inflicted on others.

He called out to the owner. "Master, we were wrong. Please take us away from this place. We regret what we did in the First Valley. Give us another chance."

The other red horses gathered around him. Their eyes were fixed on the green valley, where the white and black horses were drinking from the streams and grazing on fresh grass.

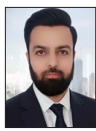
"Master, please send us back to the First Valley," their leader pleaded. "We promise that we will never enter another's pasture, eat anyone else's share of grass or oppress the weak. We will live peacefully with everyone. Please give us one more chance."

The owner looked at them and said, "The First Valley no longer exists. No one can return to it now."

The leader of the red horses fell silent. His companions stood with their heads bowed. Their pleas, promises and regrets could not bring back the time that had passed. In the Second Valley, each had received a place according to their deeds.

Email: yousufmir555@gmail.com

More Than Marks: Creating Opportunities for Children with Learning Disabilities



Mohammad Hanief

Education is often judged by examination results, grades and classroom performance. Yet, these measures do not always reflect a child's true abilities, creativity or potential. For children with learning disabilities, the pressure to meet conventional academic expectations can turn school into a place of anxiety rather than discovery. Difficulties with reading, writing, spelling or mathematics may affect their confidence, particularly when their struggles are misunderstood as carelessness or a lack of effort. In this context, co-curricular activities can play a transformative role by helping children recognise their strengths, express their abilities and develop a stronger sense of belonging.

Learning disabilities, including dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia, affect particular areas of learning and vary from child to child. They do not automatically indicate low intelligence or a lack of ambition. A student who struggles to write a paragraph may possess remarkable artistic talent, while another who finds calculations difficult may excel in music, sport, drama or practical work. When education focuses too narrowly on marks, such abilities can remain unnoticed. A more inclusive approach recognises that children learn differently and deserve opportunities to succeed in different ways.

Co-curricular activities are not merely recreational additions to the school timetable. Sports, drawing, painting, music, dance, drama, gardening, storytelling, handicrafts and cultural programmes can contribute significantly to a child's emotional, social and intellectual development. They encourage teamwork, communication, discipline, creativity and problem-solving while allowing children to learn through experience rather than relying exclusively on written assignments and examinations.

For a child who repeatedly faces academic difficulties, achieving something in another field can be deeply encouraging. Completing a painting, learning a dance sequence, participating in a school play or contributing to a sports team can provide a sense of accomplishment that conventional assessments may fail to capture. Appreciation from teachers and classmates can help children understand that their abilities matter and that they have a valuable place in the school community.

Such experiences are particularly important because repeated failure and negative comparisons can weaken a child's self-esteem. When students are given opportunities to demonstrate their

strengths, they are more likely to participate, build friendships and approach challenges with greater confidence. Co-curricular activities therefore support not only talent development but also emotional well-being and social inclusion.

India's educational framework increasingly recognises the need to make education accessible and meaningful for children with disabilities. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises equitable and inclusive education, while the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, provides a legal framework for inclusive education and appropriate support. These commitments

The emphasis should be on effort, progress and enjoyment rather than perfection. Children should not be publicly compared with classmates or discouraged because they need more time to learn. General teachers, special educators, counsellors and parents can work together to identify appropriate opportunities and provide consistent support. Professional development can also help teachers recognise learning disabilities and respond with practical, evidence-informed strategies.

Co-curricular activities can complement academic learning as well. Storytelling and drama

Education authorities should look beyond enrolment figures and examination results to examine whether children with disabilities are participating fully in school life and receiving the support they require. Reliable local information and regular monitoring can help identify gaps and improve services.

Jammu and Kashmir's rich cultural traditions also offer valuable opportunities for inclusive participation. Poetry, storytelling, art, handicrafts, music and community celebrations can allow children to express themselves while connecting with their cultural heritage. Sports and recreational

activities can promote physical well-being, teamwork and friendship when reasonable adjustments are made where necessary. Such opportunities should welcome different abilities rather than expect every child to perform in exactly the same way.

Parents, teachers, school leaders and education authorities all have a role in helping children flourish. Parents can encourage their children's interests, celebrate small achievements and avoid constant comparisons with siblings or classmates. Teachers can make participation an integral part of school life, while school leaders can ensure that bullying and ridicule are not tolerated. Community organisations can contribute by promoting awareness, supporting families and creating

opportunities for children to display their talents. Ultimately, the purpose of education extends far beyond passing examinations. It should help children develop independence, confidence, relationships and a sense of purpose. Co-curricular activities are therefore not optional extras for children with learning disabilities; they are an important part of equitable and meaningful education.

A child may need additional time to read a passage or solve a mathematical problem, yet shine on the playground, on stage, in a workshop or through a work of art. These achievements deserve recognition because they reveal dimensions of ability that marks alone cannot measure.

The true measure of an inclusive school is not whether every child learns in the same way, but whether every child receives the understanding, support and

opportunity needed to develop their potential. When schools look beyond examination results and value the whole child, they create an environment where differences are respected, confidence grows and every learner has a genuine opportunity to succeed.

The author is a senior analyst and environmentalist. Feedback can be sent to m.hanief@gmail.com. Twitter/X: [@ghaniefmha](https://twitter.com/ghaniefmha)

Salute to a dedicated public servant who continues to inspire respect through his commitment to duty



By M S Nazki

It's only after you've stepped outside your comfort zone that you begin to change, grow, and transform. Success is not how high you have climbed, but how you make a positive difference to the world.

- Be grateful for what you already have while you pursue your goals. If you aren't grateful for what you already have, what makes you think you would be happy with more.

- You never change your life until you step out of your comfort zone; change begins at the end of your comfort zone. Let the improvement of yourself keep you so busy that you have no time to criticize others...

- Listen with curiosity. Speak with honesty. Act with integrity. The greatest problem with communication is we don't listen to understand. We listen to reply. When we listen with curiosity, we don't listen with the intent to reply. We listen for what's behind the words..... Governor Bihar!

- Ata Hasnain Retd represents dedication, discipline, honesty, and a deep commitment to public service. His personal faith is his own, but his professionalism and service to the nation are what deserve to be recognised and respected. True leadership is not about titles or labels—it is about integrity, courage, responsibility, and service. Salute to a dedicated public servant who continues to inspire respect through his commitment to duty. This is the crux of the story!

- True leadership is defined by daily actions, moral character, and empowering others rather than holding an official rank or title..... Ata Hussain believes in this!

• Integrity: Aligning your actions with your words and doing what is right even when nobody is watching.

• Courage: Facing difficult challenges, making hard choices, and standing firm during times of uncertainty.

• Responsibility: Owning the outcomes—taking the blame when things fail and sharing the credit when things succeed.

• Service: Prioritizing the needs of your team or community to help them grow and succeed.

If you'd like, we can explore how to apply these traits in a specific setting like the workplace, a community project, or

your personal life. Let me know what area you want to focus on!

- Some stories of great leadership:

- The hotel with a hockey rink:

- When organisations truly empower their employees, magic happens. The Ritz-Carlton is a great example of an organisation that does just that. All the Ritz-Carlton employees referred to as Ladies and Gentlemen are empowered to spend up to \$2000 per guest to improve the guest experience—to deliver a WOW moment. No questions asked. No permission needed. They are trusted to do the right thing.

There are many Ritz-Carlton stories to be told but this is one of my favourites. A loss prevention officer at The Ritz-Carlton in Toronto, was called to a guest room for the second time to receive another complaint about children playing hockey in the corridor. He could have spoken to the parents and asked them to keep the children in the hotel room. Rather than do that, he came up with a more creative solution to the problem.

He enlisted banquet employees to isolate space in one of the meeting rooms and create a hockey rink, using banquet tables as the outline of the rink. While the set-up was taking place, he went to a local sports store and purchased two hockey nets, six hockey sticks and hockey balls. When the set-up was complete, he delivered a hand-written note to the family informing them that The Ritz-Carlton had a hockey rink for those who wished to play. Further he challenged them to a match against the Loss Prevention All-Stars. The children's father was incredulous that The Ritz-Carlton had a hockey rink and a team on site and vowed they would be down to the rink shortly. When the father and sons arrived at the meeting place, they were awed by the impromptu hockey rink. It was a WOW moment created by demonstration of inspired leadership.

The Loss-Prevention All-Stars and Team Family had a close match with Team Family winning the game. The game was recorded on the in-house cameras and the family sent photos of the event. Double-wow! -To serve

Chip Bell shares a great story from the 1995 book Fabled Service by Betsy Sanders who is now a business consultant dedicated to improving corporate organisational efficiency and individual growth. Whilst a store manager at Nordstrom, she and her team made retail history building the news southern California business to \$1 billion in annual sales over a 12-year period, quickly becoming Nordstrom's largest and profitable region. While developing Nordstrom into a business partnership with their customers.

Divisional Commissioner Jammu visits Samba, reviews developmental works, welfare schemes

HT News Network

SAMBA, OCTOBER 23: Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Vikas Kundal today visited Samba to review the progress of ongoing developmental works and assess the implementation of various welfare schemes. The visit aimed to evaluate the progress of key development initiatives, ensure effective inter-departmental coordination and strengthen the delivery of public services to the people.

During the visit, the Divisional Commissioner reviewed the status of major developmental projects being executed by various departments and took stock of the physical and financial progress achieved under different schemes. The review focused on the pace of execution, adherence to prescribed



timelines, quality of work and resolution of issues affecting the timely completion of projects.

The Divisional Commissioner also assessed the implementation of various government-sponsored welfare schemes aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of the people, particularly those belonging to economically weaker

sections and other eligible beneficiary groups. Emphasis was laid on ensuring that the benefits of these schemes reach the intended beneficiaries in a transparent, efficient and time-bound manner.

Special attention was given to strengthening inter-departmental coordination, addressing administrative bottlenecks and

ensuring accountability at all levels. The concerned officers apprised the Divisional Commissioner of the progress of developmental works, utilisation of funds, implementation of welfare initiatives and challenges encountered during execution.

The Divisional Commissioner reviewed the functioning of the concerned departments, emphasising the need for transparency, efficiency and responsiveness in public service delivery. He called upon the officers to adopt a result-oriented approach, regularly monitor ongoing works and take timely corrective measures wherever required. Deputy Commissioner Samba, Dr. Rupesh Kumar, highlighted the importance of such review meetings in assessing the ground-level implementation of government initiatives, identifying areas requiring immediate attention and establishing clear priorities for

accelerating the pace of development. He emphasised the need for coordinated efforts among departments to ensure the timely completion of projects and effective implementation of welfare schemes.

The Divisional Commissioner stressed the importance of regular monitoring, judicious utilisation of public funds and adherence to prescribed quality standards in all developmental works. He also directed the officers to maintain close coordination with field functionaries and ensure prompt redressal of public grievances related to developmental activities and welfare benefits.

Directions were also issued to the concerned officers to expedite pending works, remove bottlenecks and ensure that the intended benefits of government initiatives reach the people without unnecessary delay.

DC Udampur reviews functioning of Health Department

HT News Network

UDHAMPUR, OCTOBER 23: Deputy Commissioner Udampur, Ananth Dwivedi today chaired a meeting of the District Health Society, Udampur, to review the physical and financial progress achieved under the National Health Mission for the financial year 2026-27.

At the outset, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anil Manhas delivered a detailed PowerPoint presentation highlighting the overall functioning of the Health Department, the status of healthcare infrastructure and staff positions across health institutions in the district.

Detailed deliberations were held on various key aspects of healthcare delivery including Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY SEHAT cards, TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan, district- and block-wise presumptive TB testing, the status of Kayakalp and NQAS, block-wise institutional deliveries, OPD services, distribution of Poshan Kits to patients and the utilisation of X-ray and NAAT facilities against prescribed targets.

The DC directed the BMOs to organise extensive awareness camps across the district to sensitise the public about the benefits of the Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY SEHAT health insurance scheme and encourage eligible beneficiaries to avail themselves of its benefits.

ACD Poonch reviews progress of rural development works

HT News Network

POONCH, OCTOBER 23: Assistant Commissioner (Development) Poonch Shakeel Ahmed Malik today chaired a review meeting of the Rural Development Department. All Block Development Officers (BDOs) attended.

The meeting reviewed the physical and financial progress of works for 2026-27 under DDC, BDC, SSY, ABDP, TSP, CD & Pyt and Capex, along with the flagship programmes VB-G RAM G and PMAY.

The ACD expressed satisfaction with the overall progress. Under the SOS component, 136 of 137 works under DDC and 202 of 209 works under TSP have been completed, with expenditure at 77 per cent and 96 per cent of released funds respectively. Most works under CD & Pyt have also been completed.

The ACD directed the BDOs to speed up works under the new components, complete pending works within the stipulated timeframe and ensure timely utilisation of funds and submission of bills. He asked them to give special attention to VB-G RAM G and PMAY so that employment and housing benefits reach eligible beneficiaries without delay, and stressed quality, transparency and accountability in execution.

The BDOs briefed the Chair on the status of works in their blocks and assured that all targets would be met on time. The BDOs briefed the Chair on the status of works in their blocks and assured that all targets would be met on time.

DC Rajouri chairs meeting to review Network Connectivity across district

HT News Network

RAJOURI, OCTOBER 23: Deputy Commissioner Rajouri, Dr. Devansh Yadav today chaired a meeting to review the status of mobile network connectivity in different areas of District Rajouri and discuss measures to improve telecom connectivity in areas facing network-related challenges.

During the meeting, the status of land transfer cases required for the construction of BSNL towers was discussed. The meeting focused on identifying areas with inadequate or no network connectivity and addressing the issues affecting the establishment of telecom infrastructure in such locations.

The Deputy Commissioner directed all Sub-Divisional Officers to verify the list of network shadow areas falling within their respective jurisdictions and ensure that the information is accurate and comprehensive. The officers were asked to identify uncovered



locations and submit verified details to facilitate further action for improving network coverage.

The DC stressed the importance of coordinated efforts among the concerned officers and departments to address connectivity gaps and expedite the necessary formalities related to land transfer for the installation of 4G BSNL towers.

He emphasized that improved mobile network connectivity is essential for facilitating communication, ensuring better access to digital services and strengthening connectivity, particularly in

remote and underserved areas of the district. The concerned officers were directed to ensure timely verification and follow-up action so that the identified gaps in network coverage could be addressed effectively.

Among others who attended the meeting were ACR, Mohd Jahangir Khan; Tehsildar Koteranka; Sahil Shah; Tehsildar Khawas; Tehsildar HQ, Insha Khalid; Representatives from JJO, Airtel and BSNL. Besides this, ADC Nowshera Pritam Lal Thapa and SDM Thanamandi Abid Hussain Shah attended the meeting through virtual mode.

DC Rajesh Sharma takes stock of AMRUT projects in Kathua

HT News Network

KATHUA, OCTOBER 23: Deputy Commissioner Kathua, Rajesh Sharma chaired a meeting at the DC Office Complex, Kathua, to review and monitor the physical and financial progress of ongoing schemes under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) in the district.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner took stock of the progress achieved under various ongoing projects and reviewed their implementation status, with a focus on assessing physical achievements vis-à-vis financial expenditure. He stressed the need for close monitoring of the projects to ensure their timely execution and adherence to prescribed quality standards.

The Deputy Commissioner directed the concerned departments and executing agencies to expedite the pace of work on ongoing projects and ensure optimum utilisation of funds. He emphasised the importance of inter-departmental coordination and accountability for resolving bottlenecks, wherever encountered, to facilitate smooth implementation of the schemes.

He further underscored that all projects under AMRUT should be executed in a time-bound manner, in accordance with the approved guidelines, to achieve the



intended objectives of improving urban infrastructure and civic amenities for the residents of the district.

The Deputy Commissioner called upon the concerned officers to maintain regular oversight of the projects and ensure that the benefits of the mission reach the intended beneficiaries through efficient and effective implementation.

The meeting was attended by the Chief Planning Officer Kathua, Chief Education Officer Kathua, Chief Medical Officer Kathua, concerned district officers, representatives of the departments and executing agencies associated with the implementation of AMRUT schemes in the district.

MC Ramban organises Capacity-Building Workshop on SWM Rules 2026

HT News Network

RAMBAN, OCTOBER 23: Driving technical compliance and field-level operational excellence under the Swachh Bharat Mission framework, Municipal Council Ramban organised a comprehensive capacity-building and orientation session on the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules 2026 at the Council premises today. The session was conducted under the direct guidance and instructions of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Municipal Council Ramban, Sudershan Singh Jamwal.

The specialised technical



training was delivered by Capacity Building Expert Tapan Mohanta, who provided in-depth guidance aimed at strengthening the administrative knowledge and practical capacity of municipal personnel. The programme witnessed widespread participation from key

administrative officials and operational staff, including Senior Assistant Mubarak Hussain, the Sanitary Supervisor, Swachhata Executive, sanitation workers, municipal drivers and office staff.

During the interactive workshop, Tapan Mohanta detailed the key provisions and

regulatory mandates of the SWM Rules 2026, placing primary focus on mandatory source segregation, scientific waste management and the nationwide four-bin collection protocol. The session outlined actionable workflows for handling wet organic waste, dry recyclables, sanitary waste and special-care hazardous waste, emphasising the critical role of sanitation drivers and field staff in preventing waste mixing during transport.

The leadership of Municipal Council Ramban reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to modernising local sanitation operations, enforcing scientific waste processing and fostering,

DC Rajouri inspects development projects; directs expeditious completion

HT News Network

RAJOURI, OCTOBER 23: Deputy Commissioner Rajouri, Dr. Devansh Yadav today inspected ongoing development projects including the 160-metre-span motorable bridge over Rajouri Tawi to Panjpeer Badala Mang and the Bliss Park at Phaliana to review their progress and assess the pace of execution.

During the inspection of the Badala Mang Bridge, the Deputy Commissioner asked the SE, PWD (R&B) and the concerned officers to expedite the pace of construction to ensure its timely completion.

The Deputy Commissioner also visited the Bliss Park at Phaliana, taking stock of the ongoing works, he directed the concerned officers to accelerate the



execution of the project and ensure its expeditious completion. Dr. Yadav stressed the importance of regular monitoring and close coordination among the concerned departments to ensure timely completion of development projects and facilitate the

timely delivery of intended public benefits.

Among others, SE PWD (R&B) Manzoor Ahmed, ARTO Ashiq Rafiq Malik, Tehsildar Rajouri Varinder Sharma and AEE Headquarters Adil Wali accompanied the Deputy Commissioner during the visit.

National Conference will sweep in Upcoming Panchayat and ULB Polls as and when held: Rattan Lal Gupta Says BJP losing ground even in Kishtwar District like previous Panchayat Polls.

HT News Network

Jammu, October 23: Senior National Conference leader and Provincial President Jammu, Rattan Lal Gupta, expressed confidence that the National Conference will sweep in forthcoming Panchayat and Urban Local bodies elections as and when held on the basis of its governance, development initiatives and commitment to social justice.

Mr. Gupta said that the NC-led government under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister Omar Abdullah was committed to inclusive development, strengthening democratic institutions

and addressing the genuine concerns of people across Jammu and Kashmir. He stated that the party would approach the electorate with its performance and the work undertaken for public welfare.

Taking a dig at the Leader of Opposition, Mr. Gupta remarked that political rhetoric would not be enough to win the confidence of the people. The performance of LOP and other MLAs of BJP in the recent session of Jammu and Kashmir legislative Assembly was a big Zero they could not raise the public issues of their respective Assembly Constituencies and their only agenda was to disturb the Assembly over nothing. He said the BJP leadership should reflect



on its electoral performance in Kishtwar district in the previous elections of

Panchayat and local bodies elections instead of making tall claims about its

political strength. He asserted that the electorate would judge every political party on its record, public engagement and commitment to resolving people's problems.

Mr. Gupta further said that the BJP was facing growing questions from the public over its promises and its record on key issues concerning Jammu and Kashmir. He maintained that the National Conference would continue to highlight matters relating to development, employment, rural infrastructure, drinking water, electricity, roads and the welfare of weaker sections.

Reaffirming the party's commitment

to grassroots democracy, Mr. Gupta said that Panchayati Raj institutions were essential for empowering villages and ensuring that development benefits reached people at the local level. He added that the National Conference would present its vision before the people and seek their support through democratic means.

"The National Conference will approach the people on the strength of its governance, public service and commitment to inclusive development. The people's verdict in the Panchayat elections will reflect their assessment of the performance and promises of every political party," Mr. Gupta said.



DC Kishtwar approves 120 cases under mission YUVA to boost youth entrepreneurship

HT News Network

KISHTWAR, OCTOBER 23: The District Level Implementation Committee (DLIC) met today in Kishtwar under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Kishtwar, Pankaj Kumar Sharma to review and approve applications submitted under the Mission YUVA scheme.

A total of 130 applications, duly verified by the Small Business Development Units (SBDUs), were presented to

the committee. Each proposal was assessed based on eligibility, project feasibility and the socio-economic background of the applicant.

After detailed scrutiny, the committee approved 120 applications out of the total 130 applications received for financial assistance and handholding support, as verified by the J&K Bank Manager, Cluster Head, Kishtwar. Ten applications were reverted for reconsideration due to some deficiencies. The Deputy



Commissioner Kishtwar highlighted the significance of empowering youth to contribute to local economic development. The Deputy Commissioner directed the AD Employment, Kishtwar, to ensure that all sanctioned cases are promptly forwarded to banks so that beneficiaries receive timely assistance under the scheme. He further advised banks to expedite the sanctioning and disbursement of loans and extend continuous guidance to support emerging

entrepreneurs.

The meeting was attended by ADC Kishtwar Pawan Kotwal, GM DIC Kishtwar Mohsin Raza, DSWO/DIO Kishtwar Tariq Parveez Qazi, AD Employment/ALC Kishtwar Amit Kumar, representative of J&K Bank Cluster Head, Kishtwar and staff of the concerned departments. The Deputy Commissioner directed the AD Employment, Kishtwar, to ensure that all sanctioned cases are promptly forwarded to banks so that beneficiaries receive timely

Agriculture Department Jammu organises Khet Bachao Abhiyan at Pangiri, Akhnour

HT News Network

JAMMU, OCTOBER 23: The Agriculture Production and Farmers Welfare Department, Jammu, today organised an awareness programme under the Khet Bachao Abhiyan at village Pangiri, Zonal Bomal, Block and Sub-Division Akhnour, to promote sustainable agricultural practices and enhance farmers' awareness about soil health and resource conservation. The campaign, being conducted from October 22 to November 30, 2026, will cover every village across the Jammu Division.

Regional Level Subject Matter Specialist Ashwani Kumar, while addressing the farmers, highlighted the importance of adopting sustainable agricultural practices to safeguard soil fertility and improve farm productivity. He stressed the need for balanced fertiliser application based on soil



requirements, the promotion of natural farming and the effective utilisation of organic resources. He also urged farmers to adopt crop diversification, particularly pulses and oilseeds, conserve water through micro-irrigation and follow scientific farming practices to reduce cultivation costs and enhance their income.

Assistant Entomologist Harvinder Singh emphasised the importance of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for effective and environmentally responsible crop protection. He sensitised farmers about the judicious use of pesticides, timely identification of pests and diseases and the adoption of preventive and biological control measures to minimise

crop losses and protect beneficial organisms. He also encouraged farmers to follow scientific crop protection practices for safe and sustainable agricultural production.

The programme also focused on water conservation, micro-irrigation, post-harvest management, improved market linkages and sustainable mechanisation, with the objective of reducing input costs, preserving natural resources and improving farmers' income.

The programme was attended by SMS RL Ashwani Kumar, Assistant Entomologist Harvinder Singh, SDAO Akhnour Vijay Pal Chaudhary, SMS-SDL Jatinder Singh and Ashmeeta Sharma, scientists

SKUAST-K explores export opportunities for Kashmir's agricultural startups

Over 360 stakeholders register for programme focused on market access, branding and value addition

HT News Network

Srinagar, Oct 23 (KNS): Export opportunities for Kashmir's agricultural and horticultural products, along with challenges related to branding, quality standards and market access, came under discussion at an agri-startup programme organised by Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-K) on Friday.

More than 360 stakeholders registered for the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect 2026, which brought together entrepreneurs, researchers and industry representatives from Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Haryana.

The programme, organised in collaboration with the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, focused on connecting emerging



agricultural businesses with research institutions, industry and potential markets.

Dr Azra Mufti, Business Development Manager at the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), highlighted export prospects for Jammu and Kashmir's agricultural and horticultural produce.

She stressed the importance of branding, value addition, compliance with quality standards and improved market access to help local products reach wider markets. SKUAST-K Vice-Chancellor

Prof Nazir Ahmad Ganai said agricultural research and innovation needed stronger connections with entrepreneurship and markets to translate scientific developments into commercial opportunities. Dr Saravanan Raj, Director, MANAGE, Hyderabad, who joined the programme online, discussed institutional support, capacity building and collaboration to strengthen agricultural entrepreneurship. Abdul Rouf Khan, Incubation Manager at SKUAST-K, stressed the need for closer coordination among farmers.

High Court Upholds PSA Detention of Kulgam Man Named in 11 Cattle Theft Cases

HT News Network

Srinagar, Oct 23 : The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh has upheld the preventive detention of a Kulgam man booked under the Public Safety Act (PSA), holding that the material placed before the detaining authority concerning his alleged repeated involvement in cattle theft cases did not warrant judicial interference.

Justice M.A. Chowdhary dismissed a habeas corpus petition filed by Tariq Ahmad Dar, son of Ghulam Hassan Dar and a resident of Raiwattan Asnoor in the Manzgam area of Kulgam, challenging detention order No. 07/DMK/PSA/2025 dated December 13, 2025, issued by the District Magistrate, Kulgam. According to the grounds of detention, Dar was implicated in 11 FIRs relating to alleged livestock and cattle theft. Chargesheets had been filed in the cases, and he had obtained bail.

RBI launches financial inclusion campaign in Jammu village

HT News Network

Jammu, Oct 23 (KNO): The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Jammu, on Friday launched a financial inclusion saturation campaign at Gurha Singhu in Shamachak, Jammu, to facilitate re-KYC, access to social security schemes and raise awareness about digital frauds.

In a statement issued to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the RBI said the campaign was inaugurated by Prabhakar Jha, Regional Director, RBI Jammu, on October 23 and will continue across the country till December 31, 2026.

The campaign, being undertaken in accordance with



the directions of the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, and the RBI, aims to facilitate re-KYC and C-KYC formalities, nomination facilities, access to social security schemes and awareness about digital frauds.

Addressing the gathering, Jha highlighted the importance of completing re-KYC formalities to ensure the continued

availability of banking services and smooth operation of bank accounts. He also stressed the role of social security schemes in providing financial protection and improving the lives of beneficiaries.

The statement said Gurha Singhu, which attracts lakhs of visitors and devotees during the annual Baba Jitto Jhiri Mela, offers an effective platform to spread financial awareness among a large number of people.

The public has been advised to update their account KYC details with the latest address and identity proof by visiting their nearest bank branch or business correspondent during the campaign period.

Airtel Partners with YouTube to Bring Premium Entertainment to Prepaid Customers

HT News Network/UNI

Jammu, 23 October 2026: For customers, mobile data is no longer just about staying connected. It has become the gateway to how they watch shows and movies, follow creators, listen to music and discover new content. To cater to this mass audience usage behavior and complement it with the best of its services, Airtel has partnered with YouTube to bring YouTube Premium to its prepaid customers. The partnership gives them an ad-free YouTube experience*, including Shorts, along with background play, offline downloads and YouTube



Music Premium *T&C apply.

The launch reflects how customers use their phones today. Data is how they follow creators, catch up on shows, listen to music and discover new content. YouTube Premium now joins Airtel's entertainment lineup alongside Prime Video, JioHotstar, ZEE5 Premium, SonyLIV and 18+ other OTT platforms, all available through its 200 OTT top-up with 30GB of additional data. With the

addition of YouTube Premium, Airtel is expanding its prepaid entertainment proposition to bring together different ways customers consume content — from streaming shows and movies to watching creators, listening to music and discovering new content. By bringing data, premium entertainment and multiple digital experiences together in one affordable bundle, Airtel continues to create differentiated offerings that go beyond connectivity and delivers more relevant, everyday value to customers. The top-up is available to Airtel prepaid customers with an active recharge, across existing prepaid plans. After purchasing,

DC Rajouri chairs NCORD meeting; Directs coordinated efforts to combat drug abuse

HT News Network

RAJOURI, OCTOBER 23: Deputy Commissioner Rajouri, Dr. Devansh Yadav today chaired a meeting of the District Level NCORD Committee to review anti-drug measures and strengthen coordination among the concerned departments and enforcement agencies.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner directed all concerned officers to work in close coordination and intensify efforts to curb drug abuse and drug trafficking in the district. He stressed the need for a comprehensive approach focusing on awareness, prevention, enforcement and rehabilitation to effectively address the menace of drug abuse.

The DC directed the Police

Department to identify drug-related hotspots and take stringent measures to stop any illegal activities related to drug trafficking. He also directed the department to intensify checking at the entry points of District Rajouri to prevent the movement of narcotic substances and take strict action against drug peddlers under the provisions of the NDPS Act and PIT NDPS Act.

The ACR Rajouri was directed to identify properties of persons booked under the NDPS Act and initiate appropriate legal action against movable and immovable properties acquired from the proceeds of illegal drug-related activities. He was also directed to ensure that necessary entries regarding such properties are made in the revenue records.

Emphasising the role of preventive



measures and youth engagement, the DC directed the Youth Services and Sports

Department to organise sports activities in all blocks, involving youth and children of all age groups. The School Education Department was instructed to conduct Nasha Mukta activities regularly and ensure their timely uploading on the Nasha Mukta portal.

The DC further directed all Additional Deputy Commissioners (ADCs) and Sub-Divisional Magistrate Thanamandi to regularly review NCORD-related activities in their respective subdivisions. He also stressed the involvement of former Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) representatives and religious leaders in the Nasha Mukta campaign to strengthen community participation and public awareness.

The Deputy Commissioner

emphasised the importance of sustained awareness campaigns, community participation and strict enforcement against drug-related activities. He called upon all departments to discharge their responsibilities effectively and ensure regular monitoring of anti-drug initiatives.

The meeting was attended by SSP Rajouri, Naresh Singh; Deputy Director Prosecution Rajouri, K. K. Bandral; ACR Rajouri, Mohd Jahangir Khan; District Social Welfare Officer, Abdul Raheem and other concerned officers.

Besides, ADC Kalakote Mohd Tanvir, ADC Nowshera Pritam Lal Thapa, ADC Sunderbani Ramkesh Sharma, ADC Koteranka Dil Mir and SDM Thanamandi Abid Hussain Shah attended the meeting through virtual mode.





Birdwatching rewires the brain and slows cognitive decline

Birdwatching can help slow brain ageing and is increasingly being used as therapy for dementia patients.

Every week, a group of elderly birders spend hours hunkering down inside a wooden hide in the English countryside, peering through binoculars as they excitedly share what they spot. An oystercatcher's long, bright beak probing the pebbled ground; two great crested grebes bobbing in the water, their plumed heads poised.

Most of these birdwatchers have difficulty recalling what happened earlier that day, and might struggle to follow a conversation. But they become animated when swapping notes on the birds that fill the sky around Forge Mill Lake in the UK's West Midlands.

Among them is 78-year-old Harold*. He loved the outdoors when he was younger, but more recently dementia has made him withdrawn and anxious. His daughter Lucy* brought him here, hoping that the change of scenery and peaceful lake might be good for him. After an apprehensive start, Harold began smiling when someone pointed out a robin and enjoyed watching the ducks splashing in the water. Blue tits darted between the nearby trees, and Lucy saw Harold laugh for the first time in a long time.

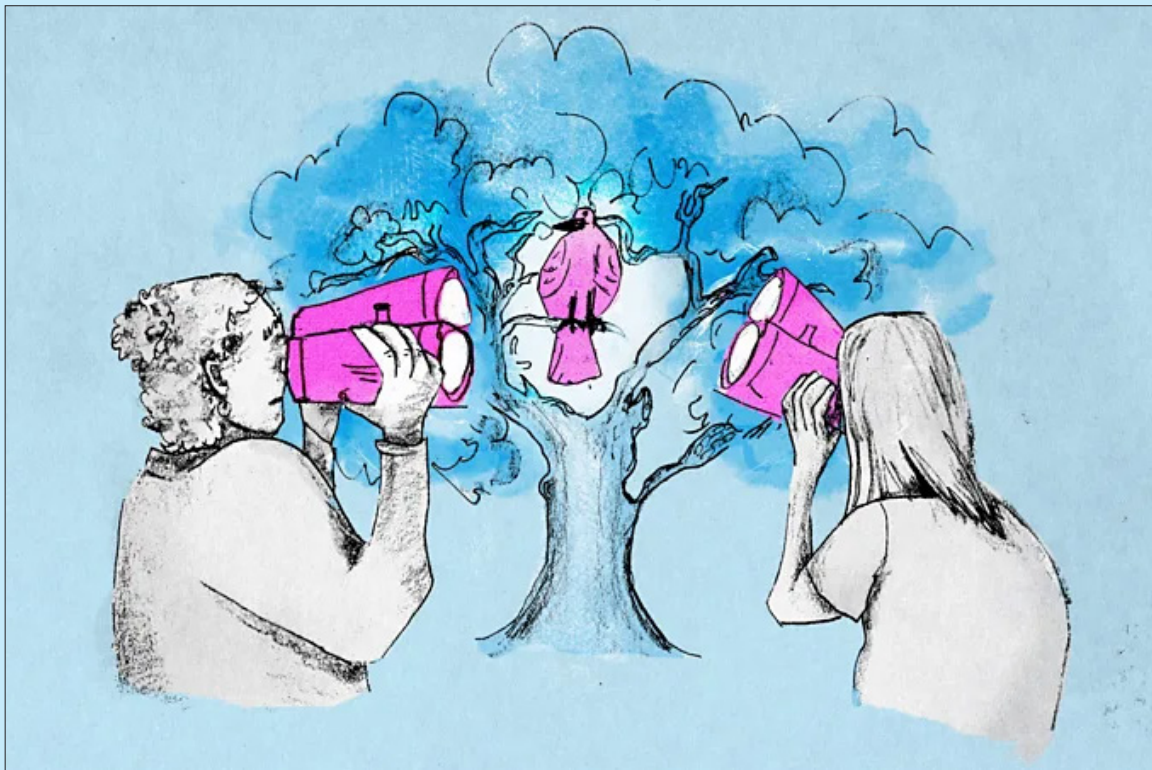
"For that moment in time he was present in the moment, he wasn't worried about his memory or his confidence. That is very powerful, in a gentle way," says Jenny Budinger, a community dementia advisor at Age UK, the non-profit that runs the birdwatching group.

Birdwatching is increasingly recognised as a valuable way for elderly people and dementia patients to spend their time, with groups set up in nursing homes in the UK, Germany and the US. Paying attention to birds, even through the window, can help older people feel more connected to others, experience more positive emotions and boost memory skills. Now new research shows that birdwatching can reshape the brain, much like learning an athletic sport or a musical instrument – and may even help slow the brain's ageing.

Better-organised brains
Meanwhile, in the laboratory, neuroscientists are investigating how birdwatching impacts the brain. They tested keen birdwatchers' identification skills to determine who was an expert and who was a novice, then looked at their brains. The scientists found that the very structure of experts' brains was different – and that birdwatching expertise might slow age-related decline by keeping the brain more organised.

Erik Wing, who led this research at Baycrest Academy for Research and Education in Toronto, Canada, compared MRI brain scans from bird experts to those of novices while they identified birds. He found that expert brains were wired differently in regions important for functions like attention, visual perception and visual recognition.

Among expert birders, these regions showed more activity – particularly when they were



asked to identify birds they weren't already familiar with. The findings don't prove whether structural brain differences are the cause or effect of birdwatching expertise. But, Wing says, one explanation is that the areas of the brain used for birdwatching might undergo "neuroplasticity" – the ability to change shape and function over time.

Wing also analysed how organised the birdwatchers' brains were. Organisation in the brain tends to reduce with age, and lower measures of organisation are associated with reduced cognition. In experts' brains, some regions had higher levels of organisation and coherence than novices of the same age. Some of these regions were also the ones that showed more activity during bird identification. This indicates a "kind of preservation of organisation" in the brains of experts as they age, Wing says.

More research is needed to understand the nature of this preservation and how it links to wider cognitive function. But for now, the results may indicate that "acquiring this skill earlier in life might produce benefits that continue through to older adults", Wing says. This is good news for the many Gen Z (16 to 29-year-old) birdwatchers who are getting their binoculars out long before old age sets in.

Bird therapy
Wing's research looked at birdwatching expertise, but other findings suggest that there may be psychological benefits to birdwatching even for those without special knowledge or skills.

In fact, when it comes to experiencing psychological restoration – feelings of calm, freedom and rejuvenation – enthusiasm may be more relevant than expertise. A study of 388 birdwatchers in Poland found that those who

say they are more interested in birding than other activities and consider it an important part of their lives are more likely to experience psychological restoration than birdwatchers who are highly skilled but less enthusiastic.

Simply choosing to be interested in birds, then, could have its own benefits. Elisabeth Kals, a professor of social and organisational psychology at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in Germany, is interested in how our relationship with nature shapes our life experiences and wellbeing. She studied what happened when people living in nursing homes had the chance to watch the local bird life.

Her team installed bird feeding stations outside 65 homes, positioned so that residents could watch the birds from the comfort of the indoor common area, and assessed the residents' cognition, mobility and wellbeing through self-reports and inputs from staff and family. They saw improvements after just a few weeks, and after a month birdwatching explained residents' wellbeing better than their age and care level.

"The findings were clearly positive," Kals says. Those who took part in birdwatching became more cognitively agile, she adds – meaning they were more able to follow a conversation and interact with family who visited, remember and recognise birds that had visited before, and show alertness.

Nursing home staff were the first to see the difference the birds made. "For weeks, they haven't seen a smile on [a resident's] face, and then they see the smile," Kals says.

Some of the memory and concentration improvements are evident after just three to four weeks, Kals says.

Her team's findings have prompted German health insurance companies – who, among others,

initially funded the research project – to invest in setting up bird feeders and viewing areas in more than 400 nursing homes across Bavaria. "It was so effective, it just economised money," Kals says.

In the US, a similar initiative was set up at four care communities in 2013 in Connecticut, and later in Texas and Colorado. Bird Tales is a therapy programme for people living with dementia that involves installing bird feeders in the facilities where they live and giving them stuffed bird animals that make bird-like calls so they can learn about different species. The result has been positive for those taking part: they report finding it cognitively stimulating and say it connects them with the past.

A similar programme has seen benefits for survivors of stroke, some of whom experience aphasia – difficulty speaking or understanding spoken language. The University of Montana's Intensive Comprehensive Aphasia Program started with owl spotting in 2021, and now includes guided observations and call identification of Montana's diverse bird population.

Why does watching birds have such a positive impact on how we feel and think? For Kals, it's "not just about birds as such; it is about nature, attention, emotion, meaning, social exchange, and activity coming together in a very simple way. It creates small moments of curiosity – pleasure, anticipation". And, she adds, it is "extremely accessible".

This may be why, in a UK survey of dementia patients and their carers, watching birds and other wildlife was the second most popular outdoor activity after simply walking in nature. The same survey found that challenges with transport and access are big considerations for people with dementia – which may not be such a barrier for those who can see birds from their kitchen window.

Wings says birdwatching is a means of exploring curiosity, and it is perhaps this curiosity that is so beneficial. "I think there's a lot of benefit to incorporating more novelty in our lives, in midlife and as we continue to age," Wing says.

Curiosity plays an important role in maintaining cognitive function later in life, possibly because it activates norepinephrine and dopamine in the brain, which have a positive, anti-inflammatory effect.

For Kals, getting to know the birds that call and swoop around us is a way to remember who we are. "We are part of nature as human beings, but we lose that connection, unfortunately, quite early in life. [Birdwatching] is a way to reestablish this connection, and it's so simple."

*Names have been changed for privacy reasons.

For trusted insights on health and wellbeing, sign up to the Health Fix newsletter by senior health correspondent Melissa Hogenboom who also writes the Live Well For Longer and Six Steps to Calm courses.

(BBC NEWS)

First personalised cancer vaccine cuts risk of disease returning in major trial

A new personalised cancer vaccine given alongside a widely used immunotherapy drug has cut the risk of patients dying or their skin cancer returning by 42% in a major clinical trial.

The researchers involved say the results could mark a turning point in cancer treatment, bringing personalised medicine a step closer.

The trial also found that the new drug combination reduced the risk of melanoma, a type of skin cancer, spreading by 38% over two years compared to immunotherapy alone.

The drug manufacturers MSD and Moderna say the same approach is already being tested against other tumours, including kidney, bladder and lung cancer.

Independent cancer experts described the results as impressive but said longer-term studies were still needed to establish whether the treatment really helps most patients live longer, on average.

Personalised vaccine
The new approach is aimed at cancer patients who have already had their tumour removed through surgery.

In the trial, 1,137 adults were given Keytruda, an established immunotherapy drug which helps the body's immune system find and attack cancer cells.

About two-thirds also received an experimental vaccine with the rest



being given a placebo or dummy drug.

The vaccine, called Intismelan, uses the same mRNA technology as some Covid jabs.

It is personalised to each patient, using information from their own tumour to help train their immune system to recognise cancer cells and target them if they return.

Two years after starting the treatment, the patients who received the jab were far less likely to have had melanoma come back or see it spread

across the body.

"Personalisation is the next step up and it's really exciting, it's a fabulous technology," says Prof Pippa Corrie, a consultant medical oncologist who helped run part of the study with patients at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge.

"The question is how much can we really demonstrate it's worth and this trial was the first proof of principle."

"What's to lose?"
Prof Corrie worked with patients enrolled in the trial including 75-year

free.

Shares in the drugmakers MSD (known as Merck in the US) and Moderna have surged since both companies first hinted at the success of the vaccine in the summer.

But investors sold off stock on Thursday after financial analysts said the results were not quite as strong as those seen in an earlier, much smaller trial.

Both companies said they were now

old Tony Chapman, who was diagnosed with melanoma in 2019.

He had the tumour removed from his chest but a lump later appeared under his arm. He was told his cancer had returned and he needed a second operation.

He then volunteered to take part in the study but, like all the other participants, he still doesn't know whether he was given the experimental vaccine or a placebo alongside his immunotherapy treatment.

"This just seemed like a really good example of moving science forward, as well as getting some benefit for yourself, so what's to lose?" Tony said.

Three years on he is now having checks every six months and remains cancer-

"engaging with authorities" suggesting they could file for approval from medicine regulators as soon as next year.

Widespread NHS use will also depend on cost, given that each individual patient will need to have their tumour genetically analysed and a personalised vaccine made for them.

The trial will continue so that the patients involved can be monitored – both to see if the cancer returns over time and to assess whether the drug ultimately helps them live longer.

Professor Alan Melcher from the Institute of Cancer Research in London, who wasn't involved in the research, described the results as "very impressive".

"It is an important proof of principle for the field, although we shouldn't get ahead of the evidence," he said.

"We can't assume from one melanoma trial that the same approach will work across all cancers, and longer follow-up will be important to understand the effect on overall survival."

The full trial results are due to be presented at the European Society of Medical Oncology (ESMO) cancer conference in Madrid on Saturday.

They have yet to be published in a peer-reviewed medical journal, where they can be scrutinised by independent experts.

(BBC NEWS)

Kotak backs Dhir's promise after explosive finish in Christchurch

United News Of India

CHRISTCHURCH, OCT 23: Naman Dhir has wasted little time making his mark in India's T20I series against New Zealand, following up a late burst against West Indies with a match-winning display here.

With India chasing 226 in the opening T20I, Dhir walked in at 167/5 with 5.3 overs remaining. What followed was a decisive 15-ball unbeaten 42, as he took charge of the chase alongside captain Shreyas Iyer before continuing the charge with Nitish Kumar Reddy.

Dhir's power hitting and composure proved crucial as India completed their highest successful chase in Men's T20I cricket, sealing the victory with a six.

The innings came just days after Dhir had struck an unbeaten 24 off six balls in the rain-affected fifth T20I against West Indies in Bengaluru, that underlined his ability to make an impact in limited time at the crease.

India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak has been encouraged by the 26-year-old's performances, highlighting his understanding of the role expected of him and the range of contributions he can make to the side.

"Yesterday, there was Sanju (Samson), Abhishek (Sharma), Shreyas (Iyer) and Axar (Patel) too, but his

he can bowl one or two overs too. He is someone who can field really well and can make an impact with



role at the end was also very, very important. He is a power-packed player, he knows what is expected (of him) and he exactly does that, which is a great sign," Kotak said.

Kotak also pointed to Dhir's potential as a bowling option and his fielding, noting that his off-spin could offer India flexibility depending on the opposition's batting line-up and match situation.

"In a T20 match, if there are lots of left-hand batters in the opposition, an offspinner can even bowl four overs and, depending on the situation,

the bat in that finisher's role." It is too early, but I feel he is very promising. His batting technique, the way he builds his base quickly, the power he has, he is a very exciting talent," Kotak added.

While Dhir has seized his recent opportunities, young batter Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is continuing to learn within a competitive India setup. The 15-year-old has attracted considerable attention for his explosive batting, but regular places in the top order have remained difficult to come by, with Samson,

Abhishek and Ishan Kishan among the established options.

With Kishan ruled out of the second T20I against New Zealand after sustaining a right adductor strain in the series opener, Sooryavanshi is in line for an opportunity, according to ICC.

Kotak believes the youngster has shown greater maturity in understanding the team's selection dynamics and the value of learning from senior players while waiting for his turn.

"Now he is much more mature. He understood that Sanju is playing well, or Abhishek is playing well - how can they be left out," Kotak said.

He acknowledged that Sooryavanshi naturally wants to play, but stressed that spending time around the senior team can help him develop beyond his already evident hitting ability.

"The middle order is also packed. Everyone understands that but of course he wants to play. If I were in his place I would too. But he is a simple boy. It's not like he has complained or looked downcast." Hitting ability is one thing, and the things you learn by being at this level day after day is another thing.

Parvinder Awana appointed Chairperson of Junior Selection Committee

United News Of India

MUMBAI, OCT 23: The Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) conducted a selection process for the appointment of members to the Junior Cricket Committee.

The CAC screened and interviewed applicants and, following the process, recommended the appointment of Parvinder Awana as Chairman, along with Krishna Das, Rakesh Patel and N. Arjun Yadav as members of the Committee.

Awana played two T20Is for India and featured in 62 First-Class matches, taking 191 wickets. The former fast bowler represented Delhi, India A and Rest of India, besides playing in the IPL for

Kings XI Punjab (now Punjab Kings). After retirement, he moved into coaching, working with Delhi's U16, U19 and U23 teams, as well as India U19 and various BCCI/COE high-performance programmes. Das, a former Assam and Goa fast bowler, played 49 First-Class matches and took 166 wickets. He represented

India U19 and India A and later worked as India U19 bowling coach and as the bowling coach



of the Uttarakhand Ranji Trophy team. Patel represented Gujarat and Baroda and played for India A, besides featuring in the Duleep Trophy, Deodhar Trophy and Irani Trophy. He worked as a coach with Baroda and Gujarat across U19, U23 and senior teams, and was Head Coach of the Baroda U23 team in the 2025-26 season.

Sindhu storms into semis to keep India's French Open campaign alive

United News Of India

PARIS, OCT 23: Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu kept India's campaign at the French Open 2026 badminton tournament alive by storming into the women's singles semi-finals with a

before clinching the Japan Open title in July.

Sindhu was in dominant form and made light work of her opponent. The Indian shuttler raced to an 11-5 lead at the interval before wrapping up the opening game comfortably.



straight-game win on Friday.

Sindhu, 11th in the women's badminton rankings, beat world No. 17 Chiu Pin-chian of Chinese Taipei 21-13, 21-14 at the Arena Grand Paris, according to olympics.com.

This was Sindhu's second win against Chiu Pin-chian, having also beaten her at the Asian Games 2026 last month.

The Indian badminton player has now made it to four semi-finals on the BWF World Tour this year.

She had earlier reached the semis of the Malaysia Open in January and the Australian Badminton Open in June,

The second game followed a similar pattern as Sindhu opened up a 7-0 advantage and closed out the contest in just 39 minutes.

Sindhu will face either world championships bronze medallist Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia or Hina Akechi of Japan in the semi-final on Saturday.

Sindhu is now the only Indian challenge left at the BWF Super 750 tournament after Ashmita Chaliha lost her quarter-final encounter against Japan's Nozomi Okuhara, an Olympic medallist, earlier in the day.

Rio assures to promote sports at grassroots level

United News Of India

DIMAPUR, OCT 23: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio has assured that the state government would continue to promote sports talent at the grassroots level.

Rio was addressing a programme held to mark Nagaland United Sports Club's (NUSC) entry into the Indian Football League (IFL) Second Tier, with the IFL Trophy Tour and the launch of its official jersey at Chumoukedima on Thursday evening.

He said sports offered significant opportunities for livelihood and asked the players to set an example for the younger generation.

Rio thanked the All India Football Federation (AIFF) for its support toward promoting football in Nagaland.

He said that NUSC belonged to all Nagas, and hoped that the club would motivate young people and provide them with a platform to compete at the national and international levels. He urged the club's officials and coaches to work with commitment and sincerity, while calling on the players to maintain discipline, professionalism and sportsmanship. He said the club's performance and progress would depend on the shared responsibility of the management and players.

Table Tennis: Harmeet-Yashaswini win historic bronze at Asian Championships

United News Of India

TASHKENT (UZBEKISTAN), OCT 23: India's Harmeet Desai and Yashaswini Ghorpade won a historic bronze medal at the Asian Table Tennis Championships 2026 here on Friday.

Harmeet Desai and Yashaswini Ghorpade, 26th in the mixed doubles table tennis rankings, lost 3-0 (11-9, 11-9, 11-8) to world No. 9 Sora Matsushima and Miwa Harimoto of Japan in the semi-finals. However, by reaching the semi-finals, the duo had already assured themselves of a medal, ending India's 72-year wait for a mixed doubles podium finish at the Asian Table Tennis Championships, according to olympics.com. Meena Parande and Yatin Vyas - silver winners from the 1954 edition - were the last Indian table tennis players to win a medal in mixed doubles at the continental championships. Harmeet and Yashaswini opened their mixed doubles campaign with a bye in the opening round before defeating Indonesia's Muhammad Negara and Citra Rasmi 3-0 (14-12, 12-10, 11-7) to advance to the pre-

quarterfinals.

The Indian duo then overcame Chinese Taipei's Hsu Hsien-chia and Wu Ying Syuan 3-1



(11-6, 12-10, 11-13, 11-7) before staging a comeback to beat the Republic of Korea's Park Gang-hyeon and Lee Daewon 3-2 (11-6, 8-11, 8-11, 11-9, 11-9) in the quarter-finals. The victory secured their place in the semi-finals and assured the medal. Meanwhile, the other Indian mixed doubles pair of Payas Jain and Youth Olympics-bound Syndrela Das crashed out in the quarter-finals.

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