

No More Health Centres In J&K Planned



Agencies

Jammu: The Jammu & Kashmir Government informed the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday that J&K has a health institution for every 3,500 souls, compared to the national average of 6,000 souls.

In a written reply to an unstarred question by MLA Reyaz Ahmed Khan, the Minister in-charge of Health & Medical Education, Sakeena Masood Ito, informed the House that according to a report published by the Union Ministry of Health & Medical Education, J&K has a health institution for every 3,500 souls, significantly better than the national average of 6,000 souls.

The Minister also informed the House that there are currently 554 New Type Primary Health Centers (NTPHCs) in Jammu and Kashmir. She added that 523 out of these 554 NTPHCs have been converted into Health & Wellness Centers under a flagship scheme launched by the Government of India.

The Minister stated that no future creation or upgradation of health centers is planned at the moment.

However, this might be reconsidered | [More on PIO](#)

Day 2 of ₹ J&K Budget Session

Jobs, Jibes, And Walkouts

Over 32K Posts Lying Vacant: CM

Observer News Service

Jammu: More than 32,000 posts are lying vacant in 37 departments of the Jammu and Kashmir government with the health and medical education department accounting for the highest 7,851 vacancies, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on Tuesday.

The JK Services Selection Board (JKSSB) and JK Public Service Commission (JKPSC) have been tasked with fulfilling 3,727 vacancies since the formation of the government on October 16, last year, he told the Assembly.

Chief Minister Abdullah, who is also in charge of the General Administration Department, said this in reply to a question raised by Peoples Conference



MLA Sajad Gani Lone.

Lone had sought information about the total number of vacancies in various departments in Jammu and Kashmir as of January 31 and those referred to the two government recruiting agencies after the formation of the National

Conference-led dispensation. The chief minister said 32,474 posts — 2,503 gazetted, 19,214 non-gazetted and 10,757 multi-tasking staff (MTS) — are lying vacant as of January 31.

Of these vacancies, 738 gazetted, 1,754 non-gazetted and 1,235 MTS | [More on PIO](#)

'Border Situation Bad Despite Chinese Help'

After a verbal skirmish between NC and BJP lawmakers in the state Assembly, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Tuesday said there is no comparison between the divided parts of Kashmir as the situation across the border is 'very bad' despite a Chinese filip to Pakistan.

He said every part of Jammu and Kashmir is far developed

even though "we have never sought help from China, America, England or France to construct our roads."

The CM made the remarks the placate the opposition BJP and ruling National Conference members exchanging heated words over the development in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). "Whatever | [More on PIO](#)

'4.40 Cr Tourists Visited J&K In Past 2 Yrs'

Over 4.40 crore tourists, including 120 lakh foreigners, visited Jammu and Kashmir in the past two years, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah told the assembly on Tuesday while stressing the sector's potential in generating employment in the region.

CM Abdullah, who is also in charge of the tourism department, said | [More on PIO](#)

'Article 370, PSA, 1987 Polls'

Sajjad Lone Walks Out Of Assembly

Observer News Service

Jammu: People's Conference leader Sajad Gani Lone on Tuesday walked out from the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly after his motion seeking inclusion of amendments, including restoration of Article 370, was disallowed by Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather.

Lone, a former minister who represents Handwara constituency, walked out of the assembly shortly after the end of the Question Hour, saying "I am not convinced by the speaker's reply and I believe they are trying to muzzle us".

As the assembly was preparing to discuss the



Lt Governor's address after the Question Hour, the People's Conference chairman drew the attention of the speaker to the amendments moved by him, including restoration of Article 370. The speaker told the member that | [More on PIO](#)

No Assembly Can Undo SC Decision: LoP

The Jammu and Kashmir Assembly witnessed a heated exchange of words on Tuesday as the Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma opposed the discussion on



J&K Wetland Mapping By March End

Observer News Service

Jammu: Mapping and demarcation of wetlands in Jammu and Kashmir is underway and scheduled to be completed by the end of March, Forest Minister Javad Ahmad Rana said on Tuesday.

Rana provided the information in a written reply to a starred question by Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) MLA Waheed ur Rehman Para seeking information about the measures taken by the government for protection and preservation of depleting wetlands during the past two years.

The (forest) department has taken up the mapping of wetlands using remote sensing data and the | [More on PIO](#)

Govt Claims Success In Saffron Revival Ministers Clash Over Figures

Agencies

Jammu: The Jammu and Kashmir government said it has successfully halted the decline in saffron cultivation, maintaining the saffron-growing area at 3,715 hectares.

Agriculture Minister Javed Ahmed Dar said new areas have been identified for expansion and an inquiry will be conducted into the working of the department in the growth of saffron cultivation in the Union territory.

"The government has successfully halted | [More on PIO](#)



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NEWS

Trump Admin Sends \$4 Billion Worth Of Weapons To Israel, Bypasses Congress

Washington: Secretary of state Marco Rubio has invoked "emergency authorization" to send Congress and send it billions of weapons and send it billions of weapons and send it billions of weapons... (text continues with details of the bypassed congressional process)

Israel has been dropping 2,000-pound bombs in Gaza, a densely populated strip of 2 million people that is about the size of Las Vegas. US military officers have said the bombs are unusable for urban combat.

of Las Vegas. US military officers have said the bombs are unusable for urban combat. President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and several others of the bombs to Israel, then withdrew use stipulated several others of the bombs to Israel, then withdrew use stipulated several others of the bombs to Israel...



Trump Pauses All US Military Aid To Ukraine After Angry Clash With Zelensky

Washington: US President Donald Trump suspended military aid to Ukraine on Monday, a White House official said, sharply escalating pressure on Kiev to accept a temporary extension to accept a temporary extension to accept a temporary extension...

Stalin Slams Centre On Hindi Push, Asks Why No Tamil Institutes In North India

New Delhi: Targeting the BJP led Centre over alleged Hindi imposition, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister... (text continues with details of the political statement)

Calling Someone 'Miyan-Tiyan', 'Pakistani' Not Offence: SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has held using terms such as "miyan-tiyan" and "Pakistani" was not an offence of hurting religious sentiments though made in poor taste. A bench of four judges...

EU Eyes €800B Plan To Boost Military amid 'possible' US pullback

Brussels: The chief of the European Union's executive on Tuesday proposed an 800 billion euro (USD 111 billion) plan to beef up defence of EU nations to boost the... (text continues with details of the EU military plan)

Mayawati Slams Crackdown on Loudspeakers During Ramadan

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati on Tuesday criticised the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to remove loudspeakers from religious places during Ramadan, urging authorities to treat all religions equally and without bias.



that it had terminated all contracts when India had taken a 'no speed' policy and sought a guarantee that whatever it revealed would be kept confidential, both had claimed it was not in a position to do because of revelations in media and public sightings, the book says.

Factor, the chief minister, refraining from specifically naming anyone, posed whether an organisation like 'The Bharat Prachar Sabha or Devnath Bhoj' was established in north India to facilitate people of northern states to learn one of the languages of northern states.

meeting following a week of increasing political uncertainty from Washington, where President Donald Trump questioned both his alliance to the President and the defence of Ukraine.

in the society to deteriorate due to this, which is a matter of great concern. In the central government's view, this is the 'shia' said. Ramadan, which began in India on Tuesday, is the month-long period of fasting and social prayers for Muslims.

NEWS MAKERS

Chitra Subramanian's New Book, Bofors Gate, Explains the Plot To 'Frame' Amitabh Bachchan

On August 23, 1986, Sitig provided the journalist with a bundle of documents in Stockholm, which also contained a 12-page typed summary of meetings between Bofors and Indian officials, which laid the... (text continues with details of the book's content)



Senior Indian bureaucrats had "betrayed" Bofors officials in a "secret meeting" in 1985 on "how to shove them Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India and those who influence bribery scandal, according to an upcoming book by investigative journalist Chitra Subramanian.

that it had terminated all contracts when India had taken a 'no speed' policy and sought a guarantee that whatever it revealed would be kept confidential, both had claimed it was not in a position to do because of revelations in media and public sightings, the book says.

STATE

Will Approach Centre For Keran-Jungund Tunnel In Kupwara:Dy CM

Press Trust of India

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir Deputy Chief Minister Sandeep Choudhary on Tuesday said the government will take up the proposal for an all-weather tunnel to border areas of Keran and Jungund in Kupwara district with the Centre.

Replying to a question raised by National Conference MLA Meera Saifullah in the assembly, Choudhary said a Detailed Project Report (DPR) will be prepared and forwarded to the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways for approval.

He said that the Keran sector is connected with the rest of Jammu and Kashmir via 46.76 km Phariyala Gali road, owned by Border Roads Organisation (BRO). The road remains partially closed during winter seasons due to snow accumulation, he said.

NC MLA Slams Admin For Ignoring PM Modi's Directive

Press Trust of India

JAMMU: National Conference MLA from Bani, MLA Meera Singh, on Tuesday criticised the Jammu and Kashmir administration for its inaction towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

"The Modi government has been very verbal sparing between the ruling members and the opposition," he said. "The way the administration is functioning in Jammu and Kashmir, it is not even close to what Mr. Modi said. He said, 'God forbid, please do not let me see such a situation where I forget about you', they have not even listened to the prime minister and the lieutenant governor," he said in the Assembly.

Speaking during the debate on the demand for basic facilities at her school area, the National Conference (NC) MLA cited the example of a minor girl who had raised concerns about the lack of a school building in her area. "A minor girl raised concerns demanding the construction of a school building. It reached the prime minister," he said.

The National Conference Jammu and Kashmir leader acknowledged it in his 'Man Ki Baat' program and promised that school would be built. "The prime minister promised that the school will be constructed. After hearing the entire administration rushed to the area with a promise to build a school there within two years, that school is still a distant dream. It has not been constructed yet," he said.

Taking a dig at the administration,

Pilgrim Tourism Circuits To Be Developed In Jammu Region:

Press Trust of India

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on Tuesday that the government will develop pilgrim tourism circuits in Jammu to tour various other tourist destinations in the region.

Noting that one crore pilgrims visit the Vaishnoveri shrine annually, Abdullah said if the government could divert 10 to 15 percent of these pilgrims to various destinations in the region, it would benefit the people.

"As for the pilgrim tourism circuit, we are going to create three, four and seven day packages. We will create these destinations to ensure pilgrims visit all such places," Abdullah said in the Assembly.

Responding to a query from BJP MLA Vishnu Devi Sankar, he said many pilgrims are unaware of the pilgrim tourism destinations in the region.

The chief minister emphasised the need to encourage pilgrims visiting Mata Vaishnoveri temple to also visit other parts of the region. "It is our challenge to tour other parts of the region. We have not been successful in diverting these pilgrims to other parts of the region," he said. Abdullah stressed that

JAMMU.

Smart City Limited (SJCL) has actively pursued multiple initiatives to enhance Jammu's infrastructure and make it a more appealing destination for tourists, the chief minister said.

He outlined major infrastructure projects, planned and executed by SJCL, including heritage restoration and beautification efforts such as the restoration of iconic landmarks like Bahu Fort, Maharaj Mandir, and Raghunath Bazar, along with temples and ghats under the Smart City initiative and other historical sites.

In terms of transit and transport improvements, Abdullah spoke about the upgrade of major roads, development of pedestrian-friendly pathways, and the introduction of electric buses for eco-friendly public transport. He also highlighted the redevelopment of the Jammu riverfront with promenades, cycling tracks, and leisure spaces.

Regarding historical buildings and heritage conservation, he said plans for facade lighting are underway at Bahu Fort, Raj Mahal, and the Maharaj Mandir, Maha Raja, and all law bridges.

The chief minister said the SJCL's vision aligns with making Jammu a modern, tourist-friendly and sustainable city while preserving its cultural and historical essence.

AS FOR THE PILGRIM TOURISM CIRCUIT IN JAMMU, WE WILL CREATE THREE, FOUR AND SEVEN DAY PACKAGES. WE WILL PROMOTE THESE DESTINATIONS TO ENSURE PILGRIMS VISIT ALL SUCH PLACES.

Sakeena Blames PDP For J&K Losing Statehood, Art 370

Agencies

JAMMU: Blaming Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for J&K's loss of statehood, scrapping of Article 370, the Employment, Education Minister and senior National Conference (NC) leader, Sakeena Khattak, on Tuesday said that the people have rejected the party for

Talking to reporters in the premises of the Legislative Assembly here, she said, "People will never forgive their trust in PDP again, as the PDP government has betrayed their trust." "The Minister said, 'People have rejected giving chance to the PDP. The party is responsible for the mess Jammu

and Kashmir is witnessing."

Referring to the health sector in the Union Territory, too she said, "The dearth of doctors and paramedical staff, the lack of leadership of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has been taking the health sector to ensure better healthcare facilities to the people."

"The health regime remained confined to laying foundation stones and cutting ribbons, but we have achieved in the last three months, they (previous governments) could not have done it in ten years," she said. —(KNO)

Special Status For Congress Means Statehood: Karra

Agencies

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Hari Hanu Karra on Tuesday said that for the Congress party, the concept of special status for Jammu and Kashmir is a Supreme Court verdict, transitional statehood.

Speaking to reporters outside the Assembly in Jammu, Karra, who is also the state's interim premier, said that the Congress party's demand, and we will continue to stand by it."

The PCC chief called for clarity on the demand for special status, saying that different political groups interpret the term differently. "Clarity is needed on what special status we are seeking," he said. Karra said there are different interpretations, but for Congress, special status means statehood, he said.

When asked whether Congress could push Pathak Article 371, Karra avoided referencing specific provisions but called for a "winning consensus" and safeguards, "It is not about numbers. What matters is ensuring protection for minorities and natural resources," he said.

The J&K Congress chief also said that the government is failing to provide a clear timeline for the restoration of Jammu

Pulwama Hospital Decongested: Dermatology, Homeopathy OPDs Shifted To Pricხო Facility

Agencies

PULWAMA: In a move to decongest District Hospital Pulwama, authorities have decided to shift the Dermatology and Homeopathy Outpatient Departments (OPDs) to the Prichხო Hospital in Prichხო, Pulwama.

Some non-emergency services were already shifted to the COVID Care Hospital in Prichხო last year.

A health official said that District Hospital Pulwama experiences a heavy patient influx, with 2,000-3,000 patients

visiting daily.

"To manage the overwhelming patient load, non-emergency services were relocated to Prichხო, a facility that was previously used for COVID-19 pandemic," he said.

The official advised the general public to address their Dermatology, Mental Health, Addiction Treatment Facility, and COVID Care Hospital to Prichხო last year and have been functioning smoothly since.

"We have all necessary facilities, including a CT scan, available at Prichხო, ensuring

better services for patients," he said.

Now, the Dermatology and Homeopathy OPDs are also being moved to the Prichხო facility. "This move will help reduce the congestion at the District Hospital," he said.

The official advised the general public to address their Dermatology, Mental Health, Addiction Treatment Facility, and COVID Care Hospital to Prichხო last year and have been functioning smoothly since.

"We have all necessary facilities, including a CT scan, available at Prichხო, ensuring better services for patients," he said.

Two Kashmiri Youngsters 'Detained' in Myanmar

NC MLA Seeks CM Abdullah's Intervention

Press Trust of India

JAMMU: National Conference MLA Riyaz Ahmed Khan on Tuesday urged Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to intervene to bring back two Kashmiri youngsters "detained" in Myanmar. The youngsters are the lieutenant governor's address in the Myanmar, Khan raised a point of order, drawing the government's attention to the "urgent matter" of the detention of two Kashmiri youngsters from his Myanmar Constituency, Anantnag East constituency by the Myanmar Coast Guard.

"Two boys -- Adnan Khan and Naveed Khan -- are currently being held by the Myanmar Coast Guard. They need to be brought back," he said.

The doctor said that aside from unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles, other major causes of obesity include genetic factors, hormonal disorders such as hypothyroidism and Cushing's syndrome, as well as stress, depression and emotional eating.

'Sedentary Lifestyle' Major Cause Of Obesity

Agencies

SRINAGAR: Obesity results from an imbalance between calorie intake and energy expenditure. It is associated with unhealthy diets and a sedentary lifestyle being major contributors. Sedentary lifestyles, including diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and strokes.

In Myanmar, the youngsters are at the Myanmar Coast Guard. They need to be brought back," he said. "The doctor said that aside from unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles, other major causes of obesity include genetic factors, hormonal disorders such as hypothyroidism and Cushing's syndrome, as well as stress, depression and emotional eating.

The doctor said that aside from unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles, other major causes of obesity include genetic factors, hormonal disorders such as hypothyroidism and Cushing's syndrome, as well as stress, depression and emotional eating.

According to NHFS data, 20.5% of men and 22.9% of women in Jammu and Kashmir are overweight or obese. —(KNO)

4.48 Cr Tourists Visited J&K In Past 2 Years: J&K Govt

Agencies

JAMMU: The Jammu & Kashmir Government on Tuesday informed the Legislative Assembly that 4.48 crore tourists, including 1.20 lakh foreigners, visited J&K during the past two years.

In a written reply to a question by MLA Edga, Mubarak Ali Prichხო said that the government had informed the House that 2.12 crore tourists visited J&K in 2023 and 26 crore in 2024.

Of them, 53337 foreigners toured J&K in 2023 and 656252 in 2024, the minister said.

He said that 2.3 crore tourists visited J&K in 2023 and 2.35 crore in 2024.

The government disclosed that its 35.08 crore have spent for promotion, advertisement and other tourism-related expenses.

He also said that 50 states of the Tourism Department have been outsourced for the promotion of tourism.

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Switchboard: (0194) 2502327 | 991 1947989705
Email: (0194) 2502327
Editorial: editor@kashmirobserver.net

Statehood Debate

Jaunm and Kashmir: In Lt Governor Manoj Sinha reiterated his government's "unwavering" stance on the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir in his address to the Budget Session of the UT's Assembly on Saturday, Lt Sinha said that his government will address the "legitimate desires" of the people and keep in mind "the emotional and political significance of statehood" for them. However, the LG emphasized that the government will facilitate this process "in a manner that ensures peace, stability and progress". If anything, you can infer from this that the central government, represented by the LG in J&K, isn't aware of the fallout that statehood on the region's existing calm. There is already a narrative in some quarters that J&K shouldn't be given full statehood until when the entire region remains in charge of the law and order. However, the elected government led by the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah disagrees with this point of view. When the issue was brought up at a recent media event in New Delhi, Omar challenged the commonly held belief that the existing normalcy in J&K could not be best achieved if the law and order remained under the central government's control. While acknowledging that Kashmir had witnessed a relative peace over the past five years, the CM termed it "rare" rather than "organic" and hence inherently fragile in nature. He noted full statehood like any other state of India, ratcheting competition by some interests to single out J&K for a discriminatory treatment. "There is no model in India where you have a full state without all powers. So unless you are envisaging a situation where J&K would be respected as 'India's one state which will work', Omar said and went to a question.

The centre, on its part, said revealed the centre. Both the prime minister Narendra Modi and the home minister Amit Shah have time and again promised the restoration of statehood on an appropriate time. What they have not done as far as the timeline. This is because the existing arrangement in seen as an ideal from the centre's standpoint and the union government might be better to offer this favourable arrangement by granting an early statehood to J&K. Moreover, there are also no bigger reasons to withhold it. Centre, it is believed is unlikely to be out of control on the security aspects and the allied security related matters, but it wasn't the prime made in recent years. The recent rise in military related violence is likely to further dissuade the central government from handing over a complete control over the region to an elected government. All the same time, it would be increasingly difficult to ignore the aspirations for statehood in the UT, as this will only deepen alienation. Best available option for the centre is to trust the elected government with running the state of affairs and make it accountable for its actions.

Salon Singh

The global shift towards renewable energy is being propelled by the imperative to mitigate climate change, reduce reliance on fossil fuels, and enhance energy security. Solar power, due to its wide-spread scalability and economic viability, is a key component of this shift. In India, solar energy plays a central role in achieving the country's renewable energy targets, particularly with the goal of 500 GW from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has enormous potential in solar energy, which might alter the state's energy outlook. As indicated by the Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy and Power, India's total solar energy potential has been estimated to be 148 gigawatt peak (GWp), of which Jammu and Kashmir holds the second position in the solar potential of 111600 megawatt (MWp).

Towards the Sun!

The unexploited topography of the high altitudes, snow-capped mountains with sparse cloud cover and predominant wind patterns are exceptionally fit for the generation of solar energy. J&K receives around 228 hours of sunshine per month on an average, with sunshine reaching up to 322 hours in May and June. No wonder, this beautiful region with immense solar potential also has impressive solar radiation levels with average solar radiation in the region approximately 1800 kWh/m², which designates it as one of the best solar regions in the India with above national average. The region has varied valleys, vast stretches of open land, especially in its plains and lower altitude belts. The combination of this with the region's high solar irradiance establishes a phenomenal scenario for the development of large scale solar farms, solar parks, and decentralised solar installations that can meet the energy requirement both at a local and national level.

The Current Status of Solar Energy in the J&K

J&K has already started taking baby steps by providing substantial financial incentives and subsidies to enhance the affordability of solar power. Implementation of schemes such as the J&K Solar power policy and the PM Surya Ghar Yojna aims to encourage the incorporation of solar energy in the household and commercial sectors. Under the revised subsidy framework, consumers are offered loans of maximum of Rs. 50,000 for a 5kW system, and the State Bank of India has launched an initiative to provide supplementary loans on a floating rate basis. With the execution of these policies and the availability of subsidies to stimulate solar energy, significant progress has been in the implementation of solar power installations, especially the domestic rooftop solar systems. As of January 2025, the scheme has achieved a great success by achieving rooftop installations to 64,000 households. Global data indicates that the project is expected to achieve commercial operational status by 2025, thereby substantially increasing the region's renewable energy capacity.

Business in Solar Energy in Jammu & Kashmir

Potential, Challenges, and the Road Ahead



Opportunities for Rural and Remote Areas

Solar energy has the potential to significantly improve energy access in the rural and remote areas of J&K, where traditional grid connectivity is often limited. The Jammu and Kashmir Energy Development Agency (J&KEDA) has played a key role in promoting various decentralised solar initiatives, including the PM KUSUM scheme, which aids farmers by providing solar-powered pumps that ensure a reliable water supply and lessen reliance on unstable grid services.

J&KEDA has planned to equip itself with an ambitious challenge of installing rooftop solar systems on 30,000 buildings by the end of 2025, which could positively add another 300 MW to the region's solar capacity. Moreover, under the Prime Minister's Surya Ghar Yojna, the Kashmir power Distributors Corporation Limited (DPCJL) has successfully achieved a milestone of 100 rooftop solar installations, marking a significant contribution to the green energy portfolio in the valley.

Sunshine vs. Struggles

The region's proximity to conflict zones requires strict security measures to safeguard critical infrastructure. Furthermore, there leads to higher operational costs and project delays, which hinder the growth of the solar sector in the area.

One of the major obstacles for solar energy projects in J&K is the lack of adequate infrastructure, particularly the electrical grid. The existing grid is both antiquated and suffers significant transmission losses. A substantial portion of the generated energy is dissipated prior to reaching consumers, complicating the effective integration of renewable energy sources such as solar power. Furthermore, the varying geographical features of solar energy generation, influenced by meteorological conditions and demand cycles, complicate energy distribution management. The region's another main obstacle is extreme weather, especially winter season when there

Advancing Energy Development in Jammu and Kashmir: Tax Incentives, Incentives, and Last-mile Solutions

Efficient regulatory frameworks and enduring power purchase agreements (PPAs) can mitigate risks and enhance investor confidence, thereby promoting renewable energy and generating local employment opportunities. The involvement of the private sector is fundamental to all sectors, and the solar power sector's outdated infrastructure requires significant improvement to effectively meet the state's increasing solar power demands. Prioritising smart grid aids in managing intermittent solar power, optimising energy distribution, and minimising losses. Integrating battery storage addresses the challenges of power storage, ensuring energy availability during peak hours or as needed. The involvement of the private sector via Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) is essential, as both local and national enterprises can facilitate the transition to renewable energy. Financial mechanisms, such as green bonds, facilitate the securing of investments. Government support via guarantees or tax incentives can mitigate investment risks, thereby enhancing the viability of solar projects.

“The sun can shine brighter on J&K when the vision is transformed into a collaborative effort between the government, private entities, local communities, and international collaborators. For the actualisation of this vision, there is a need for the implementation of appropriate policies, infrastructure development, and investments in the energy sector”

Rays of Resolution

The sun can shine brighter on J&K when the vision is transformed into a collaborative effort between the government, private entities, local communities, and international collaborators. For the actualisation of this vision, there is a need for the implementation of appropriate policies, infrastructure development, and investments in the energy sector. Additionally, the energy infrastructure in J&K has been dominated by conventional energy sources. As a result, this reliance has led to a lack of funding for renewable energy initiatives.

Sunny Side Up!

It is essential for both state and central governments to endorse the implementation of strong, region-specific policies aimed at providing a much-needed break for busy families and individuals who struggle to find time to cook. Moreover, sharing time with others encourages empathy, kindness, and generosity – values that are at the heart of Ramadan. I urge readers to make a conscious effort to cook Iftar for their relatives and

neighbours this Ramadan. Let us use this opportunity to revive this wonderful tradition and make our communities stronger, more compassionate, and more united.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. Salon Singh is an independent researcher

Your Financial Fix

Did you know?
A Simple Guide for Kashmiri Investors Using Cost Averaging with ETFs

Ishad Mashiq

Instead of putting all your money into a single stock, consider spreading it out. Investing in a variety of assets like ETFs (Exchange-Traded Funds), REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts), and bonds can help reduce risk. You can also set up a stable fund. Diversification means not putting all your eggs in one basket, which helps in managing risks better.

Balance Your Portfolio Wisely

Consider pairing your ETFs with other investments like gold and silver. This mix not only spreads risk but also offers stability during market downturns. Remember, the goal is to balance your portfolio—no clutter it with too many different things.

Don't Put All Your Money in One Stock

It's crucial to avoid putting all your funds in a single stock, especially when markets are falling. This can be risky if the market continues to drop. Instead, focus on spreading your investments across many stocks sensibly.

Make Informed Decisions

Act on logic and common sense when investing. The market is full of opportunities, especially with the help of technology. Use these tools wisely to make calculated investment decisions.

Prioritize Quality Investments

Always choose quality over quantity when investing, even if they seem attractive. A well-diversified and thoroughly researched portfolio will stand the test of time much better than one filled with vulgar options.

In conclusion, approach each market with a clear mind and logical strategies. Investing isn't about chasing trends or making heavy decisions based on emotions. It's about creating a stable and diversified portfolio that can withstand economic shifts. Whether you are new to investing or an experienced investor in Kashmir, following these steps can help you navigate the market with confidence.

Learn from the Insights of Ishad Mashiq, Writer, Content Entrepreneur & Founder of I Investify. Contact for valuable financial advice at investify@iinvestify.com

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Cooking Iftar for Loved Ones!

would like to highlight the importance of reviving traditional conditions that strengthen community bonds and fosters a sense of belonging among relatives and neighbours. In today's fast-paced world, many of us have become disconnected from our communities. Ramadan provides

All letters intended for publication must include the writer's name and address, even if a pseudonym is used. Letters are edited as clearly, succinct accuracy of expression require. Our publishing letter does not mean we agree with a viewpoint or even anything in it. ED:102

an opportunity to bridge this gap. By reviving and strengthening these conditions, we not only demonstrate care and concern but also promote a sense of belonging. This simple act can have profound effects. It can help alleviate loneliness, especially among the elderly and those living alone. It can also

provide a much-needed break for busy families and individuals who struggle to find time to cook. Moreover, sharing Iftar with others encourages empathy, kindness, and generosity – values that are at the heart of Ramadan. I urge readers to make a conscious effort to cook Iftar for their relatives and

MAIL YOUR LETTERS
At Box 837, Srinagar-19001
www.editpage.ko@gmail.com

Mishoor Khan
Budgam

If Devil Is Chained, Who's Sinning in Ramazan?

Syed Kaisar Shah

If generosity is seasonal and driven more by obligation than sincerity, perhaps the problem is not the presence of the Devil—but the absence of a genuine conscience.

Last Ramazan, I embarked on an unusual mission—to find the one often blamed for human misdeeds: the Devil. It's a comforting thought—the idea that for a month, the great tempter is in chains, unable to whisper mischief into our ears. Yet, as I looked around, dishonesty, greed, and corruption remained unchanged. If he was truly absent, then who was responsible for all of this? Determined to uncover the truth, I set out on my journey.

The Market: Trade or Trickery?

Commerce should reflect ethical values, yet the apple market in Kashmir told a different story. If the Devil were still at work, surely his influence would be visible in dishonest practices—perhaps in the artificial colouring of fruit to enhance its appeal. Curious, I approached a well-known fruit merchant, someone I had heard speak about honesty since childhood. When I asked about the use of these colouring agents, he simply shrugged. "Gobra, kaar chu pakan ethaipathi" (Son, this is how business works). His casual response lingered. Had deception become so ingrained that it no longer needed the Devil's whispers?

Islam places a strong emphasis on honesty in trade. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "The merchants will be raised on the Day of Judgment as evildoers, except those who fear Allah, are righteous, and speak the truth." (Tirmidhi). Yet, as I walked through the market, the spirit of Ramadan—meant to encourage restraint and simplicity—was overshadowed by crowded stores, overpriced dates, and a frantic race for luxury Eid attire. The number of beggars had noticeably increased. Some were in genuine need, while others had rehearsed their pleas with precision. When I questioned one of them, he smiled



knowingly. "People feel more charitable in Ramadan. It is believed that rewards for giving increase seventyfold this month. I just remind them of their duty." If generosity is seasonal and driven more by obligation than sincerity, perhaps the problem is not the presence of the Devil—but the absence of a genuine conscience.

Education: Learning or Excuses?

Expecting to find discipline in educational institutions, I instead discovered empty lecture halls. Students treated the month as an academic holiday, while teachers left early, citing fasting fatigue. Yet history tells a different story—the great undertakings by the companions of the Prophet were accomplished in this sacred month. Fasting did not weaken

them; it strengthened their resolve. If the pursuit of knowledge is fading, is it truly the Devil's influence—or a shift in our own priorities?

The Mosque: Unity or Division?

If the Devil thrives on division, then surely his absence should bring unity to the mosque. Yet inside, I found a heated debate underway—one group insisted on eight rakats of Taraweeh, while another argued for twenty. Elsewhere, a discussion had broken out over the exact date of Shah-e-Qadr and how it should be observed. What began as theological discourse had turned into an argument. Disagreements in faith are natural, but when they lead to hostility and division, we must ask: do we need the Devil to divide us, or are we doing it ourselves?

Public Service: Integrity or Inefficiency?

If the Devil whispers in matters of greed, then banks and government offices should have fallen silent in Ramadan. Yet, routine practices remained largely unchanged. In banks, interest-based transactions—strictly forbidden in Islam—continued as usual. In government offices, inefficiency reigned. Paperwork dragged, officials remained elusive, and behind some closed doors, progress often depended on unofficial facilitation fees to 'expedite' routine processes. Even in Ramadan, where faith emphasizes honesty and accountability, these practices endured—not because of the Devil, but because they had become institutional norms.



WHAT BEGAN AS THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE HAD TURNED INTO AN ARGUMENT. Disagreements in faith are natural, but when they lead to hostility and division, we must ask: do we need the Devil to divide us, or are we doing it ourselves?

A Conclusion, or Just the Beginning?

As I returned home, I realized I had not found the Devil. If he is truly chained, then who fuels greed in markets, division in mosques, and complacency in schools? Who ensures corruption thrives in offices without a whisper? Perhaps not all devils are bound. Some interpretations suggest only the most powerful are restrained, while others roam free. But the greater challenge lies within—our Nafs (inner desires). Even without external temptation, our habits and unchecked impulses shape our actions. Perhaps Ramadan is not about proving his absence but proving we don't need him as an excuse for our shortcomings. This Ramadan, I will observe more closely—tastebeeh in one hand, a mirror in the other. But maybe, before searching for the Devil, we should start looking within—because I have a strong suspicion he might just be hiding there!

Views expressed are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. Syed Kaisar Shah is a Data Scientist



FASTING NOT ONLY PURIFIES A MUSLIM'S SOUL but also his body. Fasting helps reduce weight and rejuvenate the body as food consumption is modified and the body gets a chance to cleanse itself of unwanted impurities and toxins."

Fasting & Health in Ramazan

Aejaz Iqbal

RAMAZAN is a month of self-regulation and self-training. Muslims fast in accordance with our religious requirements, but there are medical benefits as well. Generally, fasting has been used by patients for weight management, to rest the digestive tract, and for lowering lipids. There can be adverse effects of both total fasting and crash diets.

Islamic fasting is different from these diet plans because in Ramazan fasting, there is no malnutrition or inadequate calorie intake. The calorie intake of Muslims during Ramazan is typically at or slightly below the nutritional requirement guidelines. In addition, the fasting in Ramazan is voluntarily taken and is not a prescribed imposition from the physician. And there is hope that this training will last beyond the end of Ramazan.

The difference between Ramazan and total fasting is the timing of the food; during Ramazan, we take an early pre-dawn breakfast and do not eat until dusk. The fast is from both food and liquid intake. Abstinence from water for eight to 10 hours is not necessarily bad for health. In fact, it causes concentration of all fluids within the body, producing slight dehydration. The body has its own water conservation mechanism. It has even been shown that slight dehydration and water conservation, at least in plant life, improve their longevity.

The physiological effect of fasting includes lowering of blood sugar, lowering of cholesterol, and lowering of the systolic blood pressure. In fact, Ramazan



fasting could be an ideal recommendation for the treatment of mild to moderate, stable, non-insulin diabetes, obesity, and essential hypertension. It is important to note that patients who are suffering from severe diseases, such as Diabetes or coronary artery disease, kidney stones are exempt from fasting and should not be al-

lowed to fast. There are psychological effects of fasting as well. There is a peace and tranquility for those who fast during the month of Ramazan. Personal hostility is at a minimum, and in areas of the world where Muslims are living in large numbers, the crime rate decreases. This psychological improve-

ment could be related to better stabilization of blood glucose while fasting; hypoglycemia after eating can aggravate behavior changes.

There is a spiritual beneficial effect of extra prayer at night. This not only helps with better utilization of food, but also helps in energy output. It has been calcu-

lated that there are 10 extra calories output for each unit of the prayer. This would particularly be connected to the extra prayers that are performed during the last 10 nights of Ramazan, when the believer is seeking the night of power, when worship during this night is said to be worth a thousand months.

It is important to emphasize that Muslims are not performing prayers for exercise, but a mild movement of the joints with extra calorie utilization can be a better form of exercise. Similarly, recitation of the Quran not only produces a tranquility of heart and mind, but it has also been shown to improve memory.

Fasting is a special act of worship which is ultimately between the believer and the Creator Himself, as no one else knows for sure if this person is actually fasting. In a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, Allah says, "Fasting is for Me and I only will reward it." In another hadith, the Prophet reminds us, "If one does not give up falsehoods in words and actions, Allah has no need of him giving up food and drink."

Fasting not only purifies a Muslim's soul but also his body. Fasting helps reduce weight and rejuvenate the body as food consumption is modified and the body gets a chance to cleanse itself of unwanted impurities and toxins. Ramazan brings with itself countless blessings and benefits. Observe fasting in Ramazan to be rewarded in this world and the Hereafter.

The author is a Microbiologist and can be reached at aejazmie@gmail.com

Govt Steadfast In Easing Regulatory Burdens, Taking Steps To Make India Export-Friendly: FM

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the government remains steadfast in reducing regulatory burdens, besides enhancing trust-based governance and taking steps to make India a "seamless, export-friendly" economy.

A robust manufacturing sector free from unnecessary regulatory bottlenecks will further attract both domestic and foreign investments, driving robust growth, positioning India as a trusted global player, Sitharaman said while addressing a post-budget webinar on MSMEs as engine of growth, a crucial starting, exports, regulatory, investment and employment.

"Our government remains steadfast in reducing regulatory burdens and enhancing trust-based governance to improve the ease of doing business. Through the budget announcements, we are taking various steps towards making India a seamless, export-friendly economy, where businesses can innovate and expand, and not paperwork and red-tape," Sitharaman said.

Addressing the webinar earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured the industry to take "big steps" for taking advantage of global opportunities at a time when the world is looking at India as a trusted partner, which can produce quality goods.

"I want that our industry should not look at these expectations of the world as a mere spectator. We cannot remain spectators, you will have to look for your role in this, you will have to seek opportunities for yourself," Modi said.

In the 2025-26 budget speech, the minister had announced that a high-level committee for regulatory reforms will be set up for a review of all non-financial sector regulations, certifications, licences, and permissions.

"The committee will recommend a set of recommendations within a year. The objective is to strengthen trust-based economic governance and take transformational measures to enhance ease of doing business, especially in markets of inspections and compliances," he said.

Sitharaman said decriminalisation of business related laws and legal reforms in emerging industries to operate with greater confidence. Over 42,000 criminal provisions have already been removed, and over 3,700 legal provisions have been decriminalised since 2016, the Jan Vishwas Act 2023, more than 180 legal provisions were decriminalised.

World Looking At India As Trusted Partner: Industry Should Take Advantage: PM Modi

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Tuesday evening said the Indian industry has "big steps" to take to exploit global opportunities at a time when the world is looking at India as a trusted partner, saying the government will launch two missions to promote manufacturing and exports.

Addressing a post-budget webinar on Regulatory, Investment and Ease of Doing Business Reform, Modi asked the industry to identify to take advantage of this partnership. The Prime Minister said the industry has gained new self-confidence due to the government's consistency and assurance for reforms.

"I want to assure the stakeholders in manufacturing and export sectors that this will continue in the coming years, I urge you to move ahead with confidence and take big steps. For the country's manufacturing and export sectors new avenues have been opened," Modi said.

The Prime Minister said MSMEs need not only credit but also guidance, and suggested that industries should establish mentorship programmes to support them. Asserting that stable policy and improved business environment are vital for any country to progress, he said "Today, India is a growth

away with over 40,000 companies in the centre and state level and is working on the Jan Vishwas Act 2023. We are working on the Jan Vishwas 2.0 Bill. We have decided to open a committee to review non-financial sector regulations. Our endeavour is to make them modern, flexible, people-friendly and trust-based."

The government will launch two missions to promote manufacturing and exports, he said. Observing that the focus should be on better technology and quality products, the Prime Minister urged stakeholders to identify new products to demand globally that can be manufactured in India and encouraged them to approach countries with export potential strategically.

"The world is currently experiencing political uncertainty, and the entire world views India as a growth centre," Modi said, adding that during the COVID crisis, when the global economy slowed down, India defied the global deflation of MSMEs was further encouraged by the government's consistent support to its confidence in their continuous growth. This assured confidence in their continuous growth. This assured confidence in their continuous growth.

"I WANT TO ASSURE THE STAKEHOLDERS IN MANUFACTURING AND EXPORT SECTORS THAT THIS WILL CONTINUE IN THE COMING YEARS. I URGE YOU TO MOVE AHEAD WITH CONFIDENCE AND TAKE BIG STEPS. FOR THE COUNTRY'S MANUFACTURING AND EXPORT SECTORS NEW AVENUES HAVE BEEN OPENED."

Sensex Sinks Below 73,000 Amid Global Equity Rout On Tariff War Worries

Press Trust Of India

MUMBAI: Falling for the third straight day, benchmark BSE Sensex declined by 98 points to close below the 73,000 mark on Tuesday amid global equity rout over trade war worries and persistent foreign fund outflows.

The all-time BSE benchmark closed at 72,989.53, down by 96.01 points or 0.13 per cent, from 73,087.54. The 30-stock index is down by 12.7 per cent since its peak of 83,127.54 but recovered 52.4 per cent of its losses since the start of 2023. It had dropped 45.2 per cent in 2023, followed by a recovery of 72,633.54 but recovered 52.4 per cent of its losses since the start of the 10th straight session, the 50-share Nifty of NSE fell by 30.67 points or 0.17 per cent to close at 22,082.65. The index slipped below the 22,000 level at 21,974.45 but managed to recover some losses later.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv, IICI Technologies, Nestle India, Asian Paints, United Spirits, Pharmeasy, Capita, Indraya, Maruti Suzuki India, Tata, Hindustan Unilever and Maruti industries were among the laggards.

On the other hand, State Bank of India, Zomato, Tata Consumer Services, Adani Ports, Power Grid, Tata Steel and HPC

Bank were the gainers. Union Natix, Head of Research, Capitaland Securities, "The domestic market exhibited a recovery from today's low but remains in a negative territory in order to adverse global cues related to escalating global trade tensions."

"Weak global cues continued to weigh on sentiment, but selective buying is limiting the downside," AIG India - SVR Research, Bangalore broking Ltd. said.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul were edged in red, while Shanghai in green territory.

European markets were trading in the negative territory in the session. The markets listed ended lower on Monday. Meanwhile, global oil benchmarks declined by 0.25 to 70.64 per cent to USD 70.64 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FII) offloaded equity worth Rs 4,788.20 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Employees Increasingly Prioritising Work-Life Balance Over Pay: Survey

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI: The Indian workforce is reshaping work priorities and traditional preferences, according to a survey by a backcast for factors such as flexibility, health and opportunities for learning and development (L&D) are gaining momentum.

According to Randstad India's Workmonitor 2025 survey, 52 per cent of respondents said they are willing to leave jobs that do not offer flexibility and 47 per cent would leave a job if they did not have a good support with their family.

These findings echo global trends on the changing workplace dynamics in today's era, where talent is demanding more adaptive, inclusive, and future-ready workplaces, the survey said.

The generational divide in Indian workplace expectations is narrowing, and the millennial workforce no longer a benefit. It's a baseline expectation across all age groups.

Gold Reclaims Rs 89,000-Mark As Tariff War Worries Boosts Safe Haven Demand

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI: Gold prices on Tuesday jumped by Rs 1,300 to close at Rs 89,000 per 100 grams in the national capital on increased buying by jewellery and investment buyers.

The metal of 99.9 per cent purity rallied by Rs 1,300 to Rs 89,000 per 100 grams, its highest close since Rs 87,900 per 100 grams.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity advanced by Rs 1,100 to Rs 88,600 per 100 grams from the previous close of 87,500 per 100 grams.

Traders said bullion prices surged after the US President Trump confirmed tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China from Tuesday.

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China Retaliates Trump's Tariffs, Sanctions US Firms, Initiate Action In WTO

Press Trust Of India

BEIJING: China on Tuesday retaliated US President Donald Trump's 10 per cent tariff on its exports by imposing a 10 per cent tariff on American goods and initiated legal action against Washington in WTO while leaving the door open for talks to address trade concerns.

China will impose additional tariffs on some products imported from the United States, effective from March 10. China's Customs Tariff Commission said.

An additional 15 per cent tariff will be imposed on imported chicken, beef, corn and cotton originating from the US, it said in a statement.

China will also impose additional tariffs on pork, beef, aquatic products, fruits, vegetables and dairy products to be subject to an additional 10 per cent tariff.

Additionally, China decided to impose to add 10 US firms to the country's unreliable entity list.

China also initiated legal action against the US under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute settlement mechanism regarding the latter's latest tariff increase on Chinese products. The Ministry of Commerce said Tuesday.

The unilateral imposition of tariffs by the US undermines the multilateral trading system, increases the burden on Chinese businesses and consumers, and erodes the foundation of China-US economic and trade cooperation, the commission said.

Trump's announcement of a 10 per cent tariff on 10 per cent of US exports to the US coincides with the opening of China's annual parliament session.

The twin sessions, the National People's Congress and the advisory council, the China People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) were opened on Tuesday.

While NPC began with the customary press conference held by the President, the CPPCC held its opening session. The NPC will begin its session on Tuesday.

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CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

Jobs, bids

posts were referred to JKSSB and JKPCS after the government formation, he said, adding 594 gazetted posts are to be filled in the school education department, 56 in the health and medical education department, 45 in the power department and 41 horticulture department. The health and medical education department has 2,851 vacancies, the Public Works (Roads and Buildings) department has 3,759 posts vacant, Animal Husbandry department 2,589 vacancies, Industries and commerce 2,517, Housing and Urban Development 2,420, agriculture production and farmers welfare 1,340, power department 1,305, Food and supplies department 1,131, finance department 1,009, revenue department 1,004, Jal Shakti 856 and the School Education department has to fill 770 vacancies.

The Department of Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction is the only one that has no vacancies. In response to another question, the chief minister said JKPCS collected over Rs 8.44 crore and JKSSB over Rs 5.72 crore as application fees from the candidates since October 16, last year. "Presently, no such proposal to make job application forms free for aspirants" is under consideration," Abdullah said.

Sajad Lone Walks

The House has already passed a resolution about the special status and there is no need for such a move, before dismissing the motion. "I have moved some amendments with regards to Lt Governor's address but five of the seven amendments were rejected by the speaker. I have demanded restoration of Article 370, repeal of Public Safety Act, recent civilian killings, police verification and a probe in 1987 rigging in assembly elections which were rejected," Lone told reporters outside the assembly.

He said it is ironic that this is the same National Conference, which highlighted these issues during its election campaign, but after forming the government "they do not want to listen and have imposed a ban on talking about these things".

The Centre revoked the special status of J&K under Article 370 and bifurcated it into two UTs — J-K and Ladakh — in August 2019.

The speaker said the House cannot take a call on revoking the Public Safety Act and police verification as these are beyond the control of the government and are under the purview of the Union Home Ministry.

On the alleged poll rigging in 1987, Rather said over 37 years have passed since and it was not possible to go for a probe.

No Assembly Can

Article 370, calling it "foolishness." He said that Article 370 is now history and everyone should acknowledge it. Discussing it is completely foolish and tantamount to misleading people, he said. His remarks came after J&K Peoples Conference Chief Sajad Gani Lone sought amendments to the Lieutenant Governor's speech, addressing Article 370, the Public Safety Act (PSA), the 1987 elections, and police verification procedures.

Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather rejected Lone's

amendments, citing procedural rules. "As per Rule 187, a discussion on Article 370 cannot take place within a year of a resolution on the same issue," Rather stated.

He further said that the 1987 elections were a past event and did not qualify for discussion. On PSA and police verification, he clarified that these matters fall under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and cannot be debated until stationhood is restored.

Lone walked out of the session in protest and accused the National Conference (NC) of working with the BJP. The BJP reiterated its position, stating that Parliament had already abrogated Article 370 and that state assemblies cannot overturn parliamentary decisions. "Discussing Article 370 is unnecessary. It is a waste of time to discuss an issue that has been a history now. Those who don't have knowledge about the constitution would try to discuss these issues," Sharma said. "The Supreme Court has upheld its abrogation. No Assembly in the country has the power to overturn the decision of the Parliament," Sharma told reporters.

Criticizing Peoples Conference chairman and MLA Handwara, Sajad Lone for staging walkout over the issue of Article 370, Sharma said, "His (Lone's) love for Pakistan has resurfaced as his sarsar (in law) is there."

He (Lone) is frustrated after barely winning the election and is alone in the Assembly." Pertinently, during the inaugural session of the J&K Assembly in November last year, Lone, along with FDP's Waheed Parra and Awami Ittehad Party's (AIP) Sheikh Khurshid, had supported a resolution for restoring J&K's special status.

***4.40 Cr Tourists**

Rs 35.08 crore has been allocated for the promotion, advertisement and related activities of the department over the past two financial years.

Rs 12.54 crore was spent in FY 2023-24 and Rs 22.54 crore in 2024-25, he told the House, he said.

Responding to a question from National Conference member Mubarak Gul, the chief minister said 4.48 crore pilgrims, including 1.20 lakh foreigners, visited Jammu and Kashmir in the past two years.

He added that 2,11,24,674 tourists visited Jammu and Kashmir in 2023 and 2,35,24,629 in 2024. Of these, 55,337 foreign tourists visited in 2023 and 65,452 in 2024.

Abdullah said the tourism sector holds extensive employment potential for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. He acknowledged that while the sector employs a significant workforce in Jammu and Kashmir, no formal survey has been conducted to ascertain the exact numbers.

The chief minister also told the House that 59 assets of the Tourism Department have been outsourced in the past two years.

***Border Situation**

progress has been made in the areas across the border because of the blessings of China," Abdullah said.

During question hour, NC MLA and former minister Saifulullah Mir in passing said that border infrastructure is better in PoK than on this side, even as he advocated for the construction

of a tunnel to provide an all-weather connectivity to border areas of Keran and Jungmugd in Kupwara district.

BJP's R S Pathania objected to his comparison of the two sides. NC MLA Nazir Gurezi and Peoples Conference legislator Sajad Gani Lone came in defence of Mir, who highlighted the challenges being faced by the locals, especially during the winter when snow cuts off roads for several months.

Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather ensured a smooth house proceeding, but BJP Pathania decried Mir's remarks.

Pathania told reporters outside the assembly, "He (Mir) praised a country with which we have no diplomatic relation. Our country did not send its cricket team there to play in the Champions Trophy and this is the country which is promoting separatism and terrorism in India. Mir's remark is of concern and condemnable and the chief minister should clarify his party's stand on it."

During a discussion on Lt Governor's address while BJP member Sham Lal Sharma was speaking, Mir rose up from his seat and questioned Pathania for terming him a "traitor."

"My intention was not to draw a comparison between the two parts (of Kashmir). The National Conference is a party which has rendered the highest number of sacrifices for the country. Our workers, MLAs and ministers were killed by terrorists," he said. Gurezi also stood up from his seat in defence of Mir and said "if someone had worn a coat, what is wrong when I say he is having a good coat," sending the house in a commotion.

Sensing the situation getting out of control, the chief minister requested the members to take up their seats, and said, "Gurezi is not wrong in his statement but he had not completed his talk."

Abdullah said, "All what has been done on the borders is for show off and that also was not done by them (Pakistan) on its own. Whatever progress was made in the border areas across the border was because of the blessings of China while there is no progress in the rest of the areas."

He said the development can be a matter of discussion but Mir, who lives near the Line of Control, is not wrong in sharing what he sees.

"The situation is very bad there (in PoK)... We have never sought help from any other country, we have not asked China, America, England or France to build our roads. The roads constructed across the border were done by China," he said, adding, every part of Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed development even as "we have not provided coats to our border people."

He said the coats given to the people across the border have empty pockets, drawing laughter in the house.

"We should not get entangled in such unnecessary arguments. Wherever there is need for development, it should happen and wherever there is need for further improvement that will also be done for the welfare of the people," Abdullah said.

Before resuming his speech, Sharma pointed to party MLA Shagan Parihar and said her father Aji Parihar and uncle Anil Parihar also fell to the bullets of terrorists in Kishitwar district in November 2018.

"The terrorist bullets do not differentiate between the people," he said.

No More Health

once the austerity measures imposed by the Finance Department are withdrawn, and any critical gaps as per the Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) are assessed," (KNO)

J&K Wetland

ground truthing and subsequent demarcation of these wetlands exercise, in collaboration with the stakeholder departments revenue and wildlife for wetlands, above 2.25 hectares, as per the directions of the Supreme Court," the minister said.

The exercise is underway at present and scheduled to be completed by March end, he added.

In accordance with the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, brief documents for six wetlands have been prepared by the district working groups concerned. Of these, four — Ahansur-Waskursar Wetland Complex; Sansar Lake; Khushalsar and Gilsar Lake (complex); and Anchar and Rakh-i-Rajar (complex) are almost finalised and two (Mansbal Lake and Narkara) are under examination of the technical committee, the minister said.

Rana said district wetland management units headed by the deputy commissioner concerned were constituted on December 19 for protection and preservation of wetlands.

In response to another question about the details of the environmental impact assessment report of a proposed road for the Amarnath Yatra from Baltal and Pahalgam, the minister said the tracks leading to the cave shrine in the south Kashmir Himalayas had been developed according to the Supreme Court's December 13, 2012, order.

Govt Claims

the decline in saffron cultivation. Since 2010-11, the saffron-growing area has remained stable at 3,715 hectares—3,665 hectares in Kashmir division and 50 hectares in Kishtwar—with new areas identified for expansion," Dar said.

The National Saffron Mission has successfully revived saffron cultivation in Jammu and Kashmir, significantly increasing productivity and prices for farmers, he said in reply to a question from National Conference member Justice Hasnain Masoodi during Question Hour in the House.

However, key challenges such as irrigation infrastructure and land encroachments persist, the agriculture minister said.

The government launched the mission in 2010-11 under a flagship scheme devised by SKUAST-K, with a financial outlay of Rs 400.11 crore, he said.

"Of this, Rs 315.99 crore was contributed by the Government of India and Rs 84.12 crore by farmers. So far, Rs 269.91 crore has been released, with Rs 259.67 crore spent," he added.

The minister highlighted that the implementation of modern techniques has led to a rise in saffron productivity from 2.50 kilogram per hectare in 2009-10 to a peak of 4.42 kilogram per hectare in 2023. "The establishment of the Indian Institute

of Kashmir Saffron and Technology Centre (IKSTC) and the introduction of scientific post-harvest methods have significantly benefited farmers," he said.

Dar said that the price of saffron increased from Rs 80,000 per kg to Rs 2,20,000 per kg in 2021-22, while saffron stigma recovery improved from 22 grams per kilo to 28 grams per kilo, enhancing overall yield.

On the export and revenue trends, he said saffron production has increased 14.87 metric tonnes in 2022 to 14.94 tonnes in 2023 with the value of production hovering up to Rs 291.33 crore in 2023 to Rs 261.38 crore in 2022. Various members of the parties raised supplementary questions about the further course of action and increase in the area of saffron cultivation.

BJP's Sunil Sharma alleged discrepancies in the answer and called for the Minister to rectify it. Some members alleged a probe into spending on the mission program.

Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather intervened, pointing towards the members' concerns. Minister further said in the reply to supplementary questions, "The quality of saffron colour has also improved from 8 per cent (traditional drying) to 16 per cent (scientific drying) due to advanced processing at IKSTC."

To eliminate middlemen and ensure fair pricing, the government introduced an e-auction system.

This has enabled transparent transactions, ensuring fair farm-gate prices for saffron growers across India," Dar added.

Despite these successes, the minister acknowledged significant gaps in irrigation infrastructure.

The National Mission on Saffron had planned to construct 124 community bore-wells, each serving 30 hectares, to provide sprinkler irrigation for 3,665 hectares of saffron fields. "Another challenge is the recurring operational costs of bore-wells, which farmers are reluctant to bear. Many farmers find the maintenance expenses too high, further delaying full irrigation coverage," he added. The minister also highlighted threats to saffron cultivation from real estate developers and land grabbers.

"There have been instances of sprinkler irrigation systems and bore-wells being damaged. Complaints have been lodged with revenue officials regarding encroachments," he said.

A government committee found that 77 bore-wells remain non-functional, while only eight-four each in Srinagar and Budgam—are operational.

Despite these hurdles, Dar emphasised that the National Mission on Saffron has achieved most of its objectives.

"While challenges remain, especially in irrigation, we have made significant progress. The government remains committed to addressing these gaps," he said.

To ensure farmer participation in policy decisions, the government has formed committees of saffron growers, traders, and civil society members to incorporate their views.

"The success of the saffron mission depends on continued farmer engagement, improved irrigation systems, and protection from land encroachments," Dar said.

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NZ, SA Look To Shed Underachievers Tag In Champions Trophy Semifinal

Press Trust of India

LAHORE: Loaded with world-class talent but haunted by the underachievers' tag at ICC events, New Zealand and South Africa will square off in an evenly-matched second semifinal of the Champions Trophy here on Wednesday.

South Africa and New Zealand have won the Champions Trophy once each in 1998 and 2000 respectively, but the tournament was called the ICC Knockout Trophy at that time and didn't carry the significance which it has now.

While South Africa would look to shed their big tournament "chokers" tag, the Kiwis will also be desperate to lay their hands on a title after having finished second best twice in the ODI World Cup (2015 and 2019) and once in the T20 World Cup (2021).

Led by Mitchell Santner, New Zealand finished behind India



South Africa and New Zealand topped Group B ahead of Australia. But there is little to separate the two sides. Both are evenly-matched in most departments but the Proteas look to be slightly ahead on the bowling front because of variety.

The two teams have enough firepower in their batting line-ups and have quality fielders the contest is expected to be decided by the spinners.

Although the pitches here are a bit on the slower side but they haven't spun as much as the surfaces in Dubai and it will be interesting to see how the spinners of both the teams fare.

New Zealand were in Dubai

on Sunday to play against India and headed to Lahore the next morning.

Latham has been New Zealand's best batter so far with 187 runs from three matches, but Kane Williamson's return to form with a classy 81 against India also augurs well for the Kiwis.

On the bowling front, Matt Henry stood out and is currently the highest wicket-taker with eight scalps and has good support from Will O'Rourke (six wickets).

In skipper Mitchell Santner, Michael Bracewell, Rashid Raza, Glenn Phillips and Mark Chapman, New Zealand boast of a good spin attack.

South Africa too are in red-hot form. The Proteas have fielded one of their most prolific squads in the tournament and have all their bases covered.

With a century under his belt, Ryan Rickelton is in ominous form, while the likes of Temba Bavuma, Rassie van der Dussen and Aiden Markram have also contributed with the bat.

South Africa's bowling also looks impressive with the likes of Viaan Mulder, Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj and Tabraiz Shamsi in their ranks.

Match starts at 2:30pm IST.

Short TAKES

India Enter CT Final With Four-Wicket Win Over Australia

Star batter Virat Kohli top-scored with 84 as India entered the final of the Champions Trophy with a four-wicket win over Australia here on Tuesday.

Batting first, Australia were bowled out for 264 in 49.3 overs and India chased it down with 11 balls to spare.

Besides Kohli's 98-ball knock, Shreyas Iyer made 45 while KL Rahul and Hardik Pandya chipped in with 42 and 28 respectively in the semifinal.

Earlier, captain Steve Smith and Alex Carey struck fifties to guide Australia past 260.

Smith top-scored with 73 off 96 balls as he stitched two crucial partnerships, first with Travis Head (39) for the second wicket, which yielded 50 runs, and then with Marcus Labuschagne (29) for the third for another 56 runs.

Gayle made 61.

For India, Mohammed Shami (3/38) grabbed three wickets while Varun Chakravarty and Ravindra Jadeja took two wickets apiece.

J&K Shootingball Association Felicitates Junior National Team

The J&K Shootingball Association hosted a felicitation ceremony to honour the Junior National Shootingball Team at Oasis Educational Institute, Gulshahar, Nowgam, Srinagar.

The ceremony was attended by prominent figures, including Faheem Ali Punjabi (S.P. Ganderbal), the Chairman, Director, Principals of both wings of Oasis School, and members of the J&K Shootingball Association.

The Junior Boys team was felicitated with National Participation Certificates and Appreciation Medals in recognition of their outstanding performance at the 37th Junior National Shootingball Championship, which was held in Kolkata, West Bengal, in December 2024.

The event celebrated the team's dedication and success on the national stage, further encouraging the growth of Shootingball in the region.

CT: South Africa Add Linde As Cover For Injured Markram

South Africa roped in left-arm spin bowling all-rounder George Linde as a cover for the injured Aiden Markram ahead of their Champions Trophy semi-finals against New Zealand on Wednesday.

Markram, who captained South Africa in their final league game against England, had sustained a right hamstring injury and didn't take part in the match after leaving the field in the 31st over.

"He will undergo a fitness test at training on Tuesday evening to determine his availability for the semifinal against New Zealand," a report in ESPNcricinfo said on Tuesday.

"Linde will join the South African camp on Tuesday evening but will not officially replace Markram in the squad unless he is ruled out and the ICC's event technical committee confirms the swap."

Linde scored 161 runs at a strike rate of 153.33 and picked up 11 wickets at an economy of 6.29 in 11 games at the SA20 this year.

Skipper Temba Bavuma and Tony de Zorzi have also recovered from illness and trained this evening.

Benfica Coach Expects More Fireworks Against Barcelona

Barcelona and Benfica produced one of the most electrifying games of the season with a nine-goal thriller in the first phase of the Champions League and the Portuguese side's manager Bruno Lage told fans to brace for more excitement on Wednesday.

He said Benfica, who lost 5-4 after a stoppage time Raphinha strike, will stay true to their identity of attacking football when they host Barca again in the first leg of their last-16 clash and expects the Spanish giants to do the same.

"I can't predict how many goals will be scored in the game, but I can predict a great game of football because they're two teams with an eye for attack," Lage told a press conference on Tuesday.

"I think it's going to be a tough match and we will go out for the win. Sure, tomorrow's result will be important, but the result of the second leg will be more decisive."

Div Com Kashmir Reviews Winter Games Preparations

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Vijay Kumar Bidhuri on Tuesday reviewed the preparations for the fifth edition of Khelo India Winter Games and impressed on concerned departments for ensuring befitting arrangements at Gulmarg.

Deputy Commissioner Baramulla, Director Tourism, Director Urban Local Bodies, Director Health Services Kashmir, CEO Gulmarg Development Authority, Secretary J&K Sports Council, officers from various departments including SMC, PHE, KPDCI, R&B, MED, Transport, Airport Authority, Cable Car Corporation, Information,



J&KDC, H&H, NHIDCL, Police, SDRF, CSF, HAWAS and other stakeholders attended the meeting.

At the outset, Div Com reviewed arrangements regarding arrival of participants at Srinagar Airport, transportation of participants, accommodation facilities and

essential services including electricity, drinking water, sanitation, mobile network, critical health services and mobile recovery vans.

The Div Com called for flawless arrangements at the venue, and ensuring smooth conduct of the prestigious sporting event.

Babar Azam, Rizwan Dropped From Pakistan's T20 Squad

Press Trust of India

LAHORE: Captain Muhammad Rizwan and Babar Azam were on Tuesday dropped from the Pakistan squad for the five-match T20 series in New Zealand.

Saiman Ali Agha replaced Rizwan as captain of the T20 outfit with all-rounder Shadab Khan being recalled and named his vice-captain.

Rizwan has been retained as captain of the ODI squad after the team's disappointing show in the Champions Trophy. The selectors have avoided an overhaul in the one-day squad and retained majority of the players who flopped in the ongoing ICC event.

Babar is also retained in the ODI squad but batters Saud Shakil and Kamran Ghulam have been axed.



T20: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Shadab Khan (VC), Abdul Samad, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Hasan Nawaz, Jahandad Khan, Khushdil Shah, Muhammad Abbas Afridi, Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Harris, Muhammad Irfan Khan, Genar Bin Yousaf, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Suyfan Maqsood, Usman Khan.

Pakistan play five T20s and three ODIs in New Zealand starting March 16.

Pakistan will still be without dashing opener Saim Ayub, who is yet to recover from an ankle injury while opener, Fakhar Zaman has also been ruled out of the tour with an injury he sustained in the first match of the CT.

His injury came after making a comeback to the Pakistan squad last month in the three-nation event while Saim got injured while fielding during the Test series in South Africa earlier this year.

Pakistan squads:
ODI: Muhammad Rizwan (captain), Salman Ali Agha (VC), Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Afif Javed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Imam ul Haq, Khushdil Shah, Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Wasim junior, Mu-

Aaqib Javed To Continue As Pakistan's Head Coach

The Pakistan Cricket Board has asked former pacer and national selector, Aaqib Javed, to continue as interim head coach for the white-ball tour of New Zealand.

A PCB official said due to time constraints between the Champions Trophy and New Zealand tour, Aaqib will continue as interim head coach.

The official said his new head coach when they begin their new cycle of the World Test Championship (WTC) in August.

Last year, the PCB had appointed Jason Gillespie and Gary Kirsten as the red ball and white ball coaches respectively, but both resigned within six to eight months of their appointment citing issues with the Pakistan board.

U-20 Football Trials For National Championship Begin In Jammu

Observer News Service

JAMMU: The selection trials for the J&K men's football team set to compete at the Swami Vivekananda U-20 Men's National Football Championship 2025, commenced on Tuesday at Mini Stadium, Parade, Jammu.

The trials are being conducted under the supervision of J&K Sports Council coaches.

The trials for Jammu Division athletes will continue on March 4 and 5, following which the selection process will shift to TRC Synthetic Football Turf, Srinagar, for Kashmir Division players on March 10, 11, and 12.

The final selection trials, featuring shortlisted players from both divisions, will be



held in Srinagar on March 17, 18, and 19 under the guidance of expert coaches of JKFC.

The selected players will undergo an intensive coaching camp to prepare for the prestigious Swami Vivekananda U-20 Men's National Football Championship, scheduled to be held in Narainpur, Chhattisgarh, in April.

Following the remarkable performance of Team J&K in the recently concluded Santosh Trophy, Secretary J&K Sports Council, Nuzhat Gul instructed officials to ensure rigorous training, top-notch facilities, and comprehensive technical support for the players.

PSG Coach Warns Players About Liverpool's 'Fighter Jets' In Attack

Agencies

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique is worried about the speed of Liverpool's "fighter jets" in attack and warned his team not to give the ball away in their Champions League clash.

PSG hosts six-time champion Liverpool in the first leg of the round of 16 at Parc des Princes on Wednesday.

"Liverpool has one of the best counter attacks in Europe so we will try to keep the ball and be careful not to suffer too much from transitions," Enrique said Tuesday at a pre-match news conference. "They have three fighter jets in attack and it's not easy to stop these fighter jets."

Liverpool striker Mohamed Salah is enjoying one of the best seasons of his career with 30 goals in 39 games, and is well supported by Luis Diaz and Cody Gakpo in attack.

"We are facing the team that has played the best football in the group stage. They were the most consistent side," Enrique said. "Arne Slot has done a great job. He has created a near-perfect team, which knows how to defend, knows how to press, which can attack either by holding the ball



or accelerating."

In a rare admission, Enrique conceded that Liverpool may have the slight edge.

"Liverpool is also able to create danger without the ball, maybe that's not their strength as we do," he said. "To impose ourselves we generally need to keep the ball."

PSG has much better teamwork in the post-Mbappe era, with Dembele scoring a career-best 26 goals in 33 games. The speedy 19-year-old forward Desire Doue and sharpshooter Goncalo Ramos provide a threat from the bench.

Enrique hopes Liverpool's players will be rattled in Paris.

"It's difficult for our opponents to play at Parc des Princes with the pressure," he said. "The atmosphere is extraordinary and I hope we can profit from it."

However, Liverpool's Anfield stadium is one of the toughest places for a return leg, as Lionel Messi's Barcelona found out in the 2019 semifinals, losing 4-0 after winning 3-0 at home.

Both sides are dominating their respective leagues.

Unbeaten PSG is coasting toward a record-extending 13th French title.

Liverpool is closing in on a record-equaling 20th Premier League title, while a seventh Champions League crown would move it level with AC Milan in second place outright.

PSG lost the only Champions League final in its history 1-0 to Bayern in 2020 in the coronavirus-shortened campaign. (AP)

'Happy' Vinicius Wants To Renew Real Contract As Soon As Possible

Agencies

Brazil forward Vinicius Jr said he is happy at Real Madrid and wants to renew his contract with the LaLiga club as soon as possible, playing down reports of interest from the Saudi Pro League.

Vinicius, who joined Real in 2018, has won the Spanish top-flight league three times with the club, apart from two Champions League and two Club World Cup titles.

He has scored 102 goals for Real in all competitions, and made his 300th appearance for the club in Saturday's 2-1 loss at Real Betis.

"I am very calm because my contract lasts until 2027 and I hope to renew my contract as soon as possible because I am happy here," Vinicius told a press conference on Monday, ahead of Tuesday's derby with Atletico Madrid in the Champions League's round of 16.

Reuters reported last month that Real were close



to agreeing a contract extension with Vinicius.

"I am living the dream of playing with the best players in the world, the best coach, the best president, the best fans. Here everybody loves me so much, I couldn't be in a better place," Vinicius added.

Vinicius, who won the FIFA men's player of the year award for 2024, said it was his childhood dream to succeed at Real.



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