

Kashmir Convener



Corruption case :
SC refers to larger bench
issues over ex-CM B S
Yediyurappa plea

P/02



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Encroaching Upon
Parliamentary And
Executive Functions: SC

P/02



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Shinde's Sena: Saamana

P/02

Omar Abdullah Reviews Relief, Restoration Measures In Ramban

KC News Network

RAMBAN: In a swift response to the devastation caused by the cloudburst in Ramban district, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today undertook a visit to the affected areas to personally assess the ground situation.

Accompanied by the Deputy Commissioner Ramban and senior civil and police officials, the Chief Minister travelled by road from Srinagar to reach Marog, one of the worst-hit villages. Demonstrating the deep concern and commitment of his government, he trekked several kilometres on foot through rugged terrain to reach Kela Morh, where the cloudburst had triggered flash floods, leaving a trail of destruction.

The natural calamity has claimed the lives of three persons, while causing extensive damage to residential structures, vehicles, and critical road infrastructure. Ramban district, often referred to as the lifeline between the Kashmir Valley and Jammu, remained cut off for the second consecutive day due to debris and damage along the National Highway, J&K's primary transport artery. Interacting with local residents and



officials from the district administration, the Chief Minister was briefed on the scale of the damage and the progress of ongoing rescue and relief operations. He expressed his heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased and assured that the government stands shoulder to shoulder with the victims of this tragedy. "The scale of destruction is

deeply distressing. Our administration is on the ground, working tirelessly to ensure the safety, relief, and rehabilitation of every affected family," CM Omar Abdullah said.

"We will leave no stone unturned in standing by our people during this difficult time," he added.

>>>SEE ON P-7

Dozen Villages Severely Hit By Flash Floods, Landslides

Will submit a report to PM: Sunil Sharma

KC News Network

RAMBAN: The flash-floods and landslides triggered by heavy rain and cloudbursts severely affected nearly a dozen villages in Jammu and Kashmir's hilly Ramban district, a senior government officer said on Monday and added the authorities had mobilised resources to restore essential services and provide relief to the affected people.

Divisional Commissioner (Jammu) Ramesh Kumar also said various teams are on the ground to assess the damage. Efforts are underway to provide an alternative road connectivity through the Mughal Road and the Sinthan Top road to the Kashmir valley as restoration of the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway could take time due to the massive damage, he said.

Heavy rain, coupled with cloudbursts and thunderstorms, on Sunday claimed three lives and left a trail of destruction in the district. Cutting across party lines, political leaders urged the Centre to declare



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Our March To Eliminate Naxalism Continues Unabated: HM Amit Shah



KC News Network

NEW DELHI: In the wake of killing of eight Naxals by security forces in Jharkhand, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday asserted that his government's commitment to eliminate Naxalism continues unabated.

Eight Naxals, including a top rung central committee member of the extremists carrying a bounty of Rs 1 crore on his head, were killed in an encounter with CoBRA commandos of the CRPF and police in Bokaro district of Jharkhand.

"Our march to eliminate Naxalism continues unabated. Today security forces achieved another significant success in the ongoing operation to uproot Naxalism. In an encounter at Lugu Hills in Bokaro, Jharkhand, 8 Maoists were neutralised, including a top-level naxal leader, Vivek, who carried a reward of Rs 1 crore, and two other notorious Naxalites. The operation is being continued. Applaud our security forces," Shah wrote on 'X'.

The troops of 209 Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) along with state police conducted the operation in which eight Naxals were killed and an AK series rifle, three INSAS rifles, a self-loading rifle (SLR), eight country-made guns and a pistol were seized, officials said.

Those killed include central committee member of the extremist outfit Prayag Manjhi alias Vivek, special area committee member Arvind Yadav alias Avinash, zonal committee member Sahebram Manjhi alias Rahul Manjhi, Mahesh Manjhi alias Mota, Talu, Ranju Manjhi, Gangaram and Mahesh. (Agencies)

Vehicular movement to remain suspended

KC NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU: The Traffic Police Headquar-

ters, J&K issued a traffic plan and Advisory advising people not to undertake journey on Jammu Srinagar National tomorrow as the restoration works in flood hit areas of Ramban is still going on.

"Tomorrow vehicular movement will remain suspended on Jammu Srinagar NHW as the restoration work could not be completed

today. People are advised not to undertake journey on Jammu-Srinagar NHW (NH-44) till the restoration work is completed and the surface is traffic worthy", it said.

As per the Advisory Kishtwar-Sinthan-Anantnag (NH244) road is closed due to fresh snow fall. Decision

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COAS General Dwivedi Bids Farewell to His 'Signalman'

KC News Network

NEW DELHI: In a moving and personal farewell, Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Upendra Dwivedi Monday paid tribute to Naib Subedar Baldev Singh of the 18th Battalion, Jammu and Kashmir Rifles (18 JAK RIF), who laid down his life in the line



of duty at Kumar Post on the Siachen Glacier—the world's highest battlefield.

The wreath-laying ceremony took place at Shradhanjali Sthal, Base Hospital, Delhi Cantt, where General Dwivedi honoured the mortal remains of his fallen comrade. The gesture held deep personal significance, marking not

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Waqf Issue

Don't Give Political Colour To Judicial Challenge: CM Omar

KC News Network

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Monday said the Supreme Court has the power to review the decisions taken by the Centre or state governments and stressed that a challenge to any legislation before the apex court should not be given a political hue.

"Everyone (institution) has a role. The Supreme Court has been given the powers to review decisions taken by the Centre or state government. Did we not go to the SC in Article 370 case? This is not the first time that the apex court has been moved (in the Waqf case). Was not Indira Gandhi's decision to impose the Emergency challenged in the court? "If today someone is going to the SC, it should not be given a political hue. The court



has its own jurisdiction and the legislature has its own jurisdiction," Abdullah told reporters here.

>>>SEE ON P-7

Adequate Stock Of Essential Supplies Available: Div Com

KC News Network

SRINAGAR: Divisional Commissioner (Div Com) Kashmir, Vijay Kumar Bidhuri on Monday said that there is an adequate stock of essential commodities including LPG, Diesel & Petrol available across the Valley.

He stated that significant efforts are underway to repair and restore the National Highway to facilitate the movement of vehicles. Bidhuri maintained that restoration work is expected to be completed within four or five days while one way Light Motor Vehicles are allowed to ply on Mughal Road.

Div Com made these remarks while chairing a meeting of officers to evaluate the availability of essential supplies in the region and to assess damage incurred by orchardists.



Addressing the meeting, he underscored that there is enough fuel stock to last for over 12 days and urged citizens to

>>>SEE ON P-7

Undisputed Final Electoral Rolls published after SSR 2025

KC NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR: The final Electoral Rolls published on 6th and 7th January 2025 following the countrywide Special Summary Revision (SSR) have witnessed an unprecedented level of acceptance, with very few First or Second Appeals filed under Section 24 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950. These appeals pertain to corrections under

Section 22 and inclusions under Section 23 of the Act.

As per the date released by ECI, this comprehensive exercise covered nearly 10.5 lakh polling booths across the country and was conducted with the active involvement of 13.87 lakh Booth Level Agents (BLAs) nominated by political parties, spanning

4,123 Assembly Constituencies nationwide.

The absence of any large scale appeals indicates a broad consensus and acceptance of the updated electoral rolls by all stakeholders. Accordingly, the Electoral Rolls published post-SSR in January 2025 are now to be treated as undisputed. It may be recalled that the SSR 2025

exercise was conducted with particular emphasis on States and Union Territories slated for Assembly Elections after the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has reiterated its commitment to free, fair, inclusive, and

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CS reviews flagship urban development schemes across J&K

KC News Network

JAMMU: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo, today chaired a high level meeting of Housing



Housing Board; MD, NULM along with other senior officers of the department.

The Chief Secretary appreciated the scale and scope of urban

department to expedite the work on the utility projects like water supply under AMRUT and sanitation under SBM (U). He made out that these projects once completed would improve the living standards of the residents substantially.

The Chief Secretary had a detailed review of progress made on the ongoing flagship projects under the Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT 2.0, PMAY-Urban, PM eBus Sewa, DAY-NULM, SBM 2.0, CITIS 2.0 and other major initiatives of the department.

Commissioner Secretary, H&UDD, Mandeep Kaur, gave a detailed outlook of the projects completed and the ongoing works across the cities and ULBs of J&K. She also apprised the meeting about the steps taken and those in pipeline to enhance

>>>SEE ON P-7

& Urban Development Department (H&UDD) to review different urban development schemes and programmes being implemented across the Union Territory.

The meeting besides Commissioner Secretary, H&UDD was attended by Commissioner, SMC; Commissioner, JMC; MD,

transformation under H&UDD. He emphasized timely execution, inter-departmental synergy and robust monitoring of all the schemes. He stressed that these reforms and infrastructure projects must translate into improved quality of life for urban residents across the UT. He enjoined upon the concerned

Mughal Road Provides Alternative Link To Kashmir



KC News Network

RAJOURI: As the landslide-hit Jammu-Srinagar National Highway remained shut for a second consecutive day on Monday, the reopening of the Mughal Road connecting the twin border districts of Rajouri and Poonch in Jammu to south Kashmir's Shopian district brought huge relief to the stranded

people.

The authorities had initially decided to restrict traffic on the recently-opened Mughal Road to one way – Kashmir to Jammu. However, the all-weather national highway's closure prompted the diversion of traffic and the deployment of additional police personnel to ensure smooth movement on both sides, officials said.

>>>SEE ON P-7

Cabinet To Decide On OBC Reservation Recommendations

KC News Network

SRINAGAR: The cabinet will soon decide on the recommendations of a three-member panel regarding reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in



Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

Sources told news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the panel's report would be presented before the cabinet for a final decision. "The report is being put up for the cabinet decision after getting approval from the concerned ministers,

>>>SEE ON P-7

Corruption case

SC refers to larger bench issues over ex-CM B S Yediyurappa plea

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Monday referred to a larger bench the legal issues stemming from a plea of BJP leader BS Yediyurappa, including the question whether a prior sanction to prosecute is needed under the Prevention of Corruption Act after a magisterial court order of inquiry.

A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra on April 4 reserved its verdict on Yediyurappa's plea against an order of the Karnataka High Court reviving a corruption case against him.

However, Justice Pardiwala on Monday said when the bench began to write the verdict, it came across an order of April 16, 2024 of a coordinate bench referring similar questions to a larger bench in a separate case.

He referred to the principle of "judicial propriety" and said on this aspect alone, Yediyurappa's plea was being sent to the Chief Justice of India for setting up a larger bench.

"When we were about to start working on the judgement, we realised that there is another order passed by a coordinate bench on April 16, 2024 in SLP. The very same issues were referred to the large bench. So we felt that propriety demands that this be also referred," the bench said.

The top court added, "We deem it appropriate to tag these petitions to the referred matter Manju Surana v. Sunil Arora. The registry is directed to place these matters before the CJ." The bench clarified the reference was only



on the ground of propriety and listed out seven questions for adjudication by the larger bench.

The high court, on January 5, 2021, allowed a plea of Bengaluru-based A Alam Pasha and revived his complaint against Yediyurappa, former Industries Minister Murugesh R Nirani and Shivaswamy KS, former managing director of Karnataka Udyog Mitra.

Pasha alleged charges of corruption and criminal conspiracy against Yediyurappa, Nirani and Shivaswamy KS.

The high court ruled the absence of a prior sanction for prosecution leading to the quashing of an earlier complaint did not bar the filing of a fresh complaint once the accused demitted office but did not allow prosecution of V P Baligar, a retired IAS officer and former principal

secretary of state government in the case.

The top court after hearing the case framed questions for adjudication including whether after a judicial magistrate orders a probe under Section 156(3) of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), would a prior sanction of the appropriate authorities still be required under Section 17A of the PC Act? Section 156 (3) of CrPC permits a judicial magistrate to order a police probe into a complaint and it may include order for a preliminary inquiry or registration of an FIR.

Section 17A of the PC Act says, "No police officer shall conduct any enquiry into any offence alleged to have been committed by a public servant under this Act, where the alleged offence is relatable to any recommendation made

or decision taken by such public servant in discharge of his official functions or duties, without the previous approval".

The legal issues are primarily focused on the interplay between the provisions of the PC Act and CrPC on the issue of prior sanction to prosecute a public servant and power of judicial magistrate to entertain a complaint and order probe and an FIR.

"What are the relevant considerations as contemplated by Section 17A of the PC Act, 1988 which the appropriate authority is expected to look into before the grant of approval for initiation of any enquiry, inquiry, or investigation by the police?" read the first question the bench framed.

Whether the considerations which weigh with the appropriate authority or government while granting approval under Section 17A of the PC Act are fundamentally so different from the one that a magistrate is ordinarily expected to apply while passing an order under Section 156(3) of CrPC, read the second issue.

"In other words, whether the considerations under Section 17A of the PC Act are of such a nature that they are necessarily beyond the ambit or scope of consideration by a Magistrate while directing an investigation under Section 156(3) of the CrPC," it said.

It asked if it could be said that once a magistrate has applied his mind under Section 156(3) of the CrPC, the requirement of a prior approval under Section 17A of the PC Act is meaningless,

redundant and no longer necessary.

"Could it be said that a police officer, despite a direction under Section 156(3) by a magistrate, would remain inhibited from conducting any enquiry, inquiry, or investigation without prior approval as required by Section 17A," it added.

Whether a magistrate could proceed with inquiry under Sections 200 (examination of private complainant) and 202 (postponement of a criminal case) of CrPC without prior sanction, and whether such actions are limited only to the pre-cognisance stage, read another question.

Pasha filed a complaint alleging Yediyurappa and others conspired to forge documents to revoke a high-level clearance committee's approval for allotting 26 acre of industrial land to him at Devanahalli Industrial Area.

The complaint, which invoked provisions under IPC and the PC Act, was initially investigated by Lokayukta Police, but in 2013, the high court quashed the complaint for a lack of mandatory sanction under Section 19 of the PC Act.

Subsequently, after the accused vacated their offices, Pasha filed a fresh complaint in 2014, arguing that sanction was no longer required in light of Supreme Court judgment in the A R Antulay case.

The special judge, however, dismissed the second complaint in 2016, citing lack of sanction. Challenging dismissal, Pasha approached the high court which passed a partly favourable order.

Heatwave warning alerts, green roofs at bus stops part of Delhi govt's heat action plan

NEW DELHI: An early warning system for heatwaves, green roofs at bus stops and special wards for heatstroke patients at all hospitals are part of the Delhi Heat Action Plan 2025 launched on Monday.

The plan, aimed at combating the effects of rising temperatures, was launched by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta,



who also inaugurated three Cool Roof pilot projects in the city.

"Our mission is to make Delhi heat-resilient, protect lives and make every season livable for its residents," the chief minister said. She said the government has been working extensively to reduce the impact of heatwaves, which have become increasingly frequent and intense, with the temperature in Delhi going as high as 52.9 degrees Celsius.

As part of the plan, the government has asked hospitals to create dedicated wards equipped with ICU beds and essential medicines for heatstroke patients. Cooling centres will also be set up in densely populated areas, especially near footpaths and slums.

Other initiatives include green roofs, shaded areas at bus stops and an early warning system for heatwaves, Gupta said. The government will issue heatwave alerts through medical portals and text messages, she said. Government schools will follow stricter routines to ensure regular water intake among children and slums will be equipped with cool shelters and have access to chilled drinking water, she said. The chief minister also virtually inaugurated three Cool Roof pilot projects at Kashmere Gate, Anand Vihar and Delhi Secretariat. The number of such projects will be increased soon, she said.

8 Naxals including one with bounty of Rs 1 cr killed in Jharkhand encounter

RANCHI: Eight Naxals, including a top rung central committee member of the extremists carrying a bounty of Rs 1 crore on his head, were killed in an encounter with CoBRA commandos of the CRPF and police in Bokaro district of Jharkhand on Monday, officials said.



The exchange of fire started around 5.30 am in Lugu Hills of Lalpania area of the district, they said.

The troops of 209 Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) along with state police conducted the operation in which eight Naxals were killed and an AK series rifle, three INSAS rifles, a self-loading rifle (SLR), eight country-made guns and a pistol were seized, officials said.

Those killed include central committee member of the extremist outfit Prayag Manjhi alias Vivek, special area committee member Arvind Yadav

alias Avinash, zonal committee member Sahebram Manjhi alias Rahul Manjhi, Mahesh Manjhi alias Mota, Talu, Ranju Manjhi, Gangaram and Mahesh.

Vivek carried a bounty of Rs 1 crore, Arvind Yadav had a reward of Rs 25 lakh and Sahebram Majhi Rs 10 lakh. They were booked by the police in various cases of violence, the officials said.

The central committee is the top decision-making body of the Maoist organisation, they said.

No injuries have been reported among the security

personnel, they said.

Jharkhand DGP Anurag Gupta said, "With this encounter, Maoist squads in North Chotanagpur region have been wiped out."

He added, "Maoists have nearly been wiped out from across the state. They only remain in Chaibasa region. We are going to relocate all our forces, including the CRPF, Jharkhand Jaguar and Jharkhand Armed Police, in the Saranda area. Our target is to eliminate all the Maoist squads in the region in the next 15 to 20 days, or certainly before the

rainy season."

"We appeal to the Maoists of Chaibasa to surrender before police. We have a good surrender policy," the DGP said.

The CoBRA is the special jungle warfare unit of the CRPF. The operation is part of the Union government's declaration of eliminating Naxalism from the country by March, 2026.

In another development, Vishnu Deo Sai, the chief minister of neighbouring Chhattisgarh, is expected to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his office in North Block in New Delhi on Monday evening for a comprehensive review of the anti-Naxal operations in his state and related subjects, officials said.

This year, more than 140 Maoists have been gunned down in separate encounters in Chhattisgarh, called by security officials as the "last bastion" for Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in the country.

First Stop Akshardham Temple For Vances, US VP Says His 'Kids, In Particular, Loved It'

NEW DELHI: US Vice President J D Vance, his Indian-origin wife Usha and their three children began their India trip on Monday with a visit to the sprawling Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple near the banks of the Yamuna.

The Vances, who are here for a four-day visit during which they are also scheduled to travel to Jaipur and Agra, were at the temple complex for about an hour.

The children — Ewan, Vivek and Mirabel, all three dressed in Indian attire — were the cynosure of many an eye.

"Thank you all so much for your hospitality and kindness in welcoming me and my family to this beautiful place. It is a great credit to India that you built a beautiful temple with precision and care.

Our kids, in particular, loved it. God bless," the vice president wrote in the temple guest book.



Once done, the family posed for camera crews outside the imposing facade of the temple.

"They were given a traditional welcome after which they had 'darshan'. A carved wooden elephant, a model of the Delhi Akshardham Temple and children's books were gifted to the family," a priest at the temple told PTI.

Temple volunteer Meera Sondagar added that the vice president was especially

captivated by the intricately sculpted Gajendra Peeth, a plinth adorned with carvings of elephants that symbolises strength and wisdom.

"He was shown the entire Akshardham complex and was deeply moved by the experience. He said he felt a sense of peace here," she said.

The temple also put out a post on X about the visit.

"The U.S. Vice President JD Vance, Second Lady Usha

Vance and their children visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in Delhi 'their first stop in India' experiencing its majestic art, architecture and timeless values of faith, family and harmony."

"The Vance family explored the mandir's majestic art and architecture, experiencing India's heritage and cultural depth and they appreciated the messages of harmony, family values, and timeless wisdom embodied in the Akshardham campus," it added.

Inaugurated in 2005, the temple dedicated to Bhagwan Swaminarayan is a must see for most visitors to the capital. Swaminarayan, believed to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, established the Swaminarayan faith and renewed the ideals of Hinduism in 18th century India. He established a spiritual way of life and code of conduct to be followed, according to the website of BAPS Swaminarayan.

SC directs former IAS probationer Puja Khedkar to appear before Delhi Police on May 2

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Monday directed former IAS probationer Puja Khedkar, accused of cheating and wrongly availing of OBC and disability quota benefits in the civil services examination, to appear before Delhi Police on May 2.

A bench comprising Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma also said no coercive steps will be taken against Khedkar till May 21, the next date of hearing.

The top court noted that no concrete investigation into the matter had taken place and directed Delhi Police to conclude the probe expeditiously.

During the hearing, Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for Delhi Police, submitted that Khedkar's custodial interrogation was required.

The apex court, however, granted her interim protection. Khedkar is accused of misrepresenting information in her application for the 2022 UPSC civil services examination for availing reservation benefits.

We Are Alleged Of Encroaching Upon Parliamentary And Executive Functions: SC

NEW DELHI: "As it is, we are alleged of encroaching upon the parliamentary and executive functions," Supreme Court's judge B R Gava said on Monday in an apparent reference to recent attacks on the judiciary.

Justice Gava's comment came while the apex court bench, also comprising Justice Augustine George Masih, was considering a fresh plea seeking an inquiry into the recent violence in West Bengal during anti-Waqf law protests.

Advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, who had filed a PIL in 2021 on behalf of two petitioners seeking President's Rule in West Bengal in the wake of violence following assembly polls, urged the bench to take up a fresh plea for hearing



on Tuesday.

Jain said the 2021 plea was listed for hearing and the fresh application bringing out more incidents of violence in West Bengal also be heard.

"In tomorrow's list item 42 pertains to imposition of President Rule in the state of West Bengal. That petition is filed by me. In that petition, I have filed

an IA (application) for directions and impleadment bringing out certain more incidents of violence which have happened in the state of West Bengal," he said.

Jain said deployment of paramilitary force and immediate action was required. He referred to Article 355 of the Constitution, which pertains to duty of the Union to protect states against

external aggression and internal disturbance, and said the apex court can call for a report as to what was happening in the state.

Jain said the top court had earlier issued notice on the 2021 petition. "When the matter will come up, I will demonstrate how the violence happened," he said.

In July 2021, the apex court agreed to hear the PIL, which also sought a direction to the Centre to deploy armed/paramilitary forces in the state. It then issued notice to the Centre, West Bengal and the Election Commission on the plea. Recently, two separate petitions were filed in the apex court seeking a court-monitored probe into the violence in West Bengal over the newly-enacted Waqf (Amendment) Act.

Uddhav won't have 'any issue' with Raj if he keeps away from BJP, Shinde's Sena: Saamana

MUMBAI: The Shiv Sena (UBT) on Monday said there will be no question of "any issue" between party chief Uddhav Thackeray and MNS head Raj Thackeray if the latter keeps away from the BJP and Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

An editorial in the Sena (UBT) mouthpiece 'Saamana' also claimed the possibility of rapprochement between Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray has rattled "Maharashtra baiters".

Cousins Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray have sparked speculation about a possible reconciliation with statements indicating they could ignore "trivial issues" and join hands nearly two decades after a bitter parting of ways.

While the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief has said uniting in the interests of "Marathi mannos" is not difficult, former CM Uddhav Thackeray said he was ready to put aside trivial fights, provided that those working against Maharashtra's interests were not entertained.

The editorial in Saamana said the issues referred to by Raj Thackeray were never known to the public.

Raj keeps talking about "Marathi mannos" and the (then undivided) Shiv Sena (founded by Bal Thackeray) was also born to champion the same cause. So where are the issues? it asked.

"There was no reason for the BJP, Shinde Sena to talk on this.

These people started those so-called issues. So there will be no issues if the BJP

and Shinde Sena are kept at a distance," the Marathi daily said.

The BJP and the Shinde-led Sena took aim at the Sena (UBT) by placing gun on Raj's shoulders. This did not benefit the



MNS, but hurt Marathi unity, it claimed.

The BJP's ploy is to weaken Marathi unity, the editorial alleged.

Raj's stand had been that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah should not be allowed to set foot in Maharashtra, but he did not stick to it, the Marathi daily claimed.

Notably, the MNS had declared unconditional support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term in 2024.

BJP's Hindutva is "fake and hollow", and Raj got embroiled in its trap and started getting sunk into it, the editorial charged.

Maharashtra will never forgive if a lifetime is spent dealing with fights and issues, it added.

Foreign delegates to explore UP's iconic destinations, cultural richness

LUCKNOW: In a major step to boost international tourism, the Uttar Pradesh government is set to host a high-level foreign delegation for a special familiarisation trip (FAM Trip) from April 22 to April 30, Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiveer Singh said on Sunday.

The Minister said that organised by the UP Eco Tourism Development Board, the initiative aims to showcase the state's rich tourism offerings and establish it as a prime destination for global travellers.

He said that while UP already ranks first in the country for domestic tourism, the state is now actively working to attract more international tourists.

"As part of the FAM trip, prominent travel industry representatives from the UK, USA, Germany, Australia

and host country India will tour several iconic and lesser-explored destinations across the state.

They will also go to places like Kashi from Chambal Safari," he said.

Singh said that this trip is an important step to introduce foreign tour operators to the state's top tourist destinations and to strengthen UP's presence on the international tourism map.

"During the trip from Chambal Safari to Kashi, the delegation will experience the state's cultural diversity, historical heritage and natural beauty," he said.

He said that representatives from major travel companies in the UK, US, Germany and Australia will be visiting UP starting April 22.

"Their journey will begin from Agra, where they will explore Bateshwar and enjoy the Chambal Safari. After that, they will travel to Kannauj and attend a special workshop on perfume making. This will give them a chance to learn about the world-famous perfume traditions of Kannauj," he said.

The Minister said that the group will also visit Dudhwa National Park, Pilibhit Tiger Reserve and Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary before Lucknow.

"There, they will explore historical sites, experience the famous Chikankari embroidery and taste local cuisine. After Lucknow, the group will travel to Prayagraj, where they will visit the Sangam, historical places and a famous farm stay called Planters' Bungalow," he said.

SOP Committee Relief meeting held at Bandipora



BANDIPORA: In order to accelerate the relief distribution process, Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Bandipora, Zaffar Husson Shawl, today chaired a meeting of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Committee, here.

The meeting discussed the evaluation of pending relief cases and ensuring timely support to eligible beneficiaries.

A total of five cases were presented out of which four cases were approved for payment, while one was found ineligible as per norms.

On the occasion, ADC highlighted the importance of swift relief distribution to mitigate the hardships faced by affected individuals. He instructed the concerned departments to streamline procedural workflows and ensure that genuine beneficiaries receive assistance without unnecessary delay.

The meeting was attended by Tehsildar Bandipora, District Treasury Officer, Assistant Executive Engineers from R&B Sumbal and Bandipora and representatives from other concerned departments.

Petronet Kashmir Super 50 Achieves Outstanding Results in JEE Mains 2025

SRINAGAR: The Kashmir Super 50 initiative, jointly run by the Chinar Corps of the Indian Army, Centre for Social Responsibility and Leadership (CSRL), and Petronet LNG Limited, has once again delivered outstanding results in the recently concluded JEE Mains 2025 examination.

An official spokesperson said among the standout performers, Tsering Choshpel secured an impressive 95.29 percentile, Fasil Bashir Wani achieved 95.17 percentile, while Mohammad Abass scored 92.31 percentile, reflecting the high academic standards and effective mentoring provided by the programme.

Since its inception, Kashmir Super 50 has maintained a commendable success rate of 63 percent, with 268 out of 425 enrolled students securing admissions in prestigious engineering colleges across India. "This includes 28 admissions to various Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), 110 enrolments in National Institutes of Technology (NITs), 11 admissions to Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), and 119 selections in other renowned government engineering colleges".

Spokesperson said the initiative stands as a shining example of the Indian Army's sustained efforts to support education and empowerment in the remote and

underserved areas of Jammu and Kashmir.

Speaking about his journey, student Sajid Ahmad said, "The Chinar Corps of

Their hard work and dedication, combined with our comprehensive educational approach, have made this success possible," he said.



Indian Army, CSRL and Petronet have provided me with the tools and resources I needed to succeed. I am grateful for the unwavering support from the management and faculty."

His sentiment echoes the impact of the programme on young aspirants who, despite facing challenges of geography and access, have risen to achieve national-level success.

Director of Operations at CSRL, Shri Krishnamurti Singh, expressed immense pride in the achievements of the students. "We are incredibly proud of our students.

The continued achievements of Kashmir Super 50 reaffirm the power of inclusive education and the transformative potential of community-driven development.

Official spokesperson said the programme not only enhances academic outcomes for Kashmiri youth but also builds bridges of trust, fosters development, and opens up opportunities for a brighter and more empowered future, further highlighting the role of the Indian Army's Chinar Corps in shaping the educational landscape of the region.

Gurez: Villagers Walk Miles for Ration as Local Stores Remains 'Shut for Decades'



BANDIPORA: Residents of Kanzalwan and Nyle villages in north Kashmir's Gurez tehsil continue to face severe hardships due to the non-functional government ration stores, which have remained shut for over 25 years.

Despite a ration depot having been constructed in Kanzalwan years ago, it has never been made operational. As a result, villagers are

forced to walk nearly 4 kilometres to collect basic food supplies—an ordeal that becomes life-threatening during the harsh winters.

"In winter, navigating these snowbound terrains on foot becomes extremely difficult. We have to walk for hours just to get essentials," said a local resident, urging the administration to act swiftly. "The government needs to un-

derstand our plight and ensure the ration store here is made functional." Repeated pleas to authorities have yielded no tangible response, residents say, compounding the distress in a region already grappling with limited infrastructure and economic challenges.

Former BDC Chairman Mukhtar Ahmad Lone voiced frustration at the prolonged neglect: "We've been facing this issue for decades. It's not merely an inconvenience—it's a safety risk, especially during snowstorms. The authorities must act before the coming winter worsens our condition."

Another villager echoed the sentiment: "We cannot continue risking our lives for basic food items. The administration must take this matter seriously."

The affected population, many of whom are economically vulnerable, say the lack of a functional ration depot adds unnecessary strain to their already difficult lives. They have once again appealed to higher authorities for urgent intervention to operationalise the local ration stores, ensuring timely access to essential commodities.

Airtel's Anti-SPAM Tool Gets Smarter Against Global Scams

SRINAGAR: Bharti Airtel has announced two major enhancements to its AI-driven anti-SPAM tool, bolstering efforts to combat rising spam and scam attempts, especially those originating from foreign networks.

The updated tool will now issue SPAM alerts for calls and SMS messages in 10 Indian languages—Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu, Punjabi, and Urdu—catering to the linguistic diversity of India. Additionally, the system has been upgraded to detect and alert customers to SPAM calls and messages from international numbers, in a bid to address the alarming 12% spike in overseas spam traffic observed over the past six months.

Airtel's anti-SPAM system, launched in September 2024, has flagged over 27.5 billion spam calls to date, averaging 1,560 spam calls per second, and has contributed to a 16% reduction in overall spam calls.

"Customers and their feedback are at the heart of everything we do," said Siddharth Sharma, Director Marketing and CEO – Connected Homes, Bharti Airtel. "As fraudsters increasingly exploit foreign networks, we've expanded our AI capabilities to safeguard our users, while ensuring they receive alerts in their preferred languages."

These updates are automatically activated and free of cost for all Airtel users. However, vernacular SPAM alerts are currently available only on Android devices.

With these additions, Airtel continues to lead the telecom sector with innovative, customer-centric security solutions, reinforcing its commitment to protecting users against evolving digital threats.

Landslide damages residential house in Tulail valley

BANDIPORA: A residential house was damaged due to a landslide, triggered by continuous snowfall and rainfall over the past two days in Busgi Kilshay area of Tulail in north Kashmir's Bandipora district, officials said here on Sunday.

An official told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the house belonging to Ali Mohammad Khan, son of Abdul Samad Khan, was unoccupied at the time of the incident, and no casualties have been reported.

He said that a police party has reached the spot to assess the situation and provide necessary assistance—(KNO)



SSWT Organizes Free Eye Checkup Camp at Puzalpura

BANDIPORA: A free eye checkup camp was organized by The Sparkling Soul Welfare Trust (SSWT) in collaboration with ASG Hospital Srinagar at Panchayat Ghar, Puzalpura, Bandipora, on Monday.

A large number of people from nearby areas availed themselves of the free medical services offered during the camp.

The initiative aimed to provide accessible and free medical assistance to the local population. Salima Parveen, Chairman of The Sparkling Soul Welfare Trust, highlighted that the primary objective of the Free Mega Medical Aid Camp was to ensure that essential healthcare reaches the masses. She encouraged all societal stakeholders to support and contribute to making such events possible.

A team of doctors was present at the camp, offering consultations and necessary medical aid. The general public received free consultations and eye checkups, underscoring the event's commitment to promoting health and wellness in the community.



JKSA Condolences Demise of Nasir Khuehami's Uncle

SRINAGAR : The Jammu and Kashmir Students Association (JKSA) on Sunday expressed profound grief and extended heartfelt condolences to its National Convenor, Nasir Khuehami, on the passing of his paternal uncle, Nazir Ahmad Malla, who died on Saturday.

In a joint condolence statement, the leadership of the Association, including Chairman Mushtaq Habib, President Umamir Jamal, General Secretaries, Secretaries, Spokespersons, Joint Secretaries, State Presidents, and Media Coordinators, conveyed their solidarity with the bereaved family during this difficult time. They also prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

"A man of remarkable warmth, humility, and generosity, his passing is an irreparable loss not only to his family but to all who knew him. We pray to Almighty Allah to grant him the highest place in Jannat-ul-Firdous and bestow strength and patience upon the bereaved family to bear this irretrievable loss," the statement read.

The statement further emphasized that Nazir Ahmad Malla's demise has created a void that cannot be filled, noting, "His absence will be deeply felt by all whose lives he touched with kindness and compassion."

Meanwhile, several political parties and leaders, including the Chief Minister's Office and several parliamentarians, have also extended their heartfelt condolences to Nasir Khuehami, expressing solidarity with the grieving family.

NC Leaders offer condolences with bereaved Aga family

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Senior leader and Advisor to HCM Nasir Aslam Wani Sogami visited Budgam to condole with the bereaved Aga Household on the recent demise of Allama Syed Muhammad Baqir Al-Mousavi.

Wani offered Fatiha for the departed soul and prayed for fortitude to the bereaved family particularly party's senior leaders Aga Syed Mehmood and MP Srinagar Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi during this difficult time.

Party's provincial President Showkat Mir, provincial secretary Syed Tawqeer Ahmad, MLAs Ali Muhammad Dar, Ahsan Pardesi, Salman Ali Sagar, Saifu Din Bhat, Dr Mohammad Shafi, State Spokesperson Imran Nabi Dar visited the Aga family in Budgam and offered heartfelt condolences with the bereaved family including the party MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi.

Earlier party's chief Spokesperson Tanvir Sadiq and party Treasurer Shammi Oberoi also visited the bereaved household for condolences.

Ramban Tragedy: Nizamuddin Bhat Urges Swift Relief and Compensation

Ramban: Senior Congress leader and MLA Bandipora, Nizamuddin Bhat, on Sunday expressed concern over the destruction caused by massive landslides and flash floods in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district, which have claimed lives and caused extensive infrastructural damage.

Expressing sorrow over the tragedy, Bhat said, "A huge loss has occurred in Ramban. There are reports of three deaths." Distressing visuals from the disaster site show vehicles buried under mounds of debris, while several shops and a local restaurant have suffered severe damage.

Bhat also stated that some of the affected vehicles belong to residents from his constituency, Bandipora. "Some vehicles from my constituency are trapped under the debris," he added.

Calling it a grave natural disaster, Bhat urged authorities to launch a coordinated relief operation. "This is not just a regional concern—besides the UT government, the central government must step in to assist and compensate the affected families," he emphasized.

While rescue operations are underway, official figures on the number of people still trapped remain unconfirmed.

Bhat concluded by stressing the importance of timely intervention and comprehensive support from both the Union Territory and Central governments to alleviate the hardships of the victims and expedite the restoration of essential services and infrastructure.



Vaccination Drive Held for Hajj Pilgrims at SDH Pampore

BILAL HABIB

PAMPORE: A special vaccination drive for Hajj pilgrims 2025 was conducted on Monday at the Sub District Hospital Pampore area of South Kashmir's Pulwama district.

The drive was held under the guidance of the District Administration Pulwama and Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Pulwama, and was organised by the Block Medical Officer (BMO) Pampore. The initiative aimed to ensure the health and safety of pilgrims from Pampore, Awantipora, and Kakapora tehsils falling under the Pampore health block—by vaccinating them as a precautionary measure against contagious diseases during the Hajj pilgrimage, officials told Kashmir Convener.

According to health officials, a total of 116 Hajj pilgrims in the health block Pampore and 89 pilgrims vaccinated following thorough medical check-ups by the team of doctors. The pilgrims expressed satisfaction with the arrangements made at the hospital and appreciated the efforts of the health authorities and supporting staff of SDHPampore.

The drive witnessed the presence of BMO Pampore Dr. Mohammad Yousuf, Registrar Medical Officer (RMO) Dr. Bilal Ahmad, Noman Hussain Andrabi, along with a team of doctors, vaccination staff, and other healthcare workers.

During their interaction with the pilgrims, BMO Dr. Mohammad Yousuf and RMO Dr. Bilal Ahmad congratulated them on being selected for the sacred journey and urged them to pray for peace, prosperity, and the well-being of the community.

Speaking to Kashmir Convener, Block Medical Officer Pampore Dr. Mohammad Yousuf said that a vaccination drive was conducted for Hajj pilgrims associated with the medical block Pampore, which includes pilgrims from Kakapora, Awantipora tehsils and Pampore tehsil including areas like Samboora, Wuyan, and Khrew. The vaccination took place at SDH Pampore.

He said that today's vaccination drive includes two categories of vaccines one is the routine vaccination for the Hajj pilgrims, and the other is the influenza vaccine for those aged 60 above. Both types of vaccinations were administered here today at SDH Pampore.

Indian Army Launches Timely Relief Ops After Ramban Cloudburst

RAMBAN: In the wake of a cloudburst and intense rainfall that triggered disruptions in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district, the Indian Army



swiftly launched coordinated relief and restoration operations, extending timely support to affected civilians and stranded commuters along National Highway-44 (NH44).

Responding promptly to the developing situation, Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) from Banihal, Karachial, Digdaul, Maitra, and Chanderkote were deployed to provide hot meals, tea, basic medical assistance, and temporary shelter to those stranded due to landslides and road blockages.

Although no emergency requisition was formally made, the Army's response

was closely coordinated with the District Administration, Police, and Traffic authorities. The Deputy Commissioner, SSP Ramban, and Superintendent of Traffic remained in touch with Army officials throughout the day.

Spokesperson said Eight Army columns (strength 1/1/18 each) have been kept on standby at strategically located posts to respond quickly if the situation escalates.

Meanwhile, road clearance operations are underway with the help of heavy machinery from civilian firms including KRCL, CPPL, and DMR. Officials estimate it could take up to 48 hours to fully restore connectivity on the highway.

Amid the ongoing relief efforts, the resilience of the local population was evident. One stranded commuter remarked, "Koi dikkat nahi hai... Army hai na... Sab kuchh theek ho jaayega." ("There's no problem... The Army is here... Everything will be fine.")

The Indian Army reaffirmed its commitment to standing shoulder to shoulder with the people of Jammu and Kashmir, ensuring safety, support, and assistance during times of distress.

Editorial

DBT – A Quiet Revolution

India's Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system, once a bold administrative experiment, has matured into one of the country's most transformative governance tools. As highlighted in the latest report by BlueKraft Digital Foundation, DBT has saved the exchequer a staggering ₹3.48 lakh crore over a decade — but its true success lies beyond numbers. It lies in the precision, transparency, and dignity it has brought to welfare delivery for over 176 crore beneficiaries. At the heart of DBT is a simple principle: eliminate intermediaries, and empower the citizen. Through the seamless integration of the JAM trinity—Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar identification, and mobile connectivity—India has re-engineered how subsidies and welfare schemes are administered. The result is a digital ecosystem where benefits reach the intended recipient without delay, distortion, or diversion. Consider the striking reduction in subsidy burden—from 16% of government expenditure in the pre-DBT era to just 9% in 2023-24—achieved alongside a 16-fold surge in coverage. This efficiency is not due to denial or downsizing of welfare but through intelligent targeting. By removing ghost beneficiaries and ensuring biometric authentication, DBT has ensured every rupee counts. The Welfare Efficiency Index, which rose from 0.32 in 2014 to 0.91 in 2023, offers empirical evidence of this governance evolution. The sectoral breakdown tells a compelling story. Food subsidies alone account for over half the DBT-driven savings, largely through Aadhaar-enabled Public Distribution System (PDS) reform. In MGNREGS, over ₹42,000 crore have been saved with 98% of wages now reaching workers on time. PM-KISAN's clean-up of 2.1 crore ineligible names saved the nation ₹22,106 crore, while targeted fertilizer disbursement has cut wasteful sales by 158 lakh MT. As technology deepens its grip over welfare, issues of data privacy, inclusion of the digitally marginalised, and seamless last-mile delivery must be addressed with equal intensity. The goal must be to not just transfer funds but transform lives. India's DBT journey offers a template for the world. As nations struggle with post-pandemic economic constraints and seek better welfare models, India's digital welfare architecture presents an inclusive, efficient, and scalable model. From plugging leakages to protecting livelihoods, DBT is a quiet revolution that is redefining public service delivery

PART I

2024: A Defining Year for India's Defence Sector under Rajnath Singh's Leadership

FIZA FAROOQ

For many years, Kashmir has faced various challenges that have shaped its economy and society. Despite these difficulties, entrepreneurship has emerged as a promising solution, offering a way to revive the economy and create jobs for the region's growing youth population. By encouraging local businesses, Kashmir can build a more stable and diverse economy that is less dependent on traditional sectors. This article explores how entrepreneurship is driving economic growth in Kashmir, addressing key challenges, creating job opportunities, and laying the foundation for a stronger and more resilient future.

Kashmir's Unemployment Tragedy: A Generation in Waiting

Unemployment in Kashmir remains one of the region's most pressing and persistent challenges, exacerbated by a combination of political instability, limited industrialization, and an inadequate educational infrastructure that fails to meet the growing demands of the job market. The Jammu and Kashmir Economic Survey of 2020 estimated the unemployment rate in the region to be around 17.5%, significantly higher than the national average of 7.1%, with youth unemployment being especially severe. This demographic, highly educated but unable to find gainful employment, is a critical factor driving discontent and unrest. Historically, the region's economy has been heavily reliant on agriculture, horticulture, and tourism—sectors vulnerable to fluctuations in climate, political disruptions, and global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. While the tourism industry has the potential for large-scale job creation, the recurring political instability and security concerns have led to cyclical disruptions, severely limiting its capacity to create sustainable employment. Moreover, the agriculture sector, although integral to the region's economy, is largely underdeveloped with issues like land fragmentation, outdated farming practices, and a lack of technological innovation hindering productivity and growth. The slow pace of industrialization and entrepreneurship further contributes to the employment gap, as the region lacks a diversified economy with a solid industrial base or strong local entrepreneurial culture that could generate new job opportunities. Furthermore, the region's infrastructure remains weak, particularly in remote areas, where poor connectivity, unreliable electricity, and limited internet access serve as significant barriers to economic

activity. Additionally, young graduates, often with little practical experience, are left to compete for a limited pool of public sector jobs, further deepening the frustration. The growing reliance on government employment has created a skewed labour market,

fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kashmir, the region could tap into this potential to address its unemployment crisis.

The establishment of local businesses helps create employment opportunities in various sectors,

traditional industries.

Overcoming Barriers to Entrepreneurship in Kashmir



where demand for private sector jobs remains unfulfilled. The situation is further complicated by the migration of educated youth to other parts of the country or abroad in search of better job prospects, resulting in a "brain drain" that depletes the region of its most skilled workforce. In response, Kashmir must develop policies that prioritize entrepreneurship, invest in vocational training, and promote industries beyond the traditional sectors.

Entrepreneurship as a Catalyst for Job Creation

The role of entrepreneurship in economic development has been well-documented globally. In regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and parts of Latin America, entrepreneurship has been a key driver of economic growth and job creation. In Kashmir, a similar approach could prove transformative, as entrepreneurs play an essential role in creating jobs, driving innovation, and fostering sustainable economic growth. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) contribute to approximately 50% of global employment. By

from manufacturing to retail, hospitality, and digital services. For example, in Kashmir, the handicraft industry has traditionally been a source of employment for artisans, but the sector remains underdeveloped. With entrepreneurial efforts focused on modernizing production methods, diversifying products, and exploring international markets, the handicraft sector could experience a resurgence, providing jobs for thousands of people. Similarly, the region's agribusiness sector, with innovations in food processing, packaging, and distribution, has the potential to create both direct and indirect employment, supporting a sustainable rural economy.

Entrepreneurship can also have a ripple effect. When one business thrives, it often leads to the creation of auxiliary services such as transportation, logistics, marketing, and human resources, which in turn contribute to further job creation. For example, the startup ecosystem in Srinagar, though in its infancy, could serve as the backbone for broader job creation. Tech-based entrepreneurs could harness global markets, providing services remotely and establishing connections with international clients, thus broadening the economic base beyond

While entrepreneurship holds immense promise for Kashmir, several barriers hinder its widespread adoption. One of the primary challenges is access to finance. Young entrepreneurs in the region often struggle to secure loans due to limited access to financial institutions and a lack of collateral. Government initiatives like the Jammu and Kashmir State Entrepreneurship Development Institute (JKEDI) have been established to address these issues by providing training, mentorship, and financial support. However, these programs have yet to reach their full potential. A major bottleneck also lies in the region's infrastructure. Poor connectivity, especially in remote areas, weak internet access, and unreliable electricity supply remain significant obstacles for entrepreneurs. The lack of a robust supply chain infrastructure also makes it difficult for businesses to scale. To overcome these challenges, there is a pressing need for investments in infrastructure, both physical and digital. The development of e-commerce platforms and digital payment systems, along with a focus on sustainable infrastructure development, can help address some of these issues.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Storm of Despair: How April's Hail Devastated Kashmir's Apple Heartland



FIRDIOUS AHMAD MALIK

The serenity of spring in Kashmir was violently disrupted on April 18, 2025, when a sudden and powerful hailstorm swept through several regions of the valley. What was expected to be another day of seasonal bloom quickly turned into a nightmare for thousands of orchardists. The tempest struck with minimal warning, pelting vast expanses of fertile land with ice and causing severe destruction to apple orchards in districts such as Shopian, Kulgam, Anantnag, and Budgam. These areas, known for their abundant apple production, now bear scars of devastation—petals shredded, branches broken, and entire trees bruised and stripped of their early blooms. In the blink of an eye, the hopes of a promising harvest were dashed, leaving farmers in despair and a critical economic sector in jeopardy.

The April hailstorm has come at a particularly vulnerable time for Kashmir's horticulture-based economy. Spring is a pivotal phase for apple growers, with blossoms on trees symbolizing not just the cycle of nature but the foundation of their annual livelihood. This natural disaster struck during the flowering stage, the most crucial period in the growth cycle of apple trees, when even slight disturbances can result in massive crop failure. Unfortunately, this was no slight disturbance. The hailstorm was intense and widespread, with some areas reporting ice pellets the size of marbles battering the landscape for over twenty minutes. In rural pockets, farmers watched helplessly as years of careful cultivation were ruined in minutes. Their anguish was visible, their voices echoing the grief of a region whose backbone is agriculture.

According to preliminary reports from the Horticulture Department of Jammu and Kashmir, more than a third of the valley's apple-producing areas have suffered measurable damage, and in some localities, especially in Shopian and Kulgam, losses are near total. Visuals emerging from these districts show orchards stripped of their flowers, broken branches scattered across fields, and farmers standing amid the ruins, some in tears, others silently mourning. The damage extends beyond the immediate loss of fruit; the hail has injured

the branches and trunks of trees, weakening them structurally and compromising their productivity for years to come. Experts from Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST-K) have expressed concern that unless urgent steps are taken, the long-term effects may cripple many farmers permanently. Dr. Altaf Wani, a senior horticultural scientist, warned that repeated hail events like this could severely destabilize the region's economy. "The problem is not just seasonal loss," he explained. "When a tree is bruised during its flowering phase, its growth is halted. Bark injuries become prone to disease. It could take years for some orchards to regain their health."

The economic consequences of this calamity are beginning to unfold. Kashmir is the largest producer of apples in India, contributing over 70% to the national output. The sector employs roughly 3.5 million people, either directly in cultivation or indirectly through allied activities like packaging, transportation, cold storage, and export. In a typical year, Kashmir produces around 2 million metric tons of apples, generating billions in revenue. But this year, those figures are likely to see a significant drop, especially if the damage from the hailstorm is compounded by further weather anomalies. Small and marginal farmers, who form the bulk of the horticulture sector, are now staring at an uncertain future. Many of them have taken loans from banks or informal lenders, using their land or property as collateral. With the crop destroyed and no produce to sell, repaying these loans will be next to impossible for many. Fear of debt traps, asset seizure, and financial collapse is widespread.

Ruqaya Bano, a widow and orchardist in Kulgam, shared her story through tears. "I have two daughters to raise. This orchard was my only means of income. I had bought new tools and paid laborers to prepare for a good harvest. Now everything is gone. Who will help me?" Her voice, choked with emotion, is one among countless others echoing through the valleys. In Budgam, Mohammad Yaqoob stood with his sons, examining what remained of their orchard. "Every year we pray for good weather. But now we pray just to survive," he said quietly, cradling a broken branch like a lost limb. These are not isolated tragedies. They reflect a broader crisis—economic, psychological, and existential—afflicting a community that depends on the rhythm of the seasons and the mercy of the skies.

The meteorological explanation for the storm offers little comfort to those affected. Scientists have attributed the hailstorm to the intrusion of a powerful western disturbance—moisture-



laden winds originating from Central Asia and the Mediterranean that periodically impact northern India. When these systems interact with local weather conditions in mountainous terrain, they can trigger intense rainfall or hail. However, the increasing frequency and unpredictability of such events is what alarms climate experts. Many see this storm not as an anomaly, but as a consequence of shifting climate patterns. Rising temperatures, erratic precipitation, and the absence of traditional weather cues are redefining Kashmir's once-predictable seasons. Dr. Mehmood Shah, a climatologist at Kashmir University, stated that the valley is already facing the early impacts of climate change. "We're witnessing changes in rainfall timing, snowfall patterns, and an increase in extreme weather events. The April 18 hailstorm is not isolated. It's part of a larger, more dangerous trend."

This trend threatens not just horticulture, but the very fabric of Kashmir's rural society. Farmers in regions like Anantnag and Shopian have begun talking about diversification, with some considering abandoning apple cultivation altogether in favor of crops perceived as less risky. Others, however, remain deeply tied to the land and reluctant to give up a heritage that spans generations. But if such hailstorms become more frequent—and without timely relief or technological support—the exodus from orchards may accelerate. Unfortunately, technological support is precisely what is lacking. Most farmers do not have access to real-time weather alerts or scientific knowledge on protective cultivation methods such as hail nets, wind barriers, or automated forecasting devices. While these tools exist, they remain prohibitively expensive for the average orchardist. The gap between policy and ground

reality remains painfully wide.

In response to the disaster, civil society and local communities have come together to express solidarity. Mosques across the region offered special

prayers for the affected families, while local NGOs have begun informal relief efforts, distributing food and basic supplies. The outpouring of support on social media has also been notable, with hashtags like #StandWithFarmers and #KashmirHailstorm trending for much of April 19. While this show of empathy is heartening, what the farmers truly need is structured and immediate institutional support. Calls have intensified for the Jammu and Kashmir administration to declare the storm a natural calamity and initiate compensation measures. Farmers' unions and political representatives have urged the Lieutenant Governor's office to dispatch high-level teams for comprehensive ground assessments and to release immediate financial relief.

However, the track record of post-disaster relief in Kashmir is not encouraging. Previous hailstorms and floods have seen bureaucratic delays, incomplete compensation, and allegations of favoritism in the distribution of aid. Many farmers are still waiting for compensation from the 2021 hailstorm. This time, they fear, may be no different. Additionally, the much-publicized crop insurance schemes promoted by the central and UT governments have largely failed to reach the majority of farmers. Due to lack of awareness, complicated procedures, and delayed payouts, very few orchardists are insured. "I have been growing apples for over thirty years and have never received a single rupee of insurance," said Nazir Ahmad from Anantnag. "We fill forms, we submit documents, but in the end, there is silence."

This stark reality calls for a complete overhaul of how disasters are managed in the agrarian sector. Immediate steps must include comprehensive damage assessment, disbursement of ex-gratia relief, waiving of loans, and free distribution of

fertilizers, pesticides, and pruning tools. In the medium term, the government must invest in setting up a climate-resilient infrastructure, including weather monitoring stations in rural belts, subsidized hail nets, mobile alert systems, and training programs for orchardists. Most importantly, agricultural insurance needs to be made universal, affordable, and transparent. The model used in other parts of India, such as Maharashtra's grape belt, could be adapted for Kashmir with the necessary geographical and economic modifications.

Despite the despair, there remains a flicker of hope. In several villages of Kulgam and Shopian, farmers are helping each other rebuild. Youth volunteers have stepped in to clean damaged orchards, and some religious scholars have called upon wealthier families to contribute zakat (charitable donations) directly to affected growers. This culture of mutual aid has long been a hallmark of Kashmiri society. But goodwill alone cannot restore the fallen blossoms or replace the lost income. It must be met with policy, planning, and political will.

This disaster also carries a lesson. The future of agriculture in Kashmir cannot rest solely on tradition and seasonal expectations. As the climate shifts, so too must farming practices. Agricultural universities, policy think tanks, and rural extension services must come together to chart a sustainable path forward. The introduction of climate-resilient apple varieties, promotion of mixed farming models, and creation of farmer cooperatives that can lobby collectively for their rights could be key strategies. Moreover, farmer education should be made a priority. Workshops, audio-visual materials, mobile advisories, and rural helplines could help bridge the gap between science and practice.

April 18 will be remembered not only for its storm, but for the questions it has raised—about preparedness, equity, resilience, and justice. If these questions go unanswered, the cost of this storm will be far greater than what can be seen in broken orchards. It will be paid for in declining rural morale, growing urban migration, and the slow erosion of a culture rooted in land and labor. For now, as the valley mourns its blossoms, it also waits—for justice, for assistance, and above all, for change.

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J&K gears up for National Panchayati Raj Day celebrations on April 24

JAMMU: In preparation for National Panchayati Raj Day (NPRD) on April 24, 2025, Director Panchayati Raj J&K, Sham Lal chaired a meeting with Assistant Commissioners Panchayats (ACPs) to finalize the modalities for the celebrations across the Union Territory.

Emphasizing the importance of grassroots democratic Institutions, the Director directed all ACPs to ensure that every Gram Panchayat convenes a Gram Sabha on April 24 to deliberate on key local governance issues, citizen-centric schemes, and developmental achievements.

"The National Panchayati Raj Day is not just a ceremonial event but a reaffirmation of our commitment to participatory governance and inclusive development," he said.

During the meeting, Sham Lal instructed officials to place special emphasis on structured dialogues at the Gram Sabhas, especially focusing on Water management & conservation, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).

To further enhance public awareness, Panchayat

Bhawans have been instructed to display details of Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) members, including their role and responsibilities. The State Panchayat Resource Centre (SPRC) and District



Panchayat Resource Centres (DPRCs) were directed to coordinate with field officials to ensure seamless event execution.

Sham Lal also stressed the need to maximize community involvement, urging the participation of

ASHA workers, Anganwadi staff and local residents in Gram Sabha proceedings.

He said a robust social media outreach must be encouraged using hashtags such as #NationalPanchayatiRajDay2025 and #GramSabha, with officials instructed to tag the Ministry of Panchayati Raj's official handles for greater visibility.

The Director directed officials to maintain detailed records of all Gram Sabha proceedings, resolutions, and certifications, which are to be uploaded on the official platform meetingonline.gov.in.

A major highlight of the event will be the live broadcast of the Prime Minister's address, for which necessary arrangements are being made in Panchayats across the Union Territory.

The NPRD 2025 celebrations aim to commemorate the legacy of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment while strengthening transparency, accountability, and community-led development through robust participation at the grassroots level.

DC Kupwara, Ayushi Sudan conferred with PM's Award for Excellence in Public Admn

KUPWARA: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kupwara, Ayushi Sudan, has been conferred the prestigious Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on the occasion of the 17th Civil Services Day, celebrated on April 21, 2025, in New Delhi.

This award is one of the highest recognitions given to civil servants in India for exemplary and innovative work in public service delivery.

Ayushi Sudan was honoured in the category 'Holistic Development of Districts' in

recognition of her outstanding contribution in implementing transformative governance initiatives in the frontier district

democracy have significantly improved the quality of life in the district, particularly in remote and far-flung areas.



of Kupwara, Jammu & Kashmir. Her dedicated efforts in promoting inclusive development, enhancing citizen-centric services, education and strengthening grassroots

Meanwhile locals and public representatives of district Kupwara have congratulated Ayushi Sudan for her remarkable leadership making Kupwara a standout district.

DC Pulwama reviews NEET (UG) examination arrangements

PULWAMA: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Pulwama, Dr Basharat Qayoom, today reviewed the arrangements for the forthcoming NEET (UG) Examination in a comprehensive meeting convened at the Administrative Complex Pulwama.

During the meeting, DC received a detailed briefing on various logistical and security measures being implemented at all designated NEET examination centres across the district.

The session began with a presentation highlighting key aspects of the examination and the guidelines issued by the National Testing Agency (NTA).

Centre Superintendents from the designated centres briefed the chair about their preparedness, including infrastructural and logistical arrangements, surveillance mechanisms and security protocols.

DC emphasized strict adherence to all Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to ensure the transparency, integrity and fairness of the examination process.

Dr Qayoom stressed the importance of thorough frisking procedures and directed that all training sessions for all invigilators to be conducted in

batches to familiarise themselves with examination protocols. He also instructed that videographers assigned to various centres be trained to ensure standardised and proper recording of exam-day activities.

DC also instructed the concerned departments to ensure seamless transportation and the provision of other essential services on the day of the examination.

Underscoring the importance of inter-departmental coordination, he called for a collaborative effort to create a conducive environment for all appearing candidates.

Among others, the meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Pulwama, ACR Pulwama, CEO Pulwama, Centre Superintendents and other district officers in addition to representatives of various Banks.



Aijaz Asad reviews RDD schemes in Shopian



SHOPIAN: Secretary, Rural Development Department and Panchayati Raj (RD&PR), Mohammad Aijaz Asad, on Monday conducted a comprehensive review of departmental schemes in Shopian district.

During the meeting, Secretary reviewed the status of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), Project UNNATI, Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP), Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G), and UT Capex and assessed targets and achievements of the district under these schemes.

Secretary held detailed deliberations with Assistant Commissioner Development (ACD), Assistant Commissioner Panchayat (ACP), Block Development Officers (BDOs) and other staff of the department instructing them to focus on achieving the targets set for various schemes.

He emphasized optimizing the functionality of 94 community compost pits constructed in the district.

Secretary directed Block Development Officers (BDOs) to train communities in efficient compost formation and explore market linkages to generate income from organic waste. "These pits should transition from mere structures to sustainable income sources for panchayats," he said.

Highlighting the functionality of Amrit Sarovars, Secretary stressed their maintenance and transformation into community leisure spots. "Regular cleaning and aesthetic development of these water bodies will boost local tourism and provide recreational spaces," he said, urging collaboration with Panchayats.

Secretary called for prioritizing durable rural assets under MGNREGA and UT Capex to ensure long-term benefits.

On waste management, he mandated scientific segregation protocols and utilization of existing rural infrastructure for efficient disposal. "Door-to-door collection must align with segregation practices to achieve Swachh Bharat's ODF-plus goals," he added. Reviewing the construction of Panchayat Ghars, Secretary directed resolving pending land disputes to expedite work. For PMAY-G, he reinforced the need for stringent verification of new registrations to prevent discrepancies and ensure timely disbursement of payments to beneficiaries.

Secretary reiterated the department's commitment to "equitable and eco-sensitive development," urging officials to leverage schemes for enhancing rural livelihoods and infrastructure. Shopian, Shishir Gupta assured coordinated efforts to meet targets, stating, "Shopian will emerge as a model district in sustainable rural transformation."

Assistant Commissioner Development presented a detailed overview of progress across flagship programs.

Achievements under MGNREGA highlighted the creation of rural infrastructure, while PMAY-G's success in housing delivery and new registrations was reviewed. Project UNNATI and IWMP's role in livelihood generation and watershed management were also discussed.

Reyaz Ahmad Bhat assumes charge as Technical Advisor JJM

SRINAGAR: Reyaz Ahmad Bhat today assumed the charge of Technical Advisor in Mission Directorate of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) at Civil Secretariat here today.

He was recently elevated as Superintending Engineer in Jal Shakti Department and subsequently posted in JJM as Technical Advisor.

Mission Director, JJM, Khurshid Ahmad Bhat and other staff members accorded warm welcome to the officer on the occasion.



Dy CM interacts with Jammu Flour Mills Association

JAMMU: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Kumar Choudhary, today convened a meeting with Jammu Flour Mills Association to take stock of their issues and concerns for speedy redress.

The Association expressed concern over the crippling impact of Punjab Government's Mandi fee on wheat procurement, severely affecting the flour mills in Jammu and Kashmir. They sought the intervention of DyCM in resolving this issue of grave concern at the earliest.

The representatives of Jammu Flour Mills Association apprised the DyCM that the government

of Punjab has levied additional 6 percent of Mandi fee which included Mandi tax, Arthia Commission and other taxes,



above the MRP for the Millers from outside the states of Punjab. They said that it has created extra burden on the Jammu Millers as they have to purchase the wheat at higher rates which automatically results in higher prices of Atta, Maida, Suji,

Dalia, Bran and other wheat derivatives.

Responding to the issues raised by the Association, the

DyCM assured that the legitimate issues of flour mills would be resolved on priority basis.

The Dy CM reiterated that government is committed to support its local industry and will take every possible step to make them flourish.

Yuva DOOTs Training/ orientation programme held at Shopian

SHOPIAN: A comprehensive day-long training-cum-orientation programme for Yuva DOOTs was conducted today at the meeting hall of Mini-Secretariat Shopian.

The event was presided over by Additional District Development Commissioner (ADDC) Shopian, Dr. Nasir Ahmed Lone, who is also Nodal Officer Mission YUVA Shopian.

Speaking on the occasion, ADDC emphasized the critical role of youth empowerment in promoting grassroots entrepreneurship.

ADDC encouraged the Yuva DOOTs to become catalysts of change and assured them of full institutional support. He highlighted the need for youth-led development and community participation to build a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem in the district.

The training was designed to equip Yuva DOOTs with the skills and knowledge necessary to identify, support, and guide potential entrepreneurs within their respective panchayats.

Participants received extensive training on their roles as grassroots motivators, tasked with spreading awareness of various self-employment schemes and facilitating youth

engagement at the village/ward level. The training session emphasized the importance of key performance Indicators



(KPIs) for monitoring the effectiveness of the initiative, ensuring that the Yuva DOOTs remain result-oriented in their approach. A detailed overview of Mission YUVA and the Institutional Business Support Mechanism was presented by the Employment Officer (DECC), Shopian.

The Career Counselling Officer shared the insights from the baseline survey conducted earlier to identify youth with entrepreneurial potential enabling the Yuva DOOTs to understand the scope and focus

areas of their intervention. The training covered all relevant parameters including mobilization techniques, scheme benefits, documentation and reporting formats.

The interactive sessions held during the training fostered active discussions and allowed DOOTs to seek clarifications and share suggestions.

Resource persons, including DDM NABARD, DNO JKEDI also provided sector-specific guidance through PowerPoint presentations and live demonstrations of the Mission YUVA App/Portal, ensuring a hands-on learning experience for all participants.

Awareness camp on Labour Laws organized at Anantnag

ANANTNAG: To educate stakeholders about various provisions of labour laws, including minimum wages, social security benefits, occupational safety standards and grievance redressal mechanisms, Labour Department Anantnag today organised awareness camp on labour laws at Dak Bunglow Khanabal, Anantnag.

The camp was held under the co-chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Anantnag, Syeed Fakhruddin Hamid, and Labour Commissioner J&K, Charandeep Singh.

The camp was attended by Executive Engineers, Block Development Officers and principal employers and labour representatives of District Anantnag.

Addressing the gathering, DC said that such camps are much-needed to improve the delivery of various legal rights

and entitlements to labour groups. He further directed that similar Information, Education and Communication (IEC) awareness



camps must be organised at Block levels. The Labour Commissioner called on the concerned officers to ensure enrollment of labour groups in various beneficiary oriented schemes of the Labour Department including Employees' State Insurance Corporation. He also hailed the present initiative as a balanced platform wherein the government officials, industry stakeholders and labour representatives can come together

to promote Labour welfare. Later, an Interactive session was conducted where other participants gave a state of the

implementation of various labour laws in their jurisdictions. They also gave feedback regarding the implementation of various labour oriented initiatives.

To facilitate better understanding, pamphlets and booklets were distributed among attendees. Notably, the Labour Department plans to conduct more such awareness drives in the district for Labour welfare in the coming months.

KVK Kulgam organizes Awareness programme under TSP

KULGAM: Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Kulgam in collaboration with TSP ICAR organized awareness cum input distribution programme under Tribal Sub-Plan

300 tribal farmers of villages Devsar, Kund, Tangmarg and Yarikhah received 150 q of high yielding SKUAST-K released varieties of potato and Maize seed.

Prof. Raihana Habib Kanth, Director Extension SKUAST-K, was chief guest on the occasion, stressing the need for adoption and dissemination of the high yielding university-released variety of seeds.

Explaining about the benefits of the potato and maize, Director Extension, SKUAST-K said that the varieties are climate resilient, less susceptible to diseases and has the potential to tolerate adverse weather conditions.

She also briefed the farmers about the role of SKUAST-K in augmenting research in agriculture to facilitate the

farming community in the valley. Prof. & Head KVK Kulgam, Manzoor A Gana and Prof Javid A Mugloo Head KVK Pulwama briefed the tribal farmers about the role of KVKs in facilitating agriculture and allied activities in the district through on farm trials, front line demonstrations and skill-based training/

awareness programmes. They encouraged the farmers to avail the services of the Kendra for more profitable farming.

Scientists and technical staff of KVK Kulgam also attended the said awareness programme. The programme was marked by interactive sessions, showcasing of farming practices, and a strong emphasis on promoting entrepreneurship in the agricultural and allied sectors.



JKTPO hosts RAMP Workshop to Empower Local MSMEs

JAMMU: With the aim of strengthening the micro, small and medium enterprises sector across Jammu and Kashmir, a district-level

RAMP awareness workshop was held today at Udyog Bhawan in Jammu. Organized by the Jammu and Kashmir Trade Promotion

Organization in partnership with Grant Thornton Bharat's State Project Implementation Unit and the District Industries Centre, this was the third in a series of outreach events under the Ministry of MSME's flagship Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance scheme.

Attendees included entrepreneurs, representatives of industry associations, officials

from the Industries and Commerce Department, and delegates from NABARD, Labour & Employment, Handloom and Handicrafts, Cooperative Societies, Government Polytechnic Jammu and other key stakeholder bodies. During the session, JKTPO Managing Director Sudarshan Kumar highlighted the transformative potential of RAMP under the guidance of Commissioner-Secretary Vikramjit

Singh, stressing its role in driving innovation and inclusive growth.

The SPIU team outlined core interventions such as formalization of enterprises through Udyam registration, enhanced packaging and promotion of GI, ODOP and other regional products, formation of producer companies under cluster development, and the organization of buyer-seller

and reverse buyer-seller meets. They also detailed plans for establishing a dedicated MSME Health Clinic, launching a real-time RAMP monitoring dashboard, expanding digital financing options, and rolling out entrepreneurship, skill development and management development programs across the Union Territory.

2024: A Defining Year for India’s Defence Sector under Rajnath Singh’s Leadership



S.S. AHMAD

The Year 2024 witnessed some path-breaking achievements & breakthroughs as Ministry of Defence (MoD), marched ahead with renewed vigour to make India a strong, secure, self-reliant & prosperous nation, as envisioned by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Shri Rajnath Singh assumed the office of Raksha Mantri for the second consecutive term in June this year and under his leadership, the Ministry reaffirmed its resolve to work in the priority areas to realise the vision of self-reliance in Defence. Some of the major highlights of 2024 include:

India-China border consensus

India and China achieved a broad consensus to restore the ground situation in certain areas along the LAC. Both countries have been holding talks at diplomatic and military levels to resolve the differences in some areas along the LAC. As a result, a broad consensus was developed on the basis of equal and mutual security. Raksha Mantri, during the Chanakya Defence Dialogue on October 24, 2024, described the consensus as proof that continuous dialogue brings solutions.

Aatmanirbharta in Defence

- Positive Indigenisation List: To boost Aatmanirbharta in defence & minimise imports by DPSUs, Department of Defence Production in July, notified the fifth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) consisting of 346 items. These include strategically-important Line Replacement Units/Systems/Sub-systems/Assemblies/Sub-assemblies/Spares & Components and raw materials. Earlier, four PILs comprising 4,666 items were notified by the DDP for DPSUs, of which 2,972 items, having import substitution value worth Rs 3,400 crore, have already been indigenised. These five lists for DPSUs are in addition to the five PILs of 509 items notified by the Department of Military Affairs. These lists include highly-complex systems, sensors, weapons and ammunition.
- Record Defence Production: MoD achieved the highest-ever growth in indigenous defence production in value terms during Financial Year (FY) 2023-24, on the back of successful implementation of the policies and initiatives of the Government. The defence production went up to a record-high figure



of Rs 1,26,887 crore, reflecting a growth of 16.7% over the defence production of the previous financial year. The value of defence production in FY 2022-23 was Rs 1,08,684 crore. Of the total value of production in 2023-24, about 79.2% has been contributed by DPSUs/other PSUs and 20.8% by the private sector. The data shows that in terms of absolute value, both DPSUs/PSUs and private sector have recorded a steady growth in defence production. MoD has set a target to achieve Rs three lakh crore defence production by 2029.

- Record Defence Exports: Defence exports touched a record Rs 21,083 crore (approx. US\$ 2.63 Billion) in the FY2023-24, a growth of 32.5% over the previous fiscal when the figure was Rs 15,920 crore. The figures indicated that the exports grew by 31 times in the last 10 years as compared to FY 2013-14. The defence industry, including the private sector and DPSUs, have made tremendous efforts in achieving the highest-ever exports. The private sector and DPSUs contributed about 60% and 40% respectively. Raksha Mantri has exuded confidence that the target to export defence equipment worth Rs 50,000 crore by 2029 will be met.
- C-295 TATA Aircraft Complex: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Spanish President Mr Pedro Sanchez jointly inaugurated the TATA Aircraft Complex for manufacturing of C-295 transport aircraft at TATA advanced systems limited Campus in Vadodara, Gujarat in October 2024. In September 2021, MoD had signed a Rs 21,935-crore contract with Airbus Defence and Space SA, Spain for supply of 56 aircraft - 16 to be brought in fly away condition from Spain and 40 to be built in India by TASL. Of the 16 aircraft, six have already been inducted into IAF at 11 Sqn based at Vadodara. The last would be delivered by August 2025. The first Made-in-India C-295 is expected to be rolled out of the Final Assembly Line facility at Vadodara by September 2026 and the remaining by August 2031.
- Indian Light Tank: Indian Light Tank (ILT) 'Zorawar' has achieved a major milestone by firing a number of rounds at different ranges at an altitude of more than 4200m (High Altitude Location) with consistently accurate results. This was subsequent to the Phase I trial in desert environment in September 2024. This light tank has been defined, designed and developed by Combat Vehicles Research & Development Establishment, the Chennai-based laboratory of DRDO for the Indian Army. It is manufactured by the Industry Partner Larsen & Toubro Precision Engineering & Systems.

During the field trials conducted in the desert terrain, the Light Tank demonstrated exceptional performance, efficiently meeting all the intended objectives. In the initial phase, the tank's firing performance was rigorously evaluated and it achieved the required accuracy on designated targets.

Major Inductions/Commissioning

- INS Arighaat: The second Arihant-Class submarine 'INS Arighaat' was commissioned into the Indian Navy on August 29, 2024 at Visakhapatnam in the presence of Raksha Mantri. The construction of INS Arighaat involved the use of advanced design and manufacturing technology, detailed research & development, utilisation of special materials, complex engineering and highly skilled workmanship. It has the distinction of having the indigenous systems and equipment which were conceptualised, designed, manufactured & integrated by the Indian scientists, industry and Naval personnel. The technological advancements undertaken indigenously on this submarine make it significantly more advanced than its predecessor Arihant.
- INS Tushil: INS Tushil (F70), the latest multi-role stealth-



guided missile frigate, was commissioned into the Indian Navy in the presence of Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh at the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad, Russia on December 09, 2024. It is an upgraded Krivak III class frigates of the Project 1135.6 of which, six are already in service – three Talwar class ships, built at Baltiysky shipyard, St. Petersburg, and three follow-on Teg class ships, built at Yantar shipyard, Kaliningrad. INS Tushil, the seventh in the series, is the first of the two upgraded additional follow-on ships, the contract for which was signed in October 2016 between JSC Rosoboronexport, Indian Navy and the Government of India. Armed with a range of advanced weapons, it is designed for blue water operations across the spectrum of naval warfare in all four dimensions - air, surface, underwater and electromagnetic.

- LCH Prachand: Induction of all Light Combat Helicopters LSP was completed in February 2024. IAF personnel were vigorously trained on the system and the LCH successfully participated in Ex Gagan Shakti in April 2024.

Major Acquisitions

To provide substantial boost to the Indian defence industry and reduce foreign spending significantly, Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) and Defence Procurement Board (DPB), during 2024 (upto November), accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for 40 Capital Acquisition proposals amounting to Rs 4,22,129.55 crore. Out of these, AoNs for Rs 3,97,584.34 Crore (i.e. 94.19%) have been accorded to be procured from indigenous sources. These include:

- DAC, in September 2024, accorded AoN for 10 capital acquisition proposals amounting to Rs 1,44,716 crore. These include procurement of Future Ready Combat Vehicles, Air Defence Fire Control Radars, Dornier-228 aircraft, Next Generation Fast Patrol & Offshore Patrol Vessels.
- DAC, in February 2024, accorded approval for AoN for various capital acquisition proposals amounting to Rs 84,560 crore. The proposals include new generation anti-tank mines, Air Defence Tactical Control Radar, Heavy Weight Torpedoes, Medium Range Maritime Reconnaissance & Multi-Mission Maritime Aircraft, Flight Refueller Aircraft & Software Defined Radios.
- In July 2024, DAC approved capital acquisition proposals including procurement of Advanced Land Navigation System for Armoured Fighting Vehicles of the Indian Army and 22 Interceptor Boats with latest state-of-art system for the Indian Coast Guard.
- DAC, in December 2024, accorded AoN for five capital acquisition proposals amounting to over Rs. 21,772 crore. These include procurement of Water Jet Fast Attack Crafts, Fast Interceptor Craft, Electronic Warfare Suite, Next Generation Radar Warning Receiver, Advanced Light Helicopters for surveillance in coastal areas.

Major contracts

- MoD inked a contract with the US Government for Tri-Service procurement of 31 MQ-9B Sky/Sea Guardian High Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) in October 2024. Another contract was signed with General Atomics Global India Pvt Ltd for Performance Based Logistics for these RPAS through Depot Level Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul in India.

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited

- A contract was signed in September 2024 for 240 AL-31FP Aero Engines for Su-30MKI aircraft at a cost of over Rs 26,000 crore.
- A contract for procurement of 12 Su-30MKI aircraft along with associated equipment was inked in December 2024, at an approximate cost of Rs 13,500 crore.
- Two contracts for a combined value of Rs 8,073.17 crore were signed in March 2024 for acquisition of 34 Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) Dhruv Mk III along with Operational Role Equipment for Indian Army (25 ALHs) and Indian Coast Guard (09 ALHs).
- A contract for RD-33 Aero Engines for MiG-29 aircraft was inked in March 2024 at a cost of Rs 5,249.72 crore. These aero engines will be produced by the Koraput Division of HAL.
- A contract was signed in March 2024 for Mid Life Upgrade of 25 Dornier Aircraft along with associated equipment for the Indian Navy at a cost of Rs 2,890 crore.

Bharat Electronics Limited

- A contract was inked in February 2024 for procurement of 11 Shakti Electronic Warfare Systems along with associated equipment for Indian Navy under Buy (Indian-IDDm) category

at a total cost of Rs 2,269.54 crore.

Advanced Weapon Equipment India Limited

- A contract was signed in February 2024 for manufacturing & supply of a total of 463 indigenously manufactured 12.7 mm Stabilised Remote Control Guns for the Indian Navy & Indian Coast Guard at a total cost of Rs 1,752.13 crore, with Indigenous Content of more than 85%.

Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited

- A contract was inked in January 2024 for acquisition of 14 Fast Patrol Vessels (FPVs) for the Indian Coast Guard. The value of the contract is Rs 1,070.47 crore. These multi-role FPVs will be indigenously designed, developed and manufactured under Buy (Indian-IDDm) Category.

Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited

- In March 2024, a contract was signed for the procurement of 693 Armament Upgrades of Infantry Combat Vehicle BMP2 to BMP2M. This upgrade includes Night Enablement, Gunner Main Sight, Commander Panoramic Sight and Fire Control System (FCS) with Automatic Target Tracker under Buy (Indian-IDDm) category.

BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited

- Two contracts were inked in March 2024 for procurement of BrahMos missiles at a cost of Rs 19,518.65 crore and Procurement of Ship borne BrahMos system at a cost of Rs 988.07 crore.

Larsen & Toubro Limited

- Two contracts for procurement of Close-in Weapon System at a cost of Rs 7,668.82 crore, and High-Power Radar at a cost of Rs 5,700.13 crore were signed in March 2024.
- A contract was inked with Larsen & Toubro Limited in December 2024 for procurement of 155 mm/52 calibre K9 VAJRA-T Self-Propelled Tracked Artillery Guns for the Indian Army under Buy (Indian) category at a total cost of Rs 7,628.70 crore.

Cochin Shipyard Limited

- A contract was inked in November 2024 for Short Refit and Dry Docking of INS Vikramaditya at an overall cost of Rs 1,207.5 crore.

Chowgule & Company Private Limited

- A contract was signed in October 2024 for procurement of six Air Cushion Vehicles for the Indian Coast Guard at a total cost of Rs 387.44 crore. These amphibious vessels, also called 'Hovercrafts', will be procured under the Buy (Indian) category.

Defence Budget

In the Union Budget of FY 2024-25, MoD has been allocated Rs 6.22 lakh crore (approx. US \$75 Billion), the highest among the Ministries. The allocation to MoD for FY 2024-25 is higher

by approx. Rs one lakh crore (18.43%) over the allocation for FY 2022-23 and 4.79% more than allocation of FY 2023-24. Out of this, a share of 27.66% goes to capital; 14.82% for revenue expenditure on sustenance and operational preparedness; 30.66% for Pay and Allowances; 22.70% for Defence Pensions, and 4.17% for civil organisations under MoD. The total allocation comes out to approx. 12.90% of Budgetary Estimate of Union of India. 75 per cent of the defence capital procurement budget has been earmarked for domestic industry.

Gaganyaan Programme

The Gaganyaan Programme was launched by the Government for demonstrating Human Spaceflight capability in Low Earth Orbit, wherein, a manned spacecraft will be launched safely to LEO for an orbital mission of 5 to 7 days followed by safe re-entry and recovery on earth. The Prime Minister revealed the names of four IAF astronauts to the nation and awarded them with the 'Space Wings' in February 2024. The four IAF astronauts

The second Arihant-Class submarine 'INS Arighaat' was commissioned into the Indian Navy on August 29, 2024 at Visakhapatnam in the presence of Raksha Mantri. The construction of INS Arighaat involved the use of advanced design and manufacturing technology, detailed research & development, utilisation of special materials, complex engineering and highly skilled workmanship. It has the distinction of having the indigenous systems and equipment which were conceptualised, designed, manufactured & integrated by the Indian scientists, industry and Naval personnel. The technological advancements undertaken indigenously on this submarine make it significantly more advanced than its predecessor Arihant.

are: Group Captain Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, Group Captain Angad Pratap and Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla. Presently, Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla and Group Captain Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair are undergoing space training at NASA for Axiom-4 mission to International Space Station scheduled in 2025.

Defence Cooperation

The year saw Ministry of Defence take defence cooperation with its friendly countries to the next level through visits of the dignitaries and military exercises. Raksha Mantri, Raksha Rajya Mantri, Chief of Defence Staff, three Service Chiefs and Defence Secretary undertook visits to various nations with the aim to strengthen defence ties with them. Major events of Raksha Mantri include:

- US visit: Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh visited US from August 23 to 26, 2024. He met US Secretary of Defence Mr Lloyd Austin, during which the two Ministers held wide-ranging discussions on bilateral defence cooperation, industrial collaboration, regional security and other international issues. Raksha Mantri also met the US Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Mr Jake Sullivan.
- Russia visit: Raksha Mantri visited Russia from December 08 to 10, 2024. He co-chaired the 21st session of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military & Military Technical Cooperation with his Russian counterpart in Moscow. Raksha Mantri also called on Russian President Mr Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Both leaders discussed various issues of bilateral defence cooperation, and expressed that partnership between both countries holds immense potential and combined efforts will pave way for remarkable outcomes.
- UK visit: Raksha Mantri paid an official visit to London, United Kingdom from January 09 - 10, 2024. He held a bilateral meeting with UK Defence Minister Mr Grant Shapps in London, and discussed a range of defence, security and cooperation matters with particular emphasis on enhancing defence industrial collaboration. He also called on the then Prime Minister of UK Mr Rishi Sunak, highlighting that both nations have made significant strides in moulding and recrafting the historic ties into a modern, multifaceted and mutually beneficial partnership.

Continued From P1...

Omar Abdullah

He further directed the concerned departments to expedite restoration work on the highway to resume vehicular movement at the earliest.

The district administration informed the Chief Minister that clearance operations are in full swing, with teams from the Public Works Department (PWD), Border Roads Organisation (BRO), disaster response units, police, volunteers, and the local population working round the clock to remove mudslides and boulders and restore normalcy in the affected area.

Dozen Villages

the tragedy a “national disaster” and provide adequate financial assistance to the families affected to restart their lives.

“About 10 to 12 villages, including Seri, Bagna, Panote and Khari, have suffered varying degrees of damage and our teams are on the ground to make a complete assessment so that the affected population are provided relief,” the divisional commissioner told reporters.

Kumar visited the affected villages and was briefed about the situation by Deputy Commissioner Baseer-ul-Haq Chaudhary.

“Restoration of essential services, including water and electricity, is underway and joint teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), army, police and other agencies are on the ground to improve the situation,” he said.

The divisional commissioner said the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway had suffered extensive damage, with certain stretches sunk and washed away while some others were buried under sludge and boulders.

“The highway will take time to get restored, even as our efforts are underway. We will have to check the cracks for stability. The retaining walls have also been damaged,” Kumar said, advising the stranded commuters to utilise the alternative Mughal Road and the Sinthan Top road for the time being.

He said efforts were being made to make the Mughal Road, connecting the twin districts of Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu to south Kashmir’s Shopian, two-way as soon as possible to allow heavy vehicles carrying essential commodities to the valley.

The Sinthan Top road connects Kishtwar in Jammu with Anantnag in Kashmir but a fresh spell of snowfall forced its closure three days ago. Work is underway to restore the link.

Senior BJP leader and Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma visited the affected villages and said, “We have come to assess the situation and submit a report to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.” “We want the government to declare it as a national disaster and announce a rehabilitation package for the affected population,” Sharma told reporters.

Condoling the deaths of the three persons, he said the BJP was standing with all those who lost their dwellings and would ensure that they were properly rehabilitated by the government.

National Conference MLA Arjun Singh Raju demanded that the tragedy be declared a “national disaster” and said villages in the hilly areas had suffered major damage.

“The full assessment can be made only when the roads leading to the villages in the hills are opened. The administration is making efforts on a war footing and we are hopeful of restoring essential supplies by later this evening,” he said.

Police, army and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel, along with civil volunteers, have been at the forefront to provide relief, especially to hundreds of the stranded commuters and tourists.

After assessing the ground situation, a defence spokesperson said the army initiated immediate action in coordination with civil administration officials.

“While no emergency requisition has been made, civil authorities have assured they will seek army assistance should the need arise,” the spokesperson said.

He said Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) from Banihal, Karachial, Digdaul, Maitra and Chanderkote were rapidly mobilised to provide relief to the stranded travellers.

Army personnel extended support by distributing tea and hot meals, offering temporary shelters, and providing basic medical aid to those in need, he added.

Eight army columns are currently on standby at key locations to assist further, if required, the spokesperson said and added the army remained steadfast in its commitment to stand by the citizens in times of crisis, ensuring safety, support and timely assistance.

Union minister Jitendra Singh also praised the army for its efforts to reach out to the affected population.

“While the district administration team led by an energetic deputy commissioner has been commendably on the job, it is time also to acknowledge and thank the Indian Army for its timely assistance, which played a crucial role in providing relief to the local population,” he said in a post on social media.

“I feel gratified to inform (you) that the army has set up medical aid camps, distributed essential medicines and ensured access to food and clean drinking water. They have also made special arrangements for tea and basic meals for the affected population. Needless to say, the Indian Army (is) at the service of the nation, not only during the war-time but equally as much during peacetime crisis,” the Udhampur MP further said. (Agencies)

Adequate Stock

refrain from causing unnecessary panic or queuing at petrol stations.

He said that the LPG stock is sufficiently available for 17 days, while the 10, 000 Kilolitres of petrol will suffice the requirement for 16 days and similarly 12500 Kiloliters of diesel are available in Valley.

Meanwhile, to address profiteering by some traders, the Div Com instructed Deputy Commissioners to constitute joint teams to conduct thorough market inspections, while Superintendents of Police were asked to deploy personnel at petrol stations to discourage queuing by people.

Regarding damage to apple orchards from severe weather conditions, Bidhuri directed Deputy Commissioners to constitute joint teams to assess the extent of the damage caused by heavy rains, strong winds, and hailstorms, and to submit their findings promptly.

Additionally, concerning the evacuation of stranded tourists, the Div Com instructed the SSP Traffic Rural and the DC of Shopian to prioritize the movement of tourist vehicles via the Mughal Road.

The meeting was attended by Commissioner SMC; Deputy Commissioners, SSPs, Directors of IMD, Health, Tourism, FCS&CA, VC LCMA, ULB, officers of various departments including Agriculture, Horticulture, School Education, Traffic, Transport, KPDCI, I&FC, PHE, PWD etc.

Don’t Give

He was responding to questions on the criticism from some quarters over the apex court hearing petitions challenging the Waqf (Amendment) Act.

The chief minister said while there was some discussion on the Waqf Amendment Act in the Legislative assembly, the National Conference moved to the Supreme Court and got some relief.

“Where is the negative impact? At least, the SC has directed the Centre to move back two steps. Non-Muslims’ interference in Waqf has been stayed while self-declared Waqf has not been stopped. Let the SC do its work, we will wait for its verdict,” he added.

“The Waqf issue has been taken to the SC by parties, not the government. The NC has taken. If the BJP has said something about their MP, what is the need to comment on it?” he said, when asked about the controversial remarks made by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey about the Supreme Court.

“If the BJP has said something about their MP (Dubey), what is the need to comment on it?” he said.

On the conditions in the Ramban district which has been hit by flash floods and landslides, Abdullah said the situation in some areas of the district was “really very bad, especially around the highway”.

“Yesterday, I had sent the Deputy CM on the spot. The local MLAs from Banihal and Ramban are also there on the ground. Efforts are being made for the early restoration of the highway.

“We are in the process of providing relief to the families who have lost their homes. We are talking to the Centre for deployment of NDRF. We will also tap the PM’s relief fund and other relief funds so that the losses suffered by people can be compensated,” he said.

The chief minister said while the Jammu-Srinagar highway has been closed due to landslides at Ramban, the traffic was moving on the Mughal Road, which connects the Valley to the Jammu region via Poonch-Rajouri region.

Abdullah sought to assure the residents of Kashmir that there was no dearth of essentials in the Valley.

“I want to assure the people that there is no shortage of essentials in the Valley and there is no need to resort to hoarding. Clear directions have been given to the officers to take strict action wherever there is any unreasonable price hike or black marketeering going on.

“They should involve the police in market checking and make arrests, if need be,” he added. (AGENCIES)

COAS General

just a formal military tribute, but a heartfelt goodbye from a fellow soldier and mentor.

Defence spokesperson said, Naib Subedar Baldev Singh was enrolled into 18 JAK RIF in 2002, during Operation Rakshak in Kashmir. His association with General Dwivedi began in October 2003, when the now Army Chief took command of the battalion. Noticing his potential, then-CO Dwivedi handpicked Baldev Singh for the Battalion Signal Platoon, personally mentoring him as an Infantry Signaller.

Baldev Singh served alongside his Commanding Officer in numerous operations, earning admiration for his professionalism, courage, and steadfast dedication. Promoted to the rank of Naib Subedar last year, he continued to serve with distinction until his tragic demise on April 20, 2025, while posted in the harsh terrain of the Northern Glacier in Siachen.

Remembered as a cheerful and courageous soldier, Baldev Singh’s legacy is one of inspiration and unwavering duty. His bond with General Dwivedi, forged in shared hardships and mutual respect, elevated the moment of farewell beyond protocol.

The Indian Army stands in solemn solidarity with his family, saluting the life and service of Naib Subedar Baldev Singh—a true embodiment of honour, bravery, and sacrifice.

Undisputed Final

transparent electoral processes, and views the smooth completion and acceptance of the SSR 2025 as a major step forward in strengthening the foundations of democracy.

“The lack of appeals following the publication of the electoral rolls is a testament to the transparency, inclusiveness, and robustness of the SSR process. With active participation from political parties through their Booth Level Agents, we are confident that the electoral rolls published in January 2025 reflect a high level of accuracy and public trust,” said a Representative of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Cabinet To Decide

” they said, adding that the implementation of the panel’s findings is expected to be swift once approved.

The three-member panel headed by Justice (Retd.) Janak Raj Kotwal and including Raj Kumar Baghat

(retired IAS officer) and Prof. (Dr.) Mohinder Singh Badwal (former dean, SKUAST, Jammu), submitted its report to Chief Secretary Atul Dooloo on February 27.

The cabinet decision on the report holds significant importance as it could pave the way for the long-awaited local bodies elections in the Union Territory. The five-year term of local bodies in J&K ended in January 2014, leaving officials to exercise powers previously held by elected representatives of Panchayats and ULBs.

The delay in polls has been attributed to the issue of OBC reservation. In February 2024, the parliament amended J&K’s Panchayat and Municipal laws to grant reservation for OBCs. After amendments in the laws, the LG-led administrative council set-up a three-member panel to finalize the reservation framework for OBCs in local bodies

Mughal Road

The Centre has already announced a tunnel on the road to ensure year-round connectivity between the two regions on either side of the Pir Panjal that forms part of the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat following a 2022 delimitation exercise.

The officials said massive traffic congestion was witnessed in the twin districts of Rajouri and Poonch due to a sudden increase in the number of vehicles moving to and from the Kashmir valley.

Almost all the roads of Rajouri and Poonch linked to the Mughal Road are heavily choked, with law enforcement agencies facing a tough time regulating traffic, especially in Thanamandi, Surankote and Chatta Pani to Peer Ki Gali, they said.

The road is single-way at a few locations between Chatta Pandi and Peer Ki Gali, causing traffic movement to be slow, they added.

“We are planning to undertake a clearance operation tonight to widen the road, which is snow-bound at various locations,” a BRO official said.

Despite the Centre making an announcement to upgrade the road and construct a tunnel in 2023, political parties have been demanding a timeline for completion of the project on a war footing to provide an alternative all-weather road to the valley.

“We have time and again requested the government to construct a tunnel on the Mughal Road and set up all kinds of amenities for travellers,” Apni Party spokesperson Raqeeq Khan said.

Traffic has been diverted to the Mughal Road but the twin districts of Rajouri and Poonch are not ready to handle such a heavy rush, he said.

There is also a lack of facilities such as restaurants, hotels and public toilets along the road, causing inconvenience for commuters, he added.

CS reviews

the beauty and sanitation of urban areas of the UT. About the Srinagar Smart City projects, CEO, SSCL, Owais Ahmad, informed that the works span infrastructure modernization, heritage restoration, mobility enhancement and public space improvement. He added that 161 projects worth budgeted cost of Rs 3634 crore have been taken in hand under Smart City Mission. Out of these, 11 works are being executed with a cost of Rs 203.47 crore. These included construction of Traditional Souq Market and Craft Centre at Batamaloo, Jhelum Waterfront Development Phase-2, Gole Market -Karan Nagar Road Development, Development of Amenity Blocks, interpretation facility centre, cafe deck and viewing towers along Shalimar Canal. Regarding Jammu Smart City Limited (JSCL), CEO, JSCL, Devansh Yadav, informed the meeting that a total of 127 projects were taken in hand at a budgeted cost of Rs 3581 crore. The ongoing 7 projects costing around Rs 529 crore included Tawi River Front Development, Oceanarium at Bag-e-Bahu, Complete Street Development from Canal Road to Talab Tilo and Waste 2 Wonder Park and others.

As part of the Tawi Riverfront Development Project (TRF), it was revealed that the interception and diversion of nullahs at both left and right banks

has been completed.

It was further divulged that 100 AC eBuses each have been approved for both the cities under PM eBus Sewa (via Challenge Method). For the same, financial assistance from GoI to the tune of 100% for ‘Behind-the-Meter’ power infrastructure and 90% (up to 20 Cr) for depot infrastructure is being provided by MoHUA.

Moreover, the DPRs for Jammu Depot Infrastructure (JSCL) has been framed costing around Rs 16.72 crore and for 6.6 MW power substation a DPR worth Rs 8.51 crore has also been formulated. Similarly, for Srinagar Depot Infrastructure a DPR of Rs 14.50 crore has been formulated besides DPR worth Rs 5.78 crore for Power sector has been made through the concerned agencies. All the DPRs have been approved by the Central Steering Committee, the meeting was informed.

With respect to progress on housing projects under PMAY-U, MD, Housing Board, Shahbaz Mirza, informed the meeting that under BLC Vertical (2021–24) 27,439 houses have been completed with a fund utilization of Rs 496.15 crore including a central assistance of Rs 40 crore released in Feb–Mar 2025.

Regarding PMAY-U 2.0 expansion, a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with MOHUA stands signed to implement the scheme in all 78 municipal bodies of the UT. It was also given out that a baseline survey for identification of houseless individual/ families had also been initiated. To ensure that the benefit of PMAY reaches the section of people who don’t have permanent house to live in, a digital app had been developed to survey the urban areas. Additionally, the Master trainers were imparted training in all the districts and committees structured for verification and selection of eligible beneficiaries.

Regarding the financial assistance under PMAY-Urban 2.0, it was said that Rs 2.25 lakh as Central Assistance and UT share of Rs 0.25 lakh under BLC and AHP vertical of the scheme would be given to the beneficiaries.

Regarding progress on SBM-U 2.0 (Swachh Bharat Urban Mission), the meeting was apprised that a Material Recovery Facility for dry waste, compost/ CBG plants for wet waste, facilities for C&D waste, bioremediation of legacy waste and STPs for Used Water Management for the two Municipal Corporations and 78 ULBs are under different stages of implementation. It was further added that all the 78 ULBs had been declared “Safaimitra Surakshit Sheher” by the Gol.

MD, NULM revealed that out of a total of Rs 61.77 crore received funds Rs 55.54 crore have been utilized, so far. She also gave out that a new mission Deendayal Jan Aajeevika Yojana (Shehri) is under design to replace NULM with components like Livelihoods, Skilling, SHGs, Enterprise Promotion, Local Action for which the deliverables, timelines and institutional mechanism being finalized here.

On PMSVANidhi, it was said that against the target of 25,856 street vendors, 23,695 street vendors have been covered. First tranche of loan was given to 17,219 applicants, 2nd tranche to 7611 and third to 2,952 and letter of recommendation to 22,504 applicants.

The meeting was apprised that a revamped online Building Permission System is also under rollout, to be ready within 2 months.

The meeting also discussed the Srinagar Water Transport project initiated for Inland Waterways from Anantnag to Wular Lake via Jhelum and Dal Lake. For the same partnership with Kochi Water Metro for peer learning and strategic support is being finalized. Moreover, the tendering for infrastructure and operations is also underway, as was given out in the meeting.

Vehicular movement

regarding the vehicular movement on the road shall be taken after getting green signal from NHIDCL. Similarly, subject to fair weather and good road condition, after getting green signal from Road maintenance agencies (BRO), only one way traffic for all LMVs with Anti-skid chains followed by HMVs

(only six tyres) shall be allowed from Kargil towards Srinagar on Srinagar-Sonamarg-Gumari road. These vehicles shall be allowed from Minamarg upto 1330 hrs. No vehicle shall be allowed after cut off timing.

Likewise, subject to fair weather and good road condition, after getting green signal from Road maintenance agencies (GREF), LMVs Passenger/ Private Cars shall be allowed from both sides on Mughal road viz from Jammu towards Srinagar and vice-versa via Poonch. These vehicles shall be allowed from Behramgala (Baffliaz) and Herpora (Shopian) at 0900 hrs. upto 1500 hrs.

The advisory further mentioned cut off timings for LMVs, Passenger/ private cars. The cut off timings from Jammu Side at Akhnoor is 1000 hrs, at Bhambla 1100 hrs, at Rajouri 1300 hrs. The commuters shall cross Manjakote by 1330 hrs, Surankote by 1430 hrs and Behramgala by 1500 hrs at the latest.

The cut off timings from Srinagar Side is 1230 hrs for TRC Srinagar, commuters should cross Nowgam Peaks by 1300 hrs, Pantha Chowk by 1300 hrs, Chandhara Pampore by 1400 hrs, Galandar via Kakapora by 1400 hrs, Marvel Crossing by 1400 hrs, Kandizal (Peaks NH-44) by 1400 hrs, Khudwani by 1400 hrs, Chawalgam Kulgam by 1415 hrs, Keegam NH-44 by 1430 hrs and Herpora by 1500 hrs at the latest. As per the advisory No vehicle shall be allowed after cut off timings and No vehicle shall be allowed through Thanamandi-DKG-Baffliaz.

For Bhaderwah-Chamba road the advisory said it is still closed due to snow accumulation.

People are advised to undertake journey only after confirming status of the road from Traffic control units viz Jammu (0191-2459048, 0191-2740550, 9419147732, 103), Srinagar (0194-2450022, 2485396, 18001807091, 103), Ramban (9419993745, 1800-180-7043), Udhampur (8491928625), PCR Kishtwar (9906154100), PCR Kargil (9541902330, 9541902331 and PCR Ganderbal (9906668731).

NOTICE

This is an information for general public that the Name of my children has been Mistakenly Mentioned in their school records as Nadeem Altaf, S/O Altaf Hussain Gojar Mitrawabi, and Rehana Altaf, D/O Altaf Hussain Gojar, while as their Actual and correct name is Nadeem Altaf, S/O Altaf Hussain Gojar Mitravi, and Rehana Altaf, D/O Altaf Hussain Gojar Mitravi. Now i want to apply for its correction in this regard any person having any objection he/she may file the Objections in office of the Headmaster GOVT Boys Middle school Goalpathri, Bonakoot Zone Quilmuqam, with in a period of seven days from the date of the publication of this notice, after that no objection shall be accepted.

Altaf Hussain Gojar Mitravi.
F/O Nadeem Altaf. (Son) and.
Rehana Altaf. (Daughter).
R/O Goal pathri Bonakoot
Bandipora.

NOTICE

This is an information for general public that Electricity Agreement Bearing Consumer ID No: 0216010063232, which is Registered in the name of Shafeeq Shahri, S/O Gh Mohd Shahri, Address Nabrepora, SBI ATM, Near old Jamia Masjid. Now i want to apply for change this Electricity Agreement in the name of SBI ATM Nebrapora, opposite old Jamia Masjid, in this regard any person having any objection he/she may file the Objections in office of the Assistant Executive Engineer Electricity Sub Division Bandipora with in a period of seven days from the date of the publication of this notice, after that no objection shall be accepted. SBI ATM Nebrapora, opposite old Jamia Masjid Bandipora.

NOTICE

This is an information for general public that Electricity Agreement Bearing Consumer ID No: 0216010003730, which is Registered in the name of Ab Jabbar khan, Now i want to apply for change this Electricity Agreement in the name of Farooq Ahmad Khan, S/O Abdul Jabbar khan, in this regard any person having any objection he/she may file the Objections in office of the Assistant Executive Engineer Electricity Sub Division Bandipora with in a period of seven days from the date of the publication of this notice, after that no objection shall be accepted.

Farooq Ahmad Khan.
S/O Abdul Jabbar Khan.
R/O Ward NO - 10, Mader Bandipora.

Bollywood’s Film “Last Salute” to Unveil Untold Heroism of J&K Police “This is not fiction, These are real stories of grit, blood and brotherhood,” says Director Imtiyaz Bhat

SRINAGAR : In a historic cinematic move, Bollywood is all set to spotlight the unparalleled courage and sacrifices of the Jammu and Kashmir Police in an upcoming feature film titled “Last Salute.” The powerful project, which begins shooting next month, promises to shake the conscience of the nation and bring long-overdue recognition to the brave hearts of J&K.

Helmed by acclaimed director Imtiyaz Ahmad Bhat and produced by Sound Gear Productions Vardan Film Productions and T3S Entertainment in collaboration with Reliance Entertainment Pvt. Ltd, Last Salute is not just a film—it’s a movement, a tribute, and a call to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice

in the line of duty.

“For the first time ever, Bollywood is telling the real story of J&K Police—of men and women who stood unflinching in the face of terror,” said Bhat. “This film is an emotional salute to their legacy of valor.”

With a stellar star cast and a script rooted in real events, the film will unveil shocking, heart-wrenching, and inspiring moments from the ground—many of which have remained hidden from public view.

Last Salute promises high drama, raw emotion, and a deep dive into the personal and professional battles faced by J&K Police officers while protecting civilians and maintaining peace.

Undisputed Final Electoral Rolls published after SSR 2025

The final Electoral Rolls published on 6th and 7th January 2025 following the countrywide Special Summary Revision (SSR) have witnessed an unprecedented level of acceptance, with very few First or Second Appeals filed under Section 24 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950. These appeals pertain to corrections under Section 22 and inclusions under Section 23 of the Act. As per the date released by ECI, this comprehensive exercise covered nearly 10.5 lakh polling booths across the country and was conducted with the active involvement of 13.87 lakh Booth Level Agents (BLAs) nominated by political parties, spanning 4,123 Assembly Constituencies nationwide. The absence of any large scale appeals indicates a broad consensus and acceptance of the updated electoral rolls by all stakeholders. Accordingly, the Electoral Rolls published post-SSR in January 2025 are now

to be treated as undisputed. It may be recalled that the SSR 2025 exercise was conducted with particular emphasis on States and Union Territories slated for Assembly Elections after the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has reiterated its commitment to free, fair, inclusive, and transparent electoral processes, and views the smooth completion and acceptance of the SSR 2025 as a major step forward in strengthening the foundations of democracy.

“The lack of appeals following the publication of the electoral rolls is a testament to the transparency, inclusiveness, and robustness of the SSR process. With active participation from political parties through their Booth Level Agents, we are confident that the electoral rolls published in January 2025 reflect a high level of accuracy and public trust,” said a Representative of the Chief Electoral Officer.

BCCI Central Contracts: Rohit, Virat retained in top grade; Iyer, Kishan back

India's Test and ODI captain Rohit Sharma and batting talisman Virat Kohli retained their place in the top category, while the out-of-favour duo of Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan returned to the fold in lower brackets in a 34-strong list of centrally contracted players released by the BCCI on Monday.

The A+ grade, which commands an annual retainership fee of Rs seven crore, also features Ravindra Jadeja and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah much like the last few years.

India's Champions Trophy hero Iyer has been the notable comeback in the list, inducted in group B which comes with an annual remuneration of Rs three crore.

Iyer was dropped last season for allegedly ignoring domestic cricket for IPL. Wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan, dropped for the same reason, also made a comeback in category C, which is worth Rs one crore annually.

Rishabh Pant, who was demoted to group B during the 2023-24 season as he didn't play due to his recovery from a life-threatening accident, is back in A category in place of the retired Ravichandran Ashwin. Category A comes with a retainership of Rs five crore annually.

Category C features the maximum number of players, 19 in all, with five new entrants in Harshit Rana, Varun Chakravarthy, Abhishek Sharma and Nitish Kumar Reddy and Akash Deep, who earlier had a fast bowling contract.

The only notable name missing in the list is Mumbai all-rounder Shardul Thakur, who last played for India in the 2023 ODI World Cup game against Bangladesh in Pune.

Fast bowler Avesh Khan, keeper-batters Shubman Gill, Hardik Pandya, Mohammed Kona Bharat and Jitesh Sharma have also Washington Sundar, Mukesh Kumar, Sanju Samson, Arshdeep Singh, Prasidh Krishna,



Category C features the maximum number of players, 19 in all, with five new entrants in Harshit Rana, Varun Chakravarthy, Abhishek Sharma and Nitish Kumar Reddy and Akash Deep, who earlier had a fast bowling contract.

been excluded from the list.

BCCI central contracts list:

A+ category: Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah, Ravindra Jadeja

A category: Mohammed Siraj, KL Rahul,

B category: Suryakumar Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shreyas Iyer

C category: Rinku Singh, Tilak Verma, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shivam Dube, Ravi Bishnoi,

Rajat Patidar, Dhruv Jurel, Sarfaraz Khan, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Ishan Kishan, Abhishek Sharma, Akash Deep, Varun Chakravarthy, Harshit Rana.

Rishabh Pant, who was demoted to group B during the 2023-24 season as he didn't play due to his recovery from a life-threatening accident, is back in A category in place of the retired Ravichandran Ashwin. Category A comes with a retainership of Rs five crore annually.

Even if we don't qualify, need to get secure 11 for next year: Dhoni

"We need to see whether we are playing the right form of cricket," the struggling Chennai Super Kings' skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni said, urging his teammates to do a bit of soul-searching with an eye on the bigger picture of creating a "secure eleven" for the 2026 IPL season.

Dhoni hinted that players "aren't applying themselves" but



also said that he is closer to identifying the core for next year.

"With all the games that are in front of us that we are supposed to win, we just take it one game at a time and if we lose a few, what will be important for us is to get the right combination for next year," Dhoni said after his team got trounced by nine wickets at the hands of Mumbai Indians in an IPL game here on Sunday evening.

"You don't want too many players getting changed, what will be important is to try and qualify, but if not get a secure 11 for next year and come back strong," the skipper said.

If one talks about core, CSK's class of 2026 will not be a Dad's Army' like the previous years.

A 17-year-old Ayush Mhatre, 20-year-old Shaikh Rasheed, 21-year-old Dewald Brevis, and 22-year-old Vansh Bedi are expected to form the batting core next year with the 25-year-old Rachin Ravindra, skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad and slogger Shivam Dube.

Having already lost six out of eight games, the bottom-placed CSK will find it extremely difficult to win all their remaining six games to make it to the last four stage which looks like a long shot at the moment.

"...we are successful because we play good cricket and at the same time, when we are not playing good cricket what is important is not to get too emotional about it and at the same time, you want to be practical," he added.

Dhoni rarely gives his opinion on any issue but he didn't mince words in dissecting his team's poor batting. CSK have consistently failed to either chase or put up big scores.



Khyber Cement Ka Zarra Zarra Dil Se Bana Hai

