



Maximum : 10°  
Minum : -2°  
Humidity : 86%

SUNSET  
Today 05:22 PM  
SUNRISE  
Tomorrow 07:14 AM



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**Diabetic eye disease associated with five-fold risk of COVID-19: Study**

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**Political Representation of Persons with Disabilities**



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**Tributes pour in after death of Islamic scholar Kalbe Sadiq**



NEWS DIGEST

**Landline To Mobile Calls Get Zero Prefix**

**NEW DELHI:** Callers will soon be required to add '0' prefix for making calls from landlines to mobile phones in the country, with the telecom department asking telcos to make necessary arrangements by January 1 to implement the new system.

The department has accepted sectoral regulator Trai's recommendation for having the '0' prefix for such calls, a move that will create sufficient numbering space for telecom services.

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**ACB Charges 2 Officials In Graft Case**

**JAMMU:** The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Wednesday filed a charge sheet against two government officials in a case related to alleged misappropriation of cement and steel worth over Rs 11.63 lakh in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, officials said.

The case was registered in 2012 after verifying the allegations of misappropriation of cement and steel issued under various schemes in Barnoti block from 2004 to 2007, a spokesperson of the ACB said.

During investigation, he said it was found that the then Block Development Officer (BDO), Barnoti, Bharat Bhushan Barnoti attested and authenticated fake entries of cement and steel in the stock registers without checking the corresponding challans.

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**Forces Face Human Shield Allegations In Pulwama**

**SRINAGAR:** The government forces on Wednesday allegedly thrashed several youths and used them as human shield, during a cordon and search operation (CASO) in Narwa village of South Kashmir's Pulwama district, reports said Wednesday.

In the wee hours on Wednesday, the government forces launched a search operation in Narwa of the district following specific inputs about the presence of militants in the village, news agency KDC reported. During the search operation, the report said that the forces barged into many residential houses and conducted door-to-door searches as well.

"During the operation, the forces allegedly thrashed several youths in the village

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**NIA Arrests PDP Youth President In Davinder Case**

**PDP Leader Accused Of Seeking Hizb Help In 2019 Polls**

**NEW DELHI:** PDP youth wing president Waheed ur Rehman Para was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday for allegedly conspiring with Hizbul Mujahideen militants in securing their support during the 2019 parliamentary elections, officials said here.

The officials alleged that Para, who recently filed his nomination for district Development Council (DDC) elections from Pulwama in South Kashmir, was arrested for his alleged "close links" with Irfan Shafi Mir, arrested along with Hizbul Mujahideen militant Naveed Babu and suspended Deputy Superintendent of Police Davinder Singh.

According to officials, during investigation into Singh's association with Hizbul Mujahideen militants, the NIA came across the phone records of Mir which showed that he was in close touch with Para.

The spokesperson of the NIA only gave a brief statement saying "today NIA arrested Waheed Ur Rehman Para, the youth wing leader of People's Democratic Party, in connection with the Naveed Babu-Davinder Singh case for supporting Hizbul Mujahideen in conspiracy with the other accused persons."

During questioning, Mir had claimed that Para had actively sought his support during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections for party candidate Mehbooba Mufti, who is also the

president of PDP, the officials said. Officials said that Para, who was being interrogated for the last two days at the NIA headquarters, was not cooperating during the ques-

**Mehbooba Alleges 'Blackmail, Intimidation'**

**SRINAGAR:** PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday claimed that the charges against her party's youth wing leader Waheed Para, who was arrested by the NIA in a militancy case, were baseless.

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tioning prompting the agency to place him under arrest.

Mir was acting as a front man for Naveed Babu and indulging in political support against monetary and other gains, the officials said.

Mir, who has emerged as a "double agent", was arrested along with Singh and Syed Naveed Mushtaq alias Naveed Babu and accomplice Rafi Ahmad Rather.

Mir was sitting in the car driven by Singh on January 11 along with Naveed and Rather when their car was intercepted by Jammu and Kashmir Police near Qazigund on

the highway connecting the Valley with the rest of the country.

A search of the vehicle led to the recovery of an AK-47 rifle, three pistols and a cache of ammunition and explosives. The NIA took over the case on January 17. The NIA filed the charge sheet under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and various sections of the Indian Penal Code against Mir, Singh, Naveed, his brother Syed Irfan Ahmad, Rather and businessman Tanveer Ahmad Wani, former president of the Line of Control Traders Association.

According to the NIA, the accused were part of a deep-rooted conspiracy hatched by the Pakistan-based Hizbul Mujahideen and Pakistani State agencies "to commit violent acts and to wage war against the Union of India".

During his extensive questioning, the NIA said Mir told them he had met Hizbul Mujahideen chief Syed Salauddin, his deputy Amir Khan, the operational chief Khurshed Alam and the militant group's financial head Nazir Mehmood where the broad concept of "Bleeding Heart" was discussed.

Later during his stay in Pakistan, Mir had a meeting with ISI officers like Umar Cheema, Ashhan Chaudhary and Sohail Abbas who also tasked him to work on a new "Hawala (non-banking) channel" for transfer of money for sustaining militant activities in the Kashmir valley. (PTI)

**Snowfall, Rains In Kashmir Valley For Third Day**

**SRINAGAR:** Intermittent snowfall and rains continued at most places in Kashmir for the third day on Wednesday, officials said.

The weather office has forecast mainly dry weather from Thursday till next week.

Officials said most places in the valley experienced rains/light snowfall which continued when last reports came in.

**Avalanche Warning Sounded In 11 Districts**

**SRINAGAR:** An avalanche warning was issued in 11 districts of Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday in view of heavy snowfall in the higher reaches of the Union Territory (UT) in the last three days, officials said here.

A 'medium danger' avalanche warning has been issued for the higher reaches of Kishtwar, Kupwara and Bandipora districts, they said.

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The famous ski-resort of Gulmarg, in north Kashmir, recorded four inches of fresh snowfall during the night, while Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir, recorded around one inch of snow.

There are reports of snowfall in other areas in the higher reaches, including the Sonamarg-Zojila axis on the Srinagar-Leh road which connects the valley with Ladakh, they said.

The road was closed for traffic on Monday.

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**LG Calls For Free And Fair Elections**

**Directs Officers To Ensure Free Movement Of Candidates Of All Parties**



**OBSERVER NEWS SERVICE**

**JAMMU:** Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha on Wednesday directed the officials in the Union Territory to maintain neutrality and ensure free and fair District Development Council (DDC) election and by-elections for Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies (ULB) besides allowing free movement of candidates of all the parties.

Chairing a high-level meeting with Divisional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, and Superintendents of Police through video-conferencing, here at Civil Secretariat, Sinha directed the officers to take all the requisite measures to maintain neutrality and ensure free and fair election, an official spokesperson said Wednesday.

The LG, he said, directed the officials to take all the preemptive measures for the smooth and peaceful conduct of the elections, besides availability of basic facilities to be ensured for the government forces

and polling staff.

"DCs and SPs to meticulously ensure free movement of candidates of all parties, security arrangements and other preparatory measures for the ensuing elections," LG, as per official spokesperson said in the meeting.

"Ensure all the facilities for people in far-flung areas so that everyone can exercise their right to vote irrespective of caste, creed, religion, or gender," he added.

According to the official spokesperson, Divisional Commissioners of Jammu and Kashmir briefed the LG about the status of preparedness regarding the elections particularly the logistical issues in view of the snowfall in remote hilly regions across the Union Territory.

"He asked the officers to ensure that all the COVID related SOPs and advisories shall be followed during elections also," he added.

Meanwhile, during the review of COVID-19 management and control efforts in J&K, the LG also took the first-hand appraisal of the preparations regarding the Covid vaccine delivery in the backdrop of Prime Minister's Video-Conference on Tuesday.

As per the official spokesperson, the LG asked the Financial Commissioner, Health and Medical Education Department, Atal Dilloo, to plan in advance and prioritize the delivery of the vaccine.

"Later, the LG also took stock of the winter preparedness and logistic arrangements being made by the various departments across the UT. He asked the concerned officers to ensure

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**Dr Farooq's Sister, Hotelier Chaya Named In Second List**

**ROSHNI SCAM**

**JAMMU:** National Conference president Farooq Abdullah's sister, an influential mahant and two prominent hoteliers including a Congress leader figure in the second list of 269 people who have availed land under the now-scrapped Roshni Act.

The Jammu administration also released another list of seven persons who have allegedly encroached upon state land and it included a PDP leader, a retired inspector general of police and a senior superintendent of police.

According to the fresh list uploaded on the website of Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, majority of the 131 beneficiaries including a former bureaucrat and his wife legalised their residential places under the Roshni scheme, while there are also names of dozens of businessmen

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**NC Warns Legal Recourse**

**SRINAGAR:** The National Conference on Wednesday rejected claims of the Jammu and Kashmir administration that its party leaders Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah had encroached on land in Jammu and said it is mulling legal recourse to challenge the "unfounded and unwarranted allegations" being levelled against them.

In a statement, a party spokesperson said the allegations of the administration has reached "an obnoxious level" and pointed out that the party vice president Omar Abdullah never owned land or a house either in Jammu or Srinagar and stayed with his father.

"The malicious nature of the allegations are laid bare by the fact that even though Mr. Omar Abdullah does not own the land but actually lives with his father in Jammu as he

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**New Land Law Will Check Roshni-Like Scams: Jitendra Singh**

**NEW DELHI:** Union minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said the new land law will check Jammu and Kashmir's Roshni-like scams and illegal land grabbing

He said the law is also against mafia members of the politician-administration nexus who have been for over half a century constructing huge mansions, bungalows and commercial complexes on unauthorised land.

It is precisely for this reason that all these habitual law breakers have ganged up to spread a disinformation campaign against the land law which has been implemented as per the provisions of the Constitution

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**12 More Corona Deaths In J&K, Toll 1663**

**33 Travelers Among 489 New Cases**

**SRINAGAR:** Jammu and Kashmir reported on Wednesday 489 fresh cases of novel coronavirus, including thirty-three travelers, taking the total number of people infected by the virus in Union Territory to 107819.

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**OBSERVER MONITORING DESK**

**SRINAGAR:** Twelve more people succumbed to coronavirus in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, taking the total number of fatalities since the outbreak of pandemic in the Union Territory to 1663.

While Kashmir Valley reported six more deaths due to the virus on Wednesday, the deadly infection claimed six more lives in Jammu division, officials said.

Among the victims from the Valley, officials said, five were residents of Srinagar, including a 60-year-old woman and a 66-year-old man from Lal Bazaar, a 60-year-old woman from HMT, an 80-year-old from Natipora and a 60-year-old from Mehjoor Nagar.

The sixth victim from valley was a 57-year-old woman from Langate in Kupwara district.

Regarding Jammu, they said, three victims were from Udhampur, two from Samba and one from Kathua.

With these deaths, the total fatality count in the Valley has reached 1091 and 572 in the Jammu region. Srinagar district with 413 deaths tops the list followed by Jammu (292), Baramulla (160), Budgam (99), Pulwama (86), Kupwara (82), Anantnag (77), Doda (53), Bandipora (50), Kulgam (50), Rajouri (49), Udhampur (46), Ganderbal (37), Shopian (37), Kathua (36), Samba (29), Poonch (22), Ramban (18), Kishtwar (16), and Reasi (9). —With GNS inputs

**Cong-BJP Backed Mattu Wrests Mayor's Chair Amid High Drama Poll**

**SRINAGAR:** A high voltage drama unfolded at the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) office here on Wednesday during the Mayoral elections, as Junaid Azim Mattu was yet again elected to the chair with the support of BJP and Congress councillors.

According to reports, unruly scenes were witnessed at the SMC office as the Deputy Mayor Parvez Qadri objected to the conduct of polls, saying that the Municipal Act 2,000 was being violated while conducting the election for the top post of the city's civic body. However, despite his opposition, the voting continued amid a high

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**"It Is Yet Another Low"**

The National Conference termed the Mayoral election as a "farce play that bulldozed established democratic and constitutional norms setting a lowest benchmark in the country for immoral politics".

In a statement issued here, a party spokesperson said "It neatly fits the Anti Kashmir agenda of BJP,

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**SPOT LIGHT**

**UMER AHMAD**

**PAHALGAM:** 35-year-old Abdul Aziz watched in sheer disbelief as different departments recently arrived with muscle and machines to demolish his ancestral dwelling.

The administration called it an anti-encroachment drive in south Kashmir's Pahalgam highland pastures.

In Ladhroo, Aziz said, 12 out of 15 dokas—huts—were razed to ground, without any eviction notice.

"It was constructed by my great-grandfather," anguished Aziz talked about his demolished mud-wood



Aziz with his homeless family taking a shelter in his tribe member's hut.

**Distress After Demolition: Homeless Tribals Fear For Future**

hut. "I don't understand how it suddenly became an encroachment, which was erased on a war-footing." Aziz is now homeless and is living in a neighbour's hut along with his 4 children and a wife.

"Since the demolition of my hut, my children are very much scared. They keep asking me how we are going to survive this harsh winter," the nomad said. "Becoming homeless overnight is the worst nightmare we've ever faced."

Aziz ferries tourists on his horse for living, but since August 2019, he has hardly earned anything. He now relies on the forest

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