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**BOOK APPOINTMENT**

## Cancer Incidence Soars In Kashmir

# SKIMS Records 5,200 Cancer Cases This Year

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Kashmir's leading tertiary care hospital, Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) Soura, has registered over 5,200 cases of cancer this year alone, while over 50,000 cases have been recorded at the institute since 2014.

According to details, a total of 5,200 new cancer registrations have been made at SKIMS Soura this year so far. Since 2014, the institute has documented 50,302 cases of cancer.

The annual breakdown of cases shows 3,940 cases registered in 2014, 4,417 in 2015, 4,320 in 2016, 4,352 in 2017, 4,816 in 2018, 4,337 in 2019, 3,814 in 2020, 4,727 in 2021, 5,271 in 2022 and over 5,200 cases this year.

Officials said there has been a steep rise in cancer cases in Kashmir. Among men, lung cancer is the most prevalent, while breast cancer is increasingly common among women. They said the rise in male cancer cases is primarily



**RISE IN LUNG CANCER AMONG MEN, breast cancer among women.**

due to smoking, alongside other factors such as family history, obesity and age. Early detection of cancer is critical, officials said, adding that timely treatment can save lives. "Cancer is a multi-dimensional disease, with risk factors including an ageing population, sedentary lifestyles, tobacco use, unhealthy diets, and air pollution," they added.

Doctors have urged people with symptoms of cancer to seek medical attention promptly, as early treatment can prevent the disease from advancing. They said quality treatments are available, including chemotherapy and radiotherapy, at SKIMS. The hospital's infrastructure is continuously being enhanced to ensure better care for patients, doctors added.

Data from the Union Health Ministry reveals that 51,577 cancer cases were reported in Jammu and Kashmir between 2019 and 2022. The annual figures include 12,396 cases in 2019, 12,726 in 2020, 13,060 in 2021, and 13,395 in 2022. |More on P6

## No Relief From Cold Wave

# Freezing Temperatures Disrupt Life, Hit Water Supply

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Minimum temperatures decreased at most places in Kashmir as the valley continued to reel under intense cold conditions, leading to the freezing of several water bodies and water supply lines in many areas.

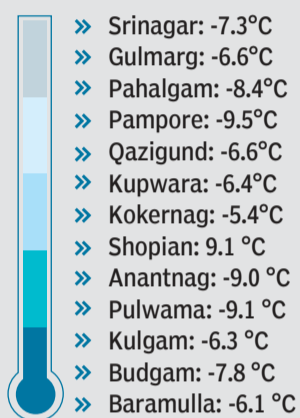
Srinagar recorded a low of minus 7.3 degrees Celsius on Tuesday night -- down from the previous night's minus 6.6 degrees Celsius, the meteorological department said on Wednesday.

It has predicted a dip of two to three degrees in the minimum temperatures in Kashmir over the next two days. Except in Gulmarg, the



night temperatures plummeted across all other weather stations in the Kashmir valley. Currently under the grip of 'Chillai-Kalan', the harshest

winter period of 40 days that started on December 21, the Kashmir valley is experiencing below-normal maximum as well as minimum



temperatures for this time of the season, the officials said. The fall in the mercury has led to the freezing of water supply lines |More on P6

## Deficit Rainfall Goes Up To 81%

Jammu and Kashmir has continued to witness an increase in the deficit rainfall as the region has recorded a precipitation deficiency of 81 per cent in the past three months. From October 01 to December 25, 2024, Jammu and Kashmir has recorded a deficit rainfall of 81 per cent as against

the normal precipitation of 110.0 mm; the UT has recorded only 21.0 mm rainfall during the period. According to the data, Shopian in South Kashmir continued to top the list with 97 per cent deficiency, followed by Poonch in Jammu division and Kulgam in South Kashmir with 96 per cent and |More on P6

## GOI Proposes To Extend Coal Act To J&K

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Union Government has proposed amendments to the Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act-1957 to make it applicable to Jammu & Kashmir.

According to the draft bill, the amendment proposes to omit the words "except the State of Jammu and Kashmir." The Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024, proposes to extend the law to Jammu & Kashmir, which was previously excluded.

According to reports, the Union Ministry of Coal has written to all states and Union Territories, inviting comments from the public and State Governments on the proposed amendments. Following the Union Ministry's communique, the J&K's Department of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs has written to the Commissioner Secretary of the Mining Department to submit their comments on the matter directly to the Union Coal Ministry.

According to the Geology and Mining Department of J&K, the Union Territory |More on P6

## 'Rape & Murder Charges' HC Acquits Budgam Resident After 22 years

M Ahmad

Srinagar: The High Court of J&K and Ladakh has acquitted a man, nearly twenty-two years after he was arrested for raping and murdering two minor sisters in Budgam district of Central Kashmir. The man, Kamal Jeet Singh alias Rinku, was subsequently convicted and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for life by trial court in 2016.

Allowing an appeal filed by Singh, a division bench of Justice Atul Sreedharan and Justice Javed Iqbal Wani termed the prosecution case as "nothing more than a bundle of contradictions, omissions, speculations and conjectures."

According to prosecution case, on 4-10-2002, a complainant was filed at Police Station Beerwah by resident of Atina Beerwah Budgam, stating that on 3-10-2002, his two minor granddaughters,



aged six years and three years respectively, returned home from their school at 4 PM and thereafter, the children, wearing their school uniform went towards the local Gurudwara but did not return thereafter.

Subsequently, a search was conducted by the police, who were joined by the members of the Sikh and the Muslim community, which led to the discovery of the bodies of the two minors from the house of a migrant Sikh. The police took custody of the bodies and ultimately arrested the accused. The search of the scene of crime led to the recovery of a steel glass with mustard oil.

Upon interrogation of the accused, police said that he confessed to the police of having committed the crime.

The prosecution also stated that accused enticed the girls and took them to the single storeyed house of a migrant who happen to be the uncle of the accused and there he committed rape on both the girls and thereafter murdered them by throttling.

The prosecution also stated that he brought mustard oil from his house in the absence of his family members in the steel glass and after committing the offence, he jumped from the attic of the house in the course of which he suffered injury on his right knee. Later, on 10-12-2016, the trial court in Budgam convicted and sentenced him to rigorous imprisonment for life and imposed a cumulative fine of Rs 75000. The convict later challenged |More on P6

## USBRL Project Trial Run Successful On Katra-Reasi Track



Observer News Service

Srinagar: As Kashmir prepares to be connected to the rest of India by rail, Northern Railway is putting the final touches on the groundwork, bringing the long-awaited project closer to completion.

As a part of the preparations a successful train run, comprising an engine and goods train, was conducted on the 17-kilometer Katra-Reasi track on Wednesday. "Another trial run of a tower wagon was also conducted on India's first cable-stayed railway bridge at Anji Khad, which is

part of the USBRL (Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link) project," a senior Northern Railway official said.

"The engine trial train ran at 30 km/h, and the goods train at 20 km/h. The trial will continue until the final inspection," he added.

Another official, who is also part of the train operations on the USBRL project, said that the speed of the engines will be increased in future. "Very soon electric engines will also chug on this line," he added.

Union Minister for Railways, Ashwini Vaishnav, |More on P6

## Shah Lauds CRPF For Restoring Peace In J&K

Observer News Service

New Delhi: Union Home Minister Amit Shah Wednesday said the CRPF has done a commendable job in tackling Naxalism and restoring peace and stability in the Northeastern states and Jammu and Kashmir.

Shah said that the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is playing an important role in ensuring internal security and peace in the country, according to an official statement.

The home minister said this while visiting the CRPF headquarters where he met senior

officers of the force, including its Director General Anish Dayal Singh, it said.

During the visit, Shah had a comprehensive review of the operations and administrative efficiency of the world's largest paramilitary force.

The CRPF has done a commendable job in tackling Naxalism and restoring peace and stability in the Northeastern states and Jammu and Kashmir, he said.

The CRPF chief apprised the home minister about the various welfare schemes being implemented for the families of martyred |More on P6

## CM Conducts Surprise Checks At Kashmir's Key Hospitals



## Pushes for Swift Completion of B&J Hospital's New Block

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Wednesday conducted surprise inspections of premier

Health Institutions in Srinagar to gain firsthand knowledge of the facilities and services being provided to patients and their attendants.

The Chief Minister visited the Bone & Joint Hospital, Barzulla, one of the region's top Orthopaedic healthcare facilities. During his |More on P6

## Vajpayee's 'Nation-First' Principle Must Guide Us: LG

Observer News Service

Srinagar: As the country remembers former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his centenary birth anniversary, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and leaders of political parties in Kashmir on Wednesday lauded the BJP stalwart's humanistic approach to conflict resolution over a military solution.

Sinha paid tribute to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya on the occasion of their birth anniversary.

Addressing a commemorative event at Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya Inter College in Ghazipur, the Lieutenant Governor said, Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya

and Atal Bihari Vajpayee represent the conscience of Bharat. He said the vision of the two giant leaders paved the way for socio-economic transformation of the nation.

"Mahamana's relentless pursuit of public welfare and nation building had shaped the idea of self-reliant, modern and united India. The vision of Mahamana had opened up new frontiers in education, technology and industrial development of the country," the Lieutenant Governor said.

Paying homage to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Lieutenant Governor spoke on the lifelong campaigns of the former Prime Minister dedicated to nation building and public welfare.

"Nation should be supreme for an individual. |More on P6



## Christmas Celebrated With Religious Fervour In Kashmir

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Christian community in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday celebrated Christmas

with religious fervour as devotees, including tourists, held special prayers.

The churches across the valley were decked up and decorated with colourful |More on P6





# Switching Off From Work Can Be Difficult But Taking Proper Break Is Good For Your Health

**The Conversation**

It's never been easier to stay connected to work. Even when we're on leave, our phones and laptops keep us tethered. Many of us promise ourselves we won't check emails during our break. But we do. Being away from the workplace, and even in a new location, is often not enough to detach psychologically. We might still be thinking about a demanding project we raced to finish or even feel guilty about leaving others to cover for us.

**'Digital presenteeism'**

It mightn't be spelt out by our employers but having phones and laptops can create an underlying expectation we are constantly available, even outside the usual work hours. This feeling of connection or "digital presenteeism", can impact our

health by making us stressed, anxious and burnt out. Switching off our work tools when we are out of the office or on leave can remove these problems as well as helping improve and enjoy our non-work activities and relationships.

**Right to disconnect**

While recently passed right to disconnect laws in Australia legally support workers to switch off, there's another option already available to workers. Taking annual leave.

Unfortunately, many workers don't take advantage of this valuable resource, with an estimated 160 million annual leave days banked up by Australian workers. One in five have more than the typical yearly allocation of four weeks unused.

**The benefits of taking a break**

Taking a break doesn't just feel good, it's been shown to benefit your health. A 2017 meta-analysis of 86 studies



revealed taking holidays can lead to reduced stress and less exhaustion during the holiday period. So what do we do with all the extra time we have? Sleep more? Do more exercise? Studies show that's exactly what happens when we are on holiday. We studied movement patterns of 375 adults during annual leave. We found people were more physically active, less sedentary and had more sleep each day - all of which are good for our health.

Holidays can also be associated with changes in how our body functions. A study of 112 holiday makers who attended a wellness resort for six days in the United States had increased heart rate variability which indicates greater resilience to stress. Also, the odds of meeting metabolic syndrome criteria decreased with each break taken each year in a cohort of workers who took on average five holidays each year. If you're male and still not con-

vinced, there is evidence that taking holidays is linked with living longer. Men who take more frequent holidays and more leave days a year have lower mortality rates than those who don't?

**The best type of break?**

Simply taking leave is beneficial. Longer breaks do not have increased benefits and where you go is also unimportant.

A study of locations found those who took a short four day break in a hotel did not benefit more than those who took a break at home. Both groups showed positive changes to stress, recovery, strain and wellbeing.

In our study, the largest favourable changes were experienced by people who took one to two weeks' leave or those who spent time outdoors camping or hiking. However positive changes were observed for all types of holidays. Ultimately, the best vacation is the one that fits your preferences and budget - there's no such thing as a

perfect holiday.

**How to make the most of your next break**

If you haven't already, book some time off and get away from the workplace. Here are five ways to make the most of the time:

1. Finish up your to-do list and clear out your inbox: returning to work after a summer holiday with fewer unfinished tasks allows the positive effects of the holiday to linger longer.
2. Step away from the normal routine: try to limit work-like activities (such as shopping, cleaning, computer-based tasks) and find environments that feel removed from your typical routine and obligations.
3. Engage in "soft fascination" activities: exploring nature is an example of an activity that gently holds your attention while leaving headspace for reflection. These types of activities have been shown to provide restorative mental benefits.

## Study Finds Baby's First Sounds Directly Linked To Changes In Heart Rate

**Press Trust Of India**

A baby's first sounds and attempts to form words could be signs that their heart is working in sync with developing speech, according to a study that found that they were directly linked to each other.

Researchers from the University of Houston, US, explained that for infants, producing recognisable speech is more than a cognitive process -- it is a motor skill requiring a coordination of many muscles performing varied functions throughout their body.

This coordination is directly linked to fluctuations in heart rate, they said. "Thus, for the developing infant, heart rate fluctuations align with the timing of vocal productions, and are associated with their duration and the likelihood of producing recognisable speech," the authors wrote in the study published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The findings are important for understanding how language develops and



potential early indicators of speech and communication disorders, they said. For the study, the researchers analysed over 2,700 sounds of varying dynamics -- such as a laugh, babble or a coo -- made by 34 infants, aged 18-27 months old and who did not speak

whole words yet. The team found that changes in heart rate were in line with the timing and duration of sounds. "Heart rate naturally fluctuates in all mammals, steadily increasing then decreasing in a rhythmic pattern. It turns out infants were most

likely to make a vocalisation when their heart rate fluctuation had reached a local peak (maximum) or local trough (minimum)," author Jeremy I. Borjon, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Houston, said.

"Vocalisations produced at the peak were longer than expected by chance. Vocalisations produced just before the trough -- when the heart rate is decelerating -- were more likely to be recognised as a word by naive listeners," Borjon. About 10 per cent of the sounds analysed were found to be reliably identified as words by naive listeners.

The researchers explained that the first few years of one's life are marked by significant changes in how the heart and lungs function -- known to be controlled by the autonomic nervous system.

"The relationship between recognisable vocalisations and decelerating heart rate may imply that the successful development of speech partially depends on infants experiencing predictable ranges of autonomic activity through development," Borjon said.

**Subject:** Grant Of Registration Of Unit Under The Name And Style "Letourista" Situated at Soura Srinagar.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Whereas, I, Mr. Faizan Fida Sofi, S/o Fida Rehman Sofi, R/o Soura, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, intend to apply to the Prescribed Authority of the Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir, for the registration of my proposed unit under the name and style "Letourista", situated at Soura, Srinagar. In this regard, if anybody has any objection to the registration, they may contact the concerned department within 15 days from the publication of this notice. Objections filed after this period will not be entertained.

**MEDIA LINE**

**NOTICE**

**I Ashaq Ahmad Shah intend to rectify the Mother's name of my Daughter Nabeela Ashaq studying in R P school girls Malla Bagh, From Rifat to Nuzhat Akhtar which is inadvertently recorded in the school record. Should there be any objection, in this regard, from any person or quarter, the same may be Reported to the principal of the institute within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice. Failing which it will be deemed that there is no objection from any quarter.**

Media Line Ads

**NOTICE**

**I Ashaq Ahmad Shah intend to rectify the Mother's name of my Son Maawan Ashaq studying in R P school Boys Alamdar colony, From Rifat to Nuzhat Akhtar which is inadvertently recorded in the school record. Should there be any objection, in this regard, from any person or quarter, the same may be Reported to the principal of the institute within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice. Failing which it will be deemed that there is no objection from any quarter.**

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## Former Mayor Criticizes Omar Over Luxury Vehicle Purchases

Agencies

Srinagar: Former Srinagar Mayor Junaid Azim Mattu sharply criticized Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah for approving the purchase of eight new Toyota Fortuners at a cost of 3.04 crore. Mattu highlighted a government order dated December 12, 2024, which sanctioned the acquisition of these vehicles. According to the order, four vehicles are to be stationed in Delhi, with two each allocated for Jammu and Kashmir.

Taking to Twitter,

Mattu expressed his disapproval by sarcastically referring to the Chief Minister as the "Hon'ble Duke of Essex" and remarked, "EIGHT new Toyota Fortuners AND apparently a brand-new personal Range Rover Defender. The only thing missing in the fleet is a plane and a yacht over Dal Lake now."

In a scathing attack, Mattu accused the Chief Minister of prioritizing personal luxuries over public welfare. He further stated, "J&K's status was downgraded. Not of the Abdullah Monarchy. Long live the King!" [KNT]

## Urs Of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (RA) Observed With Great Devotion

Agencies

Srinagar: Hazratbal Shrine in Srinagar witnessed an overwhelming rush of devotees on Wednesday as they came to pay homage on the occasion of the Urs of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (RA), one of the closest companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). "The shrine, which is rich in history and spirituality, was a place of devotion and unity as people from all walks of life from different parts of the region flocked to pay their respects," the reports reaching the news agency JKNS said.

A local resident from Nawakadal, Bashir Ahmad, shared his sentiments saying, "This is a day that fills my heart with peace and gratitude. Offering prayers here, especially in the presence of the holy relic is a spiritually uplifting experience for me." The event celebrated with fervor marks the legacy of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (RA), who is revered for his unshakable faith, leadership, and unwavering support to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). On this day, devotees remembered his exemplary character

**"I am lucky to be a part of this congregation. Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (RA) is the summary of commitment, which we should all emulate"**

and the role he played in the early days of Islam.

"I am lucky to be a part of this congregation. Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (RA) is the summary of commitment, which we should all emulate," said another devotee, Shazia Bano, while attending the religious rituals.

Significantly, the main showstopper of the occasion was the display of the sacred relic, believed to be of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and its appearance had attracted thousands of people who were enthusiastic to see this revered occasion. The air was prayerful and reflective as chanted devotion reverberated in the air.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to notify all that my name has been wrongly mentioned as Muhammad Annas (name on aadhar) in my adhaar card bearing aadhar no 571196058368. Previously I had corrected my name 2 times my initial name in aadhar was Mohammad Anus and then I changed it to Muhammad Annas and then to Muhammad Annas which is also present name on aadhar. Now I want to apply for the correction in my adhaar card with the following corrections. My new name as Muhammad Annas bhat (new name) if anybody has any objections in this regard he/she may kindly approach the concerned office within seven days. No objection will be entertained after the said time period.

jvd

## DEMISE

With profound grief and sorrow, we inform the demise of **Abdul Hamid Bhat S/o Late Ghulam Qadir Bhat, R/o 36 B/A Nund Reshi Colony, B, Bemina Srinagar**, who left for heavenly abode on **24 December 2024 (Tuesday night)**. May Almighty Allah grant Jannat-Ul-Firdous to the departed soul. Fateha Khawani will be held on **28 December, 2024 (Saturday) at 11.00 AM** at their ancestral graveyard Ziyarat Syed Mansoor Sahib, Behibagh (Zaldagar) Srinagar.

**BEREAVED**  
Inayat Hussain Bhat  
Anwar Kamal Bhat  
9149510391, 7006726913



## Christmas Celebrated With Zeal As City Church Draws Locals, Tourists

Agencies

Srinagar: The Holy Family Catholic Church in Srinagar became the focal point of Christmas celebrations on Wednesday, attracting both locals and tourists.

The highlight of the festive day was the beautifully decorated Christmas tree, which became a major attraction for visitors and local Kashmiris alike.

The church, located in the heart of Srinagar, Lal Chowk, was abuzz with activity as people from all walks of life visited to offer prayers and enjoy the holiday spirit.

Among the people were local

Kashmiri youth, who visited the church and clicked photographs with the Xmas tree and Santa Claus alike. Similarly, families also gathered around the tree, took photos,

nagar city. He said the church has always been a place of peace and joy, especially on Christmas.

Certainly, tourists and local Kashmiri people also found the

**"I came here with my family to celebrate Christmas and to witness the beauty of this tree. It is a special tradition for us"**

and shared moments of joy.

"I came here with my family to celebrate Christmas and to witness the beauty of this tree. It is a special tradition for us," said Thomas, a Christian from Sri-

atmosphere enchanting. "This is my first time in Kashmir during Christmas, and it is amazing to see how the community celebrates the holiday," said Maria, a tourist from Delhi—(KNO)

## FCIK Welcomes New MD & CEO At J&K Bank

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Federation of Chambers of Industries Kashmir (FCIK) has expressed satisfaction over the leadership change at J&K Bank, viewing it as a significant step toward the transformation necessary for both the economic development of Jammu and Kashmir and the bank's sustained growth.

While welcoming the appointment of Amitava Chatterji as the new Managing Director and CEO of the bank, the apex industrial chamber of the valley has expressed confidence that his extensive experience particularly in areas of lending will play a pivotal role in reviving struggling businesses and fostering the growth of new ventures

in various sectors including MSMEs.

FCIK emphasized that the challenges faced by businesses in Jammu & Kashmir are unique and cannot be addressed through a one-size-fits-all approach.

"The region has endured decades of turmoil, natural disasters, and socio-economic upheavals, all of which have deeply impacted the business environment," the chamber noted.

Given these complexities, FCIK is optimistic that, with his deep grasp and understanding of the region's challenges, Amitava Chatterji will recognise the need for a tailored and differentiated strategy, crucial for addressing the specific needs of local businesses and driving sustained growth in the regional economy.

Additionally, FCIK urged the Government of Jammu & Kashmir to brief and sensitize Chatterji on the ground realities faced by local businesses and the holistic approach required to meet the region's economic challenges, including prioritising sector-specific lending to support the development of weaker sections.

The Federation also expressed hope that the era of harassment and intimidation let loose over the past few years which has equally tortured borrowers, customers, and loyal bank employees, would come to an end.

FCIK has anticipated a shift towards more customer- and employee-friendly behavior which is crucial for fostering an environment of trust, growth, and collaboration.

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### HIGHWAY STATUS

- Sgr-Jammu highway - (Open)
- Mughal Road - (Open)
- Srinagar-Leh - (Open)

HIJRI CALENDAR	PRAYERS	
	23 Jumada al-Sani 1446	FAJR
	ZUHR	12:31
	ASR	3: 50
	Magrib	5:32
	ISHA	6: 57

## This Day In History

- 268 - Saint Dionysius, Roman Pope (259-260), dies
- 795 - Leo III is elected to serve as Pope on the day his predecessor was buried and is consecrated the following day
- 1198 - French bishop Odo van Sully condemns Zottenfeest
- 1261 - John IV Lascaris of the restored Eastern Roman Empire is deposed and blinded by orders of his co-ruler Michael VIII Palaeologus.
- 1492 - Christopher Columbus' flagship the Santa Maria runs aground and sinks on the north coast of Hispaniola. The crew are left to found a colony as Columbus returns to Spain
- 1553 - Battle of Tucapel: Mapuche rebels under Lautaro defeats the Spanish conquistadors and exetutes the governor of Chile Pedro de Valdivia.
- 1741 - Astronomer Anders Celsius introduces Centigrade temperature scale
- 1745 - Prussia and Austria sign Treaty of Dresden giving much of Silesia to the Prussians
- 1758 - Return of Halley's comet 1st sighted by Johann Georg Palitzsch
- 1914 - US Government protests British interference with American merchant ships at sea, on the same day Germans announce they will treat food as contraband, subject to seizure; weakens America's protest
- 1916 - Joseph Joffre becomes marshal of France
- 1925 - The Communist Party of India is founded
- 1928 - World record 10th wicket stand 307 (Kippax / Hooker) NSW v Vic
- 1941 - Winston Churchill becomes first British Prime Minister to address a joint meeting of the US Congress, warning that Axis would "stop at nothing"
- 1943 - Earl Claus von Stauffenberg vain with bomb to Hitlers headquarter
- 1944 - Battle of Bastogne: US General Patton's 3rd Army repulses Germans
- 1966 - Maulana Karenga establishes Kwanzaa (1st fruits of harvest) holiday
- 1973 - 2 Skylab 3 astronauts walk in space for a record 7 hours
- 1973 - Soyuz 13 returns to Earth
- 1975 - 1st supersonic transport service (USSR-Tupolev-144)
- 1978 - India's former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi is released from jail
- 1979 - Soviet Special forces take over presidential palace in Kabul, Afghanistan.
- 1982 - TIME's Man of the Year is a computer
- 1986 - Captured Iraqi Airways Boeing-737 in Saudi Arabia, about 60 killed
- 1991 - Militant Sikhs kill 55 & wound 70 in India
- 1993 - Antonov-26 crashes at Gyumri, Armenia, 36 killed
- 1995 - Paul Adams becomes South Africa's youngest Test Cricket player at 18 yrs 340 days/1996 - Start of the largest strike in South Korean history.
- 1998 - Iraq announces its intention to fire upon U.S. and British warplanes that patrol the northern and southern no-fly zones
- 1999 - Severe weather in France kills over 100 people and causes extensive damage to property, trees and the French national power grid (see Lothar).
- 2001 - Crude oil prices on the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX) record one of their largest 1-day jumps of the year as traders become convinced that OPEC will follow through on production cuts
- 2004 - 9.3 magnitude earthquake creates a tsunami causing devastation in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Maldives and edges of the Indian Ocean, killing 230,000 people
- 2006 - Spin bowling great Shane Warne becomes first bowler in Test cricket history to take 700 wickets; bowls England opener Andrew Strauss for 50 during Australia's 4th Test win in Melbourne
- 2012 - China opens the world's longest high speed rail route from Beijing to Guangzhou
- 2015 - Floods in Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay displace 150,000, blamed on El Nino
- 2018 - American Colin O'Brady is the first person to cross Antarctica solo and unassisted after 54 days at the Ross Ice Shelf

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### KO VIEW

## Unite For Equitable Job Quotas

The National Conference leader and Member Parliament Ruhullah Mehdi's protest outside the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's residence on Monday has triggered rumblings within his party with some NC leaders accusing the MP of going against his own party. Salman Sagar, the party's first time MLA has termed Ruhullah's protest a breach of the party discipline, and reminded him that no one was above the party including the chief minister. However, Ruhullah responded sharply, issuing a strong yet vague statement, metaphorically likening NC leaders to 'house slaves' and 'field slaves,' identifying himself with the latter.

Ruhullah's protest against his own party was over unfair job quotas, 70 percent of which have been granted to marginalized groups comprising less than 30 percent of the population. Significantly, Ruhullah was supported in his protest by the opposition parties like the PDP and the Awami Ittehad Party. Actually, the protest was a part of Ruhullah's campaign promise to the open category unemployed youth of the Valley. He had earlier assured them of the NC government's action on the equitable job reservation for the general category population within the first two months of assuming the power, promising to protest against his own government if it failed to deliver. He fulfilled the promise, and, in the process, brought much-needed attention to what is one of the most urgent issues facing the government.

J&K has now just 30 percent reservation quota for the open merit category. The reduction followed the LG administration's decision early this year to raise reservation for Paharis by 10 percent and that of the other tribes and the Other Backward Classes by 8 percent. According to the 2011 census, 69 percent of the Valley's population falls under the general category, which includes those not classified under Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. But while reservations in the rest of the country have been capped at 50 percent, in J&K, they have been fixed at 70 percent.

Not that the NC-led government is not seized of the matter. To be fair to the chief minister, he has promised action. Soon after taking over, he formed a cabinet sub-committee to look into the matter. The committee has been tasked to give its report within six months. Omar also met a student delegation representing the protesters to assure them of justice. Ruhullah's protest, which he was duty-bound to register in fulfillment of his election promise, has hurtled the issue to the foreground. It does promise like these that earned the NC the faith of voters, so Ruhullah can't be blamed for keeping it. However, through it all, it is important that the NC stays strong and united. This alone will enable the party to steer Jammu and Kashmir through its challenging political landscape, address grievances and champion the aspirations of the people.



Did you know?

## The Importance of Financial Literacy for Children

Irshad Mushtaq

Teaching children about financial literacy is essential in helping them distinguish between needs and wants. Understanding these concepts lays the foundation for responsible money management in the future.

### Needs vs. Wants

It's vital for kids to recognize the difference between needs and wants. Needs include essentials like clothing and food, while wants are items they can live without, such as favorite toys. Educating them about this distinction promotes a healthy approach to spending. Budgeting Basics Children should also learn about budgeting to effectively manage money. They need to understand the concept of income, which includes money earned from jobs or gifts received, and expenses, which are the costs they must cover. Teaching them how to analyze income versus expenses is an important skill. Understanding Savings As kids grow, they should grasp the significance of saving money. Understanding savings teaches them why it's essential to set aside funds for future needs and goals.

### Introduction to Investments

Children should be educated on the basics of investing, including how investments can generate additional income over time. This knowledge cultivates a mindset geared towards wealth building. Borrowing and Liabilities It's crucial for children to comprehend the concept of borrowing. They need to know why it can be a liability and how interest on loans can add to their financial burden. Teaching them the implications of debt empowers them to make informed choices in the future. The Role of Assets and Payments Children should also learn about assets, payments, and how these elements interact in financial decision-making.

Understanding what constitutes a depreciable asset versus valuable investments can greatly influence their financial health later in life. By instilling these financial concepts at an early age, children can develop a strong foundation for making sound financial decisions. Equipping them with this knowledge prevents potential struggles and promotes a sense of financial security as they grow.

Learn from the insights of @Irshad Mushtaq, Writer, Investor, Entrepreneur & Founder of M I Securities! Connect for valuable financial advice at [miscurities@bp.sharekhan.com](mailto:miscurities@bp.sharekhan.com)

# Reservation in Jammu & Kashmir: The Other Side

Abdul Majeed Bichoo

The subject of reservation in Jammu & Kashmir has once again become a focal point of public debate and political discourse. The framework introduced earlier this year through S.O. No. 176 dated 15th March 2024, aimed at addressing long-standing socio-economic disparities, is now a topic of contention. While its intent was to ensure inclusivity and fairness, objections raised months after its implementation suggest deeper motives, possibly more political than social. The time has come to evaluate the policy with clarity and reason.

### The Reservation Framework

The reservation policy seeks to distribute opportunities equitably among all sections of society. It is designed to allocate resources in a balanced manner, addressing the needs of marginalized communities without alienating others. The policy is structured into four categories:

#### 1. Category A: Specific Reservations for Marginalized Communities (36%)

- Scheduled Castes (SC): 8%
- Other Backward Classes (OBC): 8%
- Scheduled Tribes (ST-1): 10%
- Scheduled Tribes (ST-2): 10%
- Total: 36%

#### 2. Category B: Common Reservations for All (24%)

These are applicable to both the general and reserved categories.

- Residents of Backward Areas (RBA): 10%
- Areas Along the Line of Control (ALC): 4%
- Economically Weaker Sections (EWS): 10%
- Total: 24%

#### 3. Category C: Horizontal Reservations (10%)

These apply across all categories (A, B, and D).

- Ex-servicemen: 6%
- Persons with Disabilities (PWD): 4%
- Total: 10%

#### 4. Category D: General Category (30%)

Reserved for the general category.

- Total: 30%

The comprehensive distribution ensures that no group is left behind, with the overall reservation totaling 100%:  
36% (A) + 24% (B) + 10% (C) + 30% (D) = 100%.

### Opportunities for Reserved and General Categories

The policy provides significant opportunities for both reserved and general categories:

For Reserved Categories:  
SC + General: 8% + 30% = 38%  
OBC + General: 8% + 30% = 38%  
ST-1 + General: 10% + 30% = 40%  
ST-2 + General: 10% + 30% = 40%

#### For General Categories:

General + RBA: 30% + 10% = 40%  
General + ALC: 30% + 4% = 34%  
General + EWS: 30% + 10% = 40%



Gujjar and Bakerwal students protesting against granting reservation to Pahari people in Scheduled Tribe (ST) category in Jammu and Kashmir, in Jammu on July 28, 2023. File | Photo Credit: PTI

### Horizontal Reservations:

An additional 10% is distributed horizontally across all categories:

- Ex-servicemen: 6%
- Persons with Disabilities (PWD): 4%

### Inclusion of Newly Recognized Groups

In a significant move, an additional 10% reservation has been provided for underrepresented groups, including the Paddari Tribe, Pahari Ethnic Group, Gadda Bregmans, and Koli communities. Importantly, this inclusion was achieved without affecting the existing 10% quota for Scheduled Tribes, reflecting the government's intent to uplift marginalized communities without compromising existing entitlements.

### The Emerging Controversy

Months after the framework's introduction, certain political figures have raised objections, questioning its fairness and impact. However, these protests appear selective and politically timed, as there was no significant opposition during the Lieutenant Governor's administration when the policy was introduced. This

raises questions about whether the protests are genuinely in the public interest or politically motivated to secure voter support.

Politicizing sensitive issues such as reservation risks disrupting social harmony. The matter is currently under judicial review and being assessed by a Sub-Cabinet Committee, making premature protests unnecessary and potentially harmful.

### Unemployment: The Real Challenge

Jammu & Kashmir faces a pressing unemployment crisis, with a jobless rate of 32.8%, the highest in India as reported by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). In rural and remote areas such as Marwah, Paddar, Warwan, Dudu, Bani, and Bhalessa, the situation is dire, with poor infrastructure, inadequate education, and limited job opportunities.

Young people in these regions often migrate in search of better prospects or fall victim to cycles of frustration and despair. Instead of creating division over reservation, political leaders should focus on addressing unemployment through skill development programs, better education facilities, and industrialization.

### A Call for Constructive Dialogue

The reservation policy as implemented is both balanced and inclusive. Altering it without substantial reason could destabilize the region's socio-political environment. Political and civil society leaders must prioritize collective growth and social unity over divisive politics.

Jammu & Kashmir's youth need stability, opportunities, and a vision for a brighter future. The reservation issue must be approached with care and responsibility to ensure it fulfills its purpose of upliftment and fairness. Constructive dialogue, rather than disruptive protests, is the need of the hour.

As stakeholders, we must work together to create an equitable and prosperous Jammu & Kashmir, where every citizen—regardless of caste, class, or category—feels valued and empowered. True leadership lies in uniting people, addressing core challenges, and building a future that benefits all.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer  
The author is Chairman, Youth for Peace J&K and a retired Administrative Officer

“Jammu & Kashmir's youth need stability, opportunities, and a vision for a brighter future. The reservation issue must be approached with care and responsibility to ensure it fulfills its purpose of upliftment and fairness. Constructive dialogue, rather than disruptive protests, is the need of the hour”



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## Meritocracy is a Necessity for Progress

A recent big decision struck the sensitive nerves of thousands of unemployed youth and slumped them in deep dejection. The amendment in J&K Reservation Rules, 2005 by the Jammu and Kashmir government approved 10% additional reservations for the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category and slashed the reservations of general or OM category to mere 40%. With this move, the total reservations of ST category has now gone up to 20%. This move has shattered the aspirations of numerous open merit students who burn their midnight oil to secure a government job or to get admission in higher educational institutes.

It is clear that about 60% of the seats are reserved for the candidates belonging to SCs, STs, OBCs, and EWS etc which can be filled only by candidates from the same categories while 40% of the seats are available for general category. In the merit

seats not only general category but candidates from reserved categories can also compete. Isn't it sheer injustice with general category candidates?

The main aim of reservation is to elevate the under privileged sections of society. On the contrary, the administration is scourging a substantial section of the population in the name of reservation by curtailing their reservation to mere 40%. In Ashok Kumar Thakur vs. Union of India case Justice Ravindran has rightly said, "When more people aspire for backwardness rather than forwardness the country itself stagnates". The undeniable truth is that while seeing the success of others other communities are also demanding reservations. Nevertheless, many people in these communities are much advanced and are socially and economically sound. They are living a life of luxury. Therefore, bestowing reservation to the whole community

is inequitable and unethical.

This reservation system is a serious menace which is jeopardizing the mental health of open merit students. It promotes divisions in society leading to abhorrence and conflicts. Unreserved meritorious students are subjected to extreme injustice. It is evident that the administration is advocating caste over merit and talent. Hence, reservation system is a significant obstacle to meritocracy.

Hundreds of affluent families which include high ranking officials, well-off professionals and others have been reaping the benefits of reservations for decades. In contrast, students from the general category still struggle to secure a job or obtain admission in their desired professions.

The reservation system is a curse that thwarts the plans of OM students before they even think about flying. There are poor people in general category as well who don't have access

to basic needs of life however they are rolling in money in the eyes of administration.

Democracy can only flourish when every individual in society is given equal and fair treatment. Reservation system is not the way to stabilize the financial conditions of impoverished sections of society in lieu of that administration should look for alternative measures.

Reservation of any kind should be abolished. Additionally, in cases where reservations are necessary for certain sections of society then it needs to be based on the economic status of the people and not on the basis of their caste or religion. Instead of assassinating the hope of open merit students, the administration should make sure that they prioritize everyone's interests equitably.

Sayima Wani  
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# Intersection of Religions and Education in India

## Navigating the Crossroads of Religion and Education in India

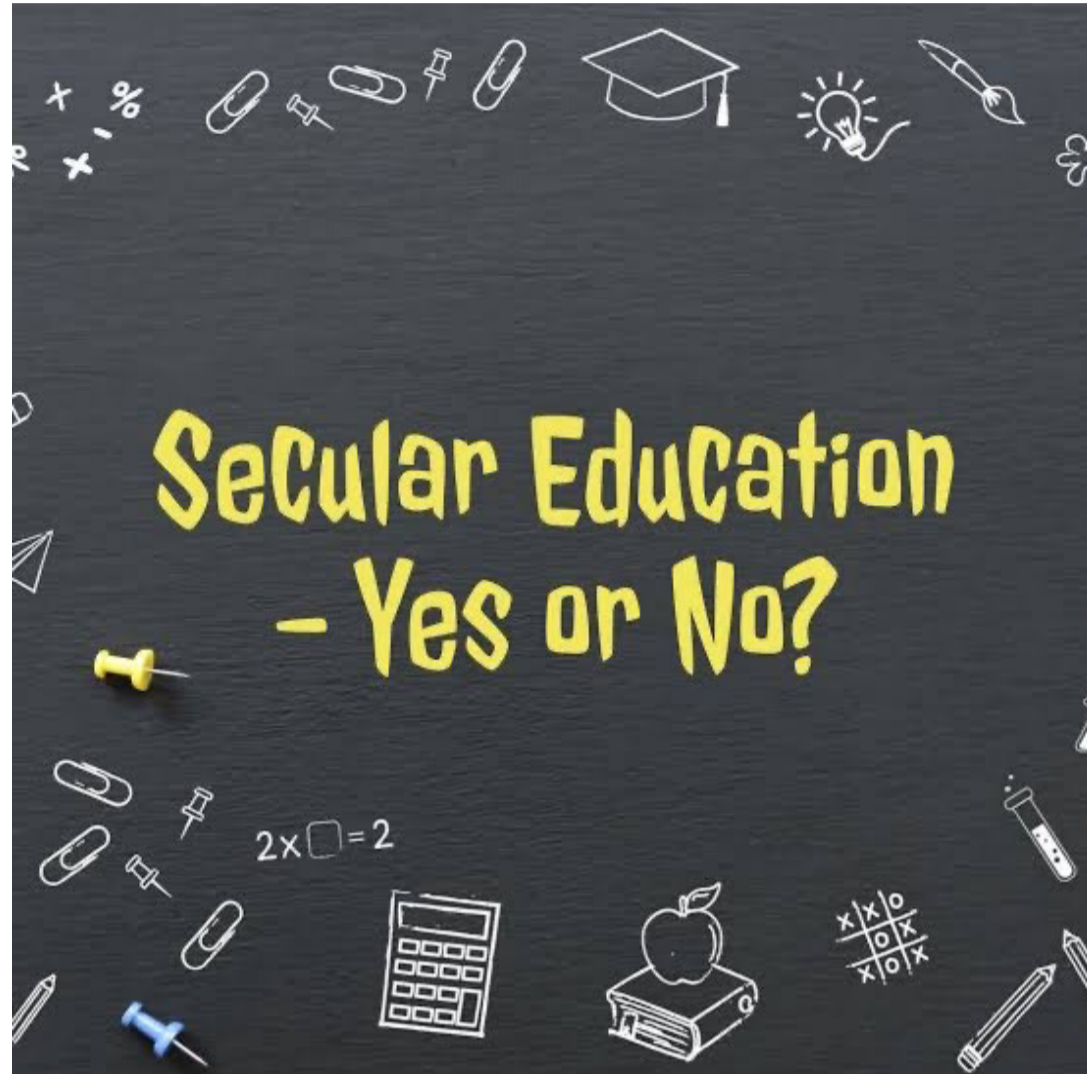
Nowshena Mushtaq

Education is a well-established means of intellectual growth, social understanding, and empowerment. As vibrant as Indian culture is, with tradition and religion being an integral part of society, there has been considerable debate on the influence of religion in educational institutions. Moral and ethical regulations can well be achieved through the teaching of religions, but when religion becomes too close to formal education, then at times, it hampers the inclusivity, scientific focus, and critical thinking that students face in order to cope with today's scenario.

It is a distinct example of diversity in culture, languages, and traditions that distinguish India in the modern world. Apart from this cultural prosperity, India has also built a skilled workforce and many innovative minds. However, progress in both these areas has been somewhat retarded because of the religious indoctrination introduced in schools. While religious teachings can indeed teach us about moral values and right conduct in our lives, the education sector, above all, should focus on science, wisdom, and knowledge that will inspire technology and innovation better than what is usually practiced in Europe, the West, and the Far East.

Religious teachings are a foundation for the development of compassion and dedication to humankind, not hatred, discrimination, or extremism. A specific time for religious teaching in schools is appropriate if balanced with science, laboratories, and innovation towards educating students about healthy competition and growth. Unfortunately, religion is now an instrument for the miscegenation of people and antagonism that threatens the sovereignty of our country. All children should be protected from religious intolerance and instead taught tolerance, sensitivity, and respect for one another. Each soul in this land must be able to feel equally treated and be equal so that our motherland becomes invincible—the country united by value and strength.

Many educational institutes of India are closely associated with religious considerations in which biases creep in the case of methodologies and curricula de-



livered. That being said, when institutions focus more on certain religions more than others, it predisposes children to a divided society, thus truncating the freedom of learning and becoming prejudiced.

Some religiously affiliated institutions compel students to participate in activities that range from forced prayers, special dress codes, and conducting ceremonies based on faith. These activities may have significant applications within particular faith communities but make education not appealing to heterogeneous students. Instead of spreading warmth and inclusivity, these forced activities tend to create divisions and isolate other students outside the same belief.

A morning assembly or religious practices belonging to one religion, such as Hindu prayers or Muslim recitations, alienates students belonging to religious

**6 WHEN RELIGION COMES INTO FORMAL EDUCATION IN A SLIGHTLY EXCESSIVE MANNER, IT WOULD ASPHYXIATE STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT.** Education for India must go forward as a secular, inclusive, and intellectually powerful society only if this serves to strengthen the secular element that combines scientific inquiry and critical thinking with religion and religious teachings kept strictly in the personal or cultural context

minority communities because a Hindu prayer in a majority of Muslim students' school or a Muslim prayer in a Hindu-majority school may make students belonging to other religions feel excluded or discomforted. This might create divisions rather than giving an impression of unity and equity, which may further impact the emotional well-being and sense of belonging of the

students. It resonates with the vision of Dr. D.S. Kothari, who presided over the Kothari Commission (1964-66). He realized that social, cultural, and religious factors bore a greater weight on the education system in India and, in numerous instances, confined the opportunities for just distribution. Overall, the differences in terms of the quality and

inclusivity had been immense. In such cases, the Kothari Commission brought out recommendations from a secular education system, aiming to integrate this vast country and prevent religion-based influences that otherwise hamper educational development. It was also on the strength of science temperament and the machinery of thinking critically that it wanted rational thinking to dominate against dogmatic religious or cultural thinking; at school-going levels, Kothari's secularism, therefore, fostered shared national identity since it transcends the religious differences, which would result in intellectual and social growth. This vision of education looked at balancing respect for culture and the focus on universal knowledge and skills, so that every child in India could be educated to prepare them for modern roles in society.

Similarly, the Romantic poet John Keats, known for his deep feeling for nature and skepticism towards organised religious dogma, did not clearly state that religion militated against education. Yet, however, his writings indicate that he followed a conservative attitude toward conventional religious dogma. Keats, in his letters, is an advocate of "negative capability," that is, the ability to embrace doubt and uncertainty without seeking absolute religious answers.

should not be mixed together. In his book *God Is Not Great*, he declared that religious teachings often clash with science and ethics, which led to an education of scientific thought and view.

Quite vocally regarding postulates about the relationships of religion and education did the German philosopher and economist, Karl Marx. His most influential essay, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), includes the statement that religion is "the opium of people." This simply means that, although very popular, religion often acts as a source of pacification, controlling the masses and not letting them ask questions about the realities around them in society and political life. Marx would believe in the propagation of inequalities through religious teachings. He would see the dangers of such teachings away from the social change the people needed. Marx advocated for a secular system of materialist education, one that would satisfy man's desire to understand the world in line with scientific analysis and critical thinking. It was through education of people for Marx that a person was to be liberated from religious illusions and was to become aware of the material conditions of life, which could in this manner transform into social and political activities.

It is an undeniable fact that religion is the greatest inspirer of values and also the highest moral guide. When religion comes into formal education in a slightly excessive manner, it would asphyxiate students' development. Education for India must go forward as a secular, inclusive, and intellectually powerful society only if this serves to strengthen the secular element that combines scientific inquiry and critical thinking with religion and religious teachings kept strictly in the personal or cultural context. Education that values and supports diversity but gives objective, evidence-based facts can actually give students the sensibilities to be well-grounded open-minded citizens in today's world.

*The author has completed her Masters in English Literature from Central University of Kashmir, currently working as an English educator*

## An AI System With Human Intelligence

Michael Timothy Bennett  
Elija Perrier

A new artificial intelligence (AI) model has just achieved human-level results on a test designed to measure "general intelligence".

On December 20, OpenAI's o3 system scored 85% on the ARC-AGI benchmark, well above the previous AI best score of 55% and on par with the average human score. It also scored well on a very difficult mathematics test.

Creating artificial general intelligence, or AGI, is the stated goal of all the major AI research labs. At first glance, OpenAI appears to have at least made a significant step towards this goal.

While scepticism remains, many AI researchers and developers feel something just changed. For many, the prospect of AGI now seems more real, urgent and closer than anticipated. Are they right?

### Generalisation and intelligence

To understand what the o3 result means, you need to understand what the ARC-AGI test is all about. In technical terms, it's a test of an AI system's "sample efficiency" in adapting to something new – how many examples of a novel situation the system needs to see to figure out how it works.

An AI system like ChatGPT (GPT-4) is not very sample efficient. It was "trained" on millions of examples of human text, constructing probabilistic "rules"

about which combinations of words are most likely.

The result is pretty good at common tasks. It is bad at uncommon tasks, because it has less data (fewer samples) about those tasks.

Until AI systems can learn from small numbers of examples and adapt with more sample efficiency, they will only be used for very repetitive jobs and ones where the occasional failure is tolerable.

The ability to accurately solve previously unknown or novel problems from limited samples of data is known as the capacity to generalise. It is widely considered a necessary, even fundamental, element of intelligence.

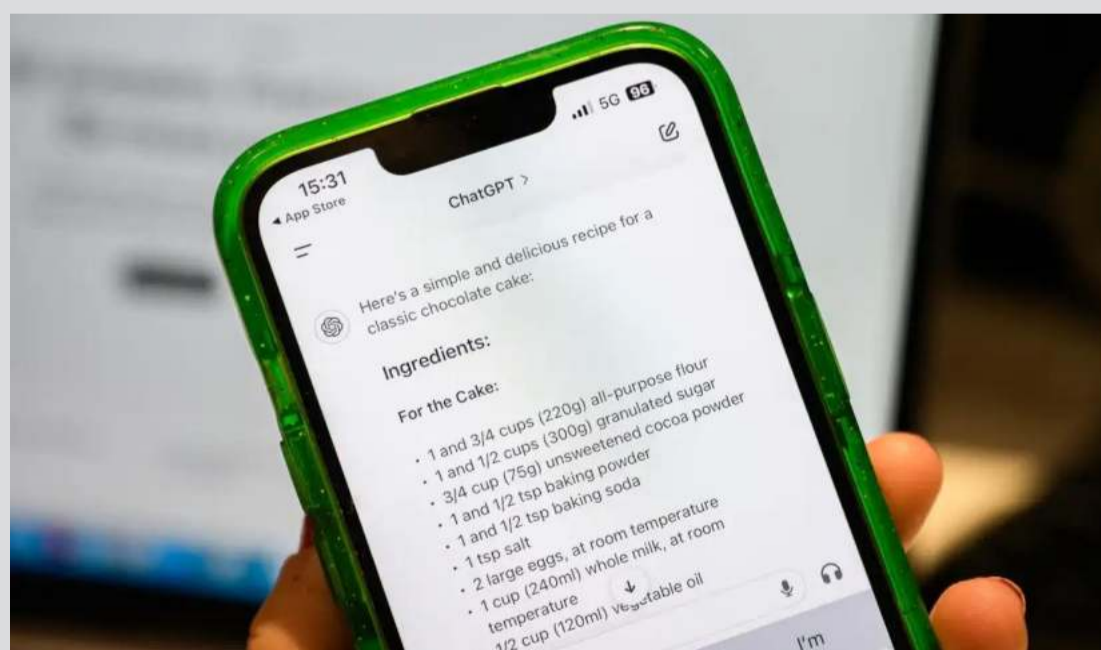
### Grids and patterns

The ARC-AGI benchmark tests for sample efficient adaptation using little grid square problems like the one below. The AI needs to figure out the pattern that turns the grid on the left into the grid on the right.

Each question gives three examples to learn from. The AI system then needs to figure out the rules that "generalise" from the three examples to the fourth. These are a lot like the IQ tests sometimes you might remember from school.

### Weak rules and adaptation

We don't know exactly how OpenAI has done it, but the results suggest the o3 model is highly adaptable. From just a few examples, it finds rules that can be generalised.



To figure out a pattern, we shouldn't make any unnecessary assumptions, or be more specific than we really have to be. In theory, if you can identify the "weakest" rules that do what you want, then you have maximised your ability to adapt to new situations.

What do we mean by the "weakest" rules? The technical definition is complicated, but weaker rules are usually ones that can be described in simpler statements. In the example above, a plain English expression of the rule might be something like: "Any shape with a protruding line will move to the end of that line and

'cover up' any other shapes it overlaps with."

### Searching chains of thought?

While we don't know how OpenAI achieved this result just yet, it seems unlikely they deliberately optimised the o3 system to find weak rules. However, to succeed at the ARC-AGI tasks it must be finding them.

We do know that OpenAI started with a general-purpose version of the o3 model (which differs from most other models, because it can spend more time "thinking" about difficult questions) and then trained it specifi-

He thought that strict religious dogmas could limit intellectual as well as poetic exploration. For Keats, true education and development of the soul must embrace that complex rather than a determinate or transcendent religious view.

A British-American author and critic of religion, Hitchens proclaimed that religious indoctrination, together with education,

o3 works, then the underlying model might not be much better than previous models.

The concepts the model learns from language might not be any more suitable for generalisation than before. Instead, we may just be seeing a more generalisable "chain of thought" found through the extra steps of training a heuristic specialised to this test. The proof, as always, will be in the pudding.

Almost everything about o3 remains unknown. OpenAI has limited disclosure to a few media presentations and early testing to a handful of researchers, laboratories and AI safety institutions.

Truly understanding the potential of o3 will require extensive work, including evaluations, an understanding of the distribution of its capacities, how often it fails and how often it succeeds.

When o3 is finally released, we'll have a much better idea of whether it is approximately as adaptable as an average human.

If so, it could have a huge, revolutionary, economic impact, ushering in a new era of self-improving accelerated intelligence. We will require new benchmarks for AGI itself and serious consideration of how it ought to be governed.

If not, then this will still be an impressive result. However, everyday life will remain much the same.

*By arrangements with The Conversation*

### What we still don't know

The question then is, is this really closer to AGI? If that is how



## CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

**SKIMS Records**

There have been many cancer-related deaths in Jammu and Kashmir, with 35,623 fatalities recorded between 2018 and 2022. These include 6,824 deaths in 2018, 7,003 in 2019, 7,189 in 2020, 7,211 in 2021, and 7,396 in 2022.

A study conducted by SKIMS in 2012 said the rising incidence of cancer is due to dietary practices, lifestyle choices and the consumption of foods with high salt content.

Kashmir Observer in March, this year, tried to uncover what exactly is causing a spike in cancers? Is there something we're eating, something we're ingesting, some combination of factors that are modern and harmful—which is resulting in these increased cancers?

Dr. Abdul Hamid Samoon, Associate Professor, Department of Minimal Access and General Surgery, GMC Srinagar told Kashmir Observer that the trend of malignancies is rising worldwide, and a similar pattern is witnessed in Kashmir. Cancer happens when the body's cells grow uncontrollably and spread to other parts of the body where these cells can form tumours or invade nearby tissues and organs, leading to serious health issues and these cancerous cells can divide rapidly and disrupt the body's normal function, making it difficult for the immune system to combat them effectively.

Presently, there's an increase in upper gastrointestinal (GI) cancers or stomach cancers, largely attributed to our dietary habits. While there's no definitive genetic or proven cause behind this trend, our dietary patterns play a significant role in driving the increase in malignancies, Dr. Samoon explained.

He pointed out that alongside upper GI cases, colorectal cancers are also on the rise in the valley, especially among the younger population. "It's concerning because cancers tend to be more aggressive in younger patients, affecting their prognosis adversely compared to older individuals. Likewise, in females, there's a significant rise in breast cancers, often associated with genetic factors and familial history," Dr. Samoon had told Kashmir Observer.

Professor of Surgery, Government Medical College Srinagar, Dr. Iqbal Saleem said the rise in cancer cases can be attributed to changes in our food habits and lifestyle.

"Furthermore, the overuse of fertilizers and pesticides is also a major contributing factor for cancers. The indiscriminate use of these chemicals, driven by the desire for quick profits, results in them entering the food chain and ultimately reaching humans. This has led to alterations in genetic make-up, which in turn contribute to cancer-related issues," Dr. Saleem said.

Data shows that with the introduction of high-density apple crops of huge economic value, pesticide use also increased threefold in the last 12 years, especially in Shopian, Pulwama, Kulgam and Anantnag districts of South Kashmir. "Consequently, orchardists in these regions are regularly exposed to pesticides. The majority of cancer cases in these areas are attributed to this pesticide exposure. It is plausible to speculate that there is a correlation between the use of pesticides and the incidence of cancer in these communities," the health expert said.

A senior oncologist at SKIMS said that there are numerous risk factors for

cancer including hormonal, hereditary, metabolic, autoimmune etc. "External causes of cancer include smoking, alcohol consumption, dietary imbalance (malnourished or obese), radiation or infections like Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Hepatitis B Virus (HBV), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), H Pylori etc," he said. (with inputs from KNO)

**Freezing Temperatures**

even as a thin layer of ice covered the surface of several water bodies, including the Dal Lake.

The bone-chilling cold sweeping through Srinagar and other parts of Kashmir has disrupted daily life, freezing water taps and pipes across the valley. As the icy conditions persist, many residents are grappling with severe water shortages.

According to the reports, the taps and water supply pipelines are freezing locals frustrated and causing water scarcity in many areas. In response, people were seen defrosting the pipes using various methods, including pouring hot water over them and using makeshift heaters, in an attempt to restore access to water.

Meanwhile, the weather experts have issued a cold wave alert, warning of severe conditions in Jammu and Kashmir over the next three days. Night temperatures are expected to remain 4 to 8°C below the seasonal average.

Independent weather forecaster Faizan Arif said that he believes that there is a possibility that low-level clouds might develop during the morning hours and persist until the afternoon, particularly in the plains of Kashmir.

The city was colder than Gulmarg, where the mercury settled at a low of minus 6.6 degrees Celsius, up from minus 7.4 degrees Celsius the previous night, the department added.

Pahalgam registered a minimum temperature of minus 8.4 degrees Celsius, down from the previous night's minus 7.8 degrees Celsius, it said.

Qazigund logged a minimum temperature of minus 6.6 degrees Celsius, while Konibal, a hamlet in the Pampore area, was the coldest recorded place in the valley at minus 9.5 degrees Celsius, it said.

Kupwara, in north Kashmir, registered a low of minus 6.4 degrees Celsius, while Kokernag, in south Kashmir, was at minus 5.4 degrees Celsius.

There is a possibility of light snowfall over the higher reaches towards the later afternoon on December 27 till the forenoon the next day, the Met Office said.

While the weather would stay mainly dry on December 29, 30, and 31, light snowfall is possible in the isolated higher reaches on New Year's Eve, and light snowfall could take place at isolated to scattered places in Kashmir from January 1-4.

During the 40 days of Chillai-Kalan, the chances of snowfall are most frequent and maximum and the temperature drops considerably.

It ends on January 30 next year, but the cold wave continues even after that in the valley. The 40 days are followed by a 20-day 'Chillai-Khurd' (small cold) and a 10-day 'Chillai-Bachha' (baby cold).

**Deficit Rainfall**

95 per cent respectively.

The data further reads that Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir has recorded a deficit rainfall of 88 per cent during the period while Udhampur in Jammu division too has recorded a similar deficiency in the last nearly three months.

Pulwama in South Kashmir and Kishtwar in Jammu division have recorded a deficit rainfall of 92 per cent each, the data reads, adding that Budgam in Central Kashmir has recorded a deficit rainfall of 91 per cent during the period.

Kupwara in north Kashmir has recorded below 50 per cent deficiency as against the normal precipitation of 133.7mm, the region has recorded a rainfall of 69.6 mm.

However, Samba is the only weather station across J&K where above normal rainfall has been recorded during the period as against the normal precipitation of 42.2mm, it has recorded a rainfall of 47.0mm.

Anantnag in South Kashmir also recorded a deficit rainfall of 89 per cent while Bandipora and Baramulla recorded a low precipitation of 76 per cent and 73 per cent respectively. (KNO)

**GOI Proposes**

has coal reserves of 9.5 million tonnes. The primary coal reserves are located in Kalakote, Jangalgali, Metka, Ladha, Chinka, Dhansal, Swalkote, Chakar, Dandil, Mohogala, San-gar-Marg, and Kura. The Kalakote coal mines are estimated to have a usable reserve of roughly 5.4 million tonnes up to a depth of about 300 metres, according to the Geological Survey of India.

**Shah Lauds CRPF**

jawans of the force, including compassionate appointments in the CRPF. Shah emphasised the importance of promoting Hindi in the daily functioning of the force to strengthen linguistic unity.

Along with emphasising the use of more and more 'Shri Ann' (Millets) for better health of the soldiers, the home minister also called upon the soldiers to extract the benefits of Ayurveda and participate in 'Prakriti Parikshan Abhiyan' to get health insights as per individual's Prakriti, fostering wellbeing and better health.

Several senior officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs, including Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, were present at the meeting.

**HC Acquits Budgam**

the order of conviction and sentence before the High Court.

After hearing the counsel representing the accused and the government, the Division Bench of the court acquitted Singh.

"...the appellant (Singh) says that after he enticed the two girls to the SOC (Scene of crime), he went to his house to get the mustard oil and then came back to the SOC and committed the crime. This shows that there was no need for the appellant to jump from the attic, come back to the front door, lock it and then go home. If he had to lock the front door, he could have come out of it and then locked it, there was no need for him to jump out of the attic," the DB said. Therefore, the DB said, the narrative of the prosecution that Singh jumped out of the attic after committing the offence is based solely on the disclosure of Singh u/s. 27 of the Evidence Act and it is "impermissible in law to use the disclosure statement beyond proving what was recovered at

the behest of the accused."

"Thus, in view of what has been argued, considered and held by this Court hereinabove, the prosecution's case against the appellant is nothing more than a bundle of contradictions, omissions, speculations and conjectures and it has miserably failed to prove the case against the appellant beyond reasonable doubt," the court said, adding, "Under the circumstances, the impugned judgement of conviction is set aside, and the appellant is acquitted of all charges. He shall be released forthwith."

**Trial Run Successful**

posted on X: "Trial run of tower wagon on India's First Cable-Stayed Railway Bridge at Anji Khad for USBRL Project in J&K."

While giving the details of the upcoming railway operations on the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link officials said that from January 5 to January 6, 2025, statutory inspections will be conducted for the opening of the Katra-Reasi (16.501 km) section. "This section is part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla New Broad Gauge (B.G.) Rail Link Project. The inspection will start at 20:50 hrs on January 5 and conclude at 07:55 hrs on January 6," they added.

The Commissioner of Railways Safety (CRS) is expected to submit an inspection report to the Union Government on January 8.

It is in place to mention here that the Phase-I of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) Project, covering the 118-km-long Qazigund-Baramulla section, was inaugurated in October 2009. Subsequent phases included the inauguration of the 18-km-long Banihal-Qazigund section in June 2013 and the 25-km-long Udhampur-Katra section in July 2014.

In February, the first electric trial run on the Banihal-Katra section of the USBRL project was successfully conducted on approximately 40 km of track and tunnels between Banihal and Sangaldan Railway Stations in Ramban district.

The USBRL Project involves 38 tunnels with a combined length of 119 km. The longest tunnel, T-49, measures 12.75 km, making it the country's longest transportation tunnel. The project also includes 927 bridges with a combined length of 13 km.

Among these is the iconic Chenab Bridge, with an overall length of 1,315 m, an arch span of 467 m, and a height of 359 m above the riverbed. This bridge stands about 35 meters taller than the Eiffel Tower and is recognized as the world's highest arch railway bridge.

**CM Conducts**

inspection, he toured various sections and wards, interacting with patients and attendants to understand their concerns.

Accompanied by Minister of Health, Sakeena Itoo, Senior Faculty Members and Doctors, the Chief Minister engaged with hospital staff to assess the winter arrangements, treatment facilities and the availability of medical professionals and paramedics.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also inspected the state-of-the-art additional block of the hospital, constructed under the Jhelum Tawi Flood Recovery Project (JFRP) with funding from the World Bank.

Designed with earthquake-resilient technology, the block will add 160 beds, increasing the hospital's total

capacity from 150 to 310 beds.

During his visit, the Chief Minister emphasized the need to expedite the completion of the new block, which is critical for addressing the space crunch caused by a fire incident in 2022 that reduced the hospital's original capacity of 200 beds.

He directed the executing agencies to ensure its swift operationalization by January 2025 to enhance patient care and to dedicate the facility to public service.

The Chief Minister also inspected the 500-bedded Children's Hospital in Bemina, where he interacted with patients, attendants, and hospital staff.

During his visit, attendants from far-flung areas raised concerns about the lack of a Sarai (inn) for their stay.

The Chief Minister immediately directed the concerned authorities to construct a Sarai to accommodate attendants and alleviate their difficulties.

The hospital staff highlighted the challenges of expanding super-specialty facilities due to express space constraints.

The Chief Minister assured them that the issue would be addressed on priority.

He also promised to resolve the shortage of medical staff, including doctors and paramedics, not only at this hospital but across healthcare facilities in Jammu and Kashmir.

Furthermore, the Chief Minister instructed hospital authorities to ensure the timely availability of medicines and other essential facilities for patients.

During the inspections, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah reiterated his government's commitment to improving healthcare infrastructure, ensuring better facilities for the public and addressing manpower shortages in health institutions across Jammu and Kashmir.

The Chief Minister was accompanied during his visits by Minister of Health Sakeena Itoo, Medical Superintendent of the Children's Hospital, senior faculty members and other concerned officials.

**Vajpayee's 'Nation**

To ensure this Atal Ji gave us the principles of 'Indianization' and 'Nation-First'. Every section of society should work together to make the country self-reliant with undivided loyalty," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor called upon the people, especially the youth to rededicate themselves to the ideals of Mahatma and Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and strive to build a progressive society and work unitedly to realise the vision of Viksit Bharat.

"We do not have to live in the past but we must take inspiration from history to build a brighter future," he said.

He highlighted that the Youth have a very important role to play in taking public services to the grassroots levels. To achieve this, we need to start shaping a new framework for Jan-Bhagidari and use new technologies for transparency and accountability at all levels, he added.

"Unity is our greatest strength. Young generation must unite the society with determination. I want to see every hand working like a skilled sculptor to create a beautiful, victorious and prosperous India. I want to see a sense of responsibility, steadfastness towards duties and steady determination in every youth towards nation-building," the LG said.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasised that our cultural ideals and values should be paramount for the new political and economic system.

"Today is the opportunity for us to build a brighter tomorrow for the country and to ensure that societal attitudes are changed towards responsibilities. Whole of Government Approach should be adopted to achieve socio-economic goals," the LG observed.

**Christmas Celebrated**

bunting, lights and balloons, and wore festive looks.

The biggest Mass was held at the Holy Family Catholic Church at Maulana Azad Road here, where members of the Christian community, including women and children, had assembled to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, and held special prayers.

Among the believers were a few tourists who joined the locals on the auspicious day.

"We felt good, we enjoyed it a lot. There is no danger, people live together with brotherhood and we celebrated Christmas," Poonam, a tourist from Jammu, said.

While she lamented the absence of a white Christmas in Srinagar -- as Srinagar has had no snowfall so far this season -- she prayed for a good snowfall in the valley.

"It is colder. Kashmir used to have white Christmas and it was great, but this year, there has been no snowfall in Srinagar and people are facing difficulties. We pray for a good snowfall," she added.

Another tourist, Pun Mudhiraj, a resident of Bengaluru, visiting the valley with his wife and three children, said Christmas is a season of hope, love, joy, caring and sharing.

"We met three other families here, we were strangers, but we became friends. That is the essence of Christmas celebrations. We felt good here," he said.

Christmas celebrations were also held in other churches of the valley, including in Gulmarg and Baramulla.

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha greeted the members of the Christian community on the occasion, and asked the people to imbibe Jesus Christ's message of love and compassion.

"Wish you all a Merry Christmas. Let's imbibe Jesus Christ's message of love, compassion & forgiveness, and work for welfare of humankind and upliftment of the needy & underprivileged. May this Christmas fill the hearts of people with warmth, love & goodwill towards fellow beings," Sinha said on X.

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah, and party vice president and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also greeted people, hoping the day augurs well for peace and prosperity in J&K.

"I extend warm greetings to the Christian community on the joyous occasion of Christmas. This day symbolises the spirit of selflessness and empathy, dedicating oneself to easing human suffering. May this day serve as a catalyst for global peace and prosperity," the senior Abdullah said in a statement.

Omar emphasised the importance of brotherhood, harmony, and amity as integral components of the Union Territory's rich cultural heritage.

Director General of Police J&K, Nalin Prabhat, also greeted the people of J&K a very Happy Christmas.



27<sup>th</sup> year OF PUBLICATION

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## Kashmiri 'Kandur Roti' Price Hike Fuels Anxiety Among Low-Income Families

Agencies

**SRINAGAR:** The recent doubling of the price of Kashmiri "Kandur Roti," a staple food item in the region, has triggered strong reactions from both bakers and residents, particularly among those facing economic challenges.

Traditionally sold at Rs 5, the bread is now priced at Rs 10, a change that has raised concerns throughout the Valley, especially among the poor.

Sofi Abdullah Majeed Pampori, president of the Kashmir Bread Makers and Bakers Union, defended the price hike, stating that it was necessary due to the rising costs of key ingredients like ghee and flour.

He explained that after extensive discussions, the decision was made to adjust the prices in response to mounting

operational expenses, and it had been communicated to the authorities.

However, many residents, particularly those in lower-income groups, have voiced their displeasure over the price increase. Kulsam Jan, a local from Beerwah, expressed her frustration: "We can't afford to spend Rs 50 for five rotis, which used to cost just Rs 25. A small increase would have been manageable, but this is an excessive hike."

Sajad Ahmad, another resident from Srinagar, added that the new price is unaffordable for many, especially those earning between Rs 200 and Rs 300 a day. "This price hike is hitting us hard, particularly during the harsh winter. I urge the government to step in and set a fair price that everyone can afford," he said. (KINS)

## Farooq Nazki Honored Posthumously As Bandipora's Literary Forum

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** The Literary Forum Bandipora (LFB) on Wednesday announced its prestigious yearly literary awards for 2025, recognizing two renowned Poets and Scholars of Kashmiri literature.

The late poet and former Director of Doordarshan, Farooq Nazki, has been posthumously awarded the Nazki Award for his exceptional contributions to Kashmiri literature. Prof. Naseem Shifaye has been chosen for the Charaag-i-Sukhan Award for her acclaimed book "Bu Vanyeth Zaan Kass".

The announcement was made after a day-long meeting and consultation session chaired by Mir Tariq Rasool, Vice President of LFB and Chairman of the Awards Committee. Other notable members present included Mubashir Saleem Nazki, Dr. Adil Mahiuddin, Sufi Showkat, Rouf Ghayal, Dr. Bashrat Fakir, Dr. Asrar, Mansur Muntazir, and others. "We have nominated Farooq Nazki for Nazki Award and Prof. Naseem Shafie for her book after a detailed discussion and deliberations after receiving name of many poets and writers" Mir said adding "the awards are conferred on merit, content and contribution," Mir said while speaking on the selection process.

Mir said LFB has been honouring eminent writers at award

functions being held in Bandipora for the past 10 years. The award was instituted, in 2015, in memory of Prof. Rashid Nazki a poet, academician and founder of Adbi Markaz Kamraz.

The Nazki Award, established in memory of Prof. Rashid Nazki, a poet, academician, and founder of Adbi Markaz Kamraz, honours poets and writers who have made substantial contributions to literature. The Charaag-i-Sukhan Award recognizes poets or writers for outstanding publications in the preceding year.

Speaking on the Occasion Mir highlighted that previous recipients of the Nazki Award include luminaries like Prof. G. R. Malik, Prof. Shafi Shouq, and Shahnaz Rashid. He said the grand award ceremony will take place during the annual Nazki Day event, now scheduled for the last week of February 2025 in Bandipora. Initially planned for January 5, the event has been deferred due to severe weather conditions.

"Nazki Day is a yearly tradition to honor the memory of Prof. Rashid Nazki and celebrate literary achievements. Proper invitations will be sent to the awardees or their representatives for the ceremony," Mir said. He said this year's awards reinforce Bandipora's role as a hub for literary and cultural enrichment, furthering the district's legacy and Forum's vision of promoting Kashmiri literature.

## Two Shopian Residents Among Four Held With Fake Currency, Arms in UP

Agencies

**UP / SRINAGAR:** Uttar Pradesh Police arrested four individuals, including two residents of Shopian, Jammu and Kashmir, for possessing currency and other ammunition.

A UP police officer told the news agency JKNS that Rs 2.35 crore of fake currency, a pistol, 41 cartridges, and a magazine

were recovered from them. The accused from Shopian were identified as Mukhtar Ahmed Wani, son of Abdul Majeed Wani, of Hirpora, and Basarat Hameed, son of Abdul Hameed Wani, of Kutpora. The arrests were made during a routine check.

Authorities are investigating the source of the counterfeit notes and the purpose of the arms the officer said. —(JKNS)

From Leh To Kanyakumari

## Rajasthan Cyclist On Mission For 'Drug-Free India'

Agencies

**QAZIGUND:** Girdhari Lal, a resident of Rajasthan, is cycling solo from Leh to Kanyakumari to promote the message of a "Drug-Free India".

During a brief stop in Qazigund in south Kashmir, Lal shared his mission: "My goal is to spread the message of a drug-free and self-sufficient India through this bicycle journey. I started from Leh on the 20th and plan to cross around 12 states. I expect to reach my destination by February 10."

Describing the challenges of his journey, Girdhari said, "The temperatures in Leh were freezing, and it's similarly cold here in Kashmir, but I am determined to continue my mission. Along the way, I have met incredible people. The hospitality in Kashmir is amazing, and it is very safe to ride here. Don't believe the negative portrayals on TV channels."



Lal said his journey goes beyond raising awareness. "It is a call to action for individuals to adopt healthier and more sustainable lifestyles. Building stamina is essential. Without effort, our bodies weaken," he said, encouraging people to embrace physical activities like cycling.

Highlighting the environmental benefits of cycling, he said, "Cycling not only improves physical health but also reduces pollution. The more vehicles we use, the more pollution we generate. Promoting cycling will benefit the country, the youth, and all citizens." —(KNO)

## Kashmir Reports 18 Dog Bite Cases Daily

Agencies

**SRINAGAR:** With an alarming average of 18 dog bite cases reported daily, stray dogs continue to pose a significant threat across Kashmir.

Official data accessed by news agency KINS reveals that the valley registers around 6,000 to 6,500 dog bite cases annually; indicating 18 cases of dog bites are reported daily.

A senior official from the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) stressed the urgent need to manage the growing stray dog population. "Open garbage points must be closed, as they attract dogs, especially due to poultry waste. Responsible waste disposal is crucial for public safety," the official said, urging residents to remain vigilant, particularly for children and the elderly.

Residents across the valley report rising fear and inconvenience due to stray dogs. Mushtaq Ahmad from Batalmaloo expressed frustration



over the authorities' inaction. "Children are scared to attend school, and the issue remains unresolved," he said.

In Nowpora, Bashir Ahmad shared his ordeal, stating, "After sunset, we are confined to our homes due to the stray dog menace. I have even stopped attending prayers at the mosque during early morning and evening hours."

The situation is equally dire at healthcare facilities and educational institutions. At Jawahar Lal Nehru Memorial

Hospital (JLNM), Rainawari, and Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital (SMHS), stray dogs roam the premises, often chasing attendants bringing food for patients.

"Dozens of dogs inside the hospital compound terrify us. We avoid stepping out due to the constant threat," said Mushtaq Ahmad, an attendant at SMHS Hospital. Similar issues plague SKIMS Soura and Kashmir University, where stray dogs freely roam within the premises. (KINS)

## Reservation Row

### NC Heading Towards Split: BJP Leader

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** A day after National Conference MLA Salman Sagar castigated his party MP Aga Ruhullah over leading a protest on reservation policy row, Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee chief Tariq Hameed Kara termed it as National Conference's "internal matter".

"We don't want to comment on the internal matter of the National Conference, similarly. We also expect no one to comment on our internal matters," Kara said.

Stating that the census should be made the basis for any kind of reservation, Kara said, "Rahul Gandhi has been pushing for a caste census in the country. He has made it clear that reservation should be given on the

said, "Rahul Gandhi has been pushing the entire country for the caste census. He has made it clear that reservation should be given on the basis of the population."

Another senior Congress leader while commenting on Aga Ruhullah's protest said, "Certain things need to be read between the lines." It may be recalled that earlier this week NC Member Parliament Minister Omar Abdullah's official residence in Srinagar over reservation policy row. He

was joined by the leaders from opposition parties. Reacting to Ruhullah's protest MLA Hazratbal, Salman Ali Sagar had expressed strong dismay. "If the MP believes that he can do it, then that's his individual prerogative, however, this was not the National Conference's initiative. The protest was a platform for the party's adversaries. It was a gathering of our adversaries, of our enemies. Unfortunately, one of our MPs was present there, giving them an opportunity to exploit the situation," he had said.

## CHILDREN HEALTH

### 'Helminthic Infection, Not Taking Iron Rich Diets Main Reasons Of Anemia'

Agencies

**SRINAGAR:** Helminthic infections and not eating a balanced or iron rich diet are the main reasons behind the increasing prevalence of anemia among children, the health experts said.

Several doctors said that the regular deworming is very important for both kids and adults and can be taken in any season.

Dr. Rukhsana, a gynaecologist at DSHK said that the main cause of anemia in children is Helminthic infection. She said that intestinal helminth infection in a concomitant state of malnutrition is observed among children.

"Helminthic infections, caused by parasitic worms, can contribute to anemia through various mechanisms. These parasites can affect the host's nutritional status, impair iron absorption, and induce chronic inflammation, all of which play crucial roles in the development of anemia," she said.

Dr. Shugufta, another gynaecologist at DSHK said that helminthic infections are parasitic infections caused by helminths, which are a group of multicellular

worms and may lead to nutrient competition, impaired iron absorption, blood loss, inflammation response and other issues.

She said that there is a misconception that deworming can't be done in winters but it can be given any season at regular intervals but most of the children aren't being given it that also leads to anemia.

"Deworming helps to remove worms and any infection that might disturb the patient and it is important for those infected by these worms," she added.

Doctors said that diet plays a crucial role in the prevalence of anemia among children as the insufficient dietary iron is a primary cause of anemia.

They said adequate intake of vitamin B12 and folate, nutrient-rich foods, breastfeeding and complementary foods, dietary diversity, hygiene and food safety are main things that play a role in preventing anemia among children.

Doctors said that children, who have worms, always feel tired because of malnutrition and anemia while they can have impaired physical

and cognitive development. They said that there is no need to panic as worm infection is easy to control but parents must keep vigil on their children and monitor their growth and other behavior as well, adding that untreated worm infections prevent children's healthy growth, cause poor nutrition and reduce their capacity to concentrate and learn.

"The treatment is simple, safe, effective and free of charge. A single dose of deworming treatment drastically reduces the number of worms in each child," they said.

Worm infections can cause various health problems, including anemia, abdominal distention (swelling) or severe abdominal pain, diarrhoea, etc. It can also cause loss of appetite, malnourishment, impaired mental and physical development as well as tissue damage that may require corrective surgery," Doctors said.

"Deworming improves your child's immunity, and thereby protecting him/her from chronic illnesses caused by worms, improves concentration and attendance, making them more productive in

## Vajpayee Talked To Pak Despite Kargil, Parliament Attack: Mehbooba Mufti

Agencies

**SRINAGAR:** On the occasion of 100th birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chief Mehbooba Mufti paid rich tributes to the iconic leader, focusing on his unwavering commitment to dialogue and peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

In her tribute, Mehbooba Mufti praised Vajpayee for his remarkable leadership, stating that his approach to peace and diplomacy, especially with Pakistan, remains a vital part of his legacy.

"Despite the challenges of the Kargil conflict and the 2001 Parliament attack, Vajpayee did not shy away from pursuing talks with Pakistan, a stance that distinguished him as a leader who valued dialogue over conflict."

"Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a man with a vision for peace. Despite the turmoil of Kargil and the attack on Parliament, he never abandoned the path of dialogue with Pakistan. His determination to engage in talks, even in the face of adversity, demonstrated his belief in diplomacy as the only solution for lasting peace," Mehbooba said.

She also highlighted Vajpay-



ee's acknowledgment of the late Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's "healing touch" policy, which was instrumental in improving the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. Vajpayee's support for this policy led to practical steps, such as the opening of roads, that contributed to easing the strained atmosphere in the region and provided much-needed relief to its people.

"Vajpayee's recognition of Mufti Sahab's healing touch policy was a turning point for Kashmir. The opening of roads and the beginning of confidence-building measures were the first real signs that the people of Kashmir were being given the attention they deserved. It was a significant moment in the peace process," she added.

She noted that Vajpayee's vision for a peaceful, prosperous India, built on the foundation of communication and mutual understanding, continues to shape the discourse in Jammu and Kashmir even today. —(KINS)

## Fire Safety Alert

### JKDMA Issues Life-Saving Winter Guidelines

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** With temperatures plummeting in Kashmir valley, Jammu & Kashmir Disaster Management Authority (JKDMA) has issued critical fire safety guidelines, stating that fire incidents were on the rise in the region during the winters.

JKDMA has urged people to prioritize safety measures to protect lives and property from fire incidents during the harsh winter months.

Sharing the fire safety guidelines, JKDMA has advised to install smoke detectors and smoke alarms in all buildings, stating that its functioning can increase survival chances by 50 per cent.

With regard to electrical safety, the guidelines have advised to avoid running electric wires or cords under carpets or in high-foot traffic areas.

For children safety, the guidelines have mentioned keeping matches and lighters locked away from children. The guidelines have advised placing extinguishers at strategic locations, ensuring that they are functional, and training household members to use them during emergencies.

In another set of guidelines issued by JKDMA with regard



to the response to facing or getting caught up in a fire incident, it has asked to stay calm and to evacuate immediately and call emergency services. The guidelines have advised not to re-enter the building.

In case the clothing catches fire, the guidelines have advised to drop to the ground and roll to extinguish flames. It has advised to avoid running, stating that the air will "accelerate" the burning.

The guidelines have mentioned that a shower can also quickly douse flames.

The JKDMA in the guidelines have stressed the importance of fire safety education to mitigate risks during winters, when reliance on heating devices increases significantly.

The advisory has asked to ensure proper ventilation, not leaving heating devices unattended, and keeping flammable materials away from heat sources are essential practices.

## 9 Drug Peddlers Arrested In Kashmir

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** In its tireless efforts to eradicate the menace of drugs from the society, Police on Wednesday said to have arrested nine drug peddlers in various districts of Kashmir valley and recovered contraband & psychotropic substances from their possession.

In Srinagar, a Police party of PS Nowhatta, during routine naka checking at Ganj Baksh Park, apprehended two drug peddlers identified as Khalid Ahmad son of Mohd Ismail Rather resident of Rashan Ghat, Soura, and Basit Ahmad Dar son of Bilal Ahmad Dar resident of Usmaniya Colony, Wantpora, Eidgah. During the search, a substantial quantity of contraband substances was recovered from their possession, a police spokesman said in a statement.

In Baramulla district, a Police party of Police Station Baramulla at a checkpoint established at Azadgunj Chowk Baramulla, intercepted a person identified as Mubashir Mohiuddin Dar son of Gh Mohiuddin resident of Azadgunj. During the search, 200 grams of Charas was recovered from his possession. He has been subsequently arrested, police said.

Meanwhile in Bandipora, during naka checking at Pappachan bridge, officials of PS Bandipora apprehended a drug peddler and recovered 47 Bottles of Codeine Phosphate bottles from his possession. He has been identified as Ishad Ahmad Wani son of Habibullah Wani resident of Hajin, police said.

Similarly, during naka checking at Shokbaba Sumlar another drug peddler was arrested along with 40 grams of Charas was recovered from his possession. He has been identified as Ab Rashid Sheikh son of Sonaulaha Sheikh resident of Arin. Moreover, a police party at a checkpoint established at Check Chandergar, intercepted a vehicle (Maruti Alto Car) bearing registration No. JK15C-0747 driven by Mohamad Aqib Wani son of Gh Mohd Wani resident of Hajin. During the search, 98 bottles of Codeine Phosphate were recovered from his possession. The driver has been arrested and the vehicle used in the commission of crime has also been seized, police said.



# Ready To Spar On Boxing Day: India Fret On Rohit's Batting Position

Press Trust of India

**MELBOURNE:** Divine intervention and a wagging tail might have lifted India's sagging spirits in Brisbane but an out-of-form skipper Rohit Sharma's batting position will be in focus against a dangerous Australia bracing to deliver the knockout punch in the 'Boxing Day' Test starting here on Thursday.

The Indian skipper was the last to hit the nets on Christmas eve and there is speculation doing rounds that he could replace the team's most assured opener, KL Rahul, at the top of the order.

If that happens, Rahul will come in at No. 3 while Shubman Gill could either play in the middle order or make way for a Dhruv Jurel in the playing eleven. The series is currently locked 1-1.

The Indian skipper stopped batting in the middle order after being elevated to the opening slot back in 2019. But he chose to come down in Ad-



elaide and Brisbane to accommodate an in-form Rahul and first-Test centurion Yashasvi Jaiswal.

The move was a spectacular failure and it remains to be seen how the team adjusts in case Rohit opens and Gill is either

dropped or bats at number five.

Asked about his batting position during the pre-match press conference, he was borderline irritated.

"Let's not worry about that. I think who bats where, we should be discussing that within

ourselves and I shouldn't be answering this question in every press conference," the skipper just about held his composure.

#### HOW TEAMS ARE STACKED

Both captains feel that 1-1 after three games is a fair re-

lection of the competition between the sides but things can quickly change at the MCG.

The rain-affected draw at the Gabba was like a soothing balm for India after Pink Test debacle in Adelaide.

But now, India are back at one of their favourite Australian venues where they have remained undefeated in Tests since the 2014 series.

The last two (2018-19 and 2020-21) of the three Tests (other being 2014-15) resulted in Indian wins where solid batting played its part.

But this line-up, with three young mavericks (Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill), one confident opener (KL Rahul) and a couple of ageing stalwarts (Virat Kohli and Rohit) hasn't looked very assured.

They will have to put up their best show against a home team which isn't exactly a runaway favourite either but has shown tremendous resilience.

Match Starts at 5 am.

## Shastri Believes Kohli & Smith Will Bounce Back In Style

Press Trust of India

**MELBOURNE:** They may not have been at their dominant best so far but Virat Kohli and Steve Smith will be "dangerous" and "hungry" for runs in the remaining two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series, feels former India head coach Ravi Shastri.

Part of the celebrated 'Jab Four' that also comprises Joe Root and Kane Williamson, both Kohli and Smith have

"In a situation like this, you know they'll be dangerous because they'll be hungry."

Smith's scores read 0, 17, 2, 101, and 4 in five innings, while Kohli has managed 126 runs at an average of 31.50, including an unbeaten 100 in the Perth Test.

Smith, who has struggled for runs this year, bounced back with a gritty 33rd Test century at Brisbane.

Shastri believes mental resilience is what sets players

India will face Australia in the fourth Test beginning in Melbourne on Thursday.

#### India Have Their Nose Ahead: Shastri Backs Visitors

Former coach Ravi Shastri has backed India to win the Boxing Day Test, saying the visitors have exploited Australia's "brittle" top order to have their "nose ahead" in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series.

Shastri added that Indian



endured struggles with the bat in recent times, though they have scored a century each in the first three Tests of the five-match series.

"I think they (Kohli and Smith) will have slipped down the ranks on current form because you know you've got the likes of Root taking off, there's Williamson doing well, Harry Brook has come onto the scene, you know there are a lot of other young players pushing but these are class players," Shastri said in the ICC Review.

like Kohli and Smith apart, adding that the Indian needs to show patience and discipline in the upcoming fourth Test at the MCG.

"What's needed you saw from Smith. It might have been a struggle early on but he was prepared to play the waiting game and be disciplined," Shastri said.

"I think the same with Virat. If Virat gets over that first 30, 40 minutes, with serious application and discipline, I don't think he's (out of form), none of these guys are out of form."

pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is "almost single-handedly" responsible for the visitors keeping the series levelled at 1-1.

"I think India would take this, the way the series is poised. Any overseas team being 1-1, especially with the games being in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane, they would take this."

"Going 1-1 into Boxing Day is the best case scenario. I would say India have their nose ahead," Shastri told news.com.au.

## SA Aims To Seal Its Place In WTC Final With Pakistan Tests



Agencies

**CENTURION:** South Africa will be eyeing a place in the World Test Championship final with an all-seam attack against Pakistan in the first test, starting Thursday.

The Proteas need to win one of its remaining two test matches in this WTC cycle to guarantee a place at the Lord's final next year and captain Temba Bavuma believes expectations have risen in his team to do well in the two-test series.

"There'll be pressure that comes with that," Bavuma said. "But to be honest with you, we're coming into the series to win the series 2-0. We understand that for us to do that, there's certain things that we need to do as a team: keep things simple, keep doing the small things right, and allow the results to take care of itself."

South Africa has included four fast bowlers in the lineup with Corbin Bosch, who consistently bowls above 140 kph, set to play his first test at his hometown. Seasoned fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen will team up with Dane Paterson and Bosch to challenge Pakistan's batters on an expected pacey Centurion pitch where fast bowlers have a clear advantage over the last six years, picking up 227 wickets with spinners

dismissal only 16 batters.

Heading into the tests, South Africa's top-order batters did struggle against Pakistan in a rare 3-0 ODI whitewash with Tony de Zorzi, Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs all failing to read the offspin bowling of Salman Ali Agha in the opening game of the series.

Pakistan has long been struggling in test matches in South Africa, losing 12 and winning just two of the 15 test matches since it first toured the country in 1995. Pakistan's below-par show in South Africa includes its lowest test score of 49 at the Wanderers in 2013. Pakistan is lying at No. 7 in the WTC points table and Aaqib Javed is its fourth head coach in this WTC cycle with Mickey Arthur and Mohammad Hafeez quitting after one series. Jason Gillespie resigned just two weeks before Thursday's test.

Shaheen Shah Afridi, who played in the preceding white-ball series in South Africa, has been surprisingly left out for the test matches.

Naseem Shah and Babar Azam return to the test fold after missing the last two home tests against England while selectors have recalled seamer Mohammad Abbas after three years with the left-arm seam option of Mir Hamza in the squad. Abbas took 90 wickets in 25 test matches from 2017 to 21 before he ran out of selectors' favor.

## Short TAKES

### Travis Head Fit To Face India In MCG Thriller



Australia heaved a major sigh of relief on Wednesday after skipper Pat Cummins declared run-machine Travis Head fit for the Boxing Day Test against India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

India nemesis Head, the leading scorer of the five-Test series for the Border-Gavaskar trophy, suffered a quad strain in Brisbane.

"He ticked off some final things today and yesterday, but no stress, no worries about injury for Trav," Cummins told reporters after training on Wednesday. "He'll go into the game fully fit. I don't think you'll see too much management of him throughout the game... maybe around fielding if he's a bit uncomfortable."

Middle order batter Head has tallied 409 runs from five innings in the series, which include two hundreds and a fifty, averaging nearly 82.

Australia have confirmed teenaged opener Sam Konstas will make his debut replacing Nathan McSweeney in front of a sellout Boxing Day crowd at the MCG.

Seamer Scott Boland will be coming in for the injured Josh Hazlewood in the other change for the home side in a match when the mercury is forecast to reach 40 degrees Celsius on day one.

### Grass, Spin & Heat: MCG Pitch Set To Test Bowlers

Ahead of the fourth Test against India at Melbourne, Australian skipper Pat Cummins said that the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) pitch looks "nice and firm" with a "bit of grass coverage" and it could help spinner Nathan Lyon as well.

Speaking ahead of the game in a pre-match presser, Cummins said about the pitch, "Pitch looks really good, quite consistent to what it has here for the last few years, I think, you know, a bit of grass coverage, feels nice and firm, so they (curators) have done a great job here for you, you know, probably the last five, six years, their pitches and I suspect the same this year."

The skipper also admitted that bowling during high heat, in temperatures as high as 39 degrees could be "hot". Speaking further on the wicket, Cummins called it "well-balanced".

"Nathan Lyon has had some success here, certainly plays a role, so yeah, would not be surprised if there's a little bit on-off for spin," he concluded.

### Rizwan, PCB Chief Hail CT Scheduling; Shah Excited

Pakistan white ball captain Mohammed Rizwan and PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi termed ICC's decision to hold the Champions Trophy in a hybrid model as a "significant milestone" for the country.

Pakistan will play host to an ICC event after 28 years as the last global tournament held here was the 1996 World Cup.

"As a cricket loving country, we are all very excited to host the ICC Champions Trophy 2025. It is a great occasion as Pakistan welcomes the first ICC event to its shores in 28 years and especially as we are the defending champions," Rizwan said in a PCB media release.

"We eagerly look forward to playing in front of our home crowd," he added.

Naqvi was delighted to see Pakistan hosting a part of the showpiece under the hybrid system.

The tournament opener will be played in Karachi on February 19 with Pakistan facing New Zealand and the final is scheduled for March 9.

Jay Shah, who recently took over as ICC Chairman, said he was "excited" to see the Champions Trophy finally getting a move on.

"Very excited for the ICC Men's Champions Trophy to start in February," Shah, the former BCCI secretary, wrote on 'X'.

# Indian Cricket In 2024: Painful Trophy Wait Ends Before Rare Home Loss

Press Trust of India

**NEW DELHI:** The monkey was finally off India's back in a roller-coaster 2024 when the financial giants of international cricket ended a 13-year wait for a world title, lost a rare Test series at home and dealt with transition triggered by both expected and unexpected retirements by the stalwarts of the game.

There was plenty of action over the last 12 months that kept the loyal Indian fan interested.

#### World Cup Triumph; T20 Farewell To Rohit And Kohli

The Indian cricket team and its unparalleled fan base were desperate for an ICC trophy after repeatedly faltering in the knockout stages over the past decade, most recently in the ODI World Cup final at home last year.

The trophy finally came home after Rohit Sharma and Co. played a near perfect tournament to become the T20 World Cup champions in the USA and the Caribbean.

India's clarity of thought throughout the one-month long event was remarkable and with a little bit of luck on their side, es-

pecially in the final at Barbados, they were able to go the distance.

On undercooked pitches in New York, they were pace heavy before unleashing their trump card Kuldeep Yadav from the Super 8 stage of the tournament.

India picked as many as four spinners in the squad but played three in Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and Kuldeep.

With Jadeja not getting to do much with both bat and ball, Axar came of age in the competition producing match-winning performances with both bat and ball.

The pace duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Arshdeep Singh also played their part to perfection, collecting 15 and 17 wickets respectively.

In the batting department, Rohit led from the front with a fearless approach that demoralised opposition attacks. His approach was best summed up in the Super 8 game against Australia where he tore into the likes of Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins to make all the difference in the game.

His opening partner Kohli was not able to make the contributions that were expected out of him but the superstar came



up with an innings of immense substance when it mattered the most -- his not-so-fluent 76 of 59 balls kept India in the final after a poor start.

The contributions from all-rounder Hardik Pandya, future captain Suryakumar Yadav and Rishabh Pant, playing his first international event following his comeback from a life-threatening car accident, were also noteworthy.

A better script could not have been written for the likes of Rohit

and Kohli, who got to say goodbye to the T20 format with the coveted trophy in their hands. It was also a fitting farewell for head coach Rahul Dravid, whose tenure drew to a close.

#### Change Of Guard In Coaching; Surya's Unexpected Elevation

With Rohit calling it a day, it was expected that Hardik will lead the T20 side into the transition phase, having captained the side in the former's absence.

However, Dravid's successor

Gautam Gambhir had a different line of thinking as he played a major hand in elevating India's best T20 batter Suryakumar to the leadership position ahead of the series in Sri Lanka.

To be fair to Suryakumar, the team has ticked all the boxes since he took over, also witnessing the rise of Tilak Verma and rebirth of the likes of Sanju Samson and Varun Chakaravarthy.

All three were simply sensational in India's recent T20 series in South Africa. Alongside Samson, Abhishek Sharma has also shown the talent and resolve at the top of the order and could serve India for long.

#### India Hit Rock Bottom Against Kiwis

While India moved on from the mighty duo of Rohit and Kohli in the shortest format rather quickly, the same is unlikely in the Test team.

The chatter around the future of senior players in the Test team has gained momentum after India's first whitewash at home in a three-match series and more recently, the sudden retirement of premier off-spinner R Ashwin.

India's loss to New Zealand in

their own backyard was easily one of the most embarrassing outcomes for the team in Test cricket over the past decade.

Having slayed 'Bazball' earlier in the year against England, India blanked Bangladesh and were expected to hand out a similar treatment to the visiting Black Caps.

However, in a stunning turn of events, the spirited Kiwis outbatted and out-bowled Rohit and Co. to script their biggest series wins overseas.

The Indian batters' weakness against the turning ball was exposed threadbare and the duo of Ashwin and Jadeja, who run through sides for fun at home, were bettered by Mitchell Santner and Ajaz Patel.

It was only after landing in Australia, Ashwin made up his mind on retirement but his underwhelming outing against New Zealand may have contributed to his big decision.

With Ashwin gone and Mohammed Shami not available, a Test transition is well underway Down Under.

The outcome of the remaining two Tests will determine where the Indian batting stands.

#### Jay Shah Becomes Youngest ICC Chairman

India is the engine of the global game and its influence on the sport increased further with the elevation of Jay Shah as ICC chairman, making him the fifth from the country at the helm of the governing body after Jagmohan Dalmiya, Sharad Pawar, N Srinivasan and Shashank Manohar.

Shah took over in early December and has already made his presence felt by ending the deadlock over the hosting of the Champions Trophy in Pakistan by ensuring consensus for a reciprocal hybrid model in which India will not be required to travel across the border for any ICC event till 2028.

Going forward, Shah will need to make a conscious effort to align India's interests with the game globally.

#### IPL Razzmatazz In Saudi Arabia

The IPL players' auction in Jeddah witnessed record-shattering action with Rishabh Pant (Rs 27 crore) and Shreyas Iyer (26.75 crore) becoming the first set of players to invite bids in excess of Rs 25 crore.