

Modi announces institutional research on migratory birds



GANDHINAGAR: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated a convention on migratory fauna and announced the creation of an institutional facility for undertaking research and assessment for the conservation of migratory birds.

"I wish to establish an institutional facility for undertaking research, assessment, capacity development and conservation initiatives by creating a common platform. For the coming three years, India will play a leading role in the conservation of migratory birds through presidency of this convention," Modi said via videoconferencing after inaugurating the 13th convention of 'Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals' here.

"India has prepared a National Action Plan for the conservation of migratory birds along the central Asian flyway. We would be happy to facilitate the preparation of action plans for other countries also. We are keen to take the conservation of migratory birds to a new level with the active cooperation of central Asian countries," Modi said.

"Single use of plastic has been a challenge for environmental protection. We in India have taken it on a mission mode to reduce micro plastic waste. Our government has been marching ahead with the slogan 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas'," he said.

"Millions of people living near forest areas in the country will be coopted into the formation of joint forest management committees and eco-development communities for the protection of forests and wildlife," Modi added.

Union Minister of Forest, Environment and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar released a stamp on the conservation of migratory birds at Mahatma Mandir here on the occasion.

Former executive engineer of PHE division booked on corruption charge

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir Anti-Corruption Bureau has registered a case under the Prevention of Corruption Act against a former executive engineer of the PHE division for allegedly misusing his position in the allotment of works and utilisation of funds.

"A case has been registered on the outcome of a verification regarding allegations related to misappropriation by Bashir Ahmad Shah, the then executive engineer, PHE Division Bijbehara Anantnag, and others," a spokesman of the ACB said on Monday.

He said Shah was accused of corrupt practices in the allotment of works to blue-eyed contractors. "This included the Kishtwar-Simthan-Anantnag Road project in which the allotments were cancelled and then converted into authorities with four times above the allotted cost," the spokesman said.

The physical status of permanent flood-restoration works in the division was checked and most works do not exist anywhere, he said. "During the verification, it also came to the fore that an amount of Rs 4.79 crore has been shown drawn against the execution of different work components executed by the division in the flood-restoration programme without following codal formalities," the spokesperson said, adding that the diversion of funds without mandatory approval was also detected.

Subsequent to the registration of the case, he said a search was conducted at the residence of Bashir Ahmad Shah.



Govt To Spend Rs 2,000 cr To Upgrade Tourist Infrastructure In J&K

KOLKATA: The Jammu and Kashmir government in coordination with the Centre will spend Rs 2,000 crore to upgrade infrastructure for tourists in the union territory which was visited by around one crore people last year, officials said here on Monday.

The government is also getting a lot of queries relating to investment in Jammu and Kashmir, they said.

"Many undesirable narratives are doing the rounds primarily focusing on security aspects. These are misinformation campaign by some vested interests that do not want to see J&K emerge as among the top tourist destinations," Tourism Secretary

Zubair Ahmed said. "The Jammu and Kashmir administration in coordination with the central government will spend Rs 2,000 crore to upgrade infrastructure and create better facilities for tourists," Ahmed said at a roadshow here.

"Nearly one crore tourists visited Jammu and Kashmir in the calendar year 2019. In 2020, the figure will definitely cross one crore," said Commissioner Secretary, school education, Hirdesh Kumar, J&K.

Kumar was speaking at the road-show on the upcoming Jammu & Kashmir Global Investors Summit to be held in the Union territory.

He said though the summit

will be held in May, the government has already received investment proposals worth Rs 20,000 crore.

The atmosphere in Jammu and Kashmir is safe and the only thing needed now is to spread this message across, the official said.

"We are trying to remove any suspicion or doubt which might be there in the minds of investors and tourists. Though some disturbances might have happened in the past, there has been not a single incident of any businessman or industrialist getting harassed," he said.

With the abrogation of Article 370 which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, people

are now inclined towards J&K since they can buy land there and become a voter, Kumar claimed.

"Earlier, people were hesitant to go. But now the scenario has altered. The government is getting a lot of queries relating to investment in J&K," he said.

The J&K government has identified 14 sectors which would be showcased at the summit for inviting investments.

The sectors include tourism, hospitality, education, information technology, skill development and pharmaceuticals.

This is the first roadshow before the summit. It would be followed by Bengaluru, Mumbai, New Delhi and Hyderabad.



Migratory Bird census starts in Valley wetlands

SRINAGAR: Wetlands Division Kashmir of Wildlife Protection Department conducted the census of Migratory Birds besides other endemic birds living in the Valley wetlands.

The participants from Kashmir University, SKUAST-K, World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Conservation Fund, School for Rural Development and Environment, WUCMA, Kashmir Bird Watchers Club, Wildlife SOS, Volunteers and free Lancers are taking part in the census. An orientation programme was conducted at

Camping ground Hokersar Srinagar to inculcate the census techniques amongst the participants.

The programme is aimed to identify the current status of 13 valley Wetlands including Hokersar, Mirgund, Narkara, Hygam, Badi Nambal, Shallabugh, Anchar, Dal Lake, Wullar Lake, Chatlum, Kranchoo, Manibugh and Freshkori Wetland which harbour sizeable number of Migratory birds and to check the population fluctuation of these birds during Winter migration, besides involving locals in

conservation and preservation of these Wetlands.

The Wildlife Warden, Wetlands Division, Kashmir, Ifshan Deewani said that coordinated effort by the Department of Wildlife Protection to conduct the AWC this year will go a long way in establishing the numbers of various water birds particularly the migratory waterfowl that visit the wetlands of the valley during winter months.

She said that this procedure is going to be

Strike by PHE daily wage workers enters 11th day, CPI(M) urges LG to intervene

JAMMU: On the 11th day of strike called by casual and daily wage workers of the public health engineering (PHE) department over various demands, CPI(M) leader Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami on Monday urged the Jammu and Kashmir administration to resolve the issue immediately.

The casual labourers and daily wage workers have been on strike in Jammu since February 7 demanding release of their pending wages, regularisation of jobs, filling up of vacant posts, repair and maintenance of faulty pumping houses and water stations and basic facilities at water stations for the staff among others.

While assuring full support to the ag-



itators, Tarigami said, "I urge Lieutenant Governor G S Murmu to look into issues pertaining to regularisation and release of wages to daily rated workers because their strike has impacted utility services leading to drinking water crisis especially in most parts of Jammu and Srinagar cities," Tarigami said. "The administration must talk to the representatives of the PHE workers and try to figure out a reasonable solution to their issues urgently," he said, adding they have been working sincerely for the department for the past many years, but "unfortunately they have been neglected".

Hitting out the administration's "lackadaisical" approach, he alleged that this was the reason for the present crisis as

successive governments always made deceptive commitments to buy time and avoid the crisis.

"It is apathetic on the part of the administration that instead of holding parleys with the workers on strike, it adopts coercive methods to avoid the crisis," Tarigami said. The CPI(M) leader said that any problem concerning employees of important departments which is kept unresolved badly affects the output and the performance of the government. The administration must understand the difficulties faced by these workers who have no money to pay their children's school fees or to manage their day-to-day family affairs, Tarigami said.

Eliminate illicit tobacco trade, ASPA urges Centre



NEW DELHI: The Authentication Solutions Providers' Association (ASPA) has urged the government to eliminate illicit tobacco trade as only 10 per cent of tobacco consumption in the county constitutes legal cigarettes.

Illicit tobacco trade included chewing tobacco, bidi and gutkha, it said.

"The legal cigarettes' share in tobacco consumption in India has declined from 21 per cent in 1981-82 to 10 per cent in 2016-17. During the same period, the overall tobacco consumption increased 33 per cent. This drop in legal cigarette revealed the shift to illegal cigarette," it said.

Titled 'Report for Nation - Confronting illicit tobacco trade in India for economic & development', the ASPA advisory report said illicit trade siphons tax revenues and hurts the authorities' capability to provide good governance. It also reduces allocation of resources for socio-economic development, particularly in low-income nations that rely on consumption taxes.

According to experts, the yearly loss of income from tobacco taxation globally was \$40-50 billion, that's about 600 billion sticks or 10 per cent of consumption.

Stating that all tobacco products are harmful to human health, even if produced and marketed legally, the ASPA said illicit tobacco harmed people in additional ways.

It's estimated that the illegal market reduces average cigarette prices by 4 per cent and is accountable for about 2 per cent higher cigarette consumption.

Nakul Pasricha, ASPA President, said, "Illicit trade in tobacco and tobacco-based products is a global problem, leading governments to join public health agencies in calling for stronger measures to combat it. Implementation of tax stamps has been one of the most effective measure."

In Bangladesh, illegal cigarette trade was reduced from 20 per cent in 2000 to 1.2 per cent in 2009, and in Turkey tobacco tax revenue rose 31.5 per cent within the first year of its implementation, even though tax rates remained the same.

In India, according to reports, usage of tax stamps has minimised the tragedies due to spurious liquor and increased the excise revenue collection by 15-20 per cent. It could generate similar results for the tobacco industry, Pasricha said.

UN stamps featuring endangered species released



GANDHINAGAR: A special set of UN stamps featuring endangered migratory species was released on Monday at a function to coincide with the 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS COP13).

The stamps are part of a collaboration between United Nations Postal Administration (UNPA), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

The UNPA has been issuing stamps since 1951, which illustrate the aims and achievements of the UN and its family of organisations.

Every year since 1993, the UNPA has been issuing a special set of stamps featuring endangered wildlife.

For the first time, this year the focus is on endangered migratory species, and the animals chosen for the 2020 edition are covered by both CMS and CITES.

The stamps, which can be used as postage if mailed from UN headquarters in New York, Geneva and Vienna, are also highly sought after by the collectors.

Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary of CMS, said: "This beautifully-illustrated set of stamps raises the profile of migratory species in a unique way, adding an important message to a cherished UN tradition."

"The stamps, like the endangered species they feature, will travel across the planet and connect people. In doing so, they will also help raise awareness about the very species that CMS is set up to protect."

The 12 species featured on the stamps are: Egyptian vulture, Argali sheep, Andean flamingo and the great hammerhead shark (appearing on the \$1.20 stamps), Addax, Saker falcon, Siberian crane and narwhal (on the \$1.50 stamps) and kiang, lion, Dalmatian pelican and harbour porpoise (on the \$0.90 stamps).