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Modi led regime brought lasting peace to J&K: Amit Shah

Says decisive policies over the past decade transformed internal security

NL CORRESPONDENT

Panchkula (Haryana), Dec 24: Asserting that the PM Modi led government has brought lasting peace to Jammu and Kashmir, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said that decisive policies and sustained efforts over the past decade have transformed the internal security scenario across the country.

Addressing the Passing Out Parade (POP) of the Recruit Basic Course (RBC) Batch-93 at Panchkula (Hary-

ana), Amit Shah said, "A few years ago, there were three big challenges in the country in the matter of law and order—left-wing extremism, terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, and armed groups in the northeast. But after 10 years from the formation of the Modi government, there is peace in these three areas, and the country is safe on these three fronts."

Shah said the PM Modi led government stands like a rock with the states in their fight against drug and human trafficking, cyber-

crime, and organised crime. Addressing the recruits, he said, "Your leadership is ready for it, and you will have to strengthen the hands of your leadership."

"We stand like a rock with the states," he said, referring to the Union government.

He said that the role of forensic science under the new criminal laws has been decided. "In crimes in which punishment is more than seven years, a visit by forensic experts to the scene of the crime has been made compulsory, and the main objective of this is to ensure punishment for the guilty," he said.

Shah told the constables that they were joining the police force at a time when the Colonial-era laws had been replaced by the new criminal laws.

He said the batch is the first from Haryana since the implementation of the new criminal laws.

As many as 5,061 newly trained constables formally joined the state police force from the batch.

This is the first batch in which 85 per cent youth are graduates and above, with an average age of 26, Shah said.

PoK woman repatriated after crossing LoC in Poonch

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24 : A 35-year-old woman from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) was repatriated from Poonch district to Pakistan on Wednesday, nine days after she inadvertently crossed the Line of Control (LoC), officials said.

Shahnaz Akhter, a resi-

dent of village Mohra Sharief in Kotli district, was apprehended by Army troops soon after she intruded into the Indian side near Dabi post in Mendhar sector on December 16.

The woman was later handed over to police for questioning, the officials said.

■ Cont. on Page 08

J&K HC dismisses Mehbooba's PIL on transfer of prisoners from outside jails to J-K

Srinagar, Dec 24 : The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh has dismissed a PIL filed by PDP president Mehbooba Mufti seeking transfer of prisoners from outside jails to prisons in J-K.

A division bench of the high court, comprising Chief Justice Arun Palli and Justice Rajnesh Oswal, in a 15-page order passed on Tuesday said the petition appears to have been filed for garnering political mileage.

"It appears that the instant petition has been initiated by the petitioner for the explicit purpose of garnering political advantage and positioning herself as a crusader of justice for a particular demographic," the bench observed.

The court said it cannot remain oblivious to the violent past, which the residents of Jammu and Kashmir have passed through, because of forces hostile to the unity and integrity of the country.

"In fact, the petitioner too recognises the special circumstances of Jammu and Kashmir, when in relief part of this petition, she states that the undertrials be detained in the prisons

in U.T. of Jammu and Kashmir, unless the Jail Authorities furnish reasons before this court demonstrating 'unavoidable and compelling necessity' in exceptional cases. The detailing of such exceptional cases has been conveniently ignored by the petitioner," the court said.

The bench said the PIL cannot be allowed to be utilised as an instrument for advancing partisan or political agendas or transforming the court into a political platform.

"Public Interest Litigation is also not a mechanism for gaining political leverage, and the Courts cannot serve as a forum for electoral campaigns.

■ Cont. on Page 08

Traffic crawls on Jammu-Srinagar Highway; others closed

NL CORRESPONDENT

Srinagar, Dec 24: Traffic moved slowly on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway on Wednesday due to single-lane traffic and the breakdown of two heavy motor

vehicles (HMTVs).

An official said, "Light Motor Vehicles (LMVs) and passenger vehicles have been advised to travel on NH-44 during the day and avoid night journeys,

■ Cont. on Page 08

CAG flags major lapses in rural power scheme in J&K, Ladakh

62 pc works incomplete, Ministry blames unforeseen events

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: A performance audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has exposed major lapses in the implementation of the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) in Jammu & Kashmir, including Ladakh.

The audit report tabled in the Parliament on December 18, reveals that Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh failed to complete 62.62% of its sanctioned work before the scheme's closure in March 2022.

Audit also observed that 20 States/UTs could not execute the quantum of work ranging between

3.31 per cent and 62.62 per cent till the closure of the scheme. Particularly, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, and Tripura could not complete 62.62 per cent and 20.72 per cent of their respective sanctioned project costs.

In its response to audit observations, the Union Ministry of Power stated

that delay in J&K was due to unexpected events.

"In respect of Jammu & Kashmir, it was stated that delays happened due to unexpected events i.e., issues in tendering, hostile terrain," the report said.

The Centre had launched the scheme-Deen Dayal

■ Cont. on Page 08

Chargesheet against businessman in bribery case filed by Ex-SP Jammu South

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: Jammu and Kashmir Anti-Corruption Bureau on Wednesday filed the chargesheet against a businessman in a bribery case filed against him by former Superintendent of Police, Jammu South.

The ACB Spokesman said that J&K Anti-Corruption Bureau filed the charge-sheet before the Court of Special

Judge, Anti-Corruption, Jammu against Chander Sekhar Vohra, proprietor of M/s Asian Associates, for offering bribe to the Superintendent of Police, City South, Jammu, for seeking undue favour in connection with extension of the date of exhibition cum sale at Gole Market, Gandhi Nagar, Jammu.

The then Superintendent of Police, City South, Jammu, in her complaint alleged that

the businessman approached her offering a bribe of Rs 30,000 to get an extension for the exhibition-cum-sale event at Gole Market, Gandhi Nagar, Jammu.

"The bribe money was also recovered and seized on the spot in the presence of independent witnesses," he said. He added that after the completion of investigation of the case as proved and the charge-sheet has

■ Cont. on Page 08

16 IAS officers promoted

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24

The Ministry of Home Affairs has promoted sixteen IAS officers to the next higher grade, including Shubhankar Pratyush Pathak, who is currently posted as Sub-Divisional Magistrate Uri in Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir.

Other officers promoted by the

■ Cont. on Page 08

Army JCO killed in firing incident

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24

A Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) of the Army died in a firing incident inside a military camp in Samba district, a defence spokesperson said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred late

■ Cont. on Page 08

CRPF jawan injured in leopard attack

SRINAGAR, DEC 24

A CRPF jawan was injured after a leopard attacked him at a camp of the paramilitary force in Anantnag district on Wednesday, officials said.

The leopard strayed into the CRPF camp in Kapran area of Verinag in south

■ Cont. on Page 08

Jan roster of Admn Secys for Srinagar Sectt

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24

The Jammu and Kashmir government has issued the roster of Administrative Secretaries who will remain available at the

■ Cont. on Page 08

IIM Jammu concludes training on contract management, arbitration



NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, Dec 24 The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Jammu on Wednesday concluded a three-day training programme on Contract Management and Arbitration for NHPC with a valedictory ceremony, marking a successful industry-academia collaboration.

The programme aimed to strengthen participants' understanding of contemporary contract management practices and arbitration mechanisms, with strong emphasis on practical

application in professional settings. It received highly positive feedback for its structured sessions, academic rigor and real-world relevance.

Addressing the participants, Prof. Sanjeev Pathak, Chairperson, Executive Education and Consultancy (EE&C), IIM Jammu, appreciated their active participation and constructive feedback. He described the programme as the beginning of a long-term association between NHPC and IIM Jammu and indicated the possibility of an advanced five-day programme in the future.

Sadhu Samiti raises security issues with DIG Jammu



NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, Dec 24 A delegation of the Sadhu Dharm SthanSurakshani Samiti, led by its President Mahant Datt Giri Ji, on Wednesday met DIG Jammu Shiv Kumar Sharma to raise concerns over security and rising suspicious activities in parts of Jammu, Samba, Kathua and Udhampur districts.

The delegation flagged

the presence of anti-social elements and incidents involving objectionable remarks against Bhagwan Shri Ram, expressing concern over their potential impact on communal harmony.

The Samiti appreciated the district administration and police for taking firm action under the Public Safety Act (PSA) against an individual involved in such remarks, and congratulated

the DIG for timely intervention to maintain public order.

During the meeting, the issue of increasing cattle smuggling cases was also discussed.

The delegation lauded the Jammu Police for its sustained crackdown on animal trafficking, including interception of vehicles and arrest of those involved in the illegal trade.

DIG Sharma assured the delegation of continued vigilance and strict action against unlawful activities, reiterating the police's commitment to ensuring peace and security across the region.

Those present in the delegation included Mahant Rameshwar Giri, Vice President Mahant Piyush Ji, General Secretary Harish Anand Ji, Treasurer Rahul Giri Ji, Minister Mahant Chetan Giri, Minister Mahant Shyamsundar Giri, Naresh Giri and other members of the Samiti.

Rekha inaugurates DA Lifestyle Christmas Carnival



NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, Dec 24 The two-day Christmas Carnival & Lifestyle Exhibition organized by DA Lifestyle Exhibitors opened today at KC Regalia, Jammu, with Rekha Mahajan, Vice President BJP J&K, inaugurating the event. Divya Jain, BJP Vice President Jammu South, was the special guest. The exhibition will continue on December 25 from 11 AM to 9 PM.

Rekha Mahajan praised the organizers for providing a strong platform for women entrepreneurs, small traders, and creative businesses, emphasizing that such initiatives promote self-reliance, boost confidence among women, and contribute to the local economy.

The exhibition features stalls from across India, including

Delhi, Amritsar, Chandigarh, and Kashmir, showcasing fashion wear, bridal outfits, winter clothing, party dresses, Kashmiri shawls, jewellery, western wear, and lifestyle products. With the Christmas, New Year, and wedding seasons approaching, the carnival has emerged as a major shopping attraction for Jammu residents.

The event is sponsored by OM Metal Shaper Industry and co-sponsored by PABA Jewellers, which has introduced lucky draws offering silver and gold coins. Shoppers purchasing any amount are eligible, adding an exciting element to the exhibition.

Organizer Divya Abrol highlighted that the carnival aims to support small businesses while providing visitors a diverse shopping experience in a festive environment.

Annual Zonal Workshop concludes at SKUAST-J



NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, Dec 24 The Annual Zonal Workshop of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) of ICAR-ATARI, Zone-I for 2024-25 concluded successfully at SKUAST-Jammu on Wednesday, bringing together key agricultural research and extension stakeholders from across northern India.

The valedictory session was graced by Vice Chancellor SKUAST-Jammu, Prof. B. N. Tripathi, as Chief Guest, with Dr. Randhir Singh, ADG (Extension), ICAR, and Dr. M. K. Verma, Director CITH Srinagar, as Guests of Honour. Former Vice Chancellors Dr. J. P. Sharma and Dr. P. K. Sharma attended as Special Guests.

Addressing the gathering, Prof. Tripathi highlighted the crucial role of KVKs in bridging research and farmers' fields, stressing the need for location-specific technologies, ICT tools, and stronger convergence with line departments and FPOs. Dr. Randhir Singh emphasized KVKs' role in climate-resilient agriculture, technology dissemination, and income enhancement through diversification and entrepreneurship, while Dr. Verma underlined the importance of horticulture-based interventions in temperate regions.

The three-day workshop (Dec 22-24) reviewed KVK performance, approved action plans, and discussed strategies on natural and organic farming, millets, pulses, agri-entrepreneurship, gender mainstreaming, and effective monitoring. Dr. Parvinder Sheoran presented the workshop report and recommendations, while Dr. Amrish Vaid formally welcomed the dignitaries.

Awards were presented to the best performing KVKs of the North Zone. The workshop concluded with a collective resolve to strengthen KVKs as ICAR's frontline extension system for sustainable and inclusive agricultural development.

CCI raises traders' issues with JMC Comm

NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, Dec 24 A delegation of the Chamber of Commerce & Industry (CCI) Jammu, led by its President Arun Gupta, on Wednesday met Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) Commissioner Devansh Yadav, and discussed key issues affecting traders, including notices issued for operating businesses under the Municipal Corporation Act, 2000.

The delegation highlighted that several shopkeepers, particularly small traders operating for 25-30 years, have been served notices seeking documents such as land records, building permissions, site plans, NOCs from neighbours,



public notices and parking plans, which are difficult for old establishments to furnish.

Arun Gupta also raised concerns over sealing of shops by JMC and the lack of proper parking facilities at Apsara Road, Gandhi Nagar.

Responding to the

issues, the JMC Commissioner assured the delegation that harassment of small shopkeepers is not the corporation's intent. He said the primary objective is to manage traffic movement in business zones rather than penalize longstanding establishments. He further assured that

JMC would take a lenient view regarding the existing document checklist.

The Commissioner also informed that a meeting would be convened with the parking contractor at Apsara Road, Gandhi Nagar, to resolve parking-related issues. Additionally, he announced that permissible construction FAR has been enhanced from 1.8 to 2.4, allowing greater built-up area for legal expansion of business and residential structures.

Senior CCI office bearers present included Anil Gupta (Senior Vice President), Rajeev Gupta (Junior Vice President), Manish Gupta (Secretary General) and Rajesh Gupta (Treasurer).

National Conference on Biodiversity, Climate Change concludes

NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, Dec 24 The two-day National Conference on "Biodiversity and Climate Change: Challenges and Solutions" concluded on Wednesday with a valedictory session highlighting the need for interdisciplinary research and practical climate action.

Prof. Neelu Rohmetra, Dean Research Studies, University of Jammu, graced the valedictory function as Chief Guest, while Prof. Yash Pal Sharma, Dean Life Sciences, attended as Guest of Honour. Addressing the gathering, Prof. Rohmetra stressed that small life-



style changes—such as reducing energy use, conserving water, using reusable items and adopting plant-based diets—can collectively make a significant impact in combating climate change. Prof. Sharma appreciated the quality of research presentations and encouraged young scholars

to pursue socially relevant and collaborative research aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The second day featured expert lectures by Prof. T. N. Lakan Pal, Prof. Arun Arya, Dr. Ashutosh Sharma, Dr. Sheweta Yadav and Dr. Yogesh Kumar. Dr. Sikan-

der Pal presented the conference report, while Prof. Susheel Verma, Head of the Department, highlighted the objectives of the event.

Around 100 research scholars from the University of Jammu, SKUAST-Jammu, CSIR-IIIM and IISER Mohali presented oral and poster papers. Prizes were awarded in both categories, recognizing outstanding research contributions.

The proceedings were conducted by Purnamrita, and the programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Harish Chander Dutt, marking the conference as a meaningful platform for academic exchange and collaboration.

JU hosts extension lecture on OER

NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, Dec 24 The Department of Library and Information Science, University of Jammu, organized an extension lecture on the theme "OER: Bridging the Gap between Users and Textbooks" in the Department today.

Dr. Madhu Midha, Deputy Librarian and Head, Knowledge Resource Centre (KRC), I.K. Gujral Punjab Technical University, Kapurthala, was the distinguished resource person for the lecture. She deliber-

ated on the role of OER in enhancing access to quality educational content, reducing the cost of textbooks, and promoting innovative teaching-learning practices by effectively bridging the gap between users and learning resources.

Earlier, Prof. Sangita Gupta, Head of the Department, delivered the introductory address in which she formally welcomed the resource person to the Department. She highlighted the growing importance and relevance of Open Educational Resources (OER)

in contemporary higher education, emphasizing their role in enhancing access to quality learning materials and bridging the gap between users and textbooks.

The lecture witnessed active participation from faculty members, students, and research scholars, who interacted with the resource person and shared their views on the adoption and integration of OER in academic institutions.

Dr. Meghna Dhar, Assistant Professor, proposed the vote of thanks.



NC felicitates MP Sajjad Kichloo



NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, Dec 24 The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (NC) on Wednesday felicitated Sajjad Ahmad Kichloo on his election as Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) at a ceremony held at Sher-e-Kashmir Bhavan, Jammu.

Senior party leaders, led by Provincial President JKNC Jammu Rattan Lal Gupta, welcomed Kichloo, describing his election as a significant step towards strengthening the party's outreach and representation of Jammu and Kashmir at the national level. Several senior leaders, MLAs, former ministers

and party functionaries were present on the occasion.

Addressing the gathering, Rattan Lal Gupta congratulated Kichloo and expressed confidence that he would effectively raise the issues and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in the Rajya Sabha. He also highlighted the initiatives of the Omar Abdullah-led government, urging party workers to actively communicate the government's achievements and public welfare policies at the grassroots level to strengthen public connect.

In his address, Sajjad Ahmad Kichloo thanked the party leadership for

reposing trust in him. He said it was an honour to serve as a Member of Parliament and assured that he would work diligently under the guidance of senior leadership to highlight public issues and promote the inclusive and progressive vision of the National Conference.

The programme also witnessed distribution of Christmas cake among participants, arranged by Robin Kumar, Block President Katra Minority Cell.

Several senior leaders, former legislators, district presidents, heads of party wings and workers from Jammu and Kashmir attended the felicitation ceremony.

Dr Ajay re-elected ABVP J&K President; Shrivats as Secy



NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, Dec 24 . Ajay Sharma and SannakShrivats have been re-elected as State President and State Secretary respectively of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) Jammu & Kashmir for the session 2025-26. The election process concluded on Wednesday, with results announced from the ABVP state office in Jammu.

Announcing the results, Election Officer Ishwar Shard said the newly elected office bearers will formally assume charge during the 61st ABVP State Confer-

ence scheduled to be held on December 27, 28 and 29 in Kathua district.

Dr. Ajay Sharma, a resident of Udhampur, holds a Ph.D. in Mathematics and is presently serving as Senior Professor of Mathematics at Government Women College, Udhampur. Associated with ABVP since 2015, he has earlier served as City President, District In-charge and State Vice-President. His re-election reflects continued confidence in his leadership.

SannakShrivats, originally from Billawar in Kathua district, has been associated with ABVP since 2018. A graduate from GDC Billawar and currently pursuing LLB from the University of Jammu, he previously served as State Joint Secretary for two years. He has been re-elected as State Secretary for the 2025-26 term.

ABVP leaders and workers congratulated both office bearers and expressed hope that their leadership would further strengthen the organization's activities across Jammu and Kashmir.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

E-Tender Notice

Sr.DEN-III/FZR acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites open tenders (E-Tenders) against below titled tenders and available on www.ireps.gov.in with closing date-15.01.2026 up to 15:00 Hrs. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids up to closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tenders, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. Contractors are allowed to make payments against this tender towards tender document cost and earnest money **only through only payment modes** available on www.ireps.gov.in portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc. Manual payments through Demand draft, Banker Cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc. are not allowed. For more information login to www.ireps.gov.in

Tender Type		Tendering Section		Bidding System	
Open		Works		Single Packet System	
Date of Uploading Tenders		Bid Starting Date		Bid Closing Date/Time	
23.12.2025		01.01.2026		15.01.2026/15:00 Hrs.	
S.No.	Tender No.	Details of Tender			
1.	208-2025-26-SrDEN-III-FZR	Manual Deep screening 30.157 km on BEAS-TTO section, 9.140 km on VKA-DBNK section and 10.518 km on BAT-QDN section. (G Total= 49.815 km) in the section of ADEN-I/ASR & ADEN-II/ASR.			
		Advertised Value (Rs.)	Earnest Money	Validity of Offer	Period of Completion
		5,91,90,975.11	4,46,000.00	60 Days	12 Months
		Similar nature of work:- "CTR/TRR/TRF/TRR including raising of Track, screening, distressing of track, pre & post works for track maintenance machine like tamping machines/ballast screening/regulating machines and TTR by T-28."			
Note: 1. Before bidding, bidders to check for any corrigendum issued against tender. No.: 208-2025-26-SrDEN-III-FZR Date: 23.12.2025 3988/2025					
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE					

Implementation of PM Surya Muft Bijli Yojana re-viewed

N L CORESSPONDENT

SRINAGAR: o assess the progress achieved in installation of Solar Roof tops un-der PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana across the district, the Deputy Commissioner(DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo, who is also the Chairman Monitoring and Management Committee of the scheme, today chaired a review meeting at Meeting Hall of the DC Office Complex. Besides, Chief

Planning Officer, Fayaz Ahmad Dar, Executive Engineers of KPDC, Lead District Manager (Banks), the meeting was attended by KPDC, Engineers and empanelled scheme ven-dors who presented team wise appraisal of the ongoing installation works and the current status of implementation under the centrally sponsored scheme. At the outset, the DC took a detailed assessment of division-wise and team-wise performance, focusing on targets

achieved, applications received, and installations completed across all four Electric Divisions of Srinagar. On the occasion, the DC stressed the concerned and stakeholders to reach all the eligible households in a time bound manner so that consumers can avail the benefits of the scheme. He directed all stakeholders to ensure greater public awareness, faster banking facilitation and timely installation of solar rooftops so that benefits reach

the beneficiaries without delay. During the meeting, the DC appreciated the efforts of teams performing well in the implemen-tation of the scheme and took cognizance of poor performers, directing them to improve their pace and efficiency to meet the prescribed targets. Earlier, the DC was informed that more than 3,000 solar rooftops have been installed in the dis-tribt so far under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana.

DDK, Akashvani Sgr conduct Mission Karmayogi Training

N L CORESSPONDENT

SRINAGAR: Doordarshan Kendra (DDK) and Akashvani Srinagar conducted a Mission Karmayogi training programme to enhance the capacity, efficiency and professional skills of their staff in Jammu and Kashmir.

The training was imparted through the iGOT Karmayogi platform, part of the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building, aimed at providing “anytime-anywhere” learning to government employees. DDK and Akashvani function under Prasar Bharati, India’s public service broadcaster.

The programme focused on strengthening domain knowledge, improving professional competencies and fostering a performance-oriented work culture. Batches of officials from both DDK Srinagar and Akashvani Srinagar were trained through one-day sessions conducted in blended online and offline modes.

The training was held under the guidance of Master Trainer Shri H. P. Meena, DDE/HOO, with support from Shri Promod Kumar, DDE; Shri Satish Vimal, PEX, AIR; and Shri Sanjay Koul, Senior Accounts Officer, DDK Srinagar. A total of 32 staff members from DDK Leh and Akashvani Leh Cluster were also trained earlier on December 17.

Officials stated that the initiative reflects Prasar Bharati’s commitment to continuous learning and building a future-ready workforce. Staff members participated enthusiastically and appreciated the focus on skill upgradation, innovation and productivity. The training process is ongoing and is expected to significantly improve operational efficiency and service delivery across Prasar Bharati platforms in the region.

Property of notorious drug peddler attached

N L CORESSPONDENT

SRINAGAR: In its sustained efforts to eliminate the menace of drugs from the society and dismantle the infrastructure supporting illegal narcotics trade, Srinagar Police has attached double-storeyed residential house and double-storeyed shopping complex, along with land measuring 1 Kanal and 4 marlas, worth approximately Rs 3 crores.

According to a statement issued to the news agency, the aforementioned properties belong to a notorious drug peddler namely Ajaz Ahmad Mir, S/o Late Ali Ahmad, R/o Palpora Noorbagh, who is involved in case FIR No. 201/2022 u/s 8/21 NDPS Act of Police Station Safakadal.

The attachment was carried out under the relevant provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

During the course of investigation, it was established that the accused



person had acquired the said property through illicit proceeds generated from drug trafficking activities. Consequently, the property was attached under the provisions of Section 68-F of the NDPS Act.

The attachment proceedings were conducted in the presence of Executive Magistrate, strictly in accordance with the prescribed legal procedures.

As per the attachment order, the owner has been restrained from selling, leasing, transferring, alter-

ing, or creating any third-party interest in the said property till further orders.

Srinagar Police reaffirms its unwavering commitment to combat drug trafficking and to dismantle the financial networks that sustain the narcotics trade by targeting both offenders and the proceeds of crime, strictly in accordance with law. The public is urged to cooperate by sharing credible information to help eliminate the drug menace from society, reads the statement—(KNO).

Arrangements for R-Day celebrations reviewed

N L CORESSPONDENT

GANDERBAL: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ganderbal, Jatin Kishore, today chaired a comprehensive meeting to review and finalize arrangements for the forthcoming Republic Day-2026 celebrations in the district.

The DC conducted a detailed review of all key preparations to ensure a successful and well-coordinated event. The arrangements discussed included preparedness of the main venue, podium and stage setup, security and traffic management, seating and transportation facilities, barricading, uninterrupted power supply, stationing of water tanker and ROs, parking, deployment of ambulance and medical staff, deployment of fire tenders, public address system, sanitation, refreshments, and decoration of prominent buildings.

It was informed that the main function will be held

at Qamaria Stadium, Ganderbal, where the National Flag will be unfurled by the chief guest.

The programme will feature a ceremonial march past by contingents of the District Police, CRPF, Armed Police, IRP, PTS Manigam, Forest Protection Force, along with students from various educational institutions.

The DC also emphasised proper arrangements be made for a vibrant cultural performances on the occasion of Republic Day.

He stressed the need to ensure fool-proof and meticulous arrangements for the befitting celebration of the nation event.

The DC also directed that flag unfurling ceremonies be carried out across all government offices in the district prior to the main function to mark the occasion. He further emphasized the importance of the National Flag unfurling and instructed officers to ensure strict adherence to the Flag Code

and the National Anthem protocol.

The meeting stressed cleanliness, proper illumination of Mini-Secretariat and other government offices. Special emphasis was laid on public convenience, smooth crowd management, and emergency preparedness.

Departments were assigned specific responsibilities, and monitoring committees were constituted to oversee execution on the ground and ensure timely completion of all arrangements.

Additionally, the DC directed to ensure that Republic Day celebrations at subdivision and tehsil levels are organized smoothly.

Meanwhile, the Mechanical Engineering Department, Municipal Council Ganderbal and other agencies were directed to ensure snow clearance beforehand at main and other function venues in case of snowfall for hassle free celebrations.

SWD Sgr holds sensitization prog

SRINAGAR: Social Welfare Department (SQD), SANKALP Hub for Empowerment of Women- Mission Shakti Srinagar organized Sensitization Programme with the members of Self Help groups associated with NRLM at Government Degree college for Women Nawakadal under the banner of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP). The programme focused on key issues

such as prevention of gender-based discrimination, importance of girl child education, PC&PNDT Act, prohibition of child Marriage and legal provisions for the protection of women and children.

Participants were sensitized about the objectives of the BBBP scheme and the collective role of society in ensuring a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for girls.

Resource Person, SANKALP-HEW Mission Shakti, Srinagar while addressing the gathering, emphasized that educating and empowering the girl child is fundamental to social and economic development. The speaker highlighted that changing mindsets at the grassroots level is essential for achieving the goals of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative.

Traffic Police intensify enforcement drives to ease congestion on city roads

RAJA SYED RATHER

SRINAGAR: Traffic Police Srinagar on Wednesday intensified enforcement drives across the city to check violations and ease congestion on the city roads.

SSP Traffic Srinagar Ajaz Ahmad Bhat while talking to the news agency said, “The drives will continue daily and violators will have to face the law.” “The vehicles without valid documents, fitness certificates or driving licences will face strict action. Wrong parking, overloading and minors driving vehicles will not be tolerated,” he added.

“This is not a one-day drive. We are on the roads every day and have further intensified enforcement to bring discipline on city roads,” the SSP said.

He said the department is targeting vehicles with incomplete documentation, expired fitness certificates, non-transfer of registration certificates and those violating pollution norms. He added that many vehicles have crossed their permissible lifespan but are still plying on roads.

The SSP said, “Vehicles coming from Budgam or other outside areas are not allowed to enter the city, and wherever entry is permitted for public convenience, it will be regulated and terminated at designated points.”



He said major arteries like MA Road and Residency Road need immediate decongestion.

The SSP said simultaneous drives are underway across Srinagar, including Boulevard, Batamalo and Qamari areas, with officers deployed at multiple locations.

He said special measures have been put in place to regulate Sumo vehicles near Jahan-gir Chowk, which were creating a chaos. Pas-

sengers coming from Budgam have been advised to disembark near Shergari Police Station, while designated stands have been arranged for vehicles. Similar arrangements for minibuses will be introduced in the coming days.

The SSP appealed to commuters to use public transport and cooperate with traffic authorities, saying efforts are underway to ensure smooth movement and availability of e-rickshaws in congested sectors.

He said public feedback is being acted upon and people can contact PCR numbers 103 along with Traffic Control Unit numbers, to report violations or grievances—(KNO).

‘Worm infestations, poor iron intake major causes of rising Anaemia in children’

JAHANGEER GANAIE

SRINAGAR: Doctors in Kashmir have identified intestinal worm infections and inadequate intake of iron-rich and balanced diets as the primary contributors to the high prevalence of anaemia among children. Medical professionals while speaking to the news agency said that helminthic infections—parasitic worm infestations affecting the intestines—remain widespread among children, particularly when combined with malnutrition. They emphasized that regular deworming, along with proper nutrition and hygiene, is essential to curb anaemia and its long-term health consequences.

Dr Nazir Ahmad posted in Pulwama district said that helminthic infections are one of the leading yet overlooked causes behind the growing burden of anaemia in children.

“Intestinal worm infestation, especially when associated with poor nutrition, is frequently observed in children suffering from anaemia. These parasites affect the body in multiple ways—they reduce iron absorption, consume essential nutrients, cause chronic blood loss, and trigger inflammation, all of which significantly contribute to anaemia,” he said.

He explained that helminths compromise a child’s nutritional status, making it difficult for the body to maintain adequate haemoglobin levels even if food intake improves later.

Dr Shagufta a gynaecologist told KNO that helminthic infections result from parasitic worms that live inside the human body and compete for nutrients, damage the intestinal lining, and in some cases cause blood loss.

“These infections can lead to nutrient depletion, impaired absorption of iron, inflammatory responses and general weakness. Over time, they push children into a cycle of malnutrition and anaemia,” she said.

Dr Shugufta also dispelled a common misconception regarding deworming. “Many parents believe deworming medicines should not be given during winter, which is incorrect. Deworming can and should be done in any season at regular intervals. Unfortunately, many children miss scheduled doses, increasing their risk of anaemia,” she added.

Doctors said diet plays an equally critical role, noting that insufficient intake of iron-rich foods remains a major driver of childhood anaemia. They stressed the importance of foods rich in iron, vitamin B12 and folate, along with dietary diversity, safe feeding practices, proper hygiene, and timely introduction of complementary foods after breastfeeding.

“Children with worm infestations often feel constantly tired, weak and lethargic due to anaemia and poor nutrition. If left untreated, this can result in impaired physical growth and delayed cognitive development,” doctors said.

However, they reassured parents that worm infections are easy to control and do not warrant panic. “Parents must remain vigilant, monitor their children’s growth, appetite, school performance and overall behaviour, and seek timely medical advice,” they said.

Medical experts warned that untreated worm infestations can severely affect a child’s health, leading to poor nutritional status, reduced immunity, learning difficulties and lower concentration levels.

“The treatment is simple, safe, effective and available free of cost through government health programmes. Even a single dose of deworming medication can drastically reduce the worm load in a child,” doctors said.

They further explained that worm infections can cause a range of health issues including anaemia, abdominal swelling, severe stomach pain, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, malnutrition

and, in severe cases, tissue damage requiring surgical intervention.

Highlighting the broader benefits, doctors said deworming improves immunity, protects children from chronic illnesses, enhances concentration and school attendance, boosts nutrient absorption, controls anaemia and gastrointestinal problems, and contributes to better productivity and livelihood outcomes in the long run. “Regular deworming also helps reduce transmission within the community,” they added.

Meanwhile, data from the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) paints a grim picture.

According to the survey, nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of children aged 6–59 months in India are anaemic. This includes 25 percent mildly anaemic, 44 percent moderately anaemic, and 4 percent severely anaemic children.

The survey shows a sharp rise in childhood anaemia, increasing from 43 percent in NFHS-4 to 73 percent in NFHS-5. The prevalence remains almost equal among girls (71 percent) and boys (71 percent).

NFHS-5 data further indicates that children born to anaemic mothers are significantly more likely to suffer from anaemia themselves. While levels vary across social and economic groups, anaemia remains widespread across all sections of society.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the situation is equally concerning. NFHS-5 reveals that nearly 74 percent of children are anaemic, even among those whose mothers have attained 12 or more years of schooling—highlighting that education alone is not sufficient without proper nutrition and healthcare access.

Doctors urged coordinated efforts involving parents, health workers and policymakers to tackle the issue through awareness, regular deworming drives, nutritional supplementation and improved child healthcare services—(KNO).

DC B’pora reviews Republic Day arrangements

BANDIPORA: Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, today chaired a meeting of concerned officers at the Conference Hall to review arrangements for the upcoming Republic Day celebrations in the district. During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner reviewed preparations for the main function at S.K. Stadium, Bandipora, besides celebrations at Sub-Divisions Gurez and Sumbal and other designated locations. She was informed that preparations were well advanced, while emphasizing that there is always scope for improvement to make the celebrations more interesting and inspirational.

The Deputy Commissioner directed departments to ensure seamless arrangements for flag hoisting, Shahnai Vadan, march-past by contingents, cultural programmes, seating and dice arrangements, keeping in view the seating capacity and prevailing weather conditions. She stressed theme-based cultural performances involving educational institutions, NSS volunteers, Scouts & Guides, musicians and local artists, with a District-level Committee tasked to scrutinize and finalise all cultural items.

Srinagar Smart City website remains offline for over three months

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

SRINAGAR: A day after Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg, conducted an on-site review of the ongoing Amira Kadal wooden pedestrian bridge and other flagship works, the Srinagar Smart City’s official website continues to remain offline, leaving citizens unable to access updates on projects and tenders.

Attempts to visit the portal, <http://www.srinagarsmartcity.in> shows an error message stating “This site can’t be reached” with the code ERR_TIMED_OUT, even when accessed from multiple devices and networks.

The website was designed to host information about multi-crore infrastructure initiatives under the Central Government’s Smart Cities Mission, has faced repeated downtime despite official claims of digital progress and online transparency.

Officials from Srinagar Smart City Limited (SSCL) told the news agency that they will check the website but are unsure of the current status. “Website... it is working. If not, we will check it,” an official said when asked about the issue.

Earlier reports by KNO highlighted persistent maintenance issues affecting public access to project data and updates.

Many citizens said it is an irony that while top officials actively monitor physical works, the city’s digital infrastructure, expected to reflect Smart City governance, is still non-functional.

Notably, launched in 2017, the Srinagar Smart City Mission aims to modernise infrastructure, improve public transport and enhance civic services. The website’s continued inaccessibility underscores the gap between physical execution and digital management. The website has been continuously offline for more than three months—(KNO).

Sun Pharma Donates School Desks in Samba



NL CORRESPONDENT

SAMBA, DEC 24 Sun Pharmaceutical Limited's Samba Unit, with support from Care For You NGO, has donated 100 school desks to government schools in remote villages of Samba block under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative.

As part of its *SunVidya* programme, 50 desks were provided to the Government Higher Secondary School in villages with limited road access, improving learning conditions for students who previously sat on mats, even in harsh winters. An additional

50 desks were handed over to Government Higher Secondary School, Sarna, further strengthening educational infrastructure in the region.

The donation event featured cultural performances and an NCC parade by students, expressing their gratitude. Chief Education Officer, *Shri Kewal Krishan, lauded the initiative, emphasizing the role of public-private partnerships in enhancing education facilities. **Principal Smt. Anita Sharma* thanked Sun Pharma and Care For You NGO, highlighting the

benefits for students and classrooms.

*Priyanka Talwar, Executive CSR of Sun Pharma, and **Touseef Malik*, Founder President of Care For You NGO, along with other NGO officials, attended the event. Local PRI members, school teachers, and CEO office representatives were also present.

This initiative reinforces *Sun Pharmaceutical Limited's commitment to social responsibility* and *Care For You NGO's efforts* in supporting education, particularly in underserved and remote areas of Samba.

Disaster Management Workshop held at GDC Udh

NL CORRESPONDENT

UDHAMPUR, DEC 24 A one-day capacity-building workshop on Disaster Management was organized on December 24, 2025, at Government Degree College, Udhampur, to enhance disaster awareness, preparedness and response skills among students and volunteers.

The programme was organized by the NSS Units and Disaster Management Cell of the college under the leadership of Principal Dr Sanjay Kumar Verma. The event commenced with the lighting of the lamp followed by the NSS song. Dr Jagjeet Singh, Convener, Disaster Management Cell, welcomed the guests and highlighted the objectives and relevance of disaster preparedness. Dr Gurpreet Kour, NSS Programme Officer, briefed participants about the workshop schedule and expected outcomes.

Addressing the gathering, Chief Guest Dr Sanjay Kumar Verma emphasized the crucial role of youth in disaster preparedness and community resilience, stressing readiness for both natural and man-made disasters.

The first technical-cum-practical session was conducted by Swantantra Dev Kotwal, Deputy Chief Warden, SDRF Udhampur, who shared practical insights on disaster response strategies, safety protocols and real-life experiences. The second



session was led by Karanvir Singh, Instructor, SDRF Udhampur, focusing on disaster management techniques, risk mitigation and community support mechanisms.

The workshop proceedings were managed by Prof Tania Akhtar and Dr Waqar Ahmed, while overall coordination was handled by Prof Kaku Ram and Prof Rahul Sharma. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Asha Sohil, followed by a certificate distribution ceremony.

SMVDU scholar presents research at IIT Roorkee Conference

NL CORRESPONDENT

KATRA, DEC 24 Anshu Sharma, PhD scholar at the School of Biotechnology, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University (SMVDU), presented her research work at the International Conference on Advances in Biotechnology, Bioprocessing and Structural Biology (ICABS-2025) held at IIT Roorkee from December 11 to 14.

She presented a poster titled "Green Synthesis of Iron Oxide Nanoparticles using Carissa opaca Extract: Potential Applications in Wastewater Treatment, Antimicrobial Activity, and Agriculture".

During the presentation, Sharma highlighted the effectiveness of Carissa opaca-derived iron oxide nanoparticles as sustainable nanomaterials with wide applications in environmental remediation and agriculture.

Sharma expressed gratitude to her supervisor, Dr Indu Bhushan, for continuous guidance and mentorship. She also acknowledged the research support and facilities provided by SMVDU, and thanked Prof Prati



gati Kumar, Vice-Chancellor, SMVDU, for promoting a strong research culture.

The international conference, organized by IIT Roorkee in collaboration with the Biotech Research Society of India, witnessed participation of around 500 students, including poster and oral presenters. SMVDU congratulated Anshu Sharma for representing the university on an international platform and contributing to impactful scientific research.

Jasrotia inaugurates Juthana Approach Road

NL CORRESPONDENT

JASROTA, DEC 24 MLA Rajiv Jasrotia on Wednesday inaugurated two road projects in the Jasrota constituency, aimed at improving rural connectivity and easing daily movement for residents.

The key project includes the 500-metre Juthana approach road connecting Juthana village with the Juthana Bridge, constructed at a cost of ₹50 lakh. The road is expected to significantly improve access for villagers by facilitating smoother transportation and better connectivity. The MLA also inaugurated the Seswan to Rajani ST Basti Road, completed at a cost of ₹5 lakh, which, despite its smaller scale, will enhance safety and convenience for local commuters.



Addressing residents, Jasrotia said improved road infrastructure plays a crucial role in boosting access to healthcare, education, markets and other essential services. He emphasized that such projects are part of the government's commitment to people-centric and inclusive development, particularly

in rural areas.

The MLA urged the local community to actively participate in maintaining public assets to ensure their long-term durability and continued benefits. He reiterated that strengthening basic infrastructure remains a priority for accelerating regional growth and improving quality of life.

The inauguration was attended by villagers, community leaders and elders, who welcomed the development initiatives and appreciated the MLA's focus on addressing grassroots-level needs. Jasrotia also interacted with residents, listening to their concerns and assuring continued efforts toward practical and sustainable development in the constituency.

MSME-DFO holds awareness prog for CTTIK members

NL CORRESPONDENT

KATRA, DEC 24 The MSME-Development and Facilitation Office (MSME-DFO) Jammu, under the Ministry of MSME, Government of India, organised an awareness programme for members of the Chamber of Tourism Trade and Industry Katra (CTTIK) here on Tuesday.

The programme was chaired by Joint Director MSME-DFO Jammu, Amit Tamaria, who was the chief guest on the occasion. He was formally welcomed by CTTIK President Raj Kumar Padha along with office bearers, including Vice President Susheel Dubey, General Secretary Rajneesh Purohit,

Treasurer Ramnik Sharma and Secretary Atul Sharma.

Addressing the gathering, Tamaria gave a detailed presentation on various MSME schemes and initiatives, including Udyam registration, financial assistance, credit-linked subsidies, skill development and technology upgradation. He also explained the procedures for availing these benefits and urged entrepreneurs to utilise government support for business growth and sustainability.

He emphasised the importance of awareness and timely adoption of MSME schemes to promote employment generation and economic development, particularly in tourism and allied sectors.



CTTIK members actively participated in the interactive session, seeking clarifications and showing keen interest in availing the schemes. Executive members Neelam Singh, Vishal Sharma, Vivek Gupta, Rattan Sharma and other traders were also present.

Raj Kumar Padha appreciated the initiative, stating that such programmes are crucial for empowering entrepreneurs and strengthening the regional economy. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks and a commitment to strengthen coordination between MSME-DFO and CTTIK.

Marriage Assistance Scheme brings relief to distressed widow

NL CORRESPONDENT

BHADERWAH, DECEMBER 24: A touching example of responsive governance was witnessed during a Grievance Redressal Camp held under the "Prashasan Gaon ki Our" campaign at Udrana-Bhaderwah, where prompt intervention by the Social Welfare Department brought much-needed relief to a distressed widow and her family.

During the camp, while awareness was being imparted about various welfare schemes, particularly the Marriage Assistance Scheme, an elderly woman brought to the notice of the Tehsil Social Welfare Officer (TSWO) Bhaderwah, the plight of a widow from the village who was suffering from mental distress due to financial hardships ahead of the marriage of her two daughters.

Taking immediate cognizance of the matter, the TSWO visited the widow's residence, as she was unable to attend the camp or visit the TSWO office owing to old age and bad health.

The widow, aged above 65 years, informed that her husband Subhash Rathore, a farmer by profession, passed away a few years ago, leaving the family with no stable source of income forcing them to make ends meet by the widow pension provided by the Social Welfare Department and the meager earnings from tuitions given by her younger daughter, which together constitute the family's only means of sustenance.

She further stated that her two daughters aged 29 and 26 years are engaged—one at Thathri and the other at Hanga-Bhaderwah.

However, due to the financial constraints, she is finding it extremely difficult to meet the marriage expenses and is therefore compelled to delay the marriages.

After assessing the case, the TSWO assured the family of financial assistance of Rs 50,000 (Rupees Fifty Thousand) each for both daughters under the Marriage Assistance Scheme, as the family holds a BPL ration card.

He also explained the documentation requirements, shared his contact details, and assured full departmental support in preparation and online submission of documents.

The assurance brought immense relief to the widow, who expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Social Welfare Department, stating that the support would enable her to solemnize her daughters' marriages in the coming months.

The widow's younger daughter Shiveti Rathore appreciated the proactive and compassionate role of the Social Welfare Department and lauded TSWO Shah Nawaz Ahmad for his empathetic approach.

She emphasized the need for greater awareness of welfare schemes among economically weaker sections, so that every deserving and downtrodden person may benefit.

The TSWO assured that with the support and able guidance of the District Development Commissioner, Additional Deputy Commissioner Bhaderwah and District Social Welfare Officer, such initiatives would be further intensified to ensure that no eligible beneficiary remains deprived of government welfare schemes.

NSS Winter Camp held at GDC Kakryal

NL CORRESPONDENT

KATRA, DEC 24 The second day of the NSS Special Winter Camp 2025 was held at Government Degree College, Kakryal, Katra, on December 24 under the guidance of the college Principal, Dr Rajni Bhagat, focusing on health, environment, community service and disaster preparedness.

The programme began with a morning assembly that reinforced the values and objectives of the National Service Scheme. The first session featured a lecture-cum-demonstration on "Importance and Benefits of Yoga" by Dr Ishfaq Hussain Parry (PTI), who highlighted yoga's role in physical fitness, mental well-being and self-discipline among youth.

This was followed by an awareness lecture on environmental sustainability by Dr Usha Sharma, NSS Programme Officer, addressing issues of ecological degradation and individual responsibility. Volunteers also participated in a poster-making activity to spread messages on environmental protection and sustainable living.

In the second session, volunteers carried out a cleanliness drive within the college campus and organised an awareness rally to the temple in the adopted village of Dadura. A cleanliness drive around the temple premises further strengthened community participation. Faculty members present included Dr Ishfaq, Dr Abdul Hafiz and Mr Bhushan.



The third session was conducted by officials from the Fire and Emergency Services Department, Katra, who provided practical insights into fire safety, disaster preparedness and emergency response.

A total of 40 NSS volunteers from Semester I, III and V participated in the programme. Light refreshments were also distributed. The programme was coordinated by Dr Usha Sharma and concluded with a renewed commitment to service and responsible citizenship.

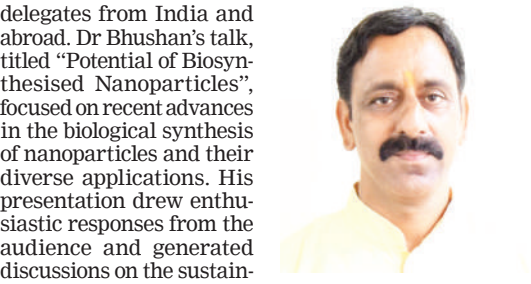
Dr Indu Bhushan delivers invited talk at IIT Roorkee

NL CORRESPONDENT

KATRA, DEC 24 Dr Indu Bhushan, Associate Professor at the School of Biotechnology, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University (SMVDU), Katra, delivered an invited talk at the International Conference on Advances in Biotechnology, Bioprocessing and Structural Biology (ICABS-2025) held at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee.

The conference, organised in collaboration with the Biotech Research Society of India, saw participation of nearly 500 delegates from India and abroad. Dr Bhushan's talk, titled "Potential of Biosynthesised Nanoparticles", focused on recent advances in the biological synthesis of nanoparticles and their diverse applications. His presentation drew enthusiastic responses from the audience and generated discussions on the sustainability and scalability of biosynthesised nanoparticle technologies.

Apart from delivering the invited lecture, Dr Bhushan also served as an evaluator for poster presentations, offering constructive feedback and expert



insights to participants.

Dr Bhushan expressed gratitude to Prof (Dr) Pragati Kumar, Vice-Chancellor, SMVDU, for encouraging and permitting him to attend the international conference.

Training courses conclude at SKPA Udh

NL CORRESPONDENT

UDHAMPUR, DEC 24 Two specialized training courses on "Terrorism/Counter Insurgency" and "Intellectual Property Rights" concluded successfully at the Sher-i-Kashmir Police Academy, Udhampur, on Wednesday, strengthening professional capabilities of police officers in key emerging areas.

The valedictory function was graced by SSP Benam Tosh, Deputy Director SKPAU, as chief guest. He addressed the participants, motivated them to combat terrorism and crime with greater

resolve, and distributed certificates in the presence of course directors Nasser Mehmood Naik and Vikas Manhas. The courses were conducted from December 22 to 24 and were attended by 32 police officers of the rank of Sub-Inspector to Superintendent of Police from different wings and districts of Jammu and Kashmir. The training focused on counter-terrorism strategies, radicalisation, internal security threats, bio-warfare and intellectual property rights.

Eminent resource persons, including Dr Savita Nayyar and

Dr Ranjan Sharma from the University of Jammu, Prof Vishal Sharma from Government MAM College, High Court advocate Ms Supriya Chouhan, Senior Prosecuting Officer Amit Prakash Sehgal, and senior officers from Cyber Police Station Jammu and SKPAU, delivered expert lectures and practical insights.

The participants reaffirmed their commitment to counter anti-national and anti-social elements with enhanced vigour, professionalism and dedication, reflecting the academy's continued emphasis on capacity building and modern policing.

UNION TERRITORY OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER JAL SHAKTI MECH. G.W.D. DIVISION JAMMU

SHORT TERM NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER
E-NIT NO GWD/200 OF 2025-26 DATED 23.12.2025

On behalf of the Lt. Governor, UT of J&K, the Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Mech. Ground Water Drilling Division Jammu invites tenders by e-tendering mode from reputed and registered firms with Chief Engineer Jal Shakti (PHE) Department Jammu who have sufficient experience in the field of drilling and are well equipped with drilling Rigs suitable for ODEX method of drilling.

Name of the Work	Name of the Division	Cost of Tender Document/Tender Fee(In Rs)	Qty.	Estimated cost (value of work) (in Rs.)	Earnest Money (In Rs)	Validity of Rates
Deep Drilling of 125 mm dia Bore Holes by using ODEX method including providing, installation, testing, commissioning of Mark-II Hand Pumps and construction of platforms at (16 Nos) different locations in District Poonch on Turnkey Basis (EPC) under District Capex PRI Grant (2025-26)	Jal Shakti Mech. Ground Water Drilling Division Jammu	1000.00 (Non-Refundable) Deposited in Govt. treasury through e-challan under the receipt head 0215 in favour of the Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Mech. GWD Div. Jammu payable at Jammu mentioning name of work	16 Nos	Rs. 62.63 lacs	@ 2% of the estimated value in shape of Fresh CDR/FDR pledged to Executive Engineer PHE (M) GWD Division	31 st March 2026

- The complete bidding process shall be online.
- Bid documents can be seen and downloaded from the website <http://jktenders.gov.in> from 23.12.2025 to 31.12.2025.
- The pre bid meeting if desired by the participating firms shall be held in the office of the Executive Engineer Jal Shakti (M) GWD Division Jammu on 24.12.2025 (1300 hrs).
- The bids shall be submitted/uploaded from the website <http://jktenders.gov.in> from 26.12.2025 (1400 hrs) to 31.12.2025 (2000 hrs).

GWD/6725-27
DATED: 23.12.2025

DIP/J-9338/25
DATED : 24-12-2025

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Jal Shakti Mech. G.W.D. Division
Jammu

editorial

Administrative Delays Cost Lives

The prolonged breakdown of CT scan machines in three of Jammu's five major government hospitals exposes a troubling picture of administrative inertia and misplaced priorities in public healthcare. Diagnostic services like CT scans are not luxuries; they are essential tools for timely and accurate treatment. Yet, patients in Jammu are being denied this basic facility for months—and in some cases, over a year.

Hospitals such as the Super Speciality Hospital, Shri Maharaja Gulab Singh (SMGS) Hospital, and the Chest Diseases Hospital cater to critical departments including neurology, cardiology, pediatrics, obstetrics, and tuberculosis care. The failure to keep CT scan machines operational in these institutions has forced patients to shuttle between hospitals like GMC Jammu and the Bone & Joint Hospital, which are already overburdened. Predictably, long waiting periods have become the norm, defeating the very purpose of referral-based healthcare.

The human cost of this failure is severe. Patients and their attendants are compelled to make repeated hospital visits, often in distressing medical conditions. Many are left with no option but to seek expensive diagnostic tests at private clinics, placing an unfair financial burden on families that depend on government hospitals precisely because they cannot afford private care. This effectively turns a public health failure into an economic injustice.

What makes the situation more disturbing is the absence of urgency. Despite assurances from hospital administrations and officials that procurement processes are underway, delays continue unabated. The fact that approvals for some hospitals are still pending reflects a lack of coordination and accountability within the system. When machines meant to serve thousands remain non-functional for months, explanations sound hollow. Beyond immediate procurement, this crisis highlights a deeper structural flaw in healthcare planning. The absence of preventive maintenance schedules, contingency arrangements, and equipment redundancy shows that hospital infrastructure is being managed reactively rather than strategically.

Essential diagnostic machinery should never be allowed to reach a point of complete collapse without alternatives in place. A robust public healthcare system anticipates failures and prepares backups—especially in regions where government hospitals are the primary lifeline for the population. Equally important is the need for transparency and public accountability. Citizens have a right to know why critical machines remain defunct for prolonged periods, who is responsible for the delays, and what corrective measures are being taken. Regular public disclosures, time-bound repair or replacement deadlines, and independent audits could help restore trust in the system. Without accountability, such failures risk becoming routine, eroding confidence in government healthcare and pushing more patients toward an already expensive and unequal private sector.

Healthcare governance must be measured not by statements, but by outcomes. The authorities must fast-track procurement, ensure proper maintenance contracts, and fix responsibility for such prolonged disruptions. Diagnostics are the backbone of modern medicine, and neglecting them undermines the entire healthcare delivery system. Jammu's patients deserve better than excuses and endless waiting. Restoring CT scan services promptly is not just an administrative task—it is a moral and public health imperative.



SH. SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN

The President of India has assented to the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025, enhancing the statutory wage employment guarantee to 125 days and strengthening rural livelihoods through empowerment, convergence, and saturation-based delivery for a resilient, self-reliant rural Bharat.

A misreading by some Yet, even as the VB-G RAM G Act comes into force, there are some who have advanced a set of assumptions that do not withstand careful scrutiny. It is being claimed that the employment guarantee has been weakened, that decentralisation and demand-based rights have been undermined without consultation, and that the reform represents fiscal withdrawal that is disguised as restructuring. Each of these assertions rests on a misreading of the Act's substance and intent.

What has led to this misreading is a deeper conceptual error the assumption that welfare and development are opposing choices. The new framework is built on the opposite understanding: that welfare, anchored in an enhanced statutory livelihood guarantee, and development, anchored in durable infrastructure creation and productivity enhancement, are mutually reinforcing. Income support, asset creation, agricultural stability and long-term rural productivity are treated as a continuum rather than a trade-off. This is not aspirational rhetoric but an approach embedded in statutory design.

The suggestion that the legal right to employment has been diluted is incorrect. The Act retains the statutory and justiciable character of the employment guarantee while strengthening its enforceability. Far from being curtailed, the entitlement has been expanded from 100 to 125 days. Procedural dis-entitlement clauses that previously nullified unemployment allowance in practice have been removed, and time-bound grievance redress mechanisms have been reinforced. The reform directly

addresses the long-recognised gap between statutory promise and lived reality.

It is also argued that demand-based employment has been abandoned in favour of top-down planning. This rests on a false binary. Demand for work continues to originate from workers. What changes is that demand is no longer addressed only after distress has set in. By anchoring execution in advance, participatory village-level planning, the reform ensures that when workers seek employment, work is actually available rather than denied due to administrative unpreparedness. Planning, in this sense, does not suppress demand; it operationalises it.

The charge of centralisation overlooks the architecture of the law. Gram panchayats remain the primary planning and implementing authorities, and gram sabhas retain approval powers over local plans. What has changed is that decentralised planning is no longer ad hoc or episodic but institutionalised as a structured and participatory process. Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans are aggregated at the block, district, State and national levels to enable coordination, convergence and visibility across sectors, not to override local priorities. What is centralised is coherence; the decision-making authority remains local. This corrects fragmentation without undermining decentralisation.

Claims that the reform was pushed through without consultation are equally inconsistent with the record. The Bill was preceded by extensive consultations with State governments, technical workshops and multi-stakeholder discussions. Core design features - village planning structures, convergence mechanisms and digital governance systems were shaped by feedback from States and by lessons drawn from years of implementation.

An increase in allocations, equity The broader premise that the employment guarantee was systematically weakened over the past decade does not align with facts. Budgetary allocations increased from 33,000 crore in 2013-14 to 286,000 crore in 2024-25. Person days generated rose from 1,660 crore in the period up to 2013-14 to 3,210 crore thereafter. Central funds released increased from 2.13 lakh crore to 8.53 lakh crore, and completed works expanded from 153 lakh to 862 lakh. Women's participation rose from 48% to 56.73%. Over 99% of fund transfer orders are now generated on time, and nearly 99% of active workers are linked to the Aadhaar Payment Bridge. These trends point to sustained commitment and improved delivery, not neglect.

What became evident over time, however, was that implementation experience had also revealed structural weaknesses in the earlier framework itself-episodic employment, weak enforceability of unemployment allowance, fragmented asset creation and persistent scope for duplication and ghost entries. These weaknesses were visible on the ground during drought years, migration spikes and periods of disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fiscal restructuring under the new Act is also mischaracterised as abdication. The central government's contribution is increasing - the provision for the Centre's share rises from 86,000 crore to nearly 295,000 crore, underscoring continued and enhanced support for rural employment. The 60:40 funding model follows the long-established structure of centrally sponsored schemes, while the northeastern and Himalayan States and Jammu and Kashmir are accorded a differential 90:10 ratio. Far from signalling fiscal withdrawal, this framework reinforces shared responsibility and accountability.

Equity is ensured through rule-based normative allocation, with State-wise allocations determined on objective parameters prescribed in the Rules. States are treated not as mere implementing agencies but as partners in development, empowered to notify and operationalise their own schemes within the statutory framework. Flexibility is explicitly preserved: during natural disasters, or other extraordinary situations, States may recommend special relaxations, which includes expansion of permissible works and temporary enhancement of employment. Rule-based allocation and contextual flexibility are thus balanced in a manner consistent with cooperative federalism.

The Act empowers States to notify, in advance, periods aggregating to 60 days in a financial year covering peak sowing and harvesting seasons during which works shall not be undertaken. Differentiated notifications may be issued at the level of districts, blocks, or gram panchayats based on agro-climatic conditions, ensuring that the enhanced employment guarantee complements agricultural operations.

The UPA's record From its very first tenure, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government failed to match rhetoric with delivery under MGNREGA. While the Congress manifesto promised "at least 100 days of work at a real wage of 100 per day", the government capped wages at 100 as early as 2009 and kept them frozen for years, ignoring inflation and rising rural distress. The Centre openly admitted

that States were acting arbitrarily under the scheme and justified the wage freeze by blaming State governments for 'indiscriminate increases'. This admission itself exposed a serious governance failure: the Congress-led Centre was unable to control even its own State governments, allowing MGNREGA to become vulnerable to misuse, fake job cards, and financial leakages.

The UPA's second term saw a steady decline in commitment to the scheme. Budgetary allocations were cut from 240,100 crore in 2010-11 to 33,000 crore by 2012-13, despite growing demand from States. In a parliamentary reply in 2013, Minister of State Rajeev Shukla acknowledged that employment under MGNREGA had fallen sharply from 7.55 crore workers in 2010-11 to just 6.93 crore by November 2013. Delayed fund releases, lack of transparency in payments, and administrative apathy discouraged workers from seeking employment, directly undermining the legal guarantee promised under the Act.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's 2013 report laid bare the true state of MGNREGA during the UPA years. It highlighted widespread corruption and mismanagement: over 4.33 lakh fake or defective job cards, thousands of crores lost to unaccounted withdrawals and irregular work, delayed or denied wages in 23 States, and poor record-keeping in more than half of India's gram panchayats. States with the highest concentration of rural poor- Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra used only about 20% of allocated funds, proving that the scheme failed precisely where it was needed most.

To frame the debate as a choice between welfare and development is to pose a false dichotomy. Welfare, when anchored in a guaranteed livelihood, and development, when anchored in durable rural infrastructure and productivity, are not competing objectives but interdependent ones.

The real decision was whether to freeze a framework that often underdelivered, or to reform it into a modern, enforceable, and integrated employment guarantee that advances welfare through development. The new Act preserves the legal right to work, expands entitlements, strengthens worker protections, and corrects structural weaknesses revealed through years of implementation. This is not demolition, but a process of renewal grounded in experience.

The author is Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, and Rural Development, Government of India.

Reading Ambedkar Isn't Optional. It's Survival

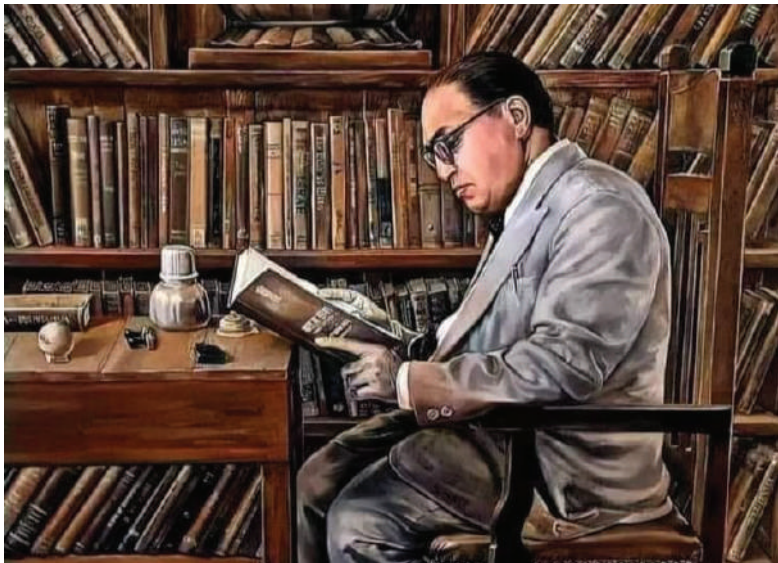
BY SHALEEN MAHAJAN

As a law student, I sit in classrooms where the Constitution is discussed every day, yet the mind behind it is barely understood. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is remembered in fragments. His name is memorized, his photograph displayed, his birthday celebrated. But for many, Ambedkar exists only in social media posts, not in spirit or practice. His ideas are rarely read, and even more rarely felt. In a time when reels replace books and opinions are formed in seconds, Ambedkar is reduced to slogans. This is not just unfair—it is dangerous.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's relevance is not limited to history books; it lives in the moral questions he compelled society to face. Democracy, for him, was not merely casting votes—it was living together with liberty, equality, and fraternity. Without these values, constitutional promises remain hollow.

Central to his philosophy was his critique of caste. Caste is not just a label; it decides a person's dignity, education, and opportunities from birth. Even today, a surname can reveal social standing, showing that caste is alive, not a chapter of . Ambedkar warned that merely declaring everyone equal before the law is not enough. When inequality is rooted in society itself, only structural change can truly break it.

Corrective measures like reservation are tools to counter systemic exclusion, not privileges. They are designed to ensure that identity does not predetermine destiny. Yet on social media, reservation is often dismissed as "unfair," as if it takes opportunities away from the so-called "general category". Gen-



erations of systemic oppression mean that achievements are rarely inherited, they are earned against immense odds. Reservation is not charity. It is a mechanism for representation, education, and participation, a way to make opportunity equitable rather than inherited.

Ambedkar's commitment to justice extended to women. He saw women's rights not as concessions but as a moral necessity. Through the Hindu Code Bill, he worked to secure equality in marriage, inheritance, and property—far ahead of his time. For him, equality could not be performative; it had to be built into institutions through laws, policies, and representation.

Yet today, Ambedkar is not often celebrated in appearance, not essence. Statues are cleaned, photographs garlanded, birthdays trend online. But his ideas are rarely engaged with. People quote him while dis-

missing reservation, mocking constitutional values, or ignoring caste realities. True honor requires understanding and practicing what he stood for.

Ambedkar's thought is not a religion to follow blindly; it is a call to think, to question, and to act with courage. In a country still struggling with caste, gender inequality, and misinformation, reading Ambedkar is not optional—it is necessary. He reminds us that equality is never automatic, justice is never symbolic, and democracy survives only when ordinary people refuse to look away. Today, when debates rage online over who deserves opportunity, when women and marginalized communities fight for spaces they have historically been denied, Ambedkar's vision speaks louder than ever. Fairness is not given, it is made and it is our responsibility to make it real.



RAYEES AHMAD KUMAR

The 40-day harsh winter period of Kashmir, popularly known as Chilla-e-Kalan, commenced on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, bringing with it a marked change in weather conditions across the Valley. The onset of Chilla-e-Kalan has coincided with a spell of fresh precipitation, offering relief from the prolonged dry, foggy and smoggy conditions that had led to deteriorating air quality in recent days. While the higher reaches of Kashmir received fresh snowfall, the plains witnessed intermittent rainfall, improving visibility and air conditions.

Weather officials said the precipitation has helped disperse pollutants, leading to an improvement in overall air quality, particularly in urban areas that were grappling with dense fog and smog. Authorities have advised people to remain cautious, particularly while travelling to snow-bound areas, as Chilla-e-Kalan is known for severe cold, freezing nights and heavy snowfall. Chilla-e-Kalan, the coldest phase of Kashmir's winter, will last for 40 days, followed by the milder periods of Chilla-e-Khurd and Chilla-e-Bachha. The season's first snowfall has transformed Gulmarg—the main winter attraction and health

resort into a winter paradise, rekindling the valley's tourism spirit and winning the hearts of visitors from across the country.

Tourists delighted by the snowfall and Kashmiri hospitality have appealed people nationwide to experience the charm, beauty and warmth of Kashmir. After a prolonged dry weather in valley, about ten inches of fresh snow blanketed the vast meadows of Gulmarg overnight, turning it into a picture-perfect destination. With the end of dry spell, the tourism stakeholders and adventure operators expressed hope for a good season ahead as they were much concerned previously.

The Sadhna top, connecting North Kashmir's Kupwara with the Keran valley witnessed about three feet of snow, the famous Razdan top also received more than one feet snow and the Bandipora Gurez road was soon declared officially as closed. Srinagar Ladakh road, Mughal road, Anantnag Kishitwar road and Machil Kupwara road, all were closed following a massive snowfall on upper reaches, while the plain areas received an intermittent spell of rains bringing minimum temperatures above the seasons normal and providing some relief to the people especially children and elderly. It is pertinent to mention that only a good snowfall can rejuvenate and recharge our already dried-up water resources such as rivers, rivulets, ponds, and lakes.

It sustains life by ensuring the prospect of a healthy agricultural crop ahead. In the absence of adequate snowfall, or in the case of scanty snowfall, we experience even drinking-water shortages during the peak summer season. To overcome such challenges, it is of utmost importance that a substantial snowfall occurs, which would

be nothing short of a blessing. When heaters, blowers, air conditioners, and other electrical gadgets fail to provide much-needed relief from the biting cold of Chilla-e-Kalan due to power shortages, the only device that comes to our rescue is the Kangri, which the inhabitants of Kashmir have been using for centuries. The Kangri is a clay vessel encased in a finely woven wicker framework, crafted by skilled artisans. Filled with glowing embers, it helps people keep their bodies warm during the harsh winter months. Meanwhile, in Kashmir, the celebration of International Pheran Day coincides with the onset of Chilla-e-Kalan on 21st December each year. This year also it was celebrated at winter capital Srinagar's commercial hub Lal Chowk, where scores of locals and tourists gathered to celebrate International Pheran Day.

Several people wore Pheran and carried Kangri to get attention from the public. Pheran is a traditionally knee length robe part of the unique identity of Kashmiri culture, a woolen gown worn for protection from cold during this harsh season. Down the memory lane, when I look back at my childhood, I recall that soon after the onset of Chilla-e-Kalan, my parents would strongly advise me not to venture out without wearing headgear, mufflers, and other warm clothes, as winters were far harsher some decades ago. Four to five feet of snow was recorded even in the plains. Children would gleefully play on slippery slopes, while some indulged in friendly wrangling by turning soft snow into hard, spherical balls. Facing winters in those days was truly a fascinating and unforgettable experience.

Writer is a columnist based in Qazigund Kashmir

ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE: The Statesman Who Shaped Modern India

A Tribute on His 101st Birth Anniversary

BY RAVI ROHMETRA

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was born on 25 December 1924 in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, to a schoolteacher, Krishna Bihari Vajpayee, and Krishna Devi. After completing his schooling, he graduated from Victoria College, Gwalior (now Laxmi Bai College). He earned his M.A. in Political Science from DAV College, Kanpur. Following a brief flirtation with communism, he became a full-time worker of the RSS in 1947.

A rare politician, brilliant orator, poet and patriot, Vajpayee was among modern India's tallest leaders who devoted his entire life to the service of the nation. He first became Prime Minister in 1996, though the government collapsed after failing to win the confidence vote in Parliament. He returned to office in 1998 for thirteen months and again in 1999, serving until 2004. The credit of making India a nuclear power goes to the sagacity of his political will and farsighted leadership.

Born into a family of modest means and high ideals, he hailed from a small town in Madhya Pradesh. His youth was marked by academic excellence and a strong commitment to public service during the freedom struggle. Starting as an ordinary karyakarta of the Jana Sangh, he went on to build the only truly national-level party in independent India — the Bharatiya Janata Party — and steered its organisational work after the passing of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya.

Through four decades of leadership in Parliament, his resistance during the Emergency (memorable was his rousing speech at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan), and his unwavering commitment to the nation over party, he defined the spirit of Indian democracy. Firm in his beliefs yet always respectful of differing viewpoints, he set high standards of parliamentary debate. His simplicity, integrity,



dignity, empathy and personal detachment from office made him an inspiration for generations of Indians.

He rescued the economy from the uncertainties of the mid-1990s, when political instability and global challenges threatened the reform process. He laid the foundation of India's economic success of the past two decades, believing that growth must empower the weakest and integrate the marginalized. His government's futuristic economic reforms and emphasis on next-generation infrastructure — particu-

larly roads and telecom — brought lasting prosperity and social empowerment.

Vajpayee irrevocably transformed India's place in the world. He overcame hesitation at home and resistance abroad to make India a nuclear power, a decision taken with utmost responsibility in the interest of national security. Even at that moment of national pride, he spoke with restraint and wisdom, earning global respect. He transformed decades of estrangement with the United States into a lasting strategic partnership.

A grassroots leader, he gave priority to good relations with India's neighbours, supported Bangladesh's liberation, journeyed to Lahore in search of peace, worked tirelessly for reconciliation in Jammu and Kashmir, and yet led India resolutely during the Kargil conflict.

Major Events in Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Political Journey

- 1942: Joined Quit India Movement; jailed during freedom struggle
- 1951: Founder member of Jana

- Sangh
- 1957: Elected to Lok Sabha for the first time
- 1962: Elected to Rajya Sabha
- 1968-73: President, Bharatiya Jana Sangh
- 1975: Placed under house arrest during Emergency
- 1977-80: Founder member, Janata Party
- 1980-86: President, Bharatiya Janata Party
- 1984: Lost Lok Sabha election to Madhavrao Scindia from Gwalior
- 1992: Conferred Padma Vibhushan
- 1996: Became Prime Minister; government lasted 13 days
- 1998: Sworn in as Prime Minister again; Pokhran nuclear tests conducted
- 1999: Lahore bus journey; India wins Kargil war
- 1999: Sworn in as Prime Minister for third term
- 2001: Agra Summit with President Pervez Musharraf
- 2004: NDA loses elections
- 2005: Retired from active politics
- 2015: Conferred Bharat Ratna

Vajpayee, a master of Indian politics — charismatic, smiling, strong yet deeply democratic by conviction — passed away on 16 August 2018 at 5:05 PM at AIIMS, aged 93. India lost one of its greatest sons, a statesman loved and respected by millions. A "Man of Peace", he will be remembered for his vision, statesmanship and unwavering dedication to national and social development. His leadership created a void that can never truly be filled.

He played a significant role in strengthening Sino-Indian relations, introduced mobile networks in the Northeast and Jammu & Kashmir despite strong opposition, reshaped the global narrative on Kashmir, and placed terrorism firmly on the international agenda.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee remains an enduring symbol of leadership, integrity and national service — a towering figure in the story of modern India.

(The Compiler is a freelance writer and a social worker and can be reached at Mob. No: 9419652999)

FTA with New Zealand: Will it Affect the Interests of Indian Apple Growers?



BY JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Amid a stalled phase in the finalisation of the Indo-American trade negotiations, India and New Zealand announced a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on December 22, 2025, projecting it as a win-win arrangement for both countries. However, the agreement is expected to take about six months to come into full effect.

A Government of India press release issued through the PIB on December 22, describing the FTA as "Gains for Agriculture, Technology Cooperation, and Farmer Income Growth", states that New Zealand has agreed on focused action plans for kiwifruit, apples and honey to improve productivity, quality and sectoral capabilities of Indian growers. The cooperation includes establishment of Centres of Excellence, improved planting material, capacity building for growers, technical support for orchard management, post-harvest practices, supply chains and food safety. Projects for premium apple cultivation and sustainable beekeeping practices are also proposed to enhance production and quality standards.

This is paired with market access for selected agricultural products — apples, kiwifruit and manuka honey — from New Zealand into India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a post on X on December 22, 2025, stated: "An important moment for India-New Zealand relations, with a strong push to bilateral trade and investment... This FTA ensures enhanced market access, deeper investment flows, and numerous opportunities for innovators, entrepreneurs, farmers, MSMEs, students and youth."

In another message the same day, the Prime Minister said the FTA sets the stage for doubling bilateral trade within five years and welcomed over USD 20 billion in investments from New Zealand across diverse sectors, while also strengthening



cooperation in sports, education and cultural exchanges.

New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), on its website, highlighted that the FTA will deliver preferential access for New Zealand exporters to 95 per cent of current exports to India over time, with more than 50 per cent receiving full tariff elimination from day one, rising to over 80 per cent gradually.

MFAT further detailed that forestry, sheep meat, wool, coal, fish and seafood, along with horticultural products including apples and kiwifruit, would benefit from phased tariff reductions, with new quota access for apples and kiwifruit, and significant tariff cuts for manuka honey, dairy preparations and other related products.

According to MFAT, New Zealand has become the first country to secure preferential access for apples and tariff-free access for kiwifruit in any Indian FTA, opening new opportunities as India's economy and middle class expand.

From New Zealand's perspective, the agreement is strongly farmer-centric, covering forestry, animal products, fisheries and horticulture.

Balancing the Concerns

While the agreement promises technological support and productivity enhancement for Indian farmers, sections of India's horticulture sector have expressed apprehension, particularly apple growers. The Apple Farmers' Federation of India (AFFI) has voiced concerns over the low-

ering of import tariffs on New Zealand apples, warning that increased imports could intensify competitive pressures on domestic producers.

In a statement, AFFI criticised the reduction of the basic customs duty on apple imports from 50 per cent under the FTA and pointed out that a fixed quantity of apples would now be allowed at zero or highly concessional tariff rates. Under the agreement, New Zealand will receive import concessions for 32,500 metric tonnes of apples in the first year, rising to 45,000 metric tonnes by the sixth year at 25 per cent duty.

Apple growers have underlined that horticulture contributes nearly 30 per cent of India's agricultural GDP and that

apples provide critical in-come to farmers in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and northeastern states. They note that apple imports have risen from 0.2 lakh metric tonnes to nearly 6 lakh metric tonnes over the past 25 years, while exports have remained stagnant.

At the same time, government officials maintain that the FTA includes provisions to support Indian orchard development through technology transfer, improved planting material, better post-harvest management and infrastructure strengthening, which could significantly enhance domestic productivity and competitiveness in the long term.

AFFI has also raised concerns over the reduction of duties on US apples, the removal of retaliatory tariffs in 2023, and alleged mislabelling of Iranian apples entering India through Afghanistan. The federation believes such factors have contributed to rising imports and depressed domestic prices.

However, policymakers argue that expanding trade partnerships, when accompanied by domestic capacity-building measures, can create a more resilient and globally competitive horticulture sector, benefiting farmers through improved quality, market access and income diversification.

The apple-producing regions of Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, which together contribute nearly 90 per cent of India's 2.6 million metric tonnes of apple output, continue to face climatic challenges, reinforcing the need for both protective measures and modernisation of orchard practices.

AFFI has called upon the government to reconsider tariff reductions and has reiterated long-standing demands including higher import duties, fair price policies, insurance coverage, and subsidies for storage and transport. It has also urged stronger regulation of pesticides and fertilisers.

At the same time, the government maintains that the broader objectives of the FTA — technological collaboration, investment inflows, infra-structure development and market expansion — can provide new growth pathways for Indian farmers if implemented with adequate safeguards.

The evolving challenge for policymakers will be to ensure that trade liberalisation proceeds hand in hand with protection of farmer livelihoods, especially in sensitive sectors like apples, so that the promise of global integration translates into sustainable gains for India's agricultural communities.

Short trips from Mcleodganj and Dharamsala

Wondering what else lies hidden in the Himalayas around Mcleodganj and Dharamsala? If yes, you are in for some surprises for there are a lot of places to visit around Mcleodganj and Dharamsala. Both the towns are surrounded by some famous as well offbeat places, leaving you with plenty to pick from. You can choose from the adventure sport destinations of Bir and Billing, the old-world Dalhousie, the astonishing greens of Khajjiar and Chamba or Barot, a place well-guarded by cedar forests. You can also explore the tea estates of Kangra and Palampur on your way to Barot, Bir and Billing. Darang is another option with nothing much to do other than a stay at a 150 plus years old tea estate. Situated on the banks of the Bagmati River, the massive Pashupatinath complex is one of the holiest pilgrimage spots in Nepal. It's best-known for housing a major temple of the Hindu god Shiva, also known as Pashupati. While the present temple was constructed in the 17th century, its history dates back to 400 AD. It has been built in the



pagoda style of architecture, with a two-tiered roof rising above the central shrine. Only Hindus are allowed to enter the



temple premises. The central point of interest is the black four-headed idol of Pashupati, and a golden statue of this bull, Nandi.

Bir and Billing

Bir and Billing, two villages situated at some 60 km from Dharamsala, are perfect for a short trip from the town. The two picturesque villages in the Dhauladhars, now famous as one of the best paragliding spots in Asia, are a break from the more touristy Mcleodganj and Dharamsala. While hiking, camping and paragliding are the most sought after activities here, the place has a spiritual connection as well. Bir and Billing house two Buddhist monasteries - Chokling and the Palpung Sherabling Monastery. Both the monasteries are much revered by Tibetans and Buddhists in the region and are open to visitors. These are perfect for a short trip from Mcleodganj/Dharamsala if you are searching for a more solitary experience. A 3-4 hours drive from Dharamsala will have you in Bir-Billing.

Palampur

Palampur is a short drive (2-3 hours) from

Dharamsala and is one of the best places for the lovers of tranquility. Abundant with tea estates, trekking trails, campsites and quaint monasteries, it sees lesser crowd compared to Dharamsala. While Tashi Jong Monastery is one of the highlights of Palampur, you can also go hiking in the Dhauladhars, set camp in the pine forest around, visit the tea estates, gorge over some homemade thukpa and Tibetan food at one of the eateries around or do nothing other than stargazing. Perfect if you wish to avoid the weekend crowd of Dharamsala and Mcleodganj in summers.

Barot

Visit Barot if you have been scouring for a "do-nothing" place near Mcleodganj/Dharamsala. An idyllic hill town, it lies at a drive of around three hours from Mcleodganj. Barot is

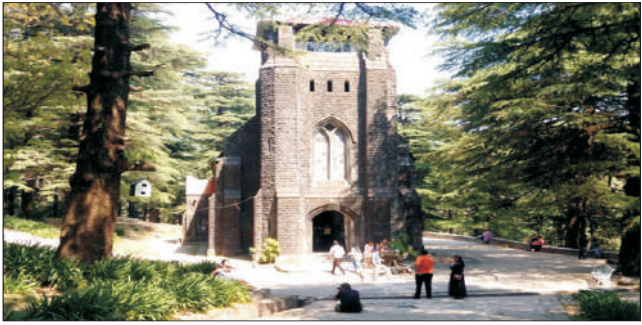
hidden deep in dense cedar forest, often taking visitors by its surprisingly serene location. This charming place is lined with terrace fields and will bowl you over with the calm spread here. Only to be broken by the gushing sounds of some waterfall nearby. A lot of trekking trails in the pine forest, angling spots along Uhl river and a trout farm are some other highlights of Barot. Charming grins of the village people will, of course, woo your heart.

Chamba and Khajjiar

Another one for the lovers of offbeat, Chamba is as stunning as a tiny hamlet in Himachal Pradesh can be. It lies at some 130 km from Mcleodganj/Dharamsala and has a charm that is hard to beat. Explore the ancient temples, wooden forts, the rolling meadows and immerse yourself in the many folk tales that the locals are too happy to recount for anyone who looks keenly interested. Hailed as a land of Gods, Chamba fascinates with its sheer mysticism. Gorge over the famous rajma-chawal in one of the homestays here and head for the neighbouring Khajjiar. Its claim to fame is the title of "Mini Switzerland". A ground that resembles Alpine meadows, with a stream-fed lake in the middle, Khajjiar is a hill-lover's wish come true. You will find plenty of scenes of both Chamba as well as Khajjiar in the critically-acclaimed movie, The Blue Umbrella.

Dalhousie

Dalhousie lies at some 120 km from Mcleodganj. A tiny town that was much fancied by the British, it still retains its old-world charm. Walk along the pine-lined roads in the evening, savour a plate of fresh, steaming momos, buy a pair of mittens or more from the Tibetan market, visit the two churches, trek up to Dain Kund and enjoy a cup of coffee with some vintage books in the church library. If this sounds like a perfect getaway to you, hit the road to Dalhousie from Mcleodganj - a journey that is an enticing as the destination.



FROM PAGE 1

India's 'Bahubali' LVM3

Department of Space, Dr V. Narayanan, announced that the US satellite had been successfully and precisely placed into its intended orbit. "This is a great achievement. All the vehicle parameters performed normally.

"This is the second LVM3 mission in a short span of 52 days," he said, congratulating the entire ISRO team. He added that this was the third commercial mission of LVM3 and the first involving a satellite from US-based AST SpaceMobile, thanking the company for reposing confidence in Indian launch capabilities. "We have lined up more launches in the coming days," he said.

Scientists at the Mission Control Centre, including former ISRO chairmen, senior ISRO officials, and representatives from AST SpaceMobile, closely monitored the flight with bated breath as real-time data streamed in. LVM3-M6 marked the sixth operational flight of the LVM3 and maintained its impeccable record of eight consecutive successful missions. ISRO said the mission carried the heaviest payload ever launched from Indian soil into LEO, weighing 6,100 kg.

"LVM3 is the operational heavy-lift launch vehicle. LVM3-M6 is its sixth operational flight and third dedicated commercial mission," ISRO said.

The mission was undertaken as part of a commercial agreement between NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), the commercial arm of the Department of Space, and AST SpaceMobile LLC, USA. BlueBird-6 is part of AST SpaceMobile's global LEO constellation designed to provide direct-to-mobile connectivity, enabling 4G and 5G voice and video calls, messaging, streaming, and data services anywhere in the world.

The satellite features a massive 223-square-metre phased array, making it the largest commercial communications satellite ever deployed into LEO.

AST SpaceMobile describes its network as the world's first space-based cellular broadband system designed to connect directly with standard smartphones for both commercial and government users.

Founder, Chairman and CEO Abel Avellan had earlier said the next-generation satellites would enable ubiquitous cellular broadband from space. The company plans to deploy 45-60 satellites by the end of 2026.

LVM3, formerly known as GSLV Mk III, is nicknamed 'Bahubali', a name originally coined by Telugu media, drawing inspiration from the blockbuster film Bahubali, in which the hero effortlessly lifts a massive lingam, symbolising strength.

On Wednesday, the nickname appeared to receive informal official recognition when Dr Narayanan referred to the vehicle as the "LVM3 Bahubali rocket" while announcing mission success.

The three-stage LVM3 consists of two S200 solid strap-on boosters, an L110 liquid core stage, and a C25 cryogenic upper stage. It can currently lift about 10 tonnes to LEO and 4 tonnes to GTO, with efforts underway to enhance its GTO capacity.

With this mission, AST SpaceMobile becomes the second satellite broadband customer to fly on LVM3, after Eutelsat OneWeb, which launched 72 satellites using the vehicle in 2022 and 2023.

The successful BlueBird-6 launch further cements India's position as a reliable global player in the commercial heavy-lift launch market.

The BlueBird 6 also has two Indian connections -- Shanti Gupta, Chief Operating Officer, and Sriram Jayasimha, Chief Scientist of Commercial Applications.

As AST SpaceMobile's COO, Gupta, an Alumnus of Sri Ram College, Delhi oversees the company's global operations, including supply chain, planning, cost management, information technology, and human resource operations.

Jayasimha earned his B.Tech and M.S. degrees in electrical engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, USA.

He brings a 30-year successful track record of IP creation and product design for the global telecommunications markets.

According to AST SpaceMobile, Sriram has authored 42 peer-reviewed journal and conference publications in an array of digital-signal-processing applications, including: mobility, satellite communications, modem, VLSI and instrumentation

signal processing.

J&K Education 2025

This deficit placed pressure on students and teachers despite syllabus completion.

Learning outcomes remained alarmingly low. According to the ASER 2024 survey, only about 21 percent of Class 5 students in government schools could read a Class 2 text, compared to over 60 percent in private schools. Mathematics outcomes were similarly weak, with just 16 percent of government school students able to solve basic division problems. While marginal improvements were recorded since 2022, progress was slow and uneven.

Dropout rates were another major concern. Jammu and Kashmir reported a secondary-level dropout rate of 13.4 percent—the third highest in North India—while Ladakh's rate stood at nearly 20 percent. Retention challenges persisted at primary and senior secondary levels, with many students leaving school due to economic pressures, family work, or lack of engagement.

Despite having over 77 percent government-run schools, only 54 percent of students were enrolled in them, reflecting declining public confidence. Teacher shortages compounded the issue: recruitment has been frozen since 2019, leaving thousands of posts vacant, including over 4,200 lecturer positions. Additionally, the region ranked among the highest nationally for untrained teachers, particularly at pre-primary and upper-primary levels.

Infrastructure gaps further weakened the system. More than 98 percent of schools lacked digital library facilities, over 1,900 schools had no separate toilets for girls, and many institutions operated with single teachers or even zero enrolment. Libraries, where present, often lacked basic textbooks.

Financial inefficiency added to the challenge. Over the past five years, only about 70 percent of allocated education funds were utilised, with utilisation dropping to nearly 55 percent in 2024-25.

Social and behavioural issues also surfaced. Surveys revealed that nearly 80 percent of adolescents used smartphones primarily for social media rather than education, while 38 percent reported being mocked by classmates, raising concerns about school climate and student well-being.

Amid these challenges, the government initiated several corrective measures. These included syllabus relaxation, curriculum standardisation, action against poor-performing lecturers, proposals to de-freeze General Line Teacher posts, staff creation for "hanging schools," free textbooks and uniforms for over 13 lakh students, and plans for dual-level mathematics exams in Class 10. The government also ordered the takeover of 215 schools linked to proscribed organisations.

While these steps signal intent, 2025 underscored that Jammu and Kashmir's education system requires sustained investment, accountability, teacher training, and a decisive shift from enrolment-focused metrics to genuine learning outcomes to ensure meaningful reform.

15-day deadline for

mark from the competent authority, failing which the vehicles will be liable for seizure, detention, penalties and other legal action under the Motor Vehicles Act and relevant rules.

16 IAS officers promoted

MHA include Samyak S Jain, Ishita Rathi, Ayushi, Manjunath R, Wairokpm Punshiba Singh, Kamleshwar Rao, Tushar Anand, Srinivas Sadi, Yashwant Meena, Sovigya S Chandra, Mohd Shabir, Shivam Chandra, Mukul Beniwal, Kanika, and Raghvendra Meena.

PoK woman repatriated

Her questioning revealed that she had inadvertently intruded into this side after getting lost in the forest while grazing her sheep, they said.

Accordingly, the Army contacted their Pakistani counterparts and confirmed her antecedents, the officials said.

They said she was handed over to the Pakistan army at Chakan-Da-Bagh border crossing point in presence of police and civil officials after completion of legal formalities Wednesday evening.

Army JCO killed

Tuesday night and is under investigation, he said, ruling out any terror angle.

"A JCO of an Army unit in Samba sustained a gunshot wound while on duty in Jammu and unfortunately succumbed to his injuries in the line of duty. At this stage, the terror angle has been ruled out.

"The incident is under investigation and further details will be shared as facts are established," the spokesperson said.

The Army's Rising Star Corps identified the jawan as Subedar Surjeet Singh and paid rich tributes to him.

"Rising Star Corps pays solemn tribute to braveheart Subedar Surjeet Singh, who made the supreme sacrifice while on operational duty in Jammu. The Indian Army stands firmly with the bereaved family in this hour of grief and assures unwavering support," it said in a post on X.

J&K HC dismisses

"While political parties possess manifold legitimate avenues to engage with the electorate, courts cannot be employed as an instrument for achieving electoral advantage," it added.

The high court said that notwithstanding the "vagueness and the ulterior motive" that prompted the petitioner to approach the government and the court, it is deemed appropriate to observe that under-trials, whose cause, the petitioner claims to have projected in this petition, are facing trials before the respective courts.

"Judicial avenues were/are available to such undertrials for the redressal of any grievance concerning their detention.

"The omission on their part to avail themselves of these legal remedies is an indicative of the fact that they are not genuinely aggrieved of their retention in the prisons outside the UT of Jammu and Kashmir," the court said.

It said a PIL is maintainable only on a prima facie showing of public interest.

Where such interest is in doubt or compromised by extraneous considerations, the court must decline to interfere, as preventing the abuse of legal process is, in itself, a matter of significant public interest, it added.

"In light of what has been said and discussed above, the present petition is found to be misconceived and is, accordingly, dismissed," the court said in the order.

CRPF jawan injured

Kashmir while personnel were having breakfast in the mess, they said.

The animal attacked one jawan before fleeing into the nearby forest, the officials said.

The injured jawan was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he is undergoing treatment, they added.

Traffic crawls on

particularly between Nashri Tunnel and Navyug Tunnel, where HMV movement may cause delays."

He urged the drivers to maintain strict lane discipline and warned that overtaking or wrong-lane driving can lead to congestion.

The official said, "Subject to fair weather and road condi-

tions, LMVs, passenger vehicles, private cars, and HMVs (good carrier) will be allowed to move in both directions on NH-44 on Thursday."

Meanwhile, Traffic Control Units (TCUs) in Jammu and Srinagar have been asked to coordinate with TCU Ramban regarding road conditions and Security forces convoys have been advised to move on the NH-44 only after confirmation of road status.

According to the officials the Kishtwar-Sinthan-Anantnag NH-244 remains closed due to snow accumulation while vehicles on the Srinagar-Sonamarg-Gumari (SSG) Road, will be allowed to move in a regulated manner after getting a green signal from BRO. "LMVs and HMVs (up to six tyres) with anti-skid chains will be permitted from Minamarg towards Srinagar between 8 AM and 11:30 AM, and from Sonamarg towards Kargil between 1 PM and 4 PM," the official said, adding, "Similarly, on Mughal Road, LMVs and private cars with anti-skid chains will be allowed from Behramgala towards Shopian and Herpora-Shopian towards Poonch between 10:30 AM and 2:30 PM, subject to fair weather and road clearance from GREF. Vehicles will not be allowed after the cutoff timings. Security forces convoys will coordinate their movement to avoid disrupting civil traffic."

Commuters have been urged to confirm road conditions before travel from the following Traffic Control Units: Jammu (0191-2459048, 0191-2740550, 9419147732, 103), Srinagar (0194-2450022, 2485396, 18001807091, 103), Ramban (9419993745, 1800-180-7043), Udhampur (8491928625), PCR Kishtwar (9906154100), and PCR Kargil (9541902330, 9541902331).

Jan roster of Admn

Civil Secretariat, Srinagar, during January 2026.

As per the order issued by the General Administration Department, Brij Mohan Sharma, Principal Secretary, Culture Department, and M. Raju, Commissioner Secretary, General Administration Department, will be on duty from January 5 to 9, followed by Dr Syed Abid Rasheed Shah, Secretary, Health and Medical Education Department, and Mohammad Aijaz, Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, from January 12 to 16.

Similarly, Vikramjit Singh, Commissioner Secretary, Industries and Commerce Department, and Zubair Ahmad, Commissioner Secretary, Floriculture, Parks and Gardens Department, will be available from January 19 to 23, while Yasha Mudgal, Commissioner Secretary, Youth Services and Sports Department, and Dr Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, Secretary, Science and Technology Department, will remain stationed from January 26 to 30.

Chargesheet against businessman

been filed against the accused in the Court of Special Judge, Anti-Corruption, Jammu for judicial determination.

CAG flags major lapses

Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana' (DDUGJY) in December 2014 to provide continuous and reliable electricity supply to rural areas through feeder separation, strengthening of distribution infrastructure, and rural electrification initiatives

DDUGJY guidelines stipulated that in a project, the work was to be completed within 24 months from the date of issue of Letter of Award in case of turnkey contract and within 30 months in case of partial turnkey contract/departmental execution.

The Monitoring Committee overseeing the implementation of DDUGJY, in its 23rd meeting held on December 21, 2021, instructed state distribution companies (DISCOMs) to take up only those works that could be completed by December 31, 2021.

It was also conveyed that works executed beyond December 31, 2021 shall not be funded under the scheme.



7 ways to keep your kid Stress-free During exams

Your child is appearing for boards, but you're the one popping a stress vessel? 7 ways to keep it together for your kid. Cuffe Parade resident Poonam Chawla vividly remembers the March of 2013. Her son Rohan was appearing for his 12th standard examination. Rohan aspired to study abroad and much of his hopes were pinned on the exams and the impending results. He dreamt of nothing less than a 90 per cent. Poonam found herself completely engulfed with the idea and took on the mantle to fulfil his desire. It wasn't just the examination that caused her anxiety -the thought of her son's dream of studying abroad crumbling, should his percent not be up to the mark, made her go off the deep end. Poonam found her solace in Buddhist chanting. Each time she felt her anxiety levels soaring, she would gather with her friends and chant. "I realised I was passing on my anxiety to my son, which would frustrate him," she recalls. "So

much so, each time he would find me getting anxious, he would tell me, 'mama, please go chant'". While examination patterns have evolved, experts claim, parents -when confronted, literally, with testing situations like the pressing board exams -haven't. Nearly a fortnight ahead of the HSC board exam (the first among the many important examinations that will follow), our panel of experts suggest seven ways you can avoid being the nagging monster and be a support system, instead.

Just stay calm

Displaying your nervousness to the child is quite common with parents. But it doesn't help. In a case like this, either the child turns into a complete rebel and deliberately does not study, or gets so nervous because of their parents' mounting pressure, that he/she will simply not be able to perform. Clinical psychologist, Salma Prabhu shares, "Children often get exasperated, if parents continuously

tell them what to do and how to do it. This not only disturbs them, but also leaves a feeling of anxiety and insecurity regarding the upcoming exams. They may lose their confidence." Your best bet? Keep calm and let your child carry on. If you're unable to, seek counselling.

Leave your old-school ideas behind

"When I was preparing for my boards more than a decade ago, everyone was concerned about marks," says Azmin Mistry, an English teacher with a south Mumbai school. "But we now realise that these marks don't matter. If we are kinder towards exams, exams will be kinder to us." Enjoy the process. Tell your child to study to expand his/her knowledge. If you only focus on the grades, it puts undue pressure on them. "Besides, those who do well in school may not necessarily do well in life, and the reverse is also true. So, don't base your child's self-worth based on these exams," says former president of the

Bombay Psychiatrist Society, Dr Kersi Chavda. "One is 15 or 16 when appearing for these exams, and parents must understand they have a whole life ahead of them. Doing poorly in an exam is not a sign that they are a failure in life."

Be a support system

You don't have to put your life on hold for your child's exams. Continue with your job and social activities through the year. It's only around the time of the examinations that you may choose to be home to make things comfortable and easy for them. Be around to keep the house calm and peaceful, keep the fragrance pleasant and speak of only positive outcomes. Ensure that they are sleeping well, eating adequately and exercising daily, as these three factors help alleviate stress levels. Don't simply nag them to study. Learning is about absorbing, and that can only happen if the child is sufficiently relaxed and rested. Trying to memorise and learn new concepts till the end may result in memory loss or tiredness during the time of actual performance. "And know that exams are a bit about luck," points out Dr Chavda. "If your child has studied diligently and is still unable to perform for some reason, spare the rod."

Know the child's capacity

Many parents feel anxious when their children don't seem to juggle their time well or are a tad tired towards the end of the examination. "This is bound to happen in some cases as children



have been running to different classes and have been solving umpteen number of papers and have been practising a lot," says Prabhu. Parents need not panic and immediately start talking of the worst case scenarios and how this will lead to low scores. "Know that your child has a limit and will only be able to perform to the best of his/her ability. Accept their limitations. As a thumb rule don't compare, not even if their sibling is a class topper." Besides, suggests Prabhu, "avoid talking to too many people on your WhatsApp groups about what to serve your children, where to seek last minute help, ask how much children must sleep. Trust the children and observe what is best for them as every child is different." Ranjana Guha, a retired junior college professor, explains, "One must instil the idea of self-study, rather than depend on tuitions." Sometimes, coaching classes add pressure and make hogwash promises. This leads to building unreasonable expectations in the parents' minds.

No talking shop

Focus on the here and now. This is not the time to discuss what stream or career path they shall be taking, or, worse still, speak about a profession you would like them to take up. "In such situations, talking about it leads to low self-esteem and feeling of letting their parents down," says Prabhu. "So do not pressurise your children. If they don't do well, they shall have to opt for Commerce and Arts and not Science isn't helpful at this time."

Be sure, conversations during this time are pleasant and different, rather than the board exam results and its consequences.

Steer clear of outside pressure

For your child's sake, and yours, avoid those friends, neighbours and relatives who give unsolicited advice and keep asking your kid what they want to be in life. This will create expectations in your mind and your child will only be bogged down by it. This is not the time to let others also come and create a cloud of anxiety and tension. "Playing Mozart and santoor stimulates the right nerves of the brain leading to good concentration and memory," advises Prabhu. "This will not only calm you as a parent but also help the children perform well." Dr Chavda adds, if it's the school which is the defaulter putting pressure, go up to the principal or teacher and have a frank chat. "Just because heshe maybe topping his class doesn't mean that heshe will become board ranker," he says.

Don't compare

As parents your level of confidence in your children is what boosts their self-esteem and self-confidence. Do not compare them or give examples of relatives and friends who have scored well and have got great admissions, or alternatively who have scored low and have had to settle for mediocre institutes or pay donations. "Parents feel by comparing children to others, they are creating a competitive spirit. However, no one likes to be compared," says Prabhu. "Instead of feeling competitive, many children just give up thinking, my parents are never satisfied and nothing can make them happy, so why bother." Keep reassuring them that you trust them and you love them no matter what they score.

How to survive a family trip

Getting ready for a trip with your family? Managing kids on the go and also ensuring you stick to your itinerary at the same time is a humongous task.

Here are some ways to help you avoid meltdowns, so that you can take in the sights and sounds without feeling overwhelmed.

Packing hacks

Getting your suitcase ready is not just about throwing in clothes and essentials according to the duration of your trip. Keep in mind the following to save your sanity. - Fold the clothes in pairs and put them in a pouch. Once you've worn them, stash them away in the same bag. - Choose apparels that are wrinkle-resistant. This way, you'll save time trying to iron the creases out. - Layer clothes with a laundry bag or sheets. Place rolled clothes at the bottom of the suitcase and folded ones next. You will find that removing what you need from the bag is easier this way. - Stuff socks in your shoes. You can also use your footwear to store neatly folded chargers and cables. Alternatively, you can use socks to store perfumes and other breakable items. - Use pill bottles and lense cases to group your jewellery and earrings. - Place a plastic sheet between the bottles of your make-up lotions and foundations and its lids to avoid spilling the content all over your



the window. You can also keep them occupied by narrating anecdotes about your family.

- Keep a stock of snacks (the more colourful, the better); it not only keeps hunger pangs at bay, but also doubles up as a toy with which kids can play 'organising games'. - If the young ones are

other belongings and ruining them.

- Buy travel-sized utilities, like toothpaste, body wash and shampoos, which can be thrown into dustbins later.

On-the move hacks

From screaming toddlers to elders who want to take a loo break, you need to know how to handle them all.

- When on the move, dress your kids in layers. If they spill on themselves, you can simply remove the dress that's on the top instead of hunting for a whole new set in your bag. This also comes in handy when you don't know how the temperature outside will be as you can adjust the layers accordingly.

- When you check in at the counter, make sure seat arrangements are in tandem and the meals are according to your taste.

- Cover the seats with towels. In case your little ones decide to play holi in the car, you will only have to wash the towels and not spend your energy scrubbing the seat covers clean.

- Have board games and books handy. If you want to entertain your children, play simple games like I Spy or narrate a story based on things you spot outside

getting impatient and want to know exactly how long will it be before they reach the destination, ask them to figure it out themselves with a map! Keep tablets and adult munchies in a separate bag so that they're easily accessible when elders ask for them.

- If you are flying, give chewing gums or lolipops to the children and elders during take off and landing.

- If you have to make a pit-stop, research beforehand to find out if there are interesting locations like an adventure park or places of historical importance enroute. This way, you can check out newer places and also relax for a while.

- Have a well-stocked first aid kit. You never know when you might need it!

Hotel room hacks

If you thought you've survived the trip the minute you plunk on those comfortable beds in your hotel room, sorry to burst the bubble you're just halfway into the battle.

- The golden rule is to book in advance.

- However, keep your agent or the

management informed that you are open to upgrading your tickets. Many airlines and hospitality services offer business class facilities at nominal hikes just before the date of travel. So, don't miss out on the luxury.

- If you have a baby who's just few months hold, then use the hotel room's sink to bathe him/her. Don't risk using the bathroom if you are not sure you can handle it.

- Tape unused sockets and sharp corners with duct tape to child-proof the room.

- If your child is restless and unwilling to go to sleep, build a makeshift fort or tent using pillows and blankets.

- If your stomach grumbles at odd hours, then make instant noodles or eggs in the kettle. You can also use shower caps to cover leftovers and have them later.

Family members insisting on wearing ironed shirt, but can't find an iron in the room? Simply use a hair dryer.

- Invest in wi-fi base stations or download hotspot apps. If internet is not available free of charge, use these gadgets so that entire family can utilise the net by paying just for one connection.

- If you have an early wake up call, then put your phone in a glass; the alarm will sound much sharper.

- You can use a USB cable to charge your phone by just connecting it to the TV's port.

- If you are leaving behind expensive items in your room, then keep the 'do not disturb' sign on. This will ward away people with mischievous intentions.

- In most hotels, power is connected to the room cards. So, if you want to charge your phone or camera while you are enjoying a relaxed breakfast, place a membership card or old bank cards in lieu of your room card in this slot.

Encourage your child to pick the Right foods

Ask any parent how difficult it is to get their child to finish their meals sans the tantrums, and you will probably get an exasperated look. Children are notorious for their fussy eating habits. And if they have a sweet tooth, it gets even more difficult to veer them towards eating something healthy. The good news, however, is that it isn't difficult to get your child to actually relish healthy items — you simply need to know how to make food more interesting and fun. Here are some simple yet effective tips...

- Don't be sceptical to try new recipes. There are several ways in which you can make food tasty without worrying about it being unhealthy. Make a dip if your kids balk at the sight of vegetables.

- Introduce new dishes slowly so that your child get can used to the taste. Don't overwhelm them by piling their plate with health food all at once.

- Encourage your child to participate in the kitchen. Let them help you while you prepare meals so that they are aware about how much effort and time goes into cooking. Ask them to suggest foods that they enjoy eating and prepare them in different ways every time so that they can enjoy the variety.

- Lead by example. This means that if you're asking your child to resist junk food, you should do the same. Children look up to adults and if they see that you're being careless about your eating habits, they'll end up doing the same.

- Don't cut out all junk food completely. This will lead to cravings and tantrums. Instead, allow them to eat out once a week. This will balance out the equation without them feeling deprived.

- Make a schedule for the week so that you don't struggle when it comes to cooking. Once the menu is planned beforehand, you have time to be innovative and plan in advance.

Healthy food alternatives

Instead of frying, bake those fries in some coconut oil.

If plain dahi is boring, add some fresh fruits to it.

Paneer bread rolls, oatmeal pancakes and puffed rice upma are tasty and healthy snacks.

Add a dash of salad dressing to a boring vegetable salad to amp up the flavour.

Encourage your child to eat a handful of nuts and fruits in-between meals.



PM to inaugurate national memorial in Lucknow to honour life, ideals of Vajpayee



NEW DELHI, DEC 24

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Thursday inaugurate a landmark national memorial and complex in Lucknow that will host statues of BJP ideologues Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, and former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

December 25 is the 101st birth anniversary of Vajpayee.

The prime minister said his government is committed to honouring and preserving the legacy of the nation's great luminaries.

Modi said he was fortunate to be inaugurating the Rashtriya Prerana Sthal in Lucknow on the occasion

of the 101st birth anniversary of the Bharat Ratna awardee.

"Along with Vajpayee ji, it (complex) features grand bronze statues of Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya. In addition, a state-of-the-art museum has been developed, where visitors will have the opportunity to learn about the invaluable contributions of these visionary leaders to nation-building," he wrote on X in Hindi.

Modi will also address a public gathering on the occasion.

According to an official statement, the Rashtriya Prerna Sthal will serve as a tribute to the life, ideals, and enduring legacy of one of "India's most revered statesmen," whose leadership left a profound impact on the nation's democratic, political, and developmental journey.

The Rashtra Prerna Sthal has been developed as a landmark national memorial and "inspirational com-

plex of enduring national significance", it said.

Constructed at an approximate cost of Rs 230 crore and spread across 65 acres, the complex is envisioned as a permanent national asset dedicated to fostering leadership values, national service, cultural consciousness, and public inspiration, it said.

The complex features 65-foot-high bronze statues of Mookerjee, Upadhyaya, and Vajpayee, symbolising their seminal contributions to India's political thought, nation-building, and public life, the statement said.

It also houses a state-of-the-art museum designed in a lotus-shaped structure, spread over 98,000 square feet.

The statement said the inauguration of the Rashtriya Prerna Sthal marks an important step in preserving and promoting the ideals of selfless leadership and good governance, and is expected to serve as a source of inspiration for present and future generations.

Union Cabinet clears 3 new Metro stretches in Delhi, including Central Vista Corridor

NEW DELHI, DEC 24

In a major boost to Delhi's infrastructure, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved three new Metro corridors, including a 9.91-km stretch from the RK Ashram Marg to Indraprastha, which will connect all Kartavya Bhavans, India Gate, Bharat Mandapam, the National War Memorial and other important installations in Lutyens' Delhi.

According to the government, the new Central Vista corridor will provide connectivity to all the Kartavya Bhavans, offering doorstep connectivity to office-goers and visitors to this area.

With this connectivity, around 60,000 office-goers and two lakh visitors will benefit on a daily basis. These corridors will further reduce pollution and the usage of fossil fuels, enhancing ease of living, an official statement said.

The stations part of this section include RK Ashram Marg, Shivaji Stadium, Central Secretariat, Kar-

tavya Bhawan, India Gate, War Memorial-High Court, Baroda House, Bharat Mandapam and Indraprastha.

The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also approved two other corridors -- Aerocity to Airport T1 (2.263 km) and Tughlakabad to Kalindi Kunj (3.9 km).

All three corridors are part of Delhi Metro's Phase-V(A) project, consisting of 16.076 km, which will further enhance connectivity within the national capital.

The total project cost of Phase-V(A) is Rs 12,014.91 crore, which will be sourced from the Centre, the Delhi government and international funding agencies, the statement said.

"Delhi's infrastructure gets a major boost! Cabinet's approval for three new corridors as part of Delhi Metro's Phase-V(A) Project will expand our capital's metro network, thus boosting 'Ease of Living' and reducing congestion," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X.

Addressing a press conference, Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the proposed expansion will add 16 more km of Metro line with 13 stations -- 10 underground and three elevated.

The RK Ashram Marg-Indraprastha stretch will be an extension of the Botanical Garden-RK Ashram Marg corridor. It will provide Metro connectivity to the Central Vista area, which is currently under redevelopment.

The Aerocity-IGD Airport Terminal 1 and the Tughlakabad-Kalindi Kunj sections will be extensions of the Aerocity-Tughlakabad corridor and will boost connectivity of the airport with the southern parts of the national capital in areas such as Tughlakabad, Saket and Kalindi Kunj.

After completion, the RK Ashram Marg-Indraprastha corridor will improve connectivity between west, north, Old Delhi and central Delhi, while the other two corridors -- Aerocity-IGD Airport T-1 (2.263 km) and



Tughlakabad-Kalindi Kunj (3.9 km) -- will connect south Delhi with the domestic airport Terminal-1 via Saket and Chhatrapur, which will significantly boost connectivity within the national capital.

"These Metro extensions will expand the reach of the Delhi Metro network in central Delhi and the domestic airport, thereby further boosting the economy. These extensions of the Magenta Line and Golden Line will reduce congestion on roads and help reduce pollution caused by motor vehicles," the government said in the statement.

The stations on the Tughlakabad-Kalindi Kunj section will be Sarita Vihar

Depot, Madanpur Khadar and Kalindi Kunj, while the Aerocity station will be connected further with the IGD T-1 station.

"Construction of Phase-IV, consisting of 111 km and 83 stations, is underway and, as of today, about 80.43 per cent of civil construction of Phase-IV (three priority) corridors has been completed. The Phase-IV (three priority) corridors are likely to be completed in stages by December 2026," the statement said.

The Delhi Metro caters to an average of 65 lakh passenger journeys per day, the government said, adding that the maximum passenger journeys recorded so far is 81.87 lakh on August 8 this year.

Govt has given free hand to monopolies, shackled small businesses: Rahul Gandhi

NEW DELHI, DEC 24

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday alleged that the government has given a free hand to monopolies and shackled the small and medium businesses with chains of bureaucracy and flawed policies like wrong GST.

In a post on X, Gandhi shared his conversation with representatives of the Vaish community who are primarily engaged in business and have traditionally been job and wealth creators in the country.

The representatives of the Vaishya community held an extensive business dialogue with the Leader of Opposition, and placed before him the serious challenges currently facing trade and business in India.

"Our business is on the brink of collapse" -- this anguished cry from the Vaishya community in the business dialogue has truly shaken us to the core. The very community that has historically contributed so

much to the nation's economy is now in despair today -- this is a warning bell of danger," Gandhi said in a post on X.

"The government has given free rein to monopolies, and shackled small and medium traders with the chains of bureaucracy and flawed policies like wrong GST. This is not just a policy failure -- it is a direct assault on production, employment, and India's future.

"This is a fight against the feudal mindset of the BJP government. And in this battle, I stand with full strength alongside the Vaishya community, the backbone of the country's trade," Gandhi said.

The business persons who met Gandhi came from a wide range of industries, including footwear manufacturing, agricultural products, industrial electricals, paper and stationery, travel, stone cutting, chemicals and hardware.

Expressing deep concern over the economic policies of the Modi government, the representatives alleged that the policies constitute

a direct attack on small traders, MSMEs and India's production-based economy. They asserted that this is not a policy failure but a deliberately designed conspiracy aimed at benefiting a handful of corporate houses while pushing crores of businesses to the brink of ruin. Rahul Gandhi has warned that a monopoly and duopoly-driven governance model will hollow out India's economy, they said.

During the dialogue, representatives alleged that the GST regime has become an instrument of oppression rather than reform. They said the recent changes to the tax policy were simply a marketing tactic by the BJP govt. GST's impractical and irrational slabs have been deliberately structured to ensure that MSMEs cannot survive.

Rahul Gandhi had earlier dubbed GST as "Gabbar Singh Tax".

A major concern raised by these businesses was the inverted duty structure, which they described as an

"eyewash". By increasing GST on raw materials while reducing it on finished products, the government creates an illusion of consumer relief, they said.

The representatives further alleged that "Atmanirbhar Bharat" has proven to be nothing more than a political slogan. In reality, the Modi government has made India more dependent on China than ever before, they said.

They reiterated Rahul Gandhi's repeated assertion that three or four billionaires cannot generate employment for the country; jobs will come only through production and MSMEs.

The representatives said they had earlier not taken Rahul Gandhi's warnings with the seriousness they deserved, but now that every warning has come true, all illusions have shattered. They pledged to stand openly with Rahul Gandhi's struggle and vision for a democratic India rooted in production, employment and economic justice.

Amit Shah to attend Madhya Pradesh govt summit on Thursday, inaugurate projects

GWALIOR, DEC 24

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah will attend a Madhya Pradesh government's summit in Gwalior on December 25, marking the birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

At the 'Abhyudaya Madhya Pradesh Growth Summit', land will be allotted for investment proposals with a collective value of Rs 2 lakh crore, an official said on Wednesday.

Shah will perform a ground-breaking ceremony and inaugurate industrial projects totalling Rs 10,000 crore.

He might visit Vajpayee's ancestral home at Shinde Ki Chawani in Gwalior, the official said.

From Gwalior, Shah will travel to Rewa to attend a conference on organic farming.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and Union Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia will also attend the summit.

Yadav said this summit will present Madhya Pradesh's development model with a new and comprehensive perspective.

"This event is not limited to investment proposals and industrial announcements, but rather it brings to the fore a holistic approach, in which industry, urban development, tourism, MSMEs, start-ups, and employment are seen moving forward together."

"The summit is emerging as a coordinated development platform, not just a simple event in the state's development journey," according to a statement.

After landing at Gwalior airport, Scindia said the late Vajpayee was a visionary leader who led India on the path of development.

He said the foundation for various changes visible in the country and Madhya Pradesh was laid by Vajpayee.

"Based on those ideas, Madhya Pradesh is moving forward on the path of progress. Tomorrow's event will be a true tribute to Atalji, in which a pledge will be made



to carry forward his ideas and vision," Scindia added.

The Union minister said development projects of over Rs 2 lakh crore have already taken shape in Madhya Pradesh.

"This is a new Madhya Pradesh, creating new opportunities for growth and progress for farmers, youth, and common citizens. Today, Madhya Pradesh is establishing a strong identity among the leading states, and this is a true reflection of Atalji's vision," he added.

Gwalior Collector Ruchika Chauhan said Shah might visit Vajpayee's ancestral home at Shinde

Ki Chawani, where he had spent his childhood days. Currently, a library and a computer education centre operate from the house, which was dedicated to education.

Gwalior Range IG Arvind Saxena said extensive security arrangements have been made at the Mela Ground and other locations in view of the summit and Shah's visit, with deployment of approximately 4,000 security personnel and officers.

"Security has been tightened at Gwalior airport and at every place the Union Home Minister may visit."

Railways to extend AI-based system on 981-km track in Northeast to protect wild animals

NEW DELHI, DEC 24

Days after eight elephants were killed in Assam after a herd crossing the tracks was hit by a Rajdhani Express, the Railway ministry has announced that an AI-based system in place to detect presence of wild animals around rail lines will be extended to a further 981-km track in the northeastern region.

The ministry has announced the award of a tender to install the AI-enabled Intrusion Detection System (IDS).

The IDS, which gives early alerts to loco pilots in case elephants come on the railway track, has already been implemented at 141-route km section on pilot basis on the Northeast Frontier Railway.

These are Madarihat-Nagrakata under Alipurduar division, Habaipur-Lamsakhang-Patharkhola-Lumding under Lumding division, Rangiya division's Kamakhya-Azara-Mirza section and Titabar-Mariani-Nakachari

under Tinsukia.

The incident took place early morning on December 20 when the Sairang-New Delhi Rajdhani Express hit the herd in Changjurai village in Assam's Hojai district. Five coaches and the train's engine also derailed.

"Indian Railways has already deployed Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled Intrusion Detection System (IDS) using Distributed Acoustic System (DAS) for detecting presence of elephants on railway tracks. With the new tender, the total coverage will extend to 1,122 route km," the ministry said.

Elaborating on the functioning of the IDS, the ministry said the system generates real-time alerts for loco pilots, station masters and control rooms about the movement of elephants in proximity of railway tracks, enabling timely preventive action.

Besides ISD, the ministry said that AI-based cameras will be installed to alert loco pilots 0.5 km in advance to save

lions, tigers and other wild animals along with elephants.

"Indian Railways has been taking continuous efforts to prevent wildlife casualties, particularly elephants, on railway tracks through technology-based solutions," it said.

"The deployment and expansion of the AI-enabled Intrusion Detection System using Distributed Acoustic System (DAS) reflects Indian Railways' commitment to wildlife conservation and safe train operations," it added.

On October 20, the Northeast Frontier Railway zone said that IDS would be rolled out in its network by April, 2026 to prevent the death of elephants by speeding trains.

The NFR had first installed IDS at two locations of the Lumding and Alipurduar divisions in 2022.

"The target date for completion of this expanded project has been set for April 2026, by which the system is expected to be fully functional across all identified elephant corridors," the NFR had said.

LUCKNOW, DEC 24

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said no one would be spared if they illegally encroach upon monuments, mythological sites or government land, asserting that bulldozers will act even if the offender is influential.

Addressing the state Assembly during a discussion on the supplementary budget, the chief minister said creating a secure environment for every citizen is the foremost priority of his government.

"Whoever encroaches upon any monument or mythological site, I will not spare them. If any mafia illegally occupies government land and turns it into a den of extortion or immoral activities, bulldozers will roll and no one can stop it," he said.

Adityanath said the change in the perception of Uttar Pradesh has been a result of improved law and order.

"A secure environment is essential for everyone. It is because of security that the outlook towards Uttar Pradesh has changed," he said.

"A criminal knows about the consequences (of his criminal acts) now. Anyone who deliberately provokes the system knows that this is no longer the Uttar Pradesh where criminals used to chase police personnel. This government guarantees safety to citizens, but it also warns criminals -- 'reform yourselves or the road to Yamraj is open'. He (criminal) can get a call from Yamraj anytime," the

chief minister said.

Adityanath asserted that clear policies and a strong political will are necessary for economic growth.

"Whether it is an individual, the society or an institution -- the first requirement is security. There must be the rule of law and a sense of safety for everyone. Every daughter and every trader should feel secure -- this should be the first priority of any government," he said.

Expressing satisfaction over the secure environment provided by his government, Adityanath said the people of Uttar Pradesh have responded through their electoral mandates.

"What we have done and what we have not done -- the people of Uttar Pradesh are giving the results and they will continue to do so. What matters is the perception within and outside the state -- before 2017 and after 2017," he said.

Adityanath claimed that Uttar Pradesh did not enjoy a good reputation before 2017 but now, people across the country acknowledge the improvement.

"Today, wherever people go, they hear that there is a strong security environment in Uttar Pradesh. There are no riots, no anarchy," he said.

Referring to the issue of justice, the chief minister targeted the previous SP regime in the state, alleging that it failed to deliver justice to one of its own party members.

"Your MLA Pooja Pal did not get justice because you lacked the courage. Bowing before the mafia was your compulsion. You could not

deliver justice to a poor daughter in front of goons," he said.

The chief minister said justice under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government would not depend on political affiliation.

"Whether a daughter belongs to this side or that side, she will get justice in all circumstances," he asserted.

Adityanath said he has also promised to give security to SP MLA Vijma Yadav.

"This is not about a single member, not about supporters of the ruling party or the opposition. Every daughter, every trader and every citizen of the country must get a secure environment. This is the priority of this government," he added.

Adityanath said in order to break the backbone of the education mafia, his government has appointed retired DGP Prashant Kumar as the head of the Uttar Pradesh Education Service Selection Commission (UPESSC).

He alleged that the SP was responsible for Uttar Pradesh getting the "BIMARU" tag but asserted that there is no "policy paralysis" now and that is why the state is getting investments.

Uttar Pradesh has become a revenue-surplus state in the last five years and is a dream investment destination, Adityanath said.

Stating that his government is committed to ensuring people's welfare without discrimination, he asked whether there was any disparity in ration distribution.

"Did anyone stop food



from reaching the poor? No BJP MLA or ally distributes benefits by looking at faces. Gas connections, ration cards, Ayushman Bharat cards -- these are rights, not favours. Even from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, giving money by seeing faces is a sin for us. This government stands for the welfare and security of 25 crore people without discrimination," Adityanath said.

About corruption in projects launched during the SP's rule, he said the JPN International Centre (JPNIC) was a Rs 175-crore project, while an amount of Rs 860 crore was spent on it and it was still incomplete.

Similarly, the Gomti Riverfront was a Rs 167-crore project and an amount of Rs 1,400 crore was spent on it but it remained unfinished, he said.

On the Purvanchal Expressway, he said, "By god's grace, your government had already fallen. You had planned 340 km at Rs 15,200 crore only for civil work. We redesigned it -- "341-km long, 120-metre wide -- and completed it in Rs 11,800 crore."

"This was not governance. This was a joke on the nation and its people. Corruption thrived because intentions were never clean," the chief minister alleged.

Alleging the presence of a "pick-and-choose policy" in providing jobs during the SP regime, he said, "Youngsters were angry because they knew the lists were already prepared on the basis caste and connections."

On attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, Adityanath said, "In Bangladesh, a Dalit Hindu man was burned alive. You cry over incidents in Gaza, but your tongues fall silent here because the victim is a Hindu, a Dalit. You only see them as vote banks."

"This is not politics. This is the truth of appeasement -- the same appeasement that created Bangladesh," he said.

Adityanath asked SP leaders not to voice support for Rohingya Muslims and illegal infiltrators when his government takes action against them. "You (SP) made voter IDs and Aadhaar cards for them. Every case will be screened," he added.

Reforms by Modi govt eliminated inefficiency, corruption: V-P Radhakrishnan

NEW DELHI, DEC 24

Vice President C P Radhakrishnan on Wednesday said the reforms being pursued by the Modi government for the past decade are not merely policy initiatives but bold steps aimed at eliminating decades-old inefficiencies and corruption.

Addressing a book launch event here, Rad-

hakrishnan said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'minimum government, maximum governance' has evolved into a working model of efficiency and discipline.

According to an official statement, Radhakrishnan said the reforms were not merely policy initiatives but bold steps aimed at eliminating decades-old inefficiencies and corrup-

tion.

The present government has ensured that India moves from policy paralysis to purposeful governance, from a poverty mindset to a prosperity mission, and from dependence to self-reliance, Radhakrishnan said.

The book, 'Economic Empowerment of Bharat in the Modi Era', has been authored by Rajya Sabha MP Sikander Kumar.

UBI reduces interest rates on home, vehicle & personal loans



NL CORESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI: Union Bank of India has announced a reduction in interest rates on select retail loan products, effective 18 December 2025, compared to its earlier applicable rates. The bank is among the first in the sector to react to recent monetary easing, lowering interest rates across Home Loans, Vehicle Loans, and Personal Loans to enhance affordability for retail borrowers.

Under the revised rate structure, home loan interest rates have been reduced by 30 basis points, and will now start at 7.15% per annum, as against the earlier rate of 7.45% p.a. Vehicle loan interest rates have been cut by 40 basis points, and will now start at 7.50% p.a., compared to the previous benchmark rate of 7.90% p.a. Personal loan interest rates have seen a sharper reduction of 160 basis points, with rates now starting at 8.75% p.a., down from the earlier rate of 10.35% p.a.

In addition to the base rate reduction, Union Bank of India is offering an additional concession of 0.10% per annum on eligible Green Finance Home Loans and Vehicle Loans.

The revision comes against the backdrop of easing monetary conditions during the year. The Reserve Bank of India reduced the repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.25% on December 5, 2025, marking the fourth rate cut in 2025 and taking the cumulative reduction for the year to 125 basis points. The Union government had also eased GST norms for the automotive sector.

With this revision, Union Bank of India aims to support homebuyers, vehicle purchasers and personal loan customers by lowering borrowing costs while continuing to maintain prudent lending standards. The revised rates are applicable from 18 December 2025 and are subject to customer eligibility, credit profile and other applicable terms and conditions.

Motorola announces sale of its ultra-slim smartphone ‘edge 70’

JAMMU TAWI: Motorola, a global leader in mobile technology and India’s leading AI smartphone brand, today announced the sale of its thinnest and most uncompromised smartphone — the motorola edge 70 — at an effective price of just 28,999*. Designed to redefine what an ultra-slim smartphone can deliver, the motorola edge 70 combines an industry-leading 5.99 mm ultra-thin design with flagship pro-grade cameras, advanced AI intelligence, long-lasting battery life, and military-grade durability.



Powered by the powerful Snapdragon® 7 Gen 4 Mobile Platform, the motorola edge 70 introduces next-generation performance and intelligence with a dedicated AI key. The chipset delivers faster CPU and GPU performance along with a significant boost in on-device AI capabilities, enabling seamless multitasking, smooth gaming, and intelligent everyday experiences. Users can choose between moto ai 2.0, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, and Perplexity, unlocking true multi-platform AI freedom. The device is equipped with 8GB LPDDR5X RAM and 256GB UFS 3.1 storage, supported by an advanced vapor-chamber cooling system for sustained performance. Photography on the motorola edge 70 sets new benchmarks as India’s only ultra-thin smartphone with three 50MP AI cameras. The setup includes a 50MP OIS main camera with 2.0µm Ultra Pixel technology, a 50MP ultra-wide + macro camera, and a 50MP front camera, all supporting 4K 60FPS video recording. Backed by moto ai features such as AI Video Enhancement, AI Action Shot, AI Adaptive Stabilization, and AI Group Shot, along with Google Photos AI tools like Magic Eraser, Photo Unblur, and Magic Editor, the device delivers professional-grade imaging with Pantone™ validated colours and accurate skin tones.

From funding winter to liquidity surge, 2025 marks turning point for Indian startups

NL CORESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: After a prolonged funding slowdown, 2025 emerged as the year of liquidity for Indian startups, marked by a revival in public listings, improved deal quality and a decisive shift toward disciplined growth. If 2023 was defined by a “funding winter” and 2024 by cautious optimism, 2025 will be remembered for a historic rise in exits, particularly through the public markets.

While overall funding volumes declined, the average median deal size nearly doubled to about USD 1.4 million in 2025, from roughly USD 700,000 in 2024, signalling greater investor selectivity and maturity. India’s technology startups raised USD 10.5 billion in 2025, down 17 per cent from USD 12.7 billion in 2024 and 4 per cent from USD 11 billion in 2023, according to Tracxn. The number of USD 100 million-plus funding rounds fell to 14, compared with 19 in 2024, though large deals included Erisha E Mobility (USD 1 billion), Zepto (USD 450 million) and GreenLine (USD 275 million).

Despite lower funding, liquidity events surged, led by a rebound in startup IPOs. As many as 18 startups, including Lenskart, Groww, Meesho and PhysicsWallah, listed on Indian exchanges, collectively raising over Rs 41,000 crore (around USD 4.5 billion), compared with Rs 29,000 crore (around USD 3.2 billion) in 2024.

“2025, I would say, was the year of liquidity. It was a year of blockbuster IPOs. It was the year which saw the record number of VC and PE-backed companies



hitting the Dalal Street. That was a record year for that. For instance, if you look at a fund like Peak XV, Elevation, there were multiple IPOs that they had in the portfolio,” Tracxn Co-Founder Neha Singhsaid.

Some listings delivered strong gains, with Urban Company debuting at a 58.26 per cent premium and Meesho at 53 per cent, while others, including Lenskart and BlueStone, saw more muted market responses, underscoring stricter public-market discipline.

Retail, fintech, transportation, logistics and quick commerce emerged as the strongest-performing sectors in a year marked by global tariff disruptions and geopolitical tensions. Enterprise applications (USD 2.6 billion), retail (USD 2.4 billion) and fintech (USD 2.2 billion)

continued to anchor funding, while new unicorns included Netradyne, Porter and Drools. India now hosts the world’s third-largest startup ecosystem, projected to grow 12-15 per cent annually, according to industry estimates.

“India’s startup story is one of remarkable domestic growth. With around 200,000 DPIIT-recognised startups, 44,000 added this year alone, 11 new unicorns, and 18 public listings raising over Rs 41,000 crore, India is now the world’s third-largest startup ecosystem after the US and China,” Prashant Singhal, Markets and Telecommunications Leader at EY India, said.

While traditional powerhouses like Enterprise Applications (USD 2.6 billion), Retail (USD 2.4 billion), and Fintech (USD

2.2 billion) continued to anchor capital raises, 2025 saw the rise of strategic dark horses. Notable entries in the unicorn club included Netradyne (AI/Logistics), Porter (Logistics), and Drools (Pet Care).

Another defining trend of 2025 was the “reverse flip”, with startups relocating headquarters from the US and Singapore back to India ahead of domestic IPOs. Companies such as Razorpay, Meesho and Flipkart completed or initiated the move, while Zepto, Shiprocket and PhonePe remain in the pipeline.

Looking ahead, funding activity is expected to rebound in 2026, driven by capital recycling following exits, new fund launches and growing LP interest. Artificial intelligence and consumer-focused businesses, including D2C brands, are expected to remain key investment themes as the ecosystem enters its next phase of disciplined expansion.

Funding in 2026 is expected to be higher than in 2025. This is driven by a significant number of exits seen by funds in 2025, which will likely lead to reinvestment in the ecosystem, according to Singh.

There is an expectation of many new funds being launched as individuals leave large established firms to start their own. Limited Partners (LPs) are also reportedly “fairly excited” about investing in the Indian market.

Artificial Intelligence will remain a major theme for investment and development, while the broader consumer market, including D2C brands and services, is an overarching theme that investors remain excited about for 2026.

Samsonite makes India its biggest manufacturing base, domestic travel & weddings to fuel demand

AGENCIES

NASHIK: American luggage manufacturer Samsonite has made India its largest manufacturing base by tripling the capacity of its plant here to 7 lakh units per month with investment of Rs 250 crore, a top company official said.

Samsonite completed the expansion in two phases post Covid, after which its Nashik unit has surpassed its other global manufacturing hubs in Hungary and Belgium in production volume.

“We are one of the world’s biggest, for the Samsonite group, it’s one of the world’s biggest factories in terms of the number of pieces that we make here. And it’s only going to get bigger and bigger. The world looks to India. Our company also looks to India for a huge amount of growth in the coming years,” Jai Krishnan, CEO – India, Samsonite South Asia, told PTI in an interaction here.

Samsonite, anticipating greater demand after a travel boom started post Covid, is now looking for another location as part of its next phase of expansion within the next 12-18 months. It has started scouting for land in other parts of India as the land parcel at Nashik is fully utilised.

“Till 2019, we used to manufacture approximately on an average about 2,25,000 pieces a month, and that is when we felt that the time had come to focus more on production from India



and decided that we would invest and expand,” he said.

The company plans to decide on the expansion location within the next 12-18 months, weighing options in North, South, and East India.

However, when the project was being executed, Covid happened in 2020, and business stopped because people stopped travelling and production also stopped. “But one good thing we did that time was construction, which had just started; we did not stop because we were quite sure that business and the country would bounce back very quickly, which happened,” he said.

The company, which is operating with three brands in India – Samsonite, American Tourister and Kamiliant – expects with the supportive tailwinds as rise in economy, increase in disposable income, people are exploring the country, which is creating demand for luggage solutions.

Moreover, affluent people are now gravitating towards

branded products such as Samsonite, which always focused on quality, he added.

“So for all our brands, I see steady growth in India for the coming many years. I do not want to put an exact number to it, but I think at least for the coming many, many years,” he said. Currently the US is the lead market for Samsonite, followed by China and India which are at number two and three.

According to Krishnan, India is the third-largest luggage market globally, and the momentum is clearly in its favour. Growth is being driven by weddings, business travel, leisure tourism and increasing mobility among younger consumers from semi-urban and smaller towns.

“That is why the world leader has put its faith in India and not just said it in words but has shown it by putting in money and investments. So India will continue to be a very important part of the company,” he said.

Castrol India shares jump 9 pc on stake sale deal



AGENCIES

NEW DELHI: Shares of Castrol India jumped 9 per cent on the bourses on Wednesday after BP plc announced that it will sell a 65 per cent stake in the lubricants maker to Stonepeak for USD 10 billion.

On the BSE, the scrip of the company was trading 8.9 per cent higher at Rs 202.50 apiece in the afternoon session. Similarly, Castrol India’s shares jumped 8.86 per cent to Rs 202.40 per share on the NSE.

Global energy giant BP Plc on Wednesday said it has reached an agreement to sell a 65 per cent shareholding in Castrol to Stonepeak, at an

enterprise value of USD 10.1 billion. The transaction represents a milestone in BP’s commitment to accelerate its strategy, including simplifying the portfolio, strengthening the balance sheet, and focusing the downstream on its leading integrated businesses, the company said.

“A significant proportion of Castrol JV minority interests relate to the shareholding in the publicly listed Castrol India Ltd,” the company said in a statement.

After the completion of the stake sale, a new joint venture will be incorporated, comprising a 65 per cent Stonepeak and 35 per cent BP ownership.

Carol Howle, interim

CEO at BP, said: “Today’s announcement is a very good outcome for all stakeholders. We concluded a thorough strategic review of Castrol, which generated extensive interest and resulted in the sale of a majority interest to Stonepeak”.

She further stated that the transaction allows us to realise value for our shareholders, generating significant proceeds while continuing to benefit from Castrol’s strong growth momentum.

US-based Stonepeak is a leading alternative investment firm specialising in infrastructure and real assets with approximately USD 80 billion of assets under management.

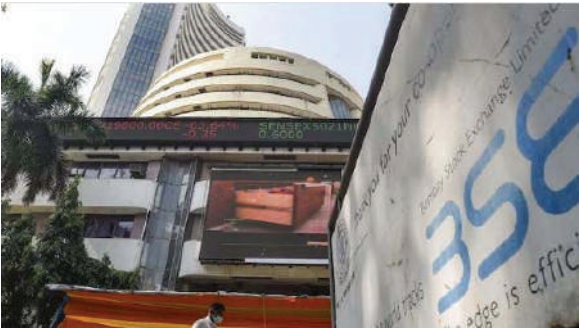
Stock markets end lower in volatile trade

AGENCIES

MUMBAI: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower in a volatile trade on Wednesday as trading volumes remained subdued amid the year-end holiday-shortened week and mixed trends in global markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped by 116.14 points, or 0.14 per cent, to settle at 85,408.70. During the day, it hit a high of 85,738.18 and a low of 85,342.19.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged lower by 35.05 points, or 0.13 per cent, to 26,142.10. From the 30-Sensex firms, InterGlobe Aviation, Sun Pharma, Asian Paints, Reliance Industries, Hindustan Unilever, and Tata Steel were among the biggest laggards.

However, Trent, Ultra-Tech Cement, Maruti, and Power Grid were among the gainers. In Asian markets, South Korea’s Kospi and Japan’s Nikkei 225 index ended lower while Shanghai’s SSE Composite index and Hong Kong’s Hang Seng



settled in positive territory. European markets were trading marginally higher. US markets ended higher. “Indian equities moved largely sideways in a holiday-shortened week, with trading volumes remaining subdued as the year draws to a close — a trend mirrored across broader Asian markets. The RBI’s recently announced liquidity initiatives, including OMOs and a USD/INR buy-sell swap, are expected to improve systemic liquidity and help stabilise currency volatility,” Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday said it will purchase government securities worth Rs 2 lakh crore and conduct a USD 10 billion buy/sell dollar-rupee swap auction to inject liquidity in the banking system.

The OMO (Open Market Operations) purchase and swap auctions will be conducted between December 29, 2025 and January 22, 2026.

Announcing the decision, the RBI said it will continue to monitor evolving liquidity and market conditions and take measures as appropriate to ensure orderly liquidity conditions.

Vikran Engineering bags Rs 2,000 cr solar projects order in Maharashtra

NEW DELHI: Vikran Engineering on Wednesday said it has bagged an order worth over Rs 2,000 crore to develop 600 MW solar projects across Maharashtra. The order secured from Onix Renewables will be executed over a period of 12 months on turnkey EPC basis. Vikran Engineering said in a statement. The work order covers end-to-end activities including design, engineering, procurement, supply, erection, testing, and commissioning of the solar projects totalling 600 MW AC (alternate current) across multiple locations in Maharashtra. The scope of work also includes the supply of key components such as solar PV modules and inverters.

The total value of the order is Rs 2,035.26 crore. Vikran Engineering Ltd is a diversified EPC player in the power transmission & distribution space.

Axis Energy, Reliance top bidders in coal gasification mine auctions

NEW DELHI: Hyderabad-based renewable energy firm Axis Energy and Reliance Industries Ltd emerged as top bidders in the latest auction of coal block auctions aimed at boosting domestic coal gasification and cleaner energy production.

According to bid participant details released following the opening of technical bids, Axis Energy Ventures India Pvt Ltd and Reliance Industries Ltd jointly bid for 17 blocks in Odisha, Chattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, underscoring their strong strategic interest in coal gasification and downstream value-added applications.

Other bidders included Penna Enterprises, which bid for one block in Odisha. NRSK Mines and Minerals Pvt Ltd and Caliber Mining and Logistics Ltd bid for two blocks each. Sai Surya Professional Services Pvt Ltd and Singareni Collieries Co Ltd-Telangana Power Generation Corp Ltd, MMPL Commercial Mines Pvt Ltd-Mohit Minerals Ltd were the other bidders.

The government had, in October, offered a total of 41 coal mines in the 14th round of commercial auctions, including provisions for underground coal gasification (UCG) for the first time.

Of the 41 mines, 21 were specifically identified as possessing potential for



UCG. The round was aimed at promoting coal gasification to produce cleaner fuels like syngas, hydrogen, and methanol, reducing India’s dependence on imported natural gas and crude oil. The government has set a target to gasify 100 million tonnes of coal by 2030.

UCG allows for the harnessing of deep-seated coal reserves that are uneconomical to extract through conventional mining methods.

A total of 49 bids were received for 24 of the 41 blocks. Axis Energy and Reliance Industries bid for UCG-potential blocks, reflecting private

sector confidence in the new policy framework.

The two companies were common participants in bids for coal blocks located in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh, including prominent blocks such as Badibahal-Kendudihi, Chhatabar Combined, Ustali, Recherla, and Chintalpudi Sector A1.

In several other blocks, Axis Energy and Reliance Industries were part of consortium bids alongside other mining and logistics firms, highlighting their intent to secure feedstock for large-scale gasification and industrial use.



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Asmita Khelo India Women League held in Samba



NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: The Asmita Khelo India Women League in Weightlifting held at Vinod Vidya Mandir Higher Secondary School, Nonath, Ghagwal in district Samba.

In total, 30 female lifters took part in this day-long event which held under the aegis of J&K Weightlifting Association.

The event was declared open by Shashi Sharma, chairman of host, Vinod Vidya Mandir School, in the presence of Yash Pal, Honorary Captain, and Rajinder Sharma, Principal of the

School.

Prominent among others present were Harbhajan Singh, president, J&K Weightlifting Association; Jangveer Singh, general secretary, Samba District Weightlifting Association; Captain Kulbir Singh, president, Samba District Weightlifting Association; Inderpal Singh, Weightlifting Coach; Dileep Singh Chib, Nirantar Sambyal, Amit, all technical officials; Ramesh Kumar, Coach; and Naman Singh, Coach. Later, the winners were felicitated by Suresh Kumar, DDC Member. In his closing remarks, Yudhvir Singh, general secretary of

the J&K Weightlifting Association encouraged female athletes to pursue sports with dedication and discipline.

The Results: 44 kg: Tamana Devi, 1st; Geetika Singh, 2nd and Sonakshi, 3rd. 48 kg: Samiksha Dubey, 1st; Lavanya Singh, 2nd and Sohani Rajput, 3rd. 53 kg: Niharika Chandel, 1st; Janvi Malhotra, 2nd and Akshita Bhagat, 3rd. 58 kg: Janvi Sharma, 1st; Ananya Bharti, 2nd. 63 kg: Shanaya Sharma, 1st; Deepika Kumari, 2nd. 69 kg: Ridhima Jasrotia (Youth), Anmol Jasrotia (Junior), 1st; Amolika Sambyal (Youth), 2nd. 77 kg: Gurpreet Kour, 1st. Plus 77 kg: Liza, 1st.

Qamran, Shubham guide J&K 10-wkt win over Chandigarh

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: Stunning batting performance from Qamran Iqbal and Shubham Khajuria and brilliant spell from Lone Nasir Muzaffar guided Jammu and Kashmir to an absolute 10-wicket win against Chandigarh in the Vijay Hazare One-Day Trophy at Sanosara Cricket Ground B, today.

As per the reports reaching here, chasing a target of 209, J&K openers Qamran

and Shubham scripted an unbroken 209-run partnership, romping home in just 42.5 overs. Shubham made 130 off 106 balls studded with 20 boundaries while Qamran impressed with 72 off 116, including seven boundaries.

Earlier, electing to bowl first, J&K's attack crumbled Chandigarh for 208 in 39.5 overs. Taranpreet Singh led the resistance with 43 while Tushar Joshi contributed 42 to remained main contributors to the total. Lone Nasir

Muzaffar spearheaded the bowling fireworks, claiming four wickets for 44 runs in nine overs. Aquib Nabi secured two for 26 in eight overs he bowled. Abid Mushtaq also bowled well to take two wickets. "The team deserves thunderous applause for this emphatic triumph. Nasir, Aquib, and Abid were lethal with the ball, while Shubham and Qamran wielded the willow like maestros," said Brig Anil Gupta while appreciating team for absolute win.

Athletics trials for Cross Country on Dec 29

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: Jammu and Kashmir Amateur Athletics Association shall hold selection trials to pick up probable for the 60th National Cross Country Athletics Championships to be held at Ranchi in Jharkhand.

The trials shall be held on December 29 at MA Stadium here. Those eligible athletes need to bring along Aadhaar card and Date of Birth cer-

tificate at 7 am, a handout issued by the Association here today informed.

Such athletes can contact Nirmal Singh (7889401211) and Gurcharan Singh (7006341648) in regard to the trials.

Categories: Open category (men and women) 10 kms; Under-20 (Boys and Girls) 8 kms and 6 kms; Under 16 (Boys and Girls) 6 kms and 4 kms and Under 16 (Boys and Girls) 4 kms.

District Poonch Taekwondo Champ begins

NL CORRESPONDENT

Poonch, Dec 24: The District Poonch Taekwondo Championships commenced today Indoor Hall, Sports Stadium, here. The event is organised by Taekwondo Association of District Poonch under the aegis of the J&K Taekwondo Association in support with J&K Sports Council (JKSC).

Around 200 players from the district are participating in this two-day event. The event aims to promote Taekwondo at the grass-roots level and provide a strong competitive platform for young athletes of the district.

The medal winners of the championship will earn the opportunity to represent District Poonch in the upcoming 28th J&K UT Taekwondo Championship.

The event was declared open by Dr. Ruby Naz Bhatti, Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Poonch, who was the chief guest, in the presence of District Youth Services and Sports Officer, Poonch.

Mushtaq Ahmed (Observer, JKSC), Nazakat Hussain Khan (Headmaster, Government Middle School, Nehrian), Perwaiz Malik Afridi, Manzoor Lone, Sajad Rather, Ram Prakash (Stadium Incharge), and Gurvinder Singh were among special guests, a handout issued informed.

The technical penal is headed by Ashaq Hussain (National Referee) and included Tabasum Nusrat, Khalida Jabeen, Akashit Sudan, Irfan Ahmed, Nadeem Viqar Ahmed, Gurbir Singh, Imran Khan, Pawandeep Singh, Sandeep Kumar, and Maywish Majid.

Vijay Merchant Trophy: Karman, Athrav put J&K in driver's seat

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: Karman Singh unfurled a masterful century, backed by sparkling fifties from Hadi Amin and Hammad Firdous, before Athrav Sharma's mesmerising leg-spin ripped through Sikkim to position Jammu and Kashmir for a fourth consecutive innings victory in the Under-16 Men's Vijay Merchant Trophy at CK Pithawala Ground today.

Opting to bat first, J&K racked up a commanding 405 for nine declared in 85 overs. Karman Singh anchored the innings with a superb 142 off 258 balls, laced with 17 boundaries, while Hadi Amin (54) and Hammad Firdous (50) provided vital support. Arslan Nayyar chipped in with a brisk 43 as J&K's young batters dominated.

Sikkim's Biswash snared



three wickets, with Ladip, Towel, and Sahil Rai picking up one wicket apiece.

In reply, Sikkim crumbled for a meagre 120 all out. Athrav Sharma was the architect of their downfall, claiming a sensational eight wickets for 24 runs in 19 overs while Sanil Singh took two.

Raunak (17), skipper

Yoowel (13) and Bishwash (11) were Sikkim's top scorers. Forced to follow on, Sikkim struggled at 30 for three in their second innings, trailing by 255 runs with seven wickets remaining. Chopal (5) and Ladip (0) were at the crease.

Earlier in Sikkim's first innings, Sanil Singh had

grabbed two wickets, with Hammad Firdous claiming one.

Meanwhile, Member Administration, J&K Cricket Association (JKCA), Brig Anil Gupta lauded the youngsters for showcasing their talent yet again saying, "Poised for another innings triumph, immensely proud."

Arun calls for united efforts to save J&K Football

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: Former India player, Arun Malhotra has asked all the stake holders to work untidily with a clear vision to bring the Football in Jammu and Kashmir back on track.

"The football has suffered a lot during the last over five years. Need of the hour is to work as a unit for the welfare of football, leaving aside personal differences," said Arun in a chat with SAN.

The way the football has been abandoned those young trainees have started losing interest and have been shifted to other disciplines to pursue their career in sports.

"The evolving trend is not in the interest of Football. The young lot of boys and girls have started losing interest in the game in view of unorganised football which leads to lack of opportunities and encouragement," explained Arun who despite being away to serve with ONGC, remains in touch.

Quite supportive in guiding the talented youngsters and extending a helping to those in need, Arun was quite disturbed with the happenings in football back home.

"I am deeply disturbed by the



recent controversy over the Santosh Trophy selection process. As someone, who shares a deep emotional connection with the game and has consistently worked to support and encourage the talent, any situation that leads to confusion or disappointment among players must be addressed with sensitivity and clarity, said Arun.

To avoid such team selection related disputes in J&K, there should be a unified and inclusive approach which can convert this challenge into an opportunity for

improvement.

"Establishing an independent selection committee, comprising experienced and elite footballers from both the divisions of Kashmir and Jammu will help prevent such issues in the future and restore players' confidence in the system, he suggested."

The football activities in J&K, especially in Jammu, have witnessed a prolonged period of stagnation. For a considerable time, there has been a noticeable lack of regular tournaments and organised league structures, which otherwise play an important role in the development and competitive exposure.

"Without a consistent competitive framework, the growth of football in the region remains constrained, calling for focused attention and timely intervention. A balanced approach with strategic planning is essential," mentioned Arun.

He further said, "Currently, the Jammu division has only two turf fields, Nagrota (Khel Gaon), which is too small for 11 a-side matches, and the overcrowded Parade (Mini Stadium) field. Even the GGM Science College ground, located in the heart of the city, is below standard and requires upgrading."

Surinder, Amrita win Christmas Cup Chess titles

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: Surinder Gupta bagged men's Under-20 title in the Christmas Cup Open Chess Tournament which was organised by the Vivek

Chess Academy at Mast Garh, here today.

The women's under-20 title went to Amrita Gupta, after she topped the points tally with four points secured by her out of five rounds. The under-15 boys event

won by Pazhany Kohli.

Earlier, young Pazhany gave a tough fight to his senior, Surinder in a drawn game. But due to buckle system in Chess, Surinder declared winner. Both got 4.5 points each.

The winners were presented with a cash prize worth Rs 3,000, certificates and title trophies by the VCA coach and former J&K champion, Vivek Bharti. The FIDE recommended Swiss software was used for pairing.



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