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

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Shah told the constables that they were joining the police force at a time when the Colonial-era laws had been replaced by the new criminal laws.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

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

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 Shafeef 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

15-day deadline for re-registration of outside vehicles in Jammu

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: The Regional Transport Officer, Jammu, has issued a public notice directing owners of motor vehicles bearing registration numbers of other States or Union Territories and plying in the Jammu Division beyond the permitted period to apply for re-registration immediately.

The notice states that

keeping such vehicles in Jammu for more than 12 months without re-registration violates Section 47 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, and poses risks to regulation, vehicle traceability and public safety.

As such, the vehicle owners have been given 15 days from the date of issuance of the notice to obtain a new registration.

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 (HMVs). 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 (DDUJY) 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, City South, Jammu.

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 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

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Jan roster of Admin 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

UT Govt ensuring world class healthcare facilities for all: LG Kavinder

NL CORRESPONDENT

KARGIL, DEC 24 The Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, Kavinder Gupta, on Tuesday dedicated a state-of-the-art 3 Tesla MRI facility worth ₹25.9 crore at District Hospital Kargil, asserting that the UT administration is committed to ensuring world-class healthcare for all, even in remote and border areas.

Inaugurating the advanced diagnostic facility, the LG said geographical remoteness and harsh climatic conditions are no longer barriers to quality medical services in Ladakh. He described the project as a major milestone in strengthening public healthcare infrastructure and a reflection of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of equitable healthcare delivery.

The LG said the new MRI facility will enable faster and accurate diagnosis of complex diseases, sparing



patients from traveling to Srinagar, Jammu or Delhi for advanced investigations, thereby reducing financial burden and stress.

Highlighting ongoing healthcare initiatives, he said Ladakh allocates nearly 8.76 per cent of its total budget to the health sector, higher than the national average. He informed that

proposals to expand District Hospital Kargil's bed capacity to 200 beds are under consideration, while construction of a new 300-bed hospital block costing ₹61 crore is underway. Projects including CHC Zanskar, staff quarters and a TB hospital are also progressing.

CEC LAHDC Kargil Dr. Jaffer Akhoo termed the

facility a major boost for local healthcare, while Chief Secretary Dr. Pawan Kotwal said the MRI installation marks a significant step towards timely and accurate diagnosis in the region.

The LG urged optimal use of the facility to benefit all sections, especially the poor and residents of far-flung areas.

Farewell accorded to outgoing Ladakh Chief Secy

NL CORRESPONDENT

KARGIL, DEC 24 Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, Kavinder Gupta, attended a farewell ceremony to honour outgoing Chief Secretary Dr. Pawan Kotwal, on his superannuation. The event was jointly organized by LAHDC Kargil, District Administration, and District Police Kargil.

Dr. Kotwal joined the Ladakh Administration on April 12, 2021, as Principal Secretary and later served as Advisor to the LG from June 2023. On February 12, 2025, he became the first Chief Secretary of the UT of Ladakh. During his tenure, he oversaw critical departments including Health, Planning, Revenue, and Environment, spearheading landmark initiatives and the historic creation of five new districts in 2024.

Addressing the gathering,



LG Kavinder Gupta lauded Dr. Kotwal's visionary leadership, administrative acumen, and people-centric approach, noting his role in driving inclusive development across Ladakh. Dr. Mohd Jaffer Akhoo, CEC LAHDC Kargil, and MP Mohamad Hanifa Jan also praised his impartiality,

structural reforms, and foundational contributions to the UT's governance.

In his farewell address, Dr. Kotwal expressed gratitude to the administration and citizens, highlighting achievements such as land records digitisation, domicile law implementation, and 95% youth reservation

policy. He described the love and respect of Ladakhi society as a cherished memory.

The ceremony was attended by Executive Councillors, senior officials, religious and social leaders, and Dr. Kotwal's family, marking a solemn tribute to his transformative tenure in Ladakh's administration.

VC SKUAST-J reviews progress of civil works

NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24 The Vice Chancellor of SKUAST-Jammu, Prof. B. N. Tripathi, chaired a review meeting to assess the progress of ongoing civil works being executed under various funding streams, including CAPEX, NABARD, HADP, Centrally Sponsored Schemes and ICAR-funded projects.

Emphasising timely completion without compromising quality, the Vice Chancellor directed that all projects be completed at the earliest and instructed the Estate Officer to expedite execution while ensuring optimal utilisation of allocated funds. Special focus

was laid on achieving major physical targets under the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), with directions to maintain close coordination with executing agencies for smooth implementation.

During the meeting, both physical and financial progress of the projects was

reviewed. Dr Sanjay Khar, Director Planning and Monitoring, presented an overview of fund releases and expenditure during the current financial year, while Er Kewal Raina, Estates Officer, briefed the meeting on the physical progress of civil works across the university. The meeting was attended

by Dr S. K. Gupta, Director Research; Dr Anil Kumar Registrar-cum-Dean, Faculty of Agriculture; Dr Sudhakar Dwivedi, Dean Students' Welfare; Dr M. S. Bhatwal, Dean, Faculty of Veterinary Sciences; Dr Bharti Sambhav, Comptroller; Dr Vikas Tandon, Chairman CPC; and officials of the Estates Office.

Power shutdown

NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24 Superintending Engineer (Distribution) JPDCL O&M Circle Kathua has informed that the power supply to Industry-1 and adjoining areas will remain affected on December 25 and 28 from 8 am to 1 pm.

Similarly, the power supply to Kaluchak, Birpur Complex old, BB Town and adjoining areas will remain affected on December 27 and 30 from 8 am to 12 noon.

Meanwhile, Executive Engineer, Electric Division-1, JPDCL, Parade, Jammu has informed that the power supply to Super Market area will remain affected on December 24, 26, 28, 30, 2025 & January 02 and 04, 2026 from 10 pm to 4 am.

Similarly, the power supply to Parade area will remain affected on December 24 to 30 daily on as and when required basis.

GPC Jammu organizes training on Artificial Intelligence



NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24 Government Polytechnic College Jammu, in collaboration with ICT Academy Tamil Nadu and IBM under the Advanced IT Skills Training Phase III, on Tuesday launched a training programme on Artificial Intelligence.

The programme was inaugurated under the guidance of Principal Er Talat Mehmood. Head of the Department of Computer Engineering, Er Sanjay Koul, delivered the welcome address, highlighting the importance of emerging technologies for technical students. The session was coordinated by Er Heena Gupta, faculty, Computer Engineering.

The training programme is being conducted by Mr Adarsh Kumar, a Python and DBMS Developer, AI Engineer and Technical Trainer, who has over three years of experience in Artificial Intelligence training. He will impart hands-on knowledge and practical skills to the participants.

Representatives from ICT Academy, including Mr Lovetesh Kumar and Mr Ajaz Yousuf, were also present on the occasion.

The initiative aims to equip students with industry-relevant skills in Artificial Intelligence and enhance their employability in the evolving technology-driven job market.

Rana assures time bound redress of public grievances



NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24 Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology, Environment & Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, today met several delegations and individuals at the Civil Secretariat, Jammu, to listen to their concerns and grievances.

MLAs Bashir Ahmad Veeri and Payare Lal Sharma also met the Minister and raised certain developmental issues related to their respective constituencies.

During the interactions, the Minister gave a patient hearing to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including representatives of the PHE Daily Wagers Union, con-

tractors associated with the Irrigation & Flood Control (I&FC) Department, employees of the Social Forestry Department and members of the general public.

The representatives of the PHE Daily Wagers Union raised issues pertaining to regularization of services, release of pending wages and other service-related concerns. Contractors of the I&FC Department brought to the fore issues related to timely payments, tendering procedures, and smooth execution of development works.

Employees of the Social Forestry Department apprised the Minister of challenges faced in the field.

They stressed the need for

strengthening the forestry and conservation activities.

Several delegations and individuals also highlighted grievances related to drinking water supply, flood control and mitigation measures, protection and conservation of forest resources and other sector-specific issues.

Assuring all delegations of prompt and fair action, Rana stated that every issue raised would be examined and addressed in a time-bound manner.

He directed the concerned departmental officers to take immediate note of the grievances and initiate necessary steps to ensure their early redressal.

Emphasizing transparency and accountability in governance, Rana stated that the administration is committed towards creating a responsive and people-centric system, where legitimate demands of both the work force and the general public are addressed efficiently and within stipulated timelines.

Congress' 'Mohabbat' politics whitewashes lynching of Hindus: Bhagat

NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24 BJP senior leader and former Health Minister Bali Bhagat today launched a fierce attack on the Congress party, saying its repeated attempts to justify or dilute violence against Hindus—this time in Bangladesh—expose its dangerous and anti-national mindset.

Reacting sharply to Congress leader Digvijaya Singh's remarks, Bhagat said calling the lynching of Hindus in Bangladesh a "reaction" is not just insensitive but outright shameful. "This is not a slip of the tongue. This is the Congress party's ideological DNA—where Hindus are treated as expendable in pursuit of minority vote-bank politics," he asserted.

Bhagat said when homes of Hindus are burnt, temples vandalised and people lynched in Bangladesh, Congress leaders rush to invent excuses instead of condemning radical mobs.

Taking a swipe at the party's past record, Bhagat reminded that Congress



had earlier questioned India's Surgical Strikes, demoralised the armed forces, and now appears to be echoing narratives that weaken India's moral position globally.

He further said that by refusing to unequivocally condemn persecution of Hindus in neighbouring countries, Congress is sending a dangerous message to extremist forces.

Calling upon the Congress leadership to introspect, Bhagat said the nation wants to know whether the party represents India's people or acts as an intellectual shield for radical elements abroad.

JMC intensifies cleanliness drive through 'Wall of Shame' initiative

NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24 Under its flagship "Wall of Shame" initiative, Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) continued its sustained and focused efforts to promote civic awareness and bring about behavioural change among citizens by discouraging public littering and open urination, which adversely impact public health, sanitation and the overall image of the city.

As part of the ongoing campaign, the JMC on Wednesday organized a comprehensive cleanliness and awareness drive at Panjbakhtar road, a location earlier identified as a spot prone to garbage dumping and open urination.

Commissioner Jammu Municipal Corporation, Dr.

Devansh Yadav interacted with locals and shopkeepers and emphasized the importance of civic sense, cleanliness and shared responsibility in maintaining public spaces. He appealed to the public to refrain from unhygienic practices and extend full cooperation to JMC in its mission to keep the city neat, clean and dignified. He underscored that sustained awareness coupled with strict enforcement is essential to achieve long-term cleanliness objectives.

Detailed discussions were held with locals to sensitize them about the harmful effects of littering and open urination on public health, environmental hygiene and the aesthetic appeal of the city. Citizens were encouraged to act as "cleanliness



ambassadors" and motivate others in their neighbourhoods to adopt proper waste disposal practices.

To bring about a visible and psychological transformation of the site, murals and awareness slogans were painted on the walls. The creative visuals aim to deter defacement of public spaces while fostering cleanliness, civic pride and respect for reli-

NORTHERN RAILWAY

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3985/2025

No. 251-Elect/T.Notice No. 22-Elect/2025-26 Dated :- 24.12.2025

Serving Customers with a Smile

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.

Dr. Naveen Goyal, Programme Director, presented a comprehensive summary highlighting key sessions, learning outcomes and takeaways from the three-day engagement. Participants praised the depth of discussions, clarity of concepts and the faculty's commitment to effective learning, while also valuing opportunities for peer learning and exchange of perspectives.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Parvathy B., Programme Director, who acknowledged NHPC, participants, faculty members and the organizing team for their support.

Coordinated by the EE&C vertical of IIM Jammu, the programme reaffirmed the institute's commitment to delivering high-quality executive education and capacity-building initiatives for public sector organizations through meaningful collaboration.

Sadhu Samiti raises security issues with DIG Jammu



NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24 A delegation of the Sadhu Dharm Sthan Surakshani 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.

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. Amrit Singh 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 long-standing 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 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 at a ceremony held at Sher-e-Kashmir Bhawan, 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.

Rekha inaugurates DA Lifestyle Christmas Carnival



NL CORRESPONDENT

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 Jewelers, 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.

Dir Info condoles demise of Subash Mehra

NL CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU TAWI, DEC 24 Director, Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Nitish Rajora, has expressed profound grief and sorrow over the demise of Sh. Subash Mehra, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Jammu Jottings Newspaper.

Mehra breathed his last today at ASCOMS Hospital after a prolonged illness.

Conveying deep sympathies with the bereaved family, the Director prayed for eternal peace to the departed soul besides courage to the family members to bear this irreparable loss.

The Director described Subash Mehra as a noble soul and a great human being who always projected the interests of the common masses with the dint of his journalistic aptitude and determination. He said the loss of late Mehra has created a void in the world of journalism and his contribution to the society would always be remembered by the media fraternity. He also expressed solidarity with the Managing Editor, Mohit Mehra, son of the deceased.

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



NL CORRESPONDENT

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.

Sannak Shrivats, 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 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 logon 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	
208-2025-26	Manual Deep screening 30.157 km on BEAS-TTO section, SrDEN-III-FZR	9.140 km on VKA-DBNK section and 10.518 km on BAT-QDI section, (G Total- 49.815 km) in the section of Katra Minority Cell.	
1.	Advertised Value (Rs.)	Earnest Money	Validity of Offer
5,91,90,755.11	4,46,000.00	60 Days	12 Months
Similar nature of work:- CTR/TRTR/TFTR/TR 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: 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-reviewed

N L CORESPONDENT

SRINAGAR: To assess the progress achieved in installation of Solar Roof-top under 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 vendors 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 implementation 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 district so far under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana.

DDK, Akashvani Sgr conduct Mission Karmayogi Training

N L CORESPONDENT

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. F. Meena, DDG/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 CORESPONDENT

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 82/21 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, altering,

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).

'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.

Srinagar Smart City website remains offline for over three months

REHAN QAYOON 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.

Dr Shagufta 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 finalize all cultural items.

Arrangements for R-Day celebrations reviewed

N L CORESPONDENT

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

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, bar-ricading, 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.

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.

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, Batamaloo and Qamarwari areas, with officers deployed at multiple locations.

He said special measures have been put in place to regulate Sumo vehicles near Jahanmir Chowk, which were creating a chaos. Passengers coming from Budgam have been advised to deboard near Shergari Police Station, while designated stands have been arranged for vehicles. Similar arrangements for mini-buses 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).

NORTHERN RAILWAY						
E-TENDER NOTICE						
Sr.DEE/G/JAT acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders (www.reps.gov.in) against below titled Tenders. Bidders will be able to submit their original / revised bids up to closing date and time only.						
Tender No.	Name of Work	App. Cost (in ₹)	Earnest Money (in ₹)	Completion period	Opening of tender	Website Particulars
251-J-Elect-T-20-2025-26	Electrical Work in c/w Improvement of Lighting Arrangements in Ventilated Tunnels T-25, T-23, T-07, Station Yards, Circulating Areas, Colonies, etc., over BJPL-SVDK SECTION	Rs. 1,81,43,065.03	2,40,700.00	06 Months	15.01.2026 after 15:00 Hrs	www.reps.gov.in

3989/2025

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

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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 1,661 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 under-delivered, 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.

The VB-G RAM G Act 2025 fixes structural gaps

Reading Ambedkar Isn't Optional. It's Survival

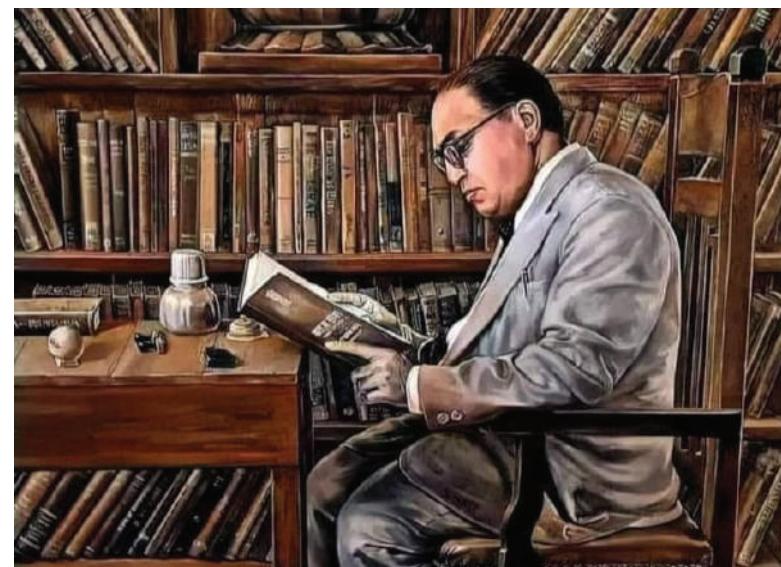
BY SHAILEEN MAHAJAN

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 history. 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 reservations 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-



RAYEES AHMAD KUMAR

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 often celebrated in appearance, not essence. Statues are cleaned, photo-graphs 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 re-quires 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.

Welcoming Chilla-e-Kalan, the harshest winter phase

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 Sadnath 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 foot snow and the Bandipora Gurez road was soon declared officially as closed.

Srinagar Ladakh road, Mughal road, Anantnag Kishhtwar 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 Say 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 woollen 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 Ram Lila 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: 9449652999)

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 income 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, infrastructure 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 his 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 Dhauladhar, 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

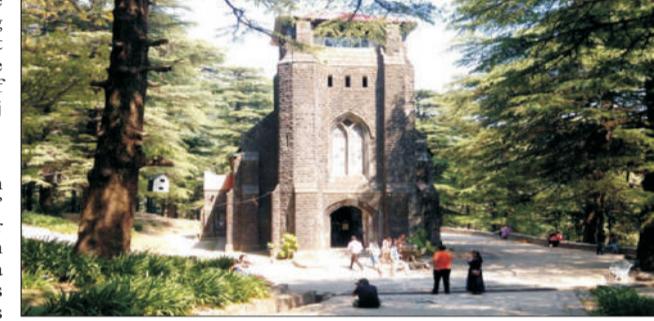
hidden deep in dense cedar forest, often taking visitors by its surprisingly serene location. This charming place is lined with terrace fields and will bowl you over with the calm spread here. Only to be broken by the gushing sounds of some waterfall nearby. A lot of trekking trails in the pine forest, 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 "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 enrollment. 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, Manju Nath R, Wairokpan 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 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-Sinhan-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, 2458396, 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 Ajiaz, 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/departamental execution.

The Monitoring Committee overseeing the implementation of DDUJY, 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 he/she maybe topping his class doesn't mean that he/she 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.

Encourage your child to pick the Right foods

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 lens 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



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

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

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 lol lipops 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 plonk on those comfortable beds in your hotel room, sorry to burst the bubble you're just half way 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 old, 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.



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 gets 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 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 Rashtriya 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.

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

NEW DELHI, DEC 24

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.

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-

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.

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.

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UBI reduces interest rates on home, vehicle & personal loans



NL CORRESPONDENT

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 innovation 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 Panorama™ validated colours and accurate skin tones.

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

NL CORRESPONDENT

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 Singh said.

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 Singh, 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)

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 in 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



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.

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 utilized.

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

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.

She further stated that the transaction allows us to realize 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 specializing 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, UltraTech 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

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.

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, Chhattisgarh 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 Calibee 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.

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-Kenduhi, Chhatabar Combined, Ustil, 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.

Axis Energy, Reliance top bidders in coal gasification mine auctions



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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 Sohanai Rajput, 3rd. 52 kg: Niharika Chandel, 1st; Janvi Malhotra, 2nd and Akshita Bhagat, 3rd. 56 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.

Arun calls for united efforts to save J&K Football

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: Former India player, Arun Mahotra 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



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

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: Stun-ning batting performance from Qamran Iqbal and Shubham Khajuria and brilliant spell from Lone Nasir Muzafar guided Jammu and Kash-mir 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 reach-ing in here, chasing a target of 209, J&K openers Qamran

and Shubham scripted an unbroken 209-run partner-ship, 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 crumpled Chandigarh for 208 in 39.5 overs. Tarunpreet Singh led the resistance with 43 while Tushar Joshi contributed 42 to remained main contribu-tors to the total. Lone Nasir

Muzaffar spearheaded the bowing 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 deserved thunderous appla-ause for this emphatic triumph.

Nasir, Aquib, and Abid were lethal with the ball, while Shubham and Qamran wielded the willow like ma-eistros," 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 Ath-letics Championships to be held at Ranchi in Jharkhand.

The trials shall be held on December 29 at MA Stadium here. Those eligible athletes to remain main contributors to the total. Lone Nasir

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.

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

NL CORRESPONDENT

Jammu Tawi, Dec 24: The District Poonch Taekwondo Championships com-menced 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 plat-form 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), Pervez 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 Ashfaq 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.



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

In reply, Sikkim crum-bled for a meagre 120 all out. Athrav Sharma was the architect of their downfall, 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 Admini-stration, J&K Cricket Association (JKCA), Brig Anil Gupta lauded the youngsters for showcasing their talent yet again saying, "Poised for another in-nings triumph, immensely proud."

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