

## Google shuts free public Wi-Fi at railway stations in India, cites cheaper mobile data

NEW DELHI: Google on Monday announced it is gradually winding down its free public Wi-Fi Station programme currently available at over 400 railway stations in India, and will work with the Indian Railways and Railtel Corporation to help them with existing sites so they can remain useful resources for people.

Google launched its Station initiative in India in 2015 to bring fast, free public Wi-Fi to over 400 of the busiest railway stations in the country by mid-2020.

"We crossed that number by June 2018 and implemented Station in

"India, specifically now has among the cheapest mobile data per GB in the world, with mobile data prices having reduced by 95 per cent in the last 5 years, as per TRAI in 2019," said Sengupta.

The Indian users consume close to 10GB of data, each month, on average, according to reports.

"Our commitment to supporting the next billion users remains stronger than ever, from continuing our efforts to make the internet work for more people and building more relevant and helpful apps and services," Sengupta noted.

Global networking gi-



thousands of other locations around the country in partnership with telecommunications companies, ISPs and local authorities," Caesar Sengupta, Vice President, Payments and Next Billion Users, Google, said in a statement.

"Over time, partners in other countries asked for Station too and we responded accordingly. We're grateful for these partnerships, especially with the Indian Railways and the Government of India, that helped us serve millions of users over the last few years," he added.

According to Google, the decision to shut Station has been taken keeping the affordable mobile data plans and mobile connectivity in mind that is improving globally including in India.

## Airtel pays Rs 10,000 cr AGR as Govt gets first dues



NEW DELHI: The first AGR payment came to government as Airtel on Monday paid Rs 10,000 crore dues to the Department of Telecom (DoT).

The company said it is paying Rs 10,000 crore in compliance with the Supreme Court order.

It paid Rs 9500 crore on behalf of Bharti Airtel and Telenor which has merged

with the parent company and Rs 500 crore for Bharti Hexacom, its subsidiary.

Further, it said it is in the process of self assessment of accounts and will duly make the balance payments before the next date of hearing (March 17).

According to DoT, Bharti Airtel owes Rs 35,500 crore to DoT.

## E-commerce Giants Continue To Halt Operations In Kashmir

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Continuous internet ban has badly hit e-commerce business in Kashmir putting on stake jobs of thousands of courier boys working for the shipping companies.

From last six months, due to internet ban, the courier boys are not able to deliver their shipments, resulting in stoppage of deliveries by these companies to Kashmir.

After the central government abrogated Article 370, special status and bifurcated the state into two Union Territories in August last year, all national and local online shopping companies decided to 'halt' their service to Kashmir resulting in business losses as well as job loss threats to the thousands of people working with the courier companies in Kashmir.

E-commerce platforms earlier on August 5 halted operations for 72 hours in Kashmir. The decision came after Article 370 was revoked. Amazon India stated that they temporarily closed their Kashmir operations due to safety concerns. Snapdeal revealed that they put all deliveries to J&K on hold until situation returns to normalcy.

"7,000 courier boys are working with more than 30 companies operating in Kashmir and majority of them are out of work these days," said a business expert.

He said while one or two courier service providers have resumed partly their work, most of the compa-



nies are reluctant to do so.

"Neither the courier companies nor the online shopping companies are going to take the risk to deliver items which probably may remain 'trapped' in warehouses," he added.

"Our business was well flourishing with the increasing demand for on-line shopping which is currently unavailable," says Imtiyaz Ahmad, a receptionist at a local courier company. "With losses piling up we are sitting 'idle' as there is no work since six months," Shabir Ahmed, a courier boy said.

However, Shabir believes that situation is Kashmir is improving fast and requests the companies to resume their services here once again.

"Whenever there's an internet ban, my sales go down by 50% as our customers can't order food via our online application," says Zahir Ahmad, another young entrepreneur, an online home delivery application that he has tied up with many restaurants and fast food joints in Srinagar as a home delivery solution. "Because of these fre-

quent bans I have not been able to expand and employ more delivery boys," he says. "My start-up is suffering." Meanwhile, officials at General Post Office (GPO) Srinagar informed that the, deliveries across Kashmir could not be possible due to unavoidable circumstances.

"Our offices could not work properly in the clampdown while customers are themselves reaching here to take their parcels," said an official.

On the other hand shoppers continue to feel annoyed as the exclusive companies like Amazon, eBay, Snapdeal and Flipkart is not yet delivering their items to Kashmir in the prevailing situation.

"It is pretty disturbing when you are trying to buy any product online and it shows 'the item cannot be delivered to your location', Sheeba Jan, a shopper said.

"I usually prefer online shopping but this time I could not buy even a 'single item' on my wedding," says Mursaleen, a shopper.

Since the 2G service was restored by authorities last month, however in Kash-

mir people are not able to perform online shopping in the absence of good internet speed.

"I have 'missed' plenty of online offers on different shopping websites during Eid, Gurupurab and Diwali festivals," says Aqib Shafi from Eidgah.

However, suspension of internet services has also brought operations of the Point Of Sale (POS) machines, popularly known as swipe machines to a standstill. A shopkeeper Abdul Hamid at Amira Kadal here said that when internet services were operating smoothly, 50 per cent shoppers used to make purchases with help of digital payments, which is at the lowest ebb now.

"Earlier, with a ban on SMS, we were unable to generate OTPs due to which the digital payments such as Paytm or other modes became inaccessible," he added.

When contacted senior executives at Amazon, Flipkart and Myntra helpline said that the companies are looking to restart the operations in J&K very soon. (KNT)

## J&K beckons Karnataka firms to invest in 'paradise'

BENGALURU: The newly formed Union Territory (UT) of Jammu-Kashmir on Monday held a road show in this tech city for the upcoming 'Global Investors Summit' and to invite Karnataka-based companies to invest in the northern state, popularly known as 'paradise on earth' for its picturesque landscape.

"The Union Territory (UT) is open for investments and business from companies and entrepreneurs from across the country and overseas, with a new industrial policy and a host of incentives and promotions," J&K Principal Secretary Rohit Kansal told India Inc. at the event.

Besides taking steps to restore normalcy on priority, the new administration is opening up for investments from outside the state with huge opportunities to set up enterprises and create thousands of jobs in manufacturing, services, agriculture, horticulture and floriculture for which the state is well-known. "As 55 per cent of the state's GDP comes from services, 28 per cent from manufacturing and 17.5 per cent from agriculture, we have opened up 14 sectors across the board for investments and employment opportunities," said Kansal.

Addressing the captains of industry, J&K Governor's advisor Kewal Kumar Sharma said a new version of



J&K 2.0 is set to emerge as the UT is at par with the rest of the country.

"The purpose of the road show is to spread awareness about our unexplored locations and trade opportunities across 14 sectors," said Sharma on the occasion.

The UT's IT secretary Bipul Pathak said the government was setting up two IT parks in Jammu and Srinagar for plug-and-play facility as the opportunities for software services and products were immense for skilled manpower. "We are offering productive incentives and relaxations in all industry sectors," Pathak added.

The delegation, comprising also of ITIIC managing director Simrandeep Singh and agriculture and horticulture secretary Manzoon Ahmad Lone, held B2B and B2G meetings on the margins of the day-long summit.

About 150 delegates from diverse sectors attended the road show.

The sectors identified for growth include tourism, film shooting, horticulture and post-harvest management, agro and food-processing, mulberry production for silk, health and pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, IT/ITeS, renewable energy, infrastructure and real estate, handlooms and handicrafts and education.

"The summit, likely to be held in May, aims to revitalise these sectors, imbuing new dynamism into the region's economy," added Kansal.

The event was organised by the Jammu and Kashmir Trade Promotion Organization (JKTPO), along with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) as the national partner and Ernst & Young (E&Y) as the knowledge partner.

## Markets feel the pinch of SC order on telcos, Moody's downgrade

MUMBAI: Indian markets closed lower as fresh growth worries emerged after global rating agency Moody's revised down India's growth forecast. Sensex lost over 200 points on Monday, led by fall in banking and telecom stocks over the SC order in the AGR case.

Investors have been worried after Moody's slashed India's growth forecast to 5.4 per cent for 2020 from 6.6 per cent on slower than expected economic recovery. Moody's also cut 2021 growth projections to 5.8 per cent from 6.7 per cent earlier.

The market reacted adversely as the apex court had pulled up telcos for not pay-

cated by a recent downgrade by Moody's. Banks having significant exposure in Telecom players continue to be in the limelight as lack of funds could delay the payments and degrade the quality of banks balance sheet."

"Continuous rise in Coronavirus cases has forced major Asian peers to downgrade their growth outlook which could cause a ripple effect in other nations in the first quarter while recovery is expected from the second," he added.

Sensex closed 202.05 points or 0.49 per cent lower at 41,055.69 after falling as much as 41,030.58. All the sectors ended in red except



ing the adjusted gross revenue (AGR) liability, leaving the telcos with limited options to get relief from legal or government sources.

According to Motilal Oswal, the recent SC order could have "far-reaching serious ramifications on the telecom and banking sectors with ripple effects on the overall economy".

Bank of Baroda, SBI, PNB, Yes Bank and RBL Bank fell over 1 to 5 per cent while Bharti Airtel, and Vodafone Idea also ended in the red.

Vinod Nair of Geojit Financial Services said: "Domestic growth concerns seem to be back in the market as indi-

IT with PSU banks being the biggest loser followed by Pharma, Realty, Metals, and Media.

The banking stocks came under pressure after the Supreme Court refused to accept Vodafone Idea's proposal to pay adjusted gross revenue dues in a staggered manner.

Besides, investors globally continue to trade cautiously as Coronavirus related deaths climbed past 17,000 and total cases jumped to 70,500. However, Asian stock markets saw some recovery after China said it will announce measures to arrest economic slump owing to the virus outbreak.

## Locust-hit Pak may make exception to trade freeze with India to import insecticides: Report

ISLAMABAD: Reeling under a major locust attack, Pakistan may allow a one-time exemption to import insecticides from India despite the trade ban which was imposed after New Delhi revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August last, according to a media report on Monday.

Importing insecticides from India will be discussed during the Pakistan federal Cabinet's meeting on Tuesday, the Dawn News reported.

Pakistan is facing its worst locust attack in decades, after insects destroyed crops on a large scale in Punjab province, the country's main region for agricultural production.

In a meeting earlier in the month, Prime Minister Imran Khan declared the locust attack a national emergency. The meeting, which was

attended by federal ministers and senior officials of the four provinces, also approved a National Action Plan that requires a sum of Rs 7.3 billion to overcome the crisis.

Other topics to be discussed by the Cabinet on Tuesday include gas pricing and power bill mandates for getting the International Monetary Fund's next tranche of funds of USD 450 million, the report said.

The Pakistan government considering the import of insecticides from India comes seven months after Islamabad on August 9 decided to suspend all trade ties with India following New Delhi's decision to abrogate Article 370 on August 5, revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan also expelled the Indian High Commission in Islamabad.

### NEWS MAKERS

## Union Jt Secretary reviews progress on Land Record digitization in J&K

JAMMU : Union Joint Secretary Land Records (LR) Department of Land Revenue Rural Development, Hukum Singh Meena today reviewed the progress of writing and updation of Jamabandis as part of the digitization of Land Records of the Digital India Land Records Modernization Program (DILRMP) in Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting was attended by Financial Commissioner (Revenue), Dr Pawan Kotwal; Commissioner Survey & Land Records, Shahnawaz Bukhari; Additional Commissioner Jammu, Manisha Sarin; Additional Commissioner Revenue



(Central), Nazir Ahmad Baba; Regional Director Survey and Land Records, Jammu, Dr. Mushtaq Ahmad, besides other senior officers of the department.

The Joint Secretary directed the revenue de-

partment to meet the deadline and complete the digitization process so that all the scanned documents are updated. He further said that error free revenue land record is imperative for developmental activities and

asked the concerned to be careful while updating the documents.

He directed for imparting regular training to the field officials to make them well acquainted with use of modern gadgets and technology. He stated that this way the capacity building of the available manpower would increase manifold.

The Financial Commissioner apprised the Union Joint Secretary that the process of digitization is being monitored at different levels. "The process has been made foolproof and error free as the records are quality checked at each level," he added.

It was informed that 94.92% of the revenue documents have been digitized in Jammu and Kashmir till date. The 98.61% of old revenue maps have been scanned, while writing of 69% new jamabandies has been completed in revenue villages, the meeting was further informed.

Giving other details, the meeting was informed that survey with DGPs (Geo Referencing) has been completed, while a UT level Data centre, modern record rooms in all 217 Tehsils and 77 Survey & Land Record Offices are coming up across J&K.

It was also said in the

meeting that e-application modules for viewing maps, Khasra Girdawari, making requests for Mutation, Jamabandi, Grievance registration, Feedback and revenue Register have been developed by the department through outsourcing of the same.

Pertinent to mention here that after the completion of the program the access to all of the significant revenue documents would become easy for all. It will also make the data impenetrable for any illegal entries or insertions, besides helping the department to preserve the same for posterity.

## DC Bandipora flags off exposure tour of orchardists

BANDIPORA: Deputy Commissioner Bandipora on Monday flagged off a group of 70 orchardists for one day exposure tour to Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Science and Technology Shalimar.

The tour has been organized by Department of Horticulture under ATMA scheme.

Among 70 orchardists, 40 are from Sonawari and 30 from Bandipora areas of the district.

During the day-long tour, the orchardists will interact with scientists at SKUAST Shalimar. Interacting with the farmers, the DC said the tour has been organized to acquaint the farmers with modern techniques of commercial horticulture, emerging trends in horticulture farming and cultivation of fruit trees on scientific lines. He urged the farmers to interact with the scientists, experts and extension functionaries to get up to date methodology, technical skills in the field of Integrated Horticulture Farming and to adopt the advanced technology for cultivation of latest, hybrid and high yielding fruit trees.