

Good Morning Kashmir

17th Year Of Publication



Narendra Modi @narendramodi
Spoke with His Majesty King Abdullah II, the King of Jordan. Conveyed our deep concern at the evolving situation in the region. We reaffirm our support for peace, security and the well-being of the people of Jordan. I thanked him for taking care of the Indian community in Jordan in this difficult hour.

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Middle East Tensions MHA Writes To States, UTs Urging Caution



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NEW DELHI: In view of the escalating conflict in the Middle East, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Monday wrote to all states and Union Territories, advising them to exercise caution and remain alert to any law and order issues arising from demonstrations.

In its communication, the MHA has asked state governments and UT administrations to closely monitor any protests organised either in support of or against Iran, and to ensure that such gatherings do not disrupt public order.

The Ministry has emphasised that adequate preventive measures should be put in place and intelligence inputs closely tracked to pre-empt any untoward incidents.

The advisory is based on concerns that certain elements may attempt to exploit the situation to incite unrest. It cautions that protests could potentially be used as a cover for deliberate attempts to disturb communal harmony or destabilise the law and order situation. States have

been urged to act swiftly and decisively in case of any signs of escalation.

The alert comes against the backdrop of a sharp flare-up in the Middle East following joint military strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran, which have heightened regional tensions.

Amid rising concerns, authorities in the Kashmir Valley imposed restrictions on Monday as a precautionary measure to maintain peace and stability. All educational institutions, including schools, colleges and universities, have been ordered to remain closed for two days.

Officials said the preventive steps were taken to ensure that miscreants and anti-national elements do not exploit public sentiment in the wake of the reported killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The restrictions aim to prevent any potential escalation and safeguard communal harmony.

Protests have been reported from the Valley, with demonstrators expressing grief and anger over developments in Iran. A separate

For 7th Consecutive Year Winter Remains Dry, Pushes J&K To Brink

UT May Face Water Crisis In Coming Months, Say Experts

SAJID RAINA

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir has recorded its seventh consecutive winter rainfall deficit, with the December 2025-February 2026 period ending 65 per cent below normal.

According to the data accessed, the region received 100.6 mm of precipitation during the core winter months against a normal of 284.9 mm, marking one of the driest seasons in recent years.

Data revealed that December 2025 recorded only 13.0 mm rainfall against a normal of 59.4 mm, a deficit of 78 per cent. January 2026 fared relatively better with 73.4 mm precipitation against a normal of 95.1 mm, reducing the deficit to 23 per cent due to some western disturbance activity.

However, February saw a sharp collapse, recording just 14.2 mm against a normal of 130.4 mm — an 89 per cent shortfall — pulling down the seasonal average significantly.

The 2025-26 winter now ranks among the most deficient in the past seven years. Since 2019-20, every winter season in Jammu and Kashmir has ended below normal.

The deficits recorded over



the past winters include minus 20 per cent (2019-20), minus 37 per cent (2020-21), minus 8 per cent (2021-22), minus 34 per cent (2022-23), minus 54 per cent (2023-24), minus 45 per cent (2024-25), and minus 65 per cent (2025-26).

In contrast, earlier years such as 2016-17 and 2018-19 had recorded surplus winters.

District-wise data indicated widespread deficiency across both Kashmir and Jammu divisions. In Kashmir, Srinagar recorded 84.2 mm rainfall

DECEMBER TO February precipitation ends 65 percent below normal after February records nearly 90 percent rainfall deficit across districts

against a normal of 236.5 mm, a 64 per cent deficit.

Shopian saw one of the steepest shortfalls at 82 per cent below normal, while Kulgam recorded an 80 per cent deficit. Kupwara, Budgam and

Anantnag also reported deficits exceeding 60 per cent.

In the Jammu division, Kishtwar recorded a 90 per cent deficit, while Kathua and Jammu districts were 66 per cent and 64 per cent below normal respectively. Ramban and Udhampur also reported significant shortfalls.

Experts said winter precipitation is critical for the Union Territory as snowfall in higher reaches feeds rivers and streams, recharges groundwater and supports

Assures Support LG Visits Family Of Deceased SSF Personnel



GMK NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha Monday visited the family of Special Security Force (SSF) Personnel, SGCT Sunny Salgotra, who had lost his life in an unfortunate road accident.

The Lieutenant Governor paid homage to the departed soul.

He expressed his heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved family and assured all assistance and support from the government.

Restrictions To Remain In Force Across Kashmir Today

REHAN QAYOUM

SRINAGAR: The authorities have decided to continue precautionary restrictions across all districts of Kashmir on Tuesday to maintain peace and prevent any untoward incidents, officials said.

A senior security official said, the decision has been taken in view of the prevailing situation and to ensure that law and order is maintained across the Valley.

J&K To Scan MSMEs For Early Risk Detection, Timely Intervention

GMK NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo Monday observed that establishing a robust and responsive mechanism under the MSME Health Clinic to provide "the right advice at the right time" to local enterprises would be one of the most significant developmental interventions ever undertaken for the MSME sector in Jammu & Kashmir.

He made these remarks while chairing a comprehensive review meeting on the performance of the MSME Health Clinic, an initiative of the Industries & Commerce Department in collaboration with IIM Jammu under the RAMP scheme.

The meeting was attended by Director, IIM Jammu; Commissioner Secretary, Industries & Commerce;

Director Industries, Jammu/Kashmir; faculty members from IIM Jammu; representatives from BISAG-N; and other senior officers.

Emphasizing the way forward, the Chief Secretary called for reaching out to all MSMEs across the UT to digitally assess their operational and financial health through a comprehensive analytical tool to be developed with BISAG-N.

He outlined a structured approach whereby enterprises would first undergo preliminary digital screening, followed by advanced assessment of identified units. Stressed or sick units would initially be provided tele-consultation, followed by personal interaction with experts and, wherever necessary, customized on-ground interventions through field visits by subject specialists.

He directed the



Around 1,100 Kashmiri Students Stranded In Iran, Families Urge Govt Intervention

IAN S

SRINAGAR: Panic and uncertainty have gripped several families in Jammu and Kashmir as around 1,100 Kashmiri students remained stranded in Iran amid escalating tensions in the Middle East.

With parts of Tehran and other areas reportedly declared "red zones" and communication remaining patchy, anxious parents have urged the Centre to immediately step in for the safe evacuation or relocation of students from high-risk zones.

A family member of the stranded students told IANS that the situation has left parents deeply worried.

"I had two children there. I evacuated my daughter four to five days ago, before the war started. I had planned to arrange a ticket for my son as well, but he said the university was not allow-



FILE PHOTO

ing students to leave, as they had their exams going on. Most of the airspace is blocked. We understand the Government of India must be trying very hard. Our country is very much capable of carrying out evacuation operations, but it takes time. But we as parents are worried and helpless," he said.

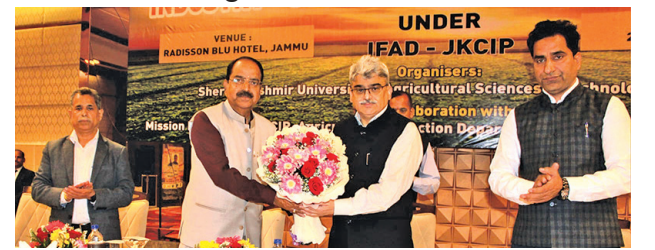
Another Kashmir Valley resident said her youngest sister is currently in Iran and described the atmosphere as tense and

uncertain.

"Recently, we learned that her area, and all of Tehran, have been declared a red zone. An advisory had been issued, but they were unable to return as they had their exams going on. We spoke to her last night; she said some missiles are being intercepted, but some are also hitting buildings. There is a lot of uncertainty and fear," she said.

"Our children are there, and at this moment, parents

CS Inaugurates SKUAST-J Industry Startup Outreach Programme Under JKICP



GMK NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU: Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu Monday organized a landmark Industry-Startup Outreach Programme under the Competitiveness Improvement of Agriculture and Allied Sectors Project (JKICP) here.

Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, inaugurated the event. The programme, attended by the senior government officials, industry leaders, startups, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), academicians and students, was aimed at to strengthen the industry-

academia-startup linkages in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

The event was attended by Vice Chancellor, SKUAST-Jammu, Professor B.N. Tripathi, Mission Director, JKICP/HADP, Sandeep Kumar (IFS), statutory officers of the university, representatives of different institutions including IIM Jammu, IIT Jammu, IIM Jammu, industry experts, UTLCB, J&K Bank, District Industries Centre (DIC) Jammu, startups and FPOs.

The Chief Secretary highlighted the need for FPOs to move beyond aggregation towards enterprise-oriented models centered on

PM Dials Saudi Crown Prince, Bahrain King; Condemns Attacks

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday engaged in separate telephone conversations with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud and Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, as the conflict in the Middle East continues to intensify following recent escalations.

During these discussions, the Prime Minister strongly condemned the recent attacks on both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. He also enquired about the safety and well-being of the large Indian community residing in these countries, reflecting India's priority to safeguard its diaspora amid the regional turmoil.

These calls build on PM Modi's ongoing diplomatic outreach since the conflict erupted involving the United States, Israel, and Iran. On Sunday, he held a telephone conversation



with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, where he reiterated India's call for an early cessation of all hostilities in the region to restore peace.

In a parallel engagement that day, PM Modi spoke with United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. He condemned Iranian attacks on Gulf countries and urged immediate de-escalation, while expressing appreciation to the UAE leader for ensuring the safety and well-being of the

Indian community there.

These high-level engagements underscore India's consistent diplomatic push for stability in West Asia and protection of its citizens abroad, even as the situation remains volatile.

The diplomatic efforts follow a critical review by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Sunday at his official residence.

The CCS was briefed on the

air strikes in Iran on February 28 and the subsequent escalation, including retaliatory attacks in several Gulf countries. The Committee expressed serious concern over the safety and security of the large Indian expatriate community in the region.

It also assessed the difficulties faced by Indian travellers transiting the area, students appearing for scheduled examinations, and the broader implications for regional security, as well as economic and commercial activities.

The CCS directed all concerned departments to take necessary and feasible measures to assist affected Indian nationals. It emphasised the importance of an early cessation of hostilities and a return to dialogue and diplomacy as the path forward.

PM Modi returned to Delhi shortly before the CCS meeting, following a two-day visit to Puducherry and

KU Postpones All Exams Scheduled For Today



GMK NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR: The authorities at Kashmir University on Monday said that all examinations scheduled for tomorrow (March 03, 2026) have been postponed due to prevailing situation.

The fresh dates for the deferred examinations will be notified separately, they said.

A notification issued by Office of the Controller of Examinations, University of Kashmir reads: "It is hereby notified that all the University examinations scheduled to be held tomorrow, i.e., 3rd March 2026, stand postponed".

"The fresh dates for the conduct of the said examinations shall be notified separately," the notification reads.

MoE Mulls AI In Curriculum, J&K Lacks Basic Facilities

RIYAZ BHAT

SRINAGAR: With the Ministry of Education (MoE) mulling to introduce Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the school curriculum, Jammu and Kashmir on the contrary is lacking the basic facilities of computers in over 60 per cent of schools—raising a question on future of students of the region.

According to the official documents available, "In J&K only 39 per cent of school going students have access to computers."

The figures further reveal that the access to internet connectivity was available to only 49 per cent of school students across Jammu and Kashmir. The document however stated that digital infrastructure remains a focus area for the govern-

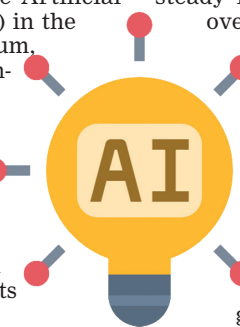
ment.

Stating the access and infrastructure indicators, the official figures show steady improvement with over 98 per cent students having access to schooling at all levels.

The official figures further reveal that Jammu and Kashmir has 90.84 per cent of toilet facilities for the girls, 88.49 per cent for boys.

It also said 75.10 per cent of students have access to libraries and electricity was available in 91.44 per cent of schools.

Pertinently, the MoE has said that the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is developing the framework for AI integration for all students from Class 3 onwards from the academic year 2026-27.



DC G'bal reviews progress under District CAPEX Budget 2025-26

GMK NEWS NETWORK

GANDERBAL: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ganderbal, Jatin Kishore Monday chaired a meeting to review the progress of works being executed under the District CAPEX Budget 2025-26 in the district.

During the meeting, the DC reviewed the progress of key sectors including I&FC, Jal Shakti, PW (R&B), KPDC, Health, Education, etc. emphasizing the urgent need to complete all ongoing projects as the financial year draws to a close.

The DC took a detailed review of both physical and financial achievements under the approved works and stressed the need for timely completion of all projects within the stipulated timeframe.

Threadbare discussions were also held with the concerned officers regarding the status of ongoing works being implemented under different pro-



grammes including Area Development Plan (DDC Grants, BDC Grants, and PRI Grants) besides Aspirational Block Development Programme and Aspirational Panchayat Development Programme.

Officers were directed to expedite progress on all ongoing projects, ensure proper utilisation of funds and maintain quality standards.

The DC emphasised close monitoring of works and called for improved

coordination among departments to avoid delays.

Later, the DC reviewed the progress on identification of suitable land and construction of assets including DEWATS, Segregation Sheds and Soakage Pits under the Rural Development Department (RDD) across the district.

The DC directed concerned BDOs to expedite construction of developmental works on the already identified suitable

land in different blocks.

He stressed the need for timely compliance and concerted efforts by all stakeholders to strengthen rural infrastructure across the district.

Chief Planning Officer, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Assistant Commissioner Panchayat, Chief Medical Officer, Chief Education Officer, Executive Engineers of KPDC, I&FC, PW (R&B), Jal Shakti, besides other officers and officials attended the meeting.

DC Kulgam visits Yaripora, reviews functioning of Govt Offices

GMK NEWS NETWORK

KULGAM: Deputy Commissioner Kulgam, Shahzad Alam Monday visited Yaripora area to review the functioning of key government offices and assess healthcare services in the area.

During his inspection of the Tehsil Office, the DC examined mutation registers and Jamabandi records.

He reviewed the delivery of revenue services through Revenue Plus and the issuance of certificates under Jan-Sugam.

Emphasizing efficiency and accountability, he



directed officials to ensure timely disposal of pending cases and seamless public service delivery.

Later, the DC visited Sub-District Hospital

(SDH) Yaripora, where he evaluated the range and quality of medical services being provided to the public.

He stressed the impor-

ance of maintaining proper sanitation standards and instructed that the public washroom constructed by the Municipal Committee be made operational without delay.

While inspecting the hospital premises, he noted vacant spaces and an unutilized residential building and directed the Block Medical Officer (BMO) to prepare a comprehensive proposal for the optimal utilization of available infrastructure to enhance healthcare facilities.

Assistant Commissioner Revenue and the Chief Medical Officer accompanied the DC during the visit.

PMAY- Urban 2.0 DC reviews progress across 3 Municipal towns in Udhampur



GMK NEWS NETWORK

UDHAMPUR: Deputy Commissioner Udhampur, Minga Sherpa Monday chaired a meeting of officers from the Urban Local Bodies to review the progress of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Urban scheme in the district.

The meeting was attended by Additional District Development Commissioner Jugal Kishore; Chief Planning Officer Uttam Singh; Assistant Commissioner Revenue Dr. Umesh Shan and other concerned officers.

The DC conducted a detailed review of the scheme's implementation across one Municipal Council and two Municipal Committees in the district. The review covered the status of PMAY-U 2.0, District Capex Budget works for 2025-26, progress of mega projects undertaken by the Municipal Council, construction of multi-storey parking facilities,

installation and maintenance of street lights, garbage collection and disposal mechanisms, night illumination in all three towns, identification of garbage dumping points, non-commenced works under PMAY-U and construction of the Town Hall building.

The DC directed the Tehsildars to clear all pending revenue papers of PMAY-U beneficiaries within a week. He further instructed initiation of recovery proceedings against beneficiaries who have failed to commence construction despite availing benefits and called for expediting the overall pace of progress.

Emphasizing effective sanitation and urban infrastructure management, the DC directed the MCs to identify garbage dumping points, ensure timely collection and proper disposal of waste in all three towns and maintain adequate night illumination.

Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Station coming up in Baderwah



GMK NEWS NETWORK

BHADERWAH: Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Sunil Kumar Bhutyal Monday laid the foundation stone for the construction of an Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Station at the premises of Divisional Forest Office Baderwah.

The station is being established by the Divisional Office of the Jammu & Kashmir Pollution Control Committee under the National Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (NAAQMP).

The monitoring station will analyze the concentration levels of key air pollutants including PM10, PM2.5, Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) to assess the ambient

air quality in Baderwah and its surrounding areas.

Divisional Officer JKPC, Gurpreet Singh informed that the monitoring station shall help generate accurate scientific data regarding air pollution levels. He stated that regular monitoring will enable the authorities to take timely and effective measures for environmental protection and pollution control.

The ADC appreciated the initiative of JKPC and emphasized the importance of maintaining clean air for public health and sustainable development.

Range Officer Sameer Ahmed Rishu and all the staff members of the Forest Department were also present during the foundation laying ceremony.

National Lok Adalat on March 14

DLSA Rajouri invites public to avail mediation process

GMK NEWS NETWORK

RAJOURI: District Legal Services Authority, Rajouri and all Tehsil Legal Services Committees of District Rajouri have invited the general public and litigants to avail National Lok Adalat scheduled on March 14, 2026 for dispute resolution through mediation.

"The interested Parties/Litigants, Lawyers and the general public are hereby called upon to physically approach the Office of the District Legal Services Authority Rajouri and all Tehsil Legal Services Committees of District Rajouri

for any advice/assistance with respect to their case or matter, or may call on the contact No. PLVS 9858424128, 9596626010, DLSA Contact No 01962-264200 during working days from 10 am to 4 pm. DLSA Rajouri would welcome your response. Parties can directly approach the concerned courts as well with an application for listing matters/cases in National Lok Adalat for amicable settlement. No matter with respect to pending Electricity Bills and Water Bills will be taken up in this National Lok Adalat," a handout issued today reads.

57 Samba Women attend Mushroom Cultivation Training at SKUAST-J



GMK NEWS NETWORK

SAMBA: A group of 57 women farmers and members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) engaged in mushroom cultivation attended a one-day training programme at the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST), Jammu.

The exposure visit was organized under the HADP project - "Promotion of Mushroom Cultivation" and the group was flagged off from the DC Office Complex by District Development Commissioner

Ayushi Sudan, in the presence of Chief Agriculture Officer, District Agriculture Officer and officers from DCTS Rakh Dahisar.

The women farmers were acquainted with the latest innovations, scientific techniques and technological interventions in the field of mushroom cultivation.

Earlier, the District Development Commissioner encouraged the participants to make optimum use of the exposure visit and adopt the advanced methods and best practices demonstrated during the training.

Women's Week campaign commences in Kathua with grand inauguration

GMK NEWS NETWORK

KATHUA: The District Administration Kathua Monday formally launched the Women's Week Campaign with a grand inaugural ceremony held at Government Degree College (GDC) Women, marking the beginning of a week-long series of activities dedicated to promote the empowerment of women in the district.

The Campaign centers on the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao theme, underscoring the collective resolve to protect, educate and empower the girl child.

The event was attended by Deputy Commissioner Rajesh Sharma as the Chief Guest, besides ADDC Surinder Mohan Sharma; District Programme Officer ICDS Mohammad Syed Khan; ADC Vishavjeet Singh; CPO Ranjeet Thakur; DSWO Varun Chaudhary and other senior officers. Faculty members, students of the Women's College and officials from the Social Welfare Department were also present in large numbers.

The ceremony commenced with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp and Saraswati Vandana, followed by a thought-provoking Nukkad Natak focusing on women safety and the measures required to ensure a secure environment for girls.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Com-



missioner underscored the pivotal role of women in nation-building and emphasized the need to ensure equal opportunities, safety, quality education and economic independence for them. Highlighting the significance of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, he reiterated the administration's commitment to strengthening women-centric schemes, promoting skill development, health awareness and inclusive growth. "It is for the first time, Women's Week is being celebrated on such a scale in the district" he noted.

College Faculty, Prof. Rachna stressed the importance of maintaining gender balance in society and called for sustained

efforts to make women self-reliant and financially independent.

Mementoes were presented to Prof. Rachna and the students who performed Saraswati Vandana and Nukkad Natak in recognition of their commendable performances.

Earlier, the District Social Welfare Officer highlighted the objectives of observing Women's Week. He lauded the increasing participation of women in diverse fields and reiterated the department's commitment towards their welfare and empowerment.

Meanwhile, similar inaugural functions were organized simultaneously across all sub-divisions of the district.

FPO-Bank interaction programme held at Chassana under JKICP

GMK NEWS NETWORK

REASI: Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu organized a one-day FPO Bank/Insurance Interaction programme here Monday at Chassana. The prominent persons among those present were the members of FPO Karsnarg Farmers Producers Cooperative Ltd.

The programme was organized under the framework of the Jammu and Kashmir Competitiveness Improvement Project (JKICP) with the objective of strengthening financial inclusion, enhancing credit linkage and creating



awareness among Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and individual farmers of the region.

Representatives from J&K Bank Ranjeet Singh Manhas, Crop Insurance Dalip Singh and others

engaged directly with FPO members and individual farmers. They provided detailed information on credit-linked schemes, institutional finance, working capital support and loan products specifi-

cally designed for FPOs under JKICP and Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP) to enhance agricultural productivity, value addition and market competitiveness in the region. Farm-

ers actively participated in discussions on access to finance, collateral requirements, interest subvention, repayment mechanisms and the role of banks in supporting agribusiness and allied activities. The programme was coordinated by the FPO Development Officer, Rakesh Kundal.

Officers from Horticulture Planning & Marketing department shared their field-level experience, challenges and imparted the awareness about the projects under JKICP, HADP and PMFME. The FPO Secretary Jeet Singh acquainted the participants regarding different schemes

DC reviews progress of RDD sector works in Udhampur

GMK NEWS NETWORK

UDHAMPUR: Deputy Commissioner Udhampur, Minga Sherpa, Monday convened a comprehensive review meeting of officers and field functionaries of Rural Development Department (RDD) to assess the physical and financial progress under the different schemes being implemented in the district.

The meeting was attended by Additional District Development Commissioner Jugal Kishore; Probationary Commissioner Seerat Baji; Assistant Commissioner Panchayat Ashwani Hansa; all

Block Development Officers and other concerned officials.

At the outset, ACD Om Parkash delivered a detailed PowerPoint presentation outlining the scheme-wise and block-wise progress under different RDD initiatives.

The DC conducted an in-depth review of the physical and financial achievements under the ADP, status of new and ongoing works under the UT Sector, constituency-wise progress under CDF and payment mechanisms being followed. He also examined the category-wise issuance of job

cards under MGNREGA, block-wise implementation of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin, progress under Swachh Bharat Mission and the status of the construction of compost pits, soak pits, DEWATS, FSTPs and Gobardhan projects.

The DC also reviewed the block-wise status of Panchayat Ghars and the construction of new Panchayat Ghars under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan. He exhorted officers to maintain transparency and accountability in all works undertaken by the RDD in the district.

DC Doda convenes introductory meeting with DC Office staff



GMK NEWS NETWORK

DODA: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Doda, Krishan Lal, Monday convened an introductory meeting with officers and officials of the Deputy Commissioner's Office here in the Conference Hall.

The officers and staff members introduced themselves and apprised the Deputy Commissioner of their respective roles, responsibilities and ongoing administrative assignments

being handled by different sections of the office.

The Deputy Commissioner emphasized adopting a people-centric approach in governance and highlighted the importance of timely and effective redressal of public grievances.

Krishan Lal stressed the need for dedication, coordination and teamwork among all officials to ensure efficient, transparent and citizen-friendly service delivery.

Anantnag's new tulip research centre to reduce import dependence, boost local floriculture

UMAISAR GULL GANIE

ANANTNAG: To boost tourism and floriculture in the Valley, Mountain Crop Research Station at Sagam in Kokernag area of south Kashmir's Anantnag district is set to begin supplying high-quality tulip bulbs and seeds to the famed Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden, Asia's largest tulip garden.

The research station has been developed by Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-K) on modern scientific lines over 407 kanals of land at Tangpawa Sagam.

Officials said that special emphasis is being laid on production, breeding and research of high-quality tulip bulbs and seeds. So far, a majority of tulip bulbs have been imported from foreign markets, but the establishment of the centre is expected to ensure local availability in the coming years.

Locals said that tulip



bulbs sown on a trial basis last year yielded encouraging results. This year, cultivation has been expanded across a major portion of the land. They said the station attracted a large number of visitors last year, generating employment opportunities for local youth, and expressed hope that more such projects would be introduced to promote Kashmir's floriculture at a global level.

Dr Muhammad Ashraf, posted at the Mountain Crop Research Station, said

the initiative would make tulip cultivation in Kashmir more organised and sustainable. He said India imports tulips worth Rs 300 to 400 crore annually from foreign markets.

"To reduce this dependence, the government established the research centre at Sagam, where multiple varieties of tulips are currently under cultivation," he said.

Dr Ashraf added that an eight crore project has been approved under a scheme supported by the Nation-

al Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and construction work is underway.

"Sustained efforts are being made to minimise imports in the coming years," he said.

Dr Mohammad Ayoub Mantoo, Professor and Head, Mountain Research Centre, Tangpawa Sagam, told KNO that the primary objective of the centre is to maximise local seed and bulb production.

"The government has been spending an amount on importing tulip bulbs. To reduce costs, the department decided to promote in-house production, and work has been ongoing for the past two years," he said.

Mantoo said farmers are also being guided to diversify into tulip cultivation alongside traditional crops.

The project is expected to generate new employment avenues in Anantnag district, with youth being trained in horticulture, seed production, packaging and supply—(KNO)

Dy CM conducts surprise inspection of CE PWD Office, Jammu

Emphasizes timely project completion, prompt service delivery to public

GMK NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, Monday conducted a surprise inspection of the office of Chief Engineer, Public Works Department (R&B) Jammu to assess its functioning and progress in both physical and financial areas.

During the inspection, the Deputy Chief Minister reviewed the overall working of the office and called for prompt, efficient and citizen-centric service delivery. He took stock of both the physical and financial progress of ongoing projects and emphasised the need for achieving the targets within stipulated timelines.

Stressing on accountability and efficiency, he directed the officers to ensure seamless coordination between the Chief Engineer's office and allied wings for timely completion of developmental works. He underscored that any delay, negligence or compromise in quality would not be tolerated and instructed the officials to



maintain strict monitoring mechanisms.

"Quality work and transparency in execution are top priorities for this government," he stated.

The Deputy Chief Minister further highlighted the government's commitment towards ensuring robust and balanced development across all districts of Jammu and

Kashmir, with a special focus on improving road connectivity and extending better infrastructure to every habitation across J&K.

Earlier, the Deputy Chief Minister met various public and individual delegations from different districts, including Padder area and listened patiently to their demands

and grievances.

Reiterating the government's resolve for transparent and public-centric governance, he assured them of time-bound and result-oriented action to address their genuine concerns.

Chief Engineer and senior officers of engineering wing were present on the occasion.

IIMC Jammu's 6-day capacity building programme for DIPR staff concludes

GMK NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU: The six-day Capacity Building and Skill Enhancement Training Programme for officers and officials of Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) concluded at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) here Monday.

The training programme was attended by around 50 staff members of DIPR, who received intensive training in Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications and contemporary media practices.

Addressing the valedictory session of the programme, Regional Director, IIMC Jammu, Dr. Dilip Kumar congratulated the participants for successfully completing the training and encouraged them to apply the newly acquired skills in their professional responsibilities. He appreciated their enthusiasm in learning AI Fundamentals and Applications, Advanced AI & Practical Applications, Print Media Basics and Advanced Practic-

es, as well as Electronic Media Basics and Advanced Practices.

Speaking on the occasion, Joint Director (Hqr) DIPR, Dr. Zahoor Ahmad Raina congratulated the participants and expressed confidence that they would implement their learning in a professional and effective manner within the department.

Prof. Anil Saumitra and Information Officer DIPR, Alka Misra were also present at the valedictory session and extended their best wishes to the participants.

During the session, Course Coordinator of the training programme, Dr. Vinit Kumar Jha Utpal presented the comprehensive training report.

The participants also received certificates during the valedictory session of the training programme.

Pertinently, the programme commenced on 23rd February, 2026 and was designed to strengthen the institutional communication capacity of DIPR personnel by equipping them with modern media skills



aligned with evolving public information needs and governance requirements.

The training programme was structured into three batches. The first batch underwent training in 'AI Fundamentals and Applications and Advanced AI & Practical Applications'. The second batch focused on 'Print Media Basics and Advanced Practices' while

as the third batch received training in "Electronic Media Basics and Advanced Practices" between February 27 and March 2, 2026.

On the first day, Dr. Vinit Kumar Jha Utpal spoke about the changing patterns of government communication. Shri Bhawani Singh conducted sessions on fact-checking, digital verification tools, and AI-based

multilingual drafting and speechwriting. Shri Rajeev Kumar delivered a session on AI-enhanced multimedia and visual public relations.

On the second day, Dr. Rajendra P. Misra delivered a lecture on government communication in an AI-driven digital media ecology. Shri Divyavasu Sharma trained participants in AI-powered crisis commu-

nication and guided them in developing AI-based projects. Dr. Dilip Kumar concluded the day with a session on AI ethics and cyber safety in government organizations.

The third day focused on content creation and print media practices. Shri Divyavasu Sharma conducted a session on content creation and linguistic design using AI tools. Shri Vishav conducted practical classes on print media basics, layout principles, and QuarkX-Press. Shri Gulshan Kumar trained participants in graphics and image editing basics.

On the fourth day, Prof. Anil Saumitra delivered a lecture on press release writing with AI integration. Dr. Ravinder Singh discussed the basics of feature writing and success stories. Dr. Vinit Kumar Jha Utpal trained participants in print production using MS Word, while Bhawani Singh conducted a session on fact-checking and verification in print media.

The fifth day was dedicated to electronic media. Ramesh

Kumar Raina, former officer of Doordarshan Jammu, and Vinod Cheerhi delivered sessions on the introduction to electronic media and camera basics. Dr. Vinit Kumar Jha Utpal trained participants in AI-assisted news packaging and editing. Bhawani Singh conducted a session on AI applications for social media reels and short videos.

On the sixth day, Dr. Rajendra P. Misra trained participants in government communication within an AI-driven digital media ecology, along with scripting, packaging, and voice-over techniques for electronic media. Divyavasu Sharma conducted sessions on fact-checking, deep-fake detection, and emerging trends such as live AI streaming and digital archiving.

The initiative reflects IIMC Jammu's continued commitment to enhancing professional competencies in government communication through structured, technology-driven training programmes.

Rana emphasizes evidence-based policy, cultural preservation for G&B welfare



GMK NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU: In a move towards intensifying tribal welfare initiatives, Minister for Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, Monday discussed with the trustees of Gurjar Desh Charitable Trust (GDCT) the ongoing efforts aimed at the welfare and upliftment of Gujjar-Bakerwal tribe.

The meeting featured in-depth deliberations on the preservation and promotion of Gojri culture, art and language. Besides, discussion was held on the Trust's expanding initiatives in education, tribal welfare and community development.

Emphasizing the importance of safeguarding indigenous identity, the Minister underlined that cultural preservation must go hand in hand with socio-

economic empowerment. During the consultation, the Minister also highlighted key interventions undertaken by the Tribal Affairs Department to accelerate the socio-economic advancement of tribal communities across J&K.

Emphasising the need for synergy between civil society and government institutions, Rana stressed that coordinated efforts are essential to achieving inclusive and sustainable development. He urged the Trust to strengthen its collaboration with the Tribal Research Institute to undertake high-quality, evidence-based research on various dimensions of tribal life including traditions, language, cultural practices and contemporary socio-economic challenges.

"Policy must be rooted in credible data and field-

based research," the Minister observed, adding that evidence-driven insights would enable the government to design the targeted interventions and formulate responsive policies that genuinely address the needs of tribal communities.

Chairman of the Trust, Arshad Choudhary briefed the Minister on the Trust's ongoing programs and future roadmap, particularly initiatives focused on educational outreach, youth empowerment and cultural documentation.

The meeting was attended by Mohammad Mumtaz Ali, Director Tribal Affairs and Dr. Abdul Khabir, Director, Tribal Research Institute, J&K besides trustees of GDCT including Dr. Showkat Choudhary, General Secretary Sadiq Azad and Advocate Zulkarnain Choudhary.

Pulwama villages say poor power infrastructure poses threat to lives

JAHANGEER GANAIE

PULWAMA: Residents of several villages in Pulwama district have raised serious concerns over the alarming condition of power infrastructure, saying that outdated and unsafe systems continue to pose a significant threat to both life and property.

People from areas including Wasoora, Astanpora, Wahipora, Yader, Panzgam, Kulpora, Grawgund, Rakh, Zahid Bagh, Chakoora, Darbagh, and nearby localities have expressed anguish over what they describe as long-standing negligence by authorities. They claim that in many places, electric wires remain loosely tied to trees due to the absence of proper poles, resulting in dangerously low-hanging lines that have persisted for decades.

Locals, said that while there has been some improvement in transformer capacity over time, the broader distribution network—particularly poles and overhead wiring—has not seen the necessary upgrades.

Aamir Ahmad, a resident of Panzgam, said the issue has been repeatedly highlighted during various Back to Village programmes, but no concrete action has followed. "We have raised this



concern multiple times before officials, yet the situation remains unchanged," he said.

Echoing similar concerns, Altaf Ahmad from Rakh said that a large proportion of electric wires in his village are supported by trees instead of poles. "Nearly 80 per cent of the wiring is tied to trees. These wires hang dangerously low, are weak, and frequently get damaged," he said.

Another resident, Sameer Ahmad of Zahid Bagh, pointed out that overhead electric lines often come into direct contact with rooftops and roadside trees, creating a constant risk. "These low-hanging wires are a serious hazard. We have been urging the

department to replace damaged lines and install proper poles, but our requests have gone unheard," he added.

Residents from other villages also voiced similar grievances, stating that despite repeated representations to concerned authorities, no meaningful intervention has taken place.

They expressed frustration over paying increased monthly tariffs while continuing to suffer from unreliable supply and unsafe infrastructure.

The residents have urged higher authorities to take immediate notice of the situation and initiate necessary upgrades to prevent any untoward incidents and ensure reliable electricity services—(KNO)

J&K to import 4 elite foreign breeds of sheep, goat

AGENCIES

JAMMU: The Jammu and Kashmir government is set to import Romanov and Finn sheep breeds, and Boer and Swiss Alpine goat breeds from Russia, Finland, South Africa, and Switzerland to boost local wool and mutton production in Jammu and Kashmir, where 1,400 other foreign breeds have already been procured.

The import of Boer Goat and Swiss Alpine Goat is at an advanced stage and is expected to be completed during the current year, officials said.

Romanov and Finn sheep breeds and Boer and Swiss Alpine goat breeds are to be imported from Russia, Finland, South Africa, and Switzerland, respectively.

They said the Department of Sheep Husbandry has undertaken the import of superior germplasm aimed at improving growth rate, carcass yield, reproductive efficiency and overall flock productivity.

Genetic upgrade, they said, is a long-term strategy to enhance farmers' income and reduce dependence on mutton imports from outside the UT.

"Under the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), Project-24 titled 'Self Suste-

nance in Mutton Production', 450 Dorper sheep were imported for the Jammu Division and 450 Texel sheep for the Kashmir Division during 2024-25," they added.

Sheep breeds of Merino, Dorper and Texel were imported from Australia, they said.

The imported breeds are being maintained at government breeding farms for multiplication, they said.

"Their progeny will be distributed among farmers in a phased manner from the third quarter of 2026-27 onwards to ensure systematic genetic upgrade of local flocks," the officials added.

Regarding steps to increase milk, poultry, livestock, wool, feed, and fodder production, they said a comprehensive employment-oriented strategy is being implemented with a focus on productivity enhancement, infrastructure creation, entrepreneurship development and market linkages, particularly in rural areas.

To increase milk production, the government said 40 high genetic merit bulls have been imported for dairy cattle upgrade and 351 satellite heifer rearing units established. (PTI)

Good Morning **Kashmir**

EDITORIAL

Bring Our Children Home

The quiet gathering of anxious parents in Bemina, Srinagar, should unsettle the conscience of the nation. These were not protesters driven by politics, but families driven by fear—fear for the safety of their children studying in a war-scarred Iran, particularly in the embattled heart of Tehran. Their plea was simple, urgent, and humane: bring our children home.

India has issued advisories urging its nationals to leave the conflict zone. Advisories, however, are only as effective as the mechanisms that support them. For dozens of students, those mechanisms have failed. Parents allege that universities and colleges in Iran have withheld original documents, making it impossible for students to complete travel formalities. In a crisis defined by speed and uncertainty, bureaucratic inertia can be as dangerous as the bombs themselves.

This is where governance must rise above routine. The responsibility cannot be pushed down the ladder or deferred with assurances. When Indian citizens, especially students, are stranded in a war zone, the response must be swift, coordinated, and compassionate. It demands diplomatic muscle, administrative agility, and political will at the highest levels.

The parents' appeals to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah underscore a broader truth: this is not merely a foreign policy issue; it is a test of the state's duty of care to its people. Diplomatic channels must be activated to ensure immediate release of students' documents, while evacuation plans—special flights, safe corridors, emergency visas, must move from paper to practice.

The restrictions that prevented parents from reaching Press Colony only amplify the irony. While security measures may be necessary, silencing distress is not. A democracy must be robust enough to hear uncomfortable truths, especially when lives are at stake.

India has, in the past, demonstrated its capacity for large-scale evacuations in times of crisis. That precedent now demands repetition. Every hour of delay compounds risk; every procedural hurdle endangers lives. The government must act—not with statements, but with solutions.

Bring the students home. Not tomorrow. Not after another advisory. Now.

Safeguarding Biodiversity For A Sustainable Future

VINOD DIXIT

World will be celebrating 3rd March as World Wild Life. Hunting and killing of animals has become a form of recreation. Murdering humans is considered a crime. But killing and wiping out an entire genre is hardly given consideration. Like forests, wildlife is also a national resource, which not only helps us in maintaining the ecological balance but is also beneficial from economic, recreational and aesthetic points of view. It was a time when human interference was minimum the number of wild animals was quite high and there was no problem of their protection or conservation.

But, with the expansion of agriculture, settlement, industrial and other developmental activities and mainly due to greed of man, the number of wild animals are gradually decreasing day by day. We must understand that the wildlife is a precious gift God has given to this planet. The term 'wildlife' not only caters to wild animals but also takes into account all undomesticated life forms including birds, insects, plants, fungi and even microscopic organisms. For maintaining a healthy ecological balance on this earth, animals, plants and marine species are as important as humans. Hunting has tradition and the support of very powerful people on its side and with their influence hunting has been left untouched by legislation - the Protection of Animals Act only covers captive and domestic animals.

High officials, who are supposed to be the guardians of law, often abuse their powers to shield the rich and powerful. Our country is unique in having a significant number of tigers in the wild, in spite of growing population and resource extraction pressures on their habitat. Tigers are the heritage of our country, evoked in the vedas, puranas and many other literature for



their unparalleled strength and aesthetic beauty. The destruction of forest coverage by Maoists may be one of the reasons for this decrease. Wild animals deaths were also reported from Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, Karnataka and Uttarakhand. No doubt, the world wild life Fund is the international agency, which is doing commendable work in promoting the protection of wildlife and there are number of national agencies engaged in the conservation of wildlife.

We should know that we are not just animals, but that we belong to the same family tree as other mammals, that our physiology and bodily processes are just like theirs, and that our mental processes too are from the same general pattern. The protection of the national animal has been a significant achievement till now. Hope this continues and leads to a significant rise in the coming

years. Among animals, some are fewer in number than the others. If proper care and security are extended to them, the rare animals would survive. Only the future can tell whether national animal will survive to maintain the much-needed ecological balance. If we delay now, it might be too late.

Tigers play a large role in sustaining the biodiversity of forests, in maintaining healthy ecology, habitat conservation and the livelihoods of rural communities. The tiger population has decreased in the states of Telengana & Andhra Pradesh. The destruction of forest coverage by Maoists may be one of the reasons for this decrease. Wild tiger deaths were also reported from Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, Karnataka and Uttarakhand.

During the first six months of the year, 30 deaths were reported. The pro-

tection of the national animal has been a significant achievement till now. Hope this continues and leads to a significant rise in the coming years. Credit must also be given to Aircel for initiating "Save Tiger" campaign, along with New Delhi Television (NDTV), who played an active role in creating awareness among the people on dwindling tiger population in India. The number of wild tigers has gone up to 3,890, from the earlier 2010 estimate of 3200, according to the World Wildlife Fund and the Global Tiger Forum. A new Tiger commando force should be created to protect tigers from the poachers. Government must try to put in more efforts to improve the arrangements to conserve the national pride - the Tiger.

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NO MORE WAR

Peace Is The Imperative Expectation Of A Changing World

LALIT GARG

The face of the emerging world is transforming at a remarkable pace, yet alongside this transformation, the sense of global insecurity is deepening just as rapidly. The escalating tensions among the United States of America, Israel, and Iran are not merely regional disputes; they signal a broader global imbalance in which the old structures of power equilibrium are crumbling while a new world order has yet to find stable ground. When major powers engage in direct or proxy wars, their consequences transcend borders and affect all of humanity. Energy markets, supply chains, currency exchange rates, stock markets, food security, peaceful civilian life, and diplomatic equations—everything becomes engulfed in uncertainty. Any major conflict in the Middle East first impacts oil supplies. If global energy shipments passing through the Strait of Hormuz are disrupted, oil prices can skyrocket. For an energy-importing country like India, this presents a double challenge: a rising import bill on one hand, and increasing inflation and fiscal pressure on the other. Higher crude oil prices inevitably push up transportation, fertilizer, electricity, and manufacturing costs, directly burdening the common citizen. Global financial markets are already grappling with instability; a prolonged war could further slow investment and economic growth.

The growing confrontation between Iran and the United States is not simply a bilateral conflict—it is a test of the evolving world order. At such a moment, accelerating peace efforts rather than intensifying hostilities is imperative. Both sides are expected to demonstrate maturity and restraint, particularly the United States, which views itself as a global leader and must balance power with responsibility. As an oil-



producing nation, Iran's stability is critical for the world economy; instability there can reverberate through energy markets and destabilize the financial structures of developing nations. Reports of hundreds killed, thousands injured, and countless civilians trapped in recent attacks are a grave concern for humanity. Strikes targeting top leadership in Iran and the sharp reactions from Tehran and other Muslim-majority countries have rendered the situation in West Asia increasingly volatile. This conflict will not remain confined to the region; its repercussions will extend to South Asia's geopolitics, maritime security, global diplomatic balances, and the broader world economy.

War does not merely generate economic crises—it fractures social fabrics, disrupts cultural dialogue, and erects higher walls of distrust among nations. In a rapidly changing world, there is an urgent need to revive the spirit of coexistence, dialogue, and multilateral cooperation. Stability can only emerge when displays of power are replaced by wisdom, retaliation by diplomacy, and dominance by shared responsibility. This conflict is not only economic but also ideological and geopolitical. After the Ukraine crisis, the world had already moved toward polar-

ization. If sustained instability grips West Asia, countries of the Global South will find it increasingly difficult to maintain balance. India, for instance, has strengthened strategic partnerships with the United States and European nations, while maintaining historical, cultural, and energy ties with Iran. Simultaneously, its defense and technological cooperation with Israel has deepened. Openly aligning with any single side would complicate India's multidimensional foreign policy.

India also faces a special concern: nearly nine million Indians work in the Middle East. If the flames of war spread, not only would their safety be at risk, but remittances worth billions of dollars could be affected. Additionally, rising tensions in the Red Sea and Gulf regions could increase shipping costs, putting pressure on India's development trajectory—currently recognized as one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world. In such circumstances, India's role is not merely that of an affected nation but potentially that of a mediator and balancer. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has pursued a policy of multi-aligned diplomacy in recent years, which may prove effective in such

complex times. India has strengthened strategic ties with the United States, maintained energy cooperation with Russia, and sustained balanced relations with West Asian nations. This policy of "strategic autonomy" prevents India from being confined to any single bloc and offers it credibility as a platform for dialogue and peace initiatives.

India currently holds the presidency of BRICS, of which Iran has become a member. This platform offers an opportunity to amplify the voice of the Global South. If India uses this forum to advocate for ceasefire, dialogue, and multilateral solutions, it could enhance its diplomatic credibility while contributing meaningfully to global stability. Amid perceptions of limited effectiveness by the United Nations, the role of middle powers is naturally expanding. India, shaped by its own experiences of colonialism and Cold War politics, can champion peace-based multilateralism. Meanwhile, South Asia presents its own challenges. Rising tensions and internal instability between Pakistan and Afghanistan could affect India's security and regional balance. If West Asia descends into instability while South Asia simultaneously experiences turbulence, India may face strategic pressures on two fronts. Terrorism, extremism, and the proliferation of illicit arms tend to thrive in such volatile environments. Thus, this is a time for India not only to manage its economy prudently but also to exercise strategic vigilance and diplomatic restraint.

What, then, is the solution? First, ceasefire and multilateral dialogue must be prioritized. Global powers must recognize that enduring peace arises not from military might but from political compromise and mutual respect. Second, investment in alternative energy

sources and renewable technologies must accelerate to reduce oil dependence and mitigate geopolitical shocks. Third, global institutions require reform so they function as equitable and effective platforms rather than instruments of great-power influence. Fourth, regional forums such as BRICS, the G20, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization should play active roles. For India, this is an opportunity to translate its civilizational ethos of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"—the world as one family—into tangible diplomatic initiatives. Peace, coexistence, and dialogue must extend beyond rhetoric into concrete action. By diversifying energy sources, strengthening defense self-reliance, and advancing digital and green economic transitions, India can maintain resilience amid global turbulence. Prime Minister Modi's active foreign policy engagement—whether through multilateral participation or direct dialogue with regional nations—reflects efforts to safeguard India's identity and interests.

History bears witness that war offers no nation lasting benefit. Displays of force may yield temporary victories, but enduring peace can only emerge through justice, dialogue, and cooperation. If the new world takes shape is to be stable and humane, it must transcend the arms race and embrace a culture of coexistence. India, a living symbol of diversity and tolerance, can serve as a forerunner of this transformation. The challenge is immense—but so is the opportunity. The condition is simple: global leadership must abandon the language of war and learn the language of peace, while India, through its balanced, autonomous, and visionary approach, stands as a pillar of stability amid global upheaval.

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Beyond The Retirement: Why We Must Root Out Ageism



BOBBY RAMAKANT

This is indeed a historic first when governments come together to draft a legally binding possible treaty to protect the human rights of older persons. The first-ever historic Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) meeting to protect the rights of older persons was held recently. IGWG was created by the UN Human Rights Council in April 2025 and given the mandate to draft a legally binding UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

"It has taken older persons, with support from the not-so-old ones, over two decades of advocacy and efforts to reach this point where governments are convening to draft a legally binding possible treaty to age with rights. The process follows the recognition that existing international human rights treaties do not specifically address the human rights of older peoples, leaving them vulnerable to violations, particularly regarding access to care, social protection, and humanitarian crises," said Shobha Shukla, who was among the registered delegates for IGWG as part of those with lived experience as well as representing the Development Justice for Older Persons (DJ4OP) campaign.

Well, better late than never. The Convention is expected to protect the rights of older persons, recognize the valuable economic and social contributions older persons make, and provide a comprehensive and coherent framework for a world free from ageism and age discrimination.

While opening the IGWG meet, Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, who, like Shobha, is a senior citizen herself, said that "meaningful participation is essential." Older persons themselves—in all their diversity, including older women, older persons with disabilities, and those belonging to indigenous peoples, minorities, and rural communities—must be actively engaged in this process. Civil society organizations, national human rights institutions, and independent experts bring indispensable experience, data, and insight. An inclusive and transparent process will strengthen both the legitimacy and the quality of the outcome."

"We are living in an age of aging with a fast-growing number of older people. Life expectancy has increased significantly in most settings over the past years. Japan has nearly 100,000 people aged 100 or older—the highest in the world, with women comprising roughly 88% of this population. By 2050 the population of persons above 60 years of age is projected to grow to 2.1 billion (nearly one fifth of the total global population)," said Shobha.

Longevity is one of humanity's greatest achievements. Yet the promise of longer life is too often accompanied by persistent gaps in the protection of human rights.

Instead of celebrating older age, we fear it and ageism fuels this fear. What is ageism? "Ageism is one big elephant in the room. It includes harmful norms, stereotypes, narratives and tropes against older persons. It affects women more than men and the less educated more than the better educated. To be a gender-diverse person or a woman or one with a disability and to be elderly is double trouble in many countries, including India, more so if you stand up against ageism and do not fit into the norm. Subtle nuances of ageism abound in every nook and corner and lurk where you least expect them – homes, society at large, workplaces, industries, healthcare facilities, media... the list is endless," said Shobha Shukla, while speaking in the SHE & Rights session organised by the Global Center for Health Diplomacy and Inclusion (CeHDI), Fos Feminista, the Women's Rights Caucus, the Women Deliver Conference 2026, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) and partners.

"At home and in society at large, relationships are often defined by age. Intimacy, companionship, love and support are as important for the elderly as for the young. Yet these human needs are expected to dry up with advancing years, and any manifestation of them is looked down upon.



Families often underestimate the ability of elders (especially women) to live on their own and lead an independent life. It is deemed okay for 'elders to go on a pilgrimage' but not on a vacation or leisure trip; it is okay for them to 'attend a religious discourse', but watching a bawdy movie or play is unacceptable. Grandparents (especially grandmothers) are expected to take care of their grandkids and are deemed selfish if they have other pri-

more negative views on ageing experience poorer health. Attributing many diseases and disabilities to old age is largely ageism. Features of our homes and outside environment (like safe and user-friendly access to utilities) are important contributory factors in maintaining health and independence as we age," she added.

"Also, it is erroneously felt that limited healthcare resources are better spent on younger persons. Elderly

erally kept absent from the discourses around sexual health and rights. In many societies there seems to be a cultural taboo around the sexual health needs of the elderly. Many find it difficult to accept sexual health and rights of all peoples – all through their lifecycle – which includes older persons too. This becomes even more critically important when it comes to older women, older women with disabilities, older gender-diverse peoples, and older indigenous peoples. All of us have the right to bodily autonomy irrespective of our age," rightly emphasised Shobha Shukla.

For many older people, these chal-

lenges are compounded by intersecting forms of stigma as well as intersectional discrimination, including on the basis of gender, disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Age can be no barrier to learning. But ageism is a huge barrier, and so is gender inequality. Failure to address ageism and do away with age-related harmful stereotypes, social norms and narratives fuels shame or self-stigma, which often results in negative self-worth, addictions, ill-health, and self-harm. Rooting out ageism will help older people live with dignity," said Shobha Shukla.

Older persons want to lead a meaningful life and require support mechanisms, including social and financial security, to continue to function positively. They need affordable and comfortable public transport; safe spaces for physical activities; and easily accessible healthcare, says Shobha.

"We need strong laws to stop all forms of harassment faced by the elderly and make commuting, work-spaces, working hours, nature of work, health services, and social security support systems friendly for them if governments truly walk the talk on active ageing and against ageism," she added.

"Older persons are as diverse as other populations – including in terms of sexual and gender orientations, expressions and identities; social and economic backgrounds; cultural backgrounds; skills and competencies; desires and ambitions; aspirations; hopes and dreams. So, we have to keep those marginalised among older persons in the centre of the response – this includes older women, older indigenous peoples, older gender-diverse persons and peoples with disabilities," said Shobha Shukla.

Elderly people should speak up, not lose their self-confidence, be positive, be as independent as they can be, not feel ashamed to take help from others, eat healthy and exercise. We need to unlearn and re-learn how to live life fully. Remember that age is just a number. We only have one shot at life! Age gracefully!" she added.

The establishment of the IGWG by the UN Human Rights Council represents a decisive step forward. Its first session has opened a new chapter in a collective effort to address the conceptual and normative gaps in the international human rights framework as it relates to older persons.

However, as the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada Al-Nashif, has rightly remarked, "A legally binding instrument will not, by itself, resolve all the challenges older persons face. Its effectiveness will depend on political will, adequate resources, strong institutions, and sustained societal transformation."

But a legally binding treaty can definitely accelerate progress towards preparing all countries for population ageing, which is already a growing reality. Let us hope that this possible legally binding UN treaty affirms the agency of older persons and safeguards their autonomy across all areas of life – and all through their lifecycle.

"We, the elderly, are not asking for mercy. We are asking for our long overdue rights. We need to be recognised – not as burdens, but as rights holders and as vital contributors to families, communities, economies and public life. We do not need shelter homes but the right to live a fulfilling life. Ageism and gender inequality has to end with us," rightly said Shobha.

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orities in life," said Shobha Shukla of DJ4OP, who also founded and leads CNS (Citizen News Service).

"At the workplace, there is the age-related archaic retirement system – the word 'retired' itself reeks of ageism. One does not retire (except perhaps when she/he/they are perpetually bedridden) as long as one lives. Yes, we do change our path and move in new directions. Instead, there must be support systems in place to ensure that older persons can make a choice with dignity and rights if they want to work or not and age with rights," said Shobha Shukla.

Ageism directly impacts the health-seeking behaviour of older people. Research suggests that people with

women are carers by default for other family members, and yet their healthcare needs are often brushed aside and dubbed a drain on family resources," rightly said Shobha.

Health promotion must include disease prevention (both non-communicable diseases and communicable or infectious diseases) in every age group and not just the elderly. Many age-related diseases and disabilities are often preventable, or their severity can be reduced, if healthy living and active ageing is promoted for every age. "We have to address population ageing with a lifecycle approach," said Shobha Shukla.

"When it comes to sexual health, less said is better. The elderly are gen-

Well, better late than never. The Convention is expected to protect the rights of older persons, recognize the valuable economic and social contributions older persons make, and provide a comprehensive and coherent framework for a world free from ageism and age discrimination.

lenges are compounded by intersecting forms of stigma as well as intersectional discrimination, including on the basis of gender, disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

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Older persons want to lead a meaningful life and require support mechanisms, including social and financial security, to continue to function positively. They need affordable and com-

High-Level Meeting To Discuss Panchayat Roll Revision, Urban Local Bodies Delimitation Today

AGENCIES

SRINAGAR: The State Election Commissioner (SEC) has convened a high-level meeting on Tuesday to discuss the revision of the Panchayat electoral roll and review the status of delimitation of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

The SEC, Shatnamani, will chair the meeting today via videoconferencing at 2:30 PM to deliberate on the revision of the Panchayat Electoral Roll-2026 and assess the progress of delimitation of ULBs.

The meeting is expected to be attended in person by the Secretary, Rural Development & Panchayati Raj; the Deputy Commissioner, Jammu; the Director, Rural Development Department, Jammu; and the Director, Panchayati Raj, J&K.

All Deputy Commissioners of the other 19 districts, along with concerned officials, have been directed to participate through video link, according to the meeting notice.

The meeting is being held at a time when all three tiers of Panchayati Raj institutions and Urban Local Bodies in Jammu & Kashmir remain non-existent due to the inordinate delay in conducting elections. While the chances of

holding Panchayat polls in 2026 appear bleak, there is a possibility that Urban Local Body elections could take place this year.

During the ongoing budget session, the J&K Government revealed that the delimitation process is incomplete in five out of 77 ULBs across the Union Territory.

"Delimitation has been completed for 72 ULBs and is under process for the remaining five," the government stated.

The Government also disclosed that the report submitted by the Dedicated Backward Classes Commission is under consideration of the Competent Authority, and further steps for conducting ULB elections will be taken accordingly. The report aims to grant reservation for OBCs in both ULBs and Panchayats.

It is worth mentioning that the term of the first two tiers of the Panchayati Raj system-Panchayats and Block Development Councils-ended on January 9, 2024, while the tenure of the third tier-District Development Councils-concluded on February 24, 2026. The tenure of elected Urban Local Bodies came to an end in October-November 2023—(KNO)

PM Modi speaks to Jordan's King Abdullah II on West Asia crisis

IANS

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday held a telephone conversation with King Abdullah II of Jordan, expressing India's deep concern over the rapidly deteriorating situation in West Asia.

The call came amid escalating military confrontations involving the US, Israel and Iran, which have reportedly drawn in several neighbouring countries through retaliatory strikes and missile attacks.

In a post on X, the Prime Minister said he had spoken with the King of Jordan to convey India's concern over the evolving regional situation.

He reaffirmed India's firm support for peace, security and the well-being of the people of Jordan.

The Prime Minister also thanked King Abdullah II for ensuring the safety and care of the Indian community in Jordan during the current crisis.

The outreach reflects India's diplomatic engagement with regional leaders as tensions intensify in West Asia.

Recent developments include joint US-Israeli strikes on Iranian targets, which, according to reports, resulted in the death of



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

This was followed by Iranian missile and drone attacks targeting Israel, US military installations and locations in Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Jordan has reportedly been directly affected, with accounts of intercepted projectiles over its territory causing injuries and property damage.

In response to the evolving security situation, Jordan has implemented partial nightly closures of its airspace as a precautionary measure to safeguard civil aviation, joining other countries that have restricted flights

amid heightened risks.

The Prime Minister's conversation with King Abdullah II follows similar discussions with leaders of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, during which he condemned attacks on their sovereignty and emphasised India's solidarity.

These engagements underscore India's priority of safeguarding its large expatriate workforce in the Middle East while advocating de-escalation and regional stability.

The broader crisis has disrupted international aviation, led to airspace restrictions and heightened concerns of a wider regional conflict, with implications for trade routes, energy supplies and civilian safety.

India has consistently called for dialogue and restraint in international forums, positioning itself as a proponent of peaceful resolution of conflicts.

PM Modi's message also reaffirmed the strong bilateral ties between India and Jordan, built on mutual respect and cooperation, even as the region faces uncertainty.

Observers say such high-level contacts are aimed at promoting calm and ensuring the welfare of affected populations, including Indian nationals residing across West Asia.

JKAACL releases two books for children

GMK NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU: Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (JKAACL) Jammu Monday organised a grand book release function here at K.L. Saigal Hall.

The two publications released are the Punjabi book "Tehakde Phull" authored by Balwinder Singh and "Rhymes for Kids" by Ms. Alka Sharma.

Principal Government College for Women Gandhi Nagar, Dr. Kulvinder Kour graced the event as the chief guest, while eminent writer and artist S. Jang Singh Verma presided over the function.

Among others present included Additional Secretary Arun Sunali Gupta; Additional Secretary Lal Chand; authors Balwinder Singh and Alka Sharma and Senior Editor, Sheeraza Punjabi, Popinder Singh Paras.

Welcoming the august gathering, the Additional Secretary Arun Sunali Gupta extended a warm welcome to the chief guest and other distinguished guests and complimented the authors for their commendable literary contributions.

In her address, Dr. Kulvinder Kour lauded the authors for their valuable contribution to children's literature in Punjabi and English. She appreciated the proactive role of the Acad-

emy in organising literary and cultural programmes to inspire the younger generation. She also expressed her willingness to extend the collaboration of Government College for Women, Gandhi Nagar to the Academy for organising joint programmes in the future.

Additional Secretary, Lal Chand highlighted the significance of the twin books and appreciated the authors for enriching children's literature, saying that the Academy is committed to preserve and promote the Art, Literature and culture.

Dr. Kusan presented a detailed paper on the Punjabi book "Tehakde Phull" authored by Balwinder Singh, while Popinder Singh Paras presented a comprehensive review of "Rhymes for Kids" by Ms. Alka Sharma.

Senior Writer and Journalist Jang Singh Verma applauded the Academy's consistent efforts in promoting language and literature.

Prof. Raj Kumar, Rattan Singh Kanwal and Suraj Singh Suraj hailed the publications noting that the books by such dedicated authors are the need of the hour and deserve due recognition and honour.

The proceedings of the programme were conducted by S. Popinder Singh Paras, while the vote of thanks was presented by Chief Editor, Gojri, Dr. Javid Rahi.

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

MHA Writes To States,

protest was also held at Aligarh Muslim University, where students gathered on campus to express their anguish. Some local residents reportedly joined the demonstration inside the university premises.

Authorities across states have been directed to remain vigilant, strengthen coordination between law enforcement agencies, and ensure that peace is maintained at all costs in the wake of the developments.

For 7th Consecutive

irrigation during the spring and summer months. Consecutive deficient winters may affect snow accumulation and meltwater availability later in the year. "This year's winter passing away without any significant weather activity can trigger water crisis across Jammu and Kashmir," they added.

They attributed the trend to changes in the frequency and intensity of western disturbances, which are the primary source of winter precipitation in the region.

They also said the situation would be monitored in the coming months, particularly in view of its potential impact on agriculture, horticulture and water resources.—(KNO)

Restrictions To

"Restrictions will continue tomorrow as a precautionary measure. The situation is being closely monitored and necessary measures are in place to maintain peace," a senior official said.

He said that security forces are manning the sensitive locations, while senior officers are reviewing the ground situation to prevent any escalation.

Meanwhile, people took out processions-to mourn assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—in several parts of Kashmir on Monday. "The situation remained under control and security personnel were deployed to ensure peace and prevent any untoward incidents," the officials added.—(KNO)

J&K To Scan MSMEs

Industries & Commerce Department to ensure seamless sharing of requisite enterprise data with experts from IIM Jammu to facilitate evidence-based diagnosis and recommend both financial and non-financial interventions tailored to the specific needs of each unit.

Stressing institutional strengthening, he advised the creation of dedicated cells within both the Industries Department and IIM Jammu to oversee and streamline this specialized service to MSMEs.

Observing that MSMEs form the backbone of the UT's industrial ecosystem, the Chief Secretary underscored the need for strong intent, coordinated action and sustained commitment to ensure the sector's growth and resilience.

He stated that no greater support could be extended to MSMEs than a timely and well-structured intervention mechanism such as this, assuring that availability of funds would not be a constraint in achieving the mission. He also encouraged securing adequate human resources to scale up the initiative effectively.

Director, IIM Jammu, B.S. Sahay described the initiative as a mission-driven effort with the sole objective of ensuring measurable impact in a time-bound manner.

He suggested launching a focused outreach campaign, building upon the work already undertaken as a sample survey. Highlight-

ing the scale of opportunity, he stated that reaching nearly 5.5 lakh enterprises across J&K is achievable with a well-designed strategy.

He further proposed leveraging the academic strength of IIM Jammu, including the involvement of its 800 students through structured project work, to contribute meaningfully to the initiative.

Commissioner Secretary, Industries & Commerce, Vikramjit Singh informed the meeting that after establishing the necessary digital framework by integrating GST, Udyam registrations, electricity consumption data and other utility metrics, around 2,050 units have been registered on the MSME Health Clinic portal. He added that approximately 12,000 units are targeted to be assessed by April this year, with expert-backed interventions to be recommended by IIM Jammu.

Director Industries, Jammu, Arun Manhas through a presentation apprised the meeting that the MSME Health Clinic Portal has been technologically strengthened with stabilized architecture, enhanced dashboard analytics and a user-friendly interface for field officers and enterprises.

He added that the key API integrations have been completed with JK Bank for financial pattern analysis, the Power Development Department for electricity consumption trends, and Udyam for enterprise registration data. Integrations with GST filings and EPFO data are currently underway to enable comprehensive multi-parameter digital assessments, the meeting was informed.

It was also divulged that over 5.85 lakh MSMEs' Udyam data has been received from the Ministry of MSME. During Phase 1 (Pilot Execution), 75 enterprises were identified, 62 clinic sessions conducted and 14 units flagged for rehabilitation across 11 districts.

Under Phase 2, 406 enterprises were digitally assessed, of which 318 were found stable, 87 categorized as stressed and three identified as sick, extending coverage to 12 districts. Combined outreach now spans 20 districts across the Union Territory.

The review highlighted that preliminarily it was diagnosed that enterprises here require financial and credit restructuring support, assistance in raw material sourcing and supply chain stabilization, marketing and branding interventions, technology upgradation, skilled manpower retention and, in complex cases, physical site visits for detailed diagnostics.

Moreover it was given out that under the upcoming Phase 3, targeted interventions will be undertaken for stressed units through in-depth interviews, stakeholder workshops, structured field visits and preparation of comprehensive diagnostic and revival reports too.

The meeting was informed that this will be a continuous and evolving process aimed at building a sustainable early-warning and enterprise support system for MSMEs in Jammu & Kashmir for the times to come.

Around 1,100 Kashmiri

here are extremely worried because of the situation. We tried to contact the children, but it wasn't possible. We appeal to the Government of India to do whatever is possible to help. Their condition is very bad; they haven't slept properly for the last two to three days. As Tehran has been declared a red zone, we urge the Government of India to at least relocate them from Tehran so that we get some relief," the family member said.

Families across the Valley said they are in constant touch with authorities and have submitted details of their children to relevant departments. Many urged swift diplomatic intervention to ensure the students'

safety, stating that prolonged uncertainty and limited communication have only deepened their distress.

As tensions continue in parts of Iran, the families hope for an early and coordinated response to bring their children home safely.

CS Inaugurates

processing, packaging, branding and value addition to significantly enhance farmers' incomes.

Atal Dulloo elaborated 4 Cs: culture, capacity building, commercialization and connectivity for success of startups. He reiterated the government's commitment towards improving the ease of doing business in agriculture, strengthening startup ecosystems and ensuring timely and affordable credit through strong banking partnerships.

Appreciating the proactive initiatives of SKUAST-Jammu and the Mission Directorate JKCIIP, the Chief Secretary stressed that despite J&K being a major producer of wool, trout fisheries, floriculture and medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs), processing remains limited and requires focused attention.

Atal Dulloo expressed hope that the outreach programme would evolve into a sustained partnership model, positioning Jammu and Kashmir as a vibrant agri-entrepreneurship hub under initiatives such as JKCIIP, HADP and Mission UVVA, contributing to the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Vice Chancellor Professor B.N. Tripathi detailed that holding the event outside the campus was both strategic and symbolic, reflecting the evolving role of universities as drivers of entrepreneurship and regional economic growth beyond teaching and research. He highlighted key milestones in industry engagement, including establishment of the Bayer Learning Centre and introduction of Professors of Practice from industry to bring real-world expertise into academics.

The Vice Chancellor informed that over 120 startup ideas have been incubated in agriculture and allied sectors, with more than 32 receiving funding from the Ministry for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India. However, he emphasized that funding alone is insufficient and stressed the need for structured mentorship during scaling, compliance and commercialisation phases. He urged the industry partners to support startups through mentorship, contract research, joint product development, pilot trials, technology validation and integration into established supply chains.

Dr. S.K. Gupta, Director Research, SKUAST-Jammu, presented the vote of thanks while Dr. Sanjay Guleria, Dean, Faculty of Basic Sciences, briefed them about the programme.

Meanwhile, two panel discussions were conducted during the programme, involving the representatives from different institutions.

PM Dials Saudi

Madurai, where he participated in National Democratic Alliance (NDA) election campaign events ahead of the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections and inaugurated key central government infrastructure projects in Tamil Nadu focused on national highways and railways to enhance connectivity and drive economic growth.

The CCS deliberations came against the backdrop of coordinated US and Israeli airstrikes across multiple Iranian cities on February 28, targeting military command centres, air-defence systems, missile sites, and key regime infrastructure. These strikes



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Bengal SIR: 200 additional judicial officers from J'khand, Odisha to join adjudication exercise

SIANS

KOLKATA: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Monday evening informed that 200 additional judicial officers - 100 each from neighbouring Jharkhand and Odisha -- will join the ongoing judicial adjudication process relating to voters' identity documents flagged under the "logical discrepancy" category in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in West Bengal.



The additional judicial officers are expected to join the exercise on March 6. Their deployment is aimed at expediting the adjudication of around 60 lakh voters' identity documents that have been placed under the "logical discrepancy" category.

Although the final electoral roll in West Bengal was published on February 28, it did not include the approximately 60 lakh cases marked as "under adjudication". Supplementary lists are to be published in due course, depending on the progress of the judicial adjudication process.

A senior official in the Commission said that the judicial officers arriving from Jharkhand and Odisha would be deployed district-wise based on the number of "under adjudication" cases in each district.

"Districts with the highest number of 'under adjudication' cases will see a proportionately higher deployment of judicial officers from these two neighbouring states," a Commission official said.

Meanwhile, a fresh exchange of statements took place between the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), West Bengal, and the West Bengal Civil Service (Executive) Officers' Association (WBCSEO) over the issue. Earlier in the day, the association accused Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal of attributing the marking of certain names as "under adjudication" in the final electoral roll to the functioning of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs).

In a late evening statement, the CEO's office refuted the allegation and stated that it had not attributed all cases under adjudication to indecision by EROs and AEROs. "However, a certain number of cases remained pending at the level of EROs/AEROs and were therefore referred for adjudication, which is factually verifiable. WBCSEO cannot and should not assume the role of spokesperson for officers under deemed deputation to the ECI. Posting comments on the basis of hearsay and attempts to discredit constitutional bodies or statutory authorities can have serious consequences. Government servants are well advised to function within the Lakshman Rekha of the applicable conduct rules," the statement said.

Stalin takes jibe at NDA leadership, calls 2026 polls 'Tamil Nadu vs Delhi' battle

SIANS

CHENNAI: Taking a sharp swipe at the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Tamil Nadu, DMK President and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Monday questioned the clarity of leadership within the opposition front, asking whether its constituents even knew who was heading the alliance in the state.

Referring to the NDA's public meeting in Madurai on Sunday, Stalin pointed to what he described as a contradiction in messaging.

While AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami had projected the alliance as one led by his party and expressed confidence of victory, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken about forming an "NDA government" in Tamil Nadu.

"The constituents themselves are not sure who is heading the alliance", Stalin remarked, suggesting a lack of cohesion within the opposition bloc.

Reiterating his earlier assertion that the forthcoming Assembly election would be a contest between



"Tamil Nadu and the NDA", the Chief Minister said recent visits by Prime Minister Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah only reinforced his position.

"Many questioned me when I described it as Tamil Nadu versus the NDA. But every time they visit the State, they confirm what I have said," he contended.

Framing the political battle as one between "regional self-respect and central dominance", Stalin said the election would be a fight between "Team Tamil

Nadu and Team Delhi". He expressed confidence that the people of the state would rally behind his government.

"Tamil Nadu will win in this electoral contest," he asserted.

Responding to a question about former political critics joining the DMK-led alliance and whether that posed a challenge, Stalin dismissed the notion of opportunism.

"This is not merely an arithmetic alliance. It is an alliance of principles," he said, underlining that

ideological compatibility, rather than numbers alone, defined his coalition.

On Prime Minister Modi's reported remarks in Madurai that the DMK's hopes of retaining power would remain a mirage, Stalin said the BJP's ambitions in Tamil Nadu had long failed to materialise.

"Modi has been dreaming of forming a BJP government here. But that dream has remained a mirage," he said, adding that the people of Tamil Nadu would once again deliver their verdict decisively.

Festival fever: Massive demand for PM Modi masks in Muzaffarpur ahead of Holi

SIANS

MUZAFFARPUR: In Bihar's Muzaffarpur, Holi preparations are in full swing, but this year the festive buzz comes with an unusual twist.

At the city's famous Chhata Bazaar -- known as the wholesale hub for colours and pichkaris -- one particular item has witnessed exceptional demand-masks featuring the face of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Shopkeepers at the Rang-Pichkari wholesale market say the "Modi mask" is now out of stock. For the past ten days, the mask is not available, lending credence to 'massive demand' for it.

According to local trader Sadhu Bhai, the demand was so high that supplies ran out quickly. "We tried to reorder from Delhi," he said, "but traders there informed us that stocks were insufficient and they could not supply more."

Amit Kumar, another shopkeeper in the market, echoed similar concerns. He noted that customers had been specifically asking for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mask as



part of their Holi celebrations, but wholesalers are currently unable to meet the demand.

Mantu, a third trader, confirmed that despite efforts to restock, the masks remain unavailable.

While the mask, that has run out of stock due to high demand, has become a talking point, the market is otherwise vibrant and thriving. Traders note a clear shift in consumer preferences this year.

Traditional hand-pump pichkaris are gradually being replaced by modern designs.

The pichkaris which look like tanks can store more coloured water and they are also popular. There are rechargeable

electronic water guns which are catching attention of buyers.

These battery-operated "gun pichkaris" have especially caught the attention of children and young buyers, reflecting a blend of festivity and technology.

Shopkeepers say the trend mirrors a changing India, where even festival accessories are becoming more advanced.

"Now pichkaris are modern too," one trader remarked, pointing to stacks of brightly coloured, high-tech water guns lining his shop.

As Holi approaches, Muzaffarpur's markets continue to overflow with colours, excitement, and innovation.

PM Modi to address post-budget webinar on sustaining economic growth tomorrow

SIANS

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a Post-Budget Webinar on the theme "Sustaining and Strengthening Economic Growth" on March 3 at 11:15 a.m. via video conferencing, an official statement said on Monday.

The webinar is part of the government's continued outreach following the Union Budget and aims to focus on turning budget announcements into effective action on the ground.

The event will bring together policymakers, industry leaders and other stakeholders to discuss ways to accelerate growth and strengthen key sectors of the economy.

"Prime Minister will address the Post Budget Webinar on the theme 'Sustaining and Strengthening Economic Growth' on March 3 at 11:15 a.m. via video conferencing," according to the official statement.

Under the broad theme of sustaining and strengthening economic growth, four

separate sessions are being organised.

These will cover manufacturing, industrial upgradation and strategic sectors; MSMEs, finances and market access; city economic regions; and infrastructure, logistics and freight.

The discussions are expected to explore how reforms announced in the Budget can help expand industrial capacity, improve competitiveness and boost job creation.

"Under this theme, four different webinar sessions are being held covering various sectors including manufacturing, industrial upgradation & strategic sectors, MSMEs, finances & market access, city economic regions and infrastructure, logistics & freight," it added.

The Post-Budget Webinar will highlight the government's forward-looking reform push aimed at increasing industrial scale, deepening technological leadership and strengthening critical sectors of the economy.

Army's Albert Ekka Brigade hosts mega ex-servicemen rally in Agartala

SIANS

AGARTALA: The Indian Army's Albert Ekka Brigade of the Red Shield Division, under the aegis of the Spear Corps, successfully organised a state-level mega ex-servicemen rally at the Agartala Military Station on Monday.

Defence spokesman Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said the rally witnessed enthusiastic participation of over 1,500 veterans and Veer Naris from all eight districts of Tripura, reaffirming the Army's steadfast commitment to the welfare and well-being of its veteran community.

The event was attended by Indrasena Reddy Nallu, Governor of Tripura, as the Chief Guest, along with senior military and civil dignitaries, including Lt Gen Abhijit S. Pendharkar, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Spear Corps.

During the programme, veterans and Veer Naris were felicitated for their dedicated service and supreme sacrifice in the service of the nation.

Lt Col Rawat said a wide range of facilitation stalls were set up, including ECHS assistance, SPARSH pension support, Aadhaar facilitation, banking ser-



vices for defence veterans, and medical services such as consultations and on-the-spot distribution of medicines to address the welfare needs of ex-servicemen and their families.

In addition, a "Know Your Army" display was organised to raise awareness and generate interest among citizens of Tripura and NCC cadets about the Indian Army.

The display, highlighting the Army's ethos, operational capabilities, modern equipment, and career opportunities, fostered stronger military-civil connections and inspired youth.

The event concluded with vibrant cultural programmes that reflected the region's rich heritage, further strengthening the bond between the Armed Forces and the people of Tripura.

The Albert Ekka Brigade has a distinguished history, having fought in the 1971

India-Pakistan war from the Tripura sector. The Brigade has the unique distinction of earning two of the highest gallantry awards in war and peacetime, including the only Param Vir Chakra awarded during the 1971 war.

The Brigade was recently relocated to the Agartala Military Station, a move of special significance as it was launched into Operation Cactus Lily during the 1971 war from the Agartala sector.

The spokesman added that the Albert Ekka Brigade played a pivotal role in the Battle of Gangasagar near the Tripura border during the 1971 war. During the battle, Lance Naik Albert Ekka of 14 Guards made the supreme sacrifice while clearing a critical enemy bunker that could have posed a serious threat to Agartala. He was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra for his conspicuous bravery.

India and Canada continue work on restoring diplomatic staff to previous levels

SIANS

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney discussed restoring diplomatic staffing levels in both countries to their previous strength, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) confirmed on Monday.

Responding to questions while addressing a media briefing after the bilateral discussions held between both leaders in New Delhi on Monday, MEA's Secretary (East) P. Kumar said that the issue had been addressed at various levels during the bilateral engagements.

"There is broad agreement that we should be increasing diplomatic strength on both sides progressively to reach their levels in the past. We are already in the process of doing that. You would have seen that the High Commissioners have returned to their positions. We have a High Commissioner in our mission in Canada, and simi-

larly, the Canadian mission is headed now by the High Commissioner," Kumar stated.

"Let me tell you that the numbers are currently at levels better than what we had in 2023. We continue to take steps to take this to the next level in keeping with the expanded agenda and ambition, and we are taking this on a step-by-step basis," he added.

Bilateral ties between India and Canada had soured after former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged in the Canadian Parliament that he had "credible allegations" of India's hand in the killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

A major diplomatic row had erupted when Canada labelled India's High Commissioner and other diplomats as "persons of interest" in the investigation of Nijjar's death.

India denied all the allegations, calling them "absurd" and "motivated", accusing

Ottawa of giving space to extremist and anti-India elements in the country.

In October 2024, India decided to withdraw its High Commissioner and "other targeted diplomats and officials" from Canada following Trudeau's continued "hostility" towards the country.

"We have no faith in the current Canadian Government's commitment to ensure their security. Therefore, the Government of India has decided to withdraw the High Commissioner and other targeted diplomats and officials. It was also conveyed that India reserves the right to take further steps in response to the Trudeau Government's support for extremism, violence and separatism against India," the MEA had stated after summoning the Canadian Charge d'Affaires in New Delhi in October 2024, over the "baseless targeting" of the Indian diplomats and officials in Canada.

Apple introduces iPhone 17e with faster performance, new iPad Air featuring M4

SIANS

CUPERTINO (CALIFORNIA): Apple on Monday launched iPhone 17e, a powerful and more affordable addition to the iPhone 17 lineup -- with latest-generation A19 chip for faster performance, an advanced camera system, enhanced durability, the magic of MagSafe, and double the starting storage at 256GB.

iPhone 17e also features C1X, the latest-generation cellular modem designed by Apple, which is up to 2x faster than C1 in iPhone 16e. The 48MP Fusion camera captures stunning photos, including next-generation portraits, and 4K Dolby Vision video. It also enables an optical-quality 2x Telephoto -- like having two cameras in one.

The 6.1-inch Super Retina XDR display features Ceramic Shield 2, offering 3x better scratch resistance than the previous genera-

tion and reduced glare.

Available in three colours with a premium matte finish -- black, white, and a beautiful new soft pink -- iPhone 17e will be available for pre-order beginning March 4, with availability starting March 11.

iPhone 17e will start at 256GB of storage for Rs 64,900 -- 2 times the entry storage from the previous generation at the same starting price, and 4x more than iPhone 12 -- giving users more space for high-resolution photos, 4K videos, apps, games, and more.

"iPhone 17e combines powerful performance and features our users love at an exceptional value, making it a compelling option for customers looking to upgrade to the iPhone 17 family,"



said Kaiann Drance, Apple's vice president of Worldwide iPhone Product Marketing.

"We know our customers want a product that will last, and iPhone 17e delivers just that. With A19 for incredible performance, double the entry storage, a smarter camera system, and enhanced durability, iPhone 17e is designed to stay fast, secure, and valuable for years to come," Drance added.

iPhone 17e delivers exceptional all-day battery life, enabled by the efficiencies of Apple silicon, including the C1X cellular modem, and the advanced power management of iOS 26.

Apple also introduced the new iPad Air featuring M4 and more memory, giving users a big jump in performance at the same starting price.

With a faster CPU and GPU, iPad Air boosts tasks like editing and gaming, and is a powerful device for AI with a faster Neural Engine, higher memory bandwidth, and 50 percent more unified system memory than the previous generation.

With M4, iPad Air is up to 30 percent faster than iPad Air with M3, and up to 2.3x faster than iPad Air with M1.

The new iPad Air also

features the latest in Apple silicon connectivity chips, N1 and C1X, delivering fast wireless and cellular connections -- and support for Wi-Fi 7 -- that empower users to work and be creative anywhere.

With the same starting price of just Rs 64,900 for the 11-inch model and Rs 84,900 for the 13-inch model, the new iPad Air is an incredible value.

And for education, the 11-inch iPad Air starts at Rs 59,900 and the 13-inch model starts at Rs 79,900.

Customers can pre-order iPad Air starting March 4 with availability beginning March 11, said the company.

"iPad Air gives users more ways than ever to be creative and productive, offering powerful performance and incredible versatility to help them turn their ideas into reality," said Bob Borchers, Apple's vice president of Worldwide Product Marketing.

T20 WC: Good things happen to good people and at the right time, says Suryakumar on Samson's knock

IAN S

KOLKATA: India captain Suryakumar Yadav paid a heartfelt tribute to Sanju Samson after the wicketkeeper-batter's match-winning 97 not out steered India into the T20 World Cup semi-finals, adding that the knock was a deserved reward for a cricketer who has endured more than his fair share of hardships.

Samson's unbeaten knock laced with 12 fours and four sixes guided India to a five-wicket victory over the West Indies at Eden Gardens on Sunday in a must-win Super Eights clash. Such was the impact of Samson's knock that Suryakumar doffed his cap when the wicketkeeper-batter was coming back to the dressing room after the chase was over.

"I always say good things happen to good people and at the right time. No better time, no better stage for someone like him to step up and give the team what the team required."

"The moment he came into the side, I think the first thing which he said amongst the group when we sat together was, 'let's do something which the team wants, not what you want,'" Suryakumar said in the video posted by the BCCI on their social media accounts on Monday.



He also reflected on a turbulent year for Samson, who was in and out of the team in last 12 months and even had to bat out of his opening position. "I always say good things happen to good people and at the right time. No better time, no better stage for someone like him to step up and give the team what the team required."

"That comes with experience and also over his life, he's seen so many ups and downs. I don't want to take you back to what happened in the whole year - losing his position, battling out of position, and then coming back batting at the

same position.

"It's not easy to win the World Cup. The World Cups, the ICC tournaments, the games which you play in ICC tournaments are won by courageous people, and this was a courageous knock. He can already get carried away by a good start, but then the way he was batting, he held one side together, took the team through."

"He deserves all the credit. I'm very happy for him, his wife, his family back home, and all the people who love him, support him. We're just one more step closer. Hopefully, this may continue. I

have a lot of things to say, but then, I'm very happy. He deserves everything," he elaborated.

In between, Samson made a hilarious reply to the endless praise Suryakumar made for him. "Rulayega kya pagle? (Will you make me cry?)," said Samson to Suryakumar, as the duo broke into laughter.

India will now face England in the semi-final at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Thursday, with Suryakumar & Co now one step away from a place in the final of a tournament they are bidding to retain on home soil.

'Nothing can beat that': Rohit picks 2007 final vs Pakistan as his favourite T20 WC match

IAN S

NEW DELHI: Former India captain Rohit Sharma reflected on the important moments that have shaped the exciting rivalry between India and Pakistan since the ICC T20 World Cup began in 2007, describing the inaugural final as his favourite T20 World Cup fixture against the Asian rivals.

"Nothing can beat that": Rohit picks 2007 final vs Pakistan as his favourite T20 WC match

New Delhi, March 2 (IANS) Former India captain Rohit Sharma reflected on the important moments that have shaped the exciting rivalry between India and Pakistan since the tournament began, describing the 2007 final as his favourite T20 World Cup fixture against the Asian rivals.

Until the recent 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup fixtures, Rohit Sharma, the ambassador for this edition, participated in every India-Pakistan match at the T20 World Cup. From his debut as a young player in 2007 to leading India to memorable wins over their rivals in 2022 and 2024, Sharma's journey in this historic rivalry has been remarkable.

"My favourite T20 World Cup match against Pakistan was definitely the final we played, nothing can beat that. We went on to win the World Cup." Rohit was quoted as saying by the ICC.

India and Pakistan met twice in the first T20 World Cup in 2007. Before the final, a league match ended in a tie and was settled by



the tournament's first bowl-out.

"In that same year (2007), we also played a league game against Pakistan, which was the only match in the tournament decided by a bowl-out, and we came out on top there as well. So in 2007, both World Cup games were special," Rohit recalled.

Another memorable India-Pakistan match took place during the 2022 T20 World Cup at the MCG. After being dismissed early, Rohit watched anxiously from the sidelines as his team staged an inspiring comeback to clinch a historic win.

"Yeah, I was in the dressing room. Then I came out, but I got nervous and went back inside. When games are this tight, especially when you're off the field

and know you can't do anything, it just takes that sense of control away from you, and I felt helpless. You actually do feel helpless watching the game unfold when you can't do anything about it," said Rohit.

Chasing 160, India faced a difficult situation at 31/4, but an extraordinary innings by Virat Kohli led them to a memorable win.

"Kohli played a blinder there. That was again very, very special to watch because we were in no position to win that game, especially after how we started."

"But the way we finished was magnificent. It has to be one of the greatest cricket games we've ever played — because of the occasion. It was a World Cup game, an important one for us to win, and to come back from that situation made it even

more special," the 2024 T20 World Cup-winning skipper said.

Rohit, who called time on his T20I career after 160 appearances in the format, said he still feels nervous before every game, and this ongoing nervousness keeps fueling his enthusiasm for cricket.

"I've played 160 T20 Internationals for India. I don't remember a single game where I wasn't nervous. I was nervous for each and every game. That feeling gives me nervousness, and I don't think that as long as I'm holding this bat, going out there and taking the field, that feeling will ever go away. It stays with me. And that feeling means you still want to go out there, play the game, and give your best," Rohit concluded.

SA, NZ meet in T20 WC semis for the first time; key stats ahead of historic clash in Kolkata



IAN S

NEW DELHI: South Africa and New Zealand head into the semi-finals of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 following impressive yet contrasting campaigns and gear up to face each other on Wednesday at Eden Gardens in Kolkata.

South Africa are heading into the semifinals on the back of a flawless campaign, having remained unbeaten through the group stage and Super Eights. The Proteas topped their Super Eight group with commanding performances that underlined both their batting depth and bowling discipline.

A comfortable chase against Zimbabwe capped their second-round run, while a commanding victory over India underlined their title credentials. Having finished as runners-up in the previous edition, the Proteas appear determined to go one step further this time.

New Zealand, meanwhile, began strongly with convincing wins over the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan and Canada. A key Super Eight triumph over Sri Lanka strengthened their semi-final push, although a narrow defeat

to England in their final Super Eights match meant qualification depended on net run rate. Despite that setback, the BlackCaps advanced and now bring a well-balanced unit into a high-stakes clash for a place in the final.

This will be the first time South Africa and New Zealand meet in a T20 World Cup semi-final. They have competed four times in the group stage of the tournament, but never in the knockout rounds, making this upcoming match a historic first. The two heavyweights first met in a T20 World Cup match in 2007, with the Proteas emerging victorious. They faced each other three more times in subsequent tournaments, in 2009, 2014 and the current edition, with South Africa winning on all occasions.

The venue, however, might prove challenging for both teams and could give the Kiwis an upper hand, given their prior experience at Eden Gardens. New Zealand have played two T20Is at the venue previously. While they beat Bangladesh in the 2016 edition of the marquee event, the BlackCaps suffered a 73-run defeat at the hands of India during a T20I series in November 2021.

T20 WC: Jasprit Bumrah wins 'impact player of the match' medal after India's win over WI

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NEW DELHI: India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was adjudged the 'Impact Player of the Match' after a decisive spell helped India maintain the West Indies to a chaseable target before Sanju Samson's unbeaten 97 helped the defending champions secure a crucial victory in their T20 World Cup clash on Sunday at Eden Gardens in Kolkata.

Bumrah returned figures of 2/36 from his four overs. While the numbers may not fully reflect his influence, the timing of his breakthroughs proved pivotal. In the 12th over of the innings, with the West Indies looking to accelerate, Bumrah struck twice, removing the dangerous Shimron Hetmyer and Roston Chase, to derail the Caribbean side's momentum and tilt the contest firmly in India's favour.

His ability to deliver in pressure situations once again underlined why he remains India's go-to bowler in crunch moments. The twin strikes not only stemmed the flow of runs but also exposed the middle order, allowing India to tighten the screws in the death overs.

Presenting the medal, India's fielding coach T Dilip lauded the team's collective intensity while singling out Bumrah for his composure in decisive phases.

"Brilliant stuff, brilliant effort, well done. We're a gun team and today we showed with our intent what it means to be that. That's what the play was today. Today's game reminds me of my favourite quote: 'The strength of the team is each individual, and the strength of each individual is the team.' Today we represented that through care and belief every time we did that. Outstanding efforts. The impact player goes to someone who owns the big moments most of the



times with his calm face and deadly execution. He's none other than Jasprit Bumrah," he said while presenting the medal to the pacer.

Bumrah, in turn, credited his teammates for holding their nerve during the chase and ensuring India crossed the line without panic, as he said, "Thank you so much. Special mention to Dube as well, the two fours that he hit didn't let the pressure come into our team. So yeah, special mention to him. Tilak also played a great knock, not taking away anything from him but yes, come the big day we're off to get together and hopefully do well in Mumbai. Cheers."

India's batting unit had its moments of anxiety, but crucial contributions, including late boundaries that eased scoreboard pressure, ensured the target was achieved without major hiccups. Tilak's composed knock in the middle phase also kept the innings on track after early setbacks.

With this win, India continued their strong run in the tournament, showcasing both bowling discipline and batting depth and secured their place in the semi-final, where they'll meet England on Thursday at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

رمضان كريم

Ramadan

2026 | 1447 Hijri

Sehri & Iftaar Time Schedule

10 Days Of Rahmat

RAMADAN	DATE	DAY	SEHRI TIME	IFTARI TIME
1	19 FEB	THURSDAY	05:49	06:21
2	20 FEB	FRIDAY	05:48	06:22
3	21 FEB	SATURDAY	05:47	06:23
4	22 FEB	SUNDAY	05:46	06:24
5	23 FEB	MONDAY	05:45	06:24
6	24 FEB	TUESDAY	05:44	06:25
7	25 FEB	WEDNESDAY	05:42	06:26
8	26 FEB	THURSDAY	05:41	06:27
9	27 FEB	FRIDAY	05:40	06:28
10	28 FEB	SATURDAY	05:39	06:29

10 Days Of Magfirat

RAMADAN	DATE	DAY	SEHRI TIME	IFTARI TIME
11	01 MARCH	SUNDAY	05:38	06:30
12	02 MARCH	MONDAY	05:37	06:31
13	03 MARCH	TUESDAY	05:36	06:32
14	04 MARCH	WEDNESDAY	05:34	06:33
15	05 MARCH	THURSDAY	05:33	06:33
16	06 MARCH	FRIDAY	05:31	06:34
17	07 MARCH	SATURDAY	05:30	06:34
18	08 MARCH	SUNDAY	05:28	06:35
19	09 MARCH	MONDAY	05:27	06:36
20	10 MARCH	TUESDAY	05:26	06:37

10 Days Of Najat

RAMADAN	DATE	DAY	SEHRI TIME	IFTARI TIME
21	11 MARCH	WEDNESDAY	05:25	06:38
22	12 MARCH	THURSDAY	05:24	06:38
23	13 MARCH	FRIDAY	05:23	06:39
24	14 MARCH	SATURDAY	05:20	06:40
25	15 MARCH	SUNDAY	05:19	06:41
26	16 MARCH	MONDAY	05:18	06:42
27	17 MARCH	TUESDAY	05:16	06:42
28	18 MARCH	WEDNESDAY	05:15	06:43
29	19 MARCH	THURSDAY	05:14	06:44
30	20 MARCH	FRIDAY	05:12	06:45

DUA FOR IFTAR

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي لَكَ صُتُّ وَبِكَ اِئْتِنْتُ وَعَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَعَلَى رِزْقِكَ اِئْتَرْتُ

DUA FOR SEHRI

وَبِصَوْمِ غَدَا تَوَيْتُ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ

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