

J&K's Debt Crosses Rs 1.25 Lakh Cr



Observer News Service

Jammu: The Jammu and Kashmir government on Saturday said its total debt stands at over Rs 1.25 lakh crore, including Rs 27,900 crore in general provident fund (GPF) for the Union Territory in the last financial year.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who is also the finance minister of the UT, said in a written reply to Assembly member Sajad Gani Lone that as of March 31, 2024, Jammu and Kashmir's total debt is Rs 1,25,205 crore.

"This includes Rs 69,894 crore in loans from the Reserve Bank of India and state development, Rs 27,901 crore in GPF, Rs 14,294 crore in reserves, Rs 5,758 crore in outstanding national small savings fund, Rs 4,032 crore in negotiated loans, Rs 2,616 crore in UDAY power loans, and Rs 710 crore in Government of India advances", he said.

Abdullah further said the total outstanding liability in treasuries as of February 27, 2025, under various account heads | [More on P6](#)

THE TOTAL OUTSTANDING LIABILITY IN TREASURIES AS OF 27 FEB, 2025 under various object heads of accounts is to the tune of Rs 5429.49 crore.

New Criminal Laws Strengthen Women's Safety: PM Says India's Economic Growth Driven By Women

Press Trust Of India

Gujarat: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said his government has given topmost priority to women's safety and framed stricter laws and rules to prevent crimes against them, besides making a provision for capital punishment to those indulging in heinous crimes like rape.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which replaced the colonial-era criminal law (Indian Penal Code), has strengthened the legal provisions related to women's safety, and made filing of complaints easier and delivery of justice faster, he said.



THE NEW LAW MANDATES THAT CHARGES IN cases of heinous crimes, like rape, be framed within 60 days and verdicts delivered within 45 days.

Addressing a huge gathering at Vansi Borsi village in Navsari district of Gujarat on

International Women's Day, Modi said that India is walking on the path of women-led development for rapid progress of the country.

"When a girl returns (home) late, her parents ask questions. But they don't do the same when a boy comes late...They should do it. In the past decade, we have given women's safety the highest priority, and in order to prevent crimes against them, we have made stricter rules and laws," the PM said.

"My government changed the law to introduce capital punishment for heinous crimes like rape," he said.

To ensure swift justice in serious crimes against women, the | [More on P6](#)

Women Leading 296 Startups in J&K: LG

Observer News Service

Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha on Saturday reiterated his commitment to the socio-economic empowerment of women and providing them with a conducive environment to realise their true potential. Joining the 'Sashakt Nari Samman' event organised by Buddha Art and Painting, in collaboration with Padma Shri Padma Sachdev Government College for Women, here, he said under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, women empowerment | [More on P6](#)

SIA Charges 'Anti-national' SM User

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The State Investigation Agency (SIA), Kashmir, on Saturday filed a charge sheet against a Twitter user in the Designated Special Court under the NIA Act in Budgam.

The case pertains to publishing of anti-national, secessionist and pro-terrorist content on social media, an official statement reads.

"The case was registered on information that a twitter handle LACTERATED KASHMIR is publishing content on Twitter which is secessionist and anti-India in nature; and promotes terrorism in J&K. Accordingly a formal case was registered vide FIR 18 of 2022 in police Station CIK/SIA Kashmir," it reads.

During extensive technical investigation, SIA said to have identified the twitter handler as Irfan-ul-Haq of Kawoosa Khalisa of Budgam | [More on P6](#)

Nearly Dozen Townships Coming Up In J&K: Govt

Press Trust Of India

Jammu: The Jammu and Kashmir government is planning to set up nearly a dozen townships at various places, including the twin capital cities, to check unplanned urban expansion and meet the housing needs of people, Health Minister Sakeena Itoo said on Saturday.

The minister was replying on behalf of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to a question raised by People's Democratic Party (PDP) MLA Waheed Ur Rehman Parra | [More on P6](#)

Land Allotted To Sri Lankan Cricketer in Kashmir?

Opposition Demands Answers In Assembly

Observer News Service

Jammu: The Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly on Saturday witnessed heated discussions over the reported allotment of land in the Union Territory to former Sri Lankan cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan's company, Ceylon Beverages.

The issue was raised during the Question Hour by CPI(M) MLA Muhammad Yousuf Tarigami, who questioned how

a foreign national was granted land in J&K. "A Sri Lankan cricketer has been given land in Kathua. Under what provisions was this allotment made?" Tarigami asked, without naming the individual.

Congress MLA Ghulam Ahmad Mir also expressed concern, calling the matter "serious" and demanding an immediate probe. "How can a non-Indian cricketer be allotted land in J&K? This needs urgent | [More on P6](#)

AFSPA Revocation In J&K Possible But Not Feasible: Army Chief

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi has said that the revocation of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) from Jammu and Kashmir is a possibility, but the current security scenario does not support its removal.

Speaking at the India Today Conclave, General Dwivedi stated that AFSPA could be withdrawn once the Army is confident that local law



enforcement can effectively manage security challenges. He pointed to regions like Doda, Rajouri, | [More on P6](#)



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J&K Completes 260 Smart City Projects, 29 Underway

Agencies

Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir has completed 260 Smart City projects at an estimated cost of Rs 6,358.31 crore, while 29 more projects worth Rs 857.58 crore are currently under execution, as per the official document for the year 2025.

The document states that the Smart City Mission has introduced 200 e-buses (100 each in Jammu and Srinagar) with real-time tracking and digital ticketing solutions to en-

hance urban mobility. "An additional 200 e-buses have been approved under the PM E-Bus Sewa initiative," it states.

According to the document, the Smart City Mission is revamping urban infrastructure in Srinagar and Jammu, focusing on developing green spaces, installing LED street lights, constructing health centres and auditoriums, and improving public transport to create modern, efficient, and eco-friendly urban centres—(KNO)

Jamia Masjid Illumination Project 'Historic': Mirwaiz

Agencies

Srinagar: Mirwaiz-Umar Farooq has termed the illumination of Srinagar's historic Jama Masjid as a "historic moment," announcing that the first phase of the project undertaken by Auqaf Jamia was completed during the holy month of Ramadan.

In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Mirwaiz expressed gratitude for the completion of the first phase.

"Alhamdulillah, the first phase of the Jama Masjid illumination project by Auqaf Jamia has been completed dur-

ing the blessed month of Ramadan. May this enhancement add to the spiritual experience of all who visit this sacred place," wrote Mirwaiz.

Notably, the illumination, he said, will not only beautify the centuries-old mosque but also enrich the experience of thousands of devotees who gather for prayers, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

It is worth mentioning, Jama Masjid, located in the heart of Srinagar's old city, has been a symbol of Kashmir's religious and cultural heritage for over past centuries—(KNO)

GCW Celebrates Intl' Women's Day

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Government College for Women, M.A. Road, Srinagar celebrated the International Women's Day at Lala Arifa auditorium of the campus.

The event was organised by the Women's Study Centre of the college and was attended by students and faculty members.

Sahitya Akademi awardee Kashmiri poet and noted scholar, Prof. Naseem Shafiaie was the Chief Guest on the occasion while former Professor University of Kashmir and Ex-Dean Outreach, Islamic University of Science and Technology, Prof. Lily Want was the Guest of Honour.

Other guests who spoke on the occasion included Dr. Fatima Jalid from the Department of Chemical Engineering at National Institute of Technology (NIT) Srinagar and Ms. Madeeha Majid, a human rights lawyer and motivational speaker.

In her welcome address, Principal of the host college, Prof. Yasmeen Farooq Khan highlighted the relevance of the day and underlined the importance of achieving gender equality in education.

Referring to the pivotal role played by Govt. College for Women, M.A. Road in women emancipation during the last over seven decades, Prof. Yasmeen said, "This institution has been a beacon of hope and a catalyst for change. As this col-

"SHE WAS NOT ONLY A TRAILBLAZER FOR women's rights, but a voice for those who were silenced, a champion for education and social justice. Her tireless efforts for promoting equality and justice continue to inspire and ignite action in all of us."

lege is completing 75 years, we humbly remember the remarkable contribution of women like Mehmooda Ali Shah whose legacy stands as a testament to what women can achieve, even in the face of adversity".

"She was not only a trailblazer for women's rights, but a voice for those who were silenced, a champion for education and social justice. Her tireless efforts for promoting equality and justice continue to inspire and ignite action in all of us", she added.

"We still have a long way to go in ensuring true gender equality, but I believe with the spirit of women like Mehmooda Ali Shah and her ilk along with the collective action of our society, we can be closer to the world where all women, regardless of their background or circumstance, have the opportunity to reach their full potential," Prof. Yasmeen said.



Ramazan: Special Plates, Grand Buffets Take Over Srinagar

Restaurants, Cafeterias Witness Surge in demand for traditional Iftar platters

Agencies

Srinagar: As the holy month of Ramadan progresses, the special plates and grand buffets are making waves across Kashmir, with local restaurants and cafeterias witnessing an increased demand for traditional delicacies.

From bustling street vendors to high-end restaurants, the food culture during Iftar has transformed into a grand culinary experience.

Residents say this trend is not just about feasting but also about community bonding.

"Ramazan is a month of spirituality, but food remains a big part of our celebrations. Restaurants and cafeterias are offering unique Iftar buffets, which people are enjoying with their families and friends," said Irfan Ahmad, a resident of Srinagar's Hazratbal.

From wazwan platters to kebabs, dates, and refreshing drinks, restaurants and cafeterias across the Valley have introduced special menus cater-

ing to the increased demand. "Our restaurant has introduced an Iftar buffet with many dishes, including traditional Kashmiri items like kebab, gushtaba, and rogan josh. The response has been great," said a restaurant owner in Hyderpora, Srinagar.

Similarly, not just in Srinagar city but also in other districts, the trend of Iftar meals is gaining popularity. "In Baramulla, Sopore, and Shopian, along with other districts, hotels and cafeterias are offering combo deals for Iftar, which include everything from desserts to kebabs. This is a new trend we are witnessing in recent years," said Junaid, a local from Baramulla.

Notably, locals on the other hand are also expressing concerns over rising food prices during the holy month. "While the variety is appealing, prices have skyrocketed. A simple Iftar meal that used to cost Rs 200 last year now costs around Rs 300-350. The administration should monitor food prices," said Shabir Hussain, a local in Srinagar.

Meet Pherni Vendor Selling Sweet Dish For Decades

Srinagar: An elderly Pherni vendor from the Aali Kadal area of Srinagar has been serving his signature sweet dish for decades, attracting customers from across Kashmir, especially during the holy month of Ramazan.

Nazir Ahmad, along with his two sons, Showkat and Aabid, continues the family tradition of preparing and selling Pherni at Aali Kadal Srinagar, where the stall witnesses a heavy rush, particularly before Iftari.

Nazir said his family has been in this trade for around eight decades. Initially handled by his brother, Nazir took over the business and has been making Pherni for the past 60 years. He proudly said that his customer base extends across Kashmir and that the business has provided a stable livelihood for his family.

- TRAFFIC POLICE : 9419993745, 01998-266686
- PCR: 0194-2452092, 2455883
- PDD: 0194-2450213
- FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES : 2479488, 2452222, 2452155
- CAPD: 18001807011
- SMC HEALTH OFFICER: 9469409081
- Ambulance: Kashmir EMS Service: +91 94841 00200


AIRPORTS
SHEIK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311

RAILWAYS

- SRINAGAR: 0194-2103259
- ANANTNAG: 01932-228243
- BARAMULLA: 0194-102029
- BIJHERA: 01932-228243
- PAMPOR: 01933-294132
- PATTAN: 01954-293507
- QAZIGUND: 01951-296153

HIGHWAY STATUS

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



**HIJRI
CALENDAR**

08 Ramazan
1446

PRAYERS	
FAJR	5: 27
ZUHR	12:43
ASR	4: 52
Magrib	6:36
ISHA	7: 56

This Day In History

- 1862 - USS Monitor and CSS Merrimack battle in Hampton Roads
- 1889 - Battle at Gallabat (Meterna): Mahdi's beat Abyssinian emperor John IV.
- 1891 - Great
- 1891 - Great Blizzard of 1891 begins in England (lasts until 13th March; 200 people and 6,000 animals killed).
- 1893 - Congo cannibals killed thousands of Arabs
- 1907 - 1st involuntary sterilization law enacted, Indiana.
- 1916 - Germany declares war against Portugal.
- 1925 - Pink's War, the first RAF operation conducted independently of the Army or Navy, begins.
- 1935 - Adolf Hitler announces the creation of a new air force.
- 1942 - Construction of the Alaska Highway began
- 1945 - 334 US B-29 Superfortresses attack Tokyo with 120,000 fire bombs
- 1945 - Japanese proclaim "independence" of Indo-China.
- 1961 - Soviet flight Sputnik 9 carries and returns a dog named Chernushka (Blackie), frogs and a guinea pig from orbit
- 1962 - Egyptian Pres Nasser declares Gaza belongs to Palestinians.
- 1962 - US advisors in South-Vietnam join the fight
- 1975 - Construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System begins.
- 1986 - NASA announces searchers found remains of Challenger astronauts.
- 1986 - Soviet probe Vega 2 flies by Halley's Comet at 8,030 km
- 1989 - Soviet Union officially submits to jurisdiction of the World Court.
- 1991- US 70th manned space mission STS 39 (Discovery 12) launches into orbit
- 1994 - IRA launch 1st of 3 mortar attacks on London's Heathrow Airport.
- 2006 - Liquid water is discovered on Enceladus, the sixth largest moon of Saturn.
- 2007 - The US Justice Department releases an internal audit that found that the Federal Bureau of Investigation had acted illegally in its use of the USA Patriot Act to secretly obtain personal information about US citizens.

From KO Archives

Wife Pushes Husband Behind Bars

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Police today arrested a resident of Sarnal, Anantnag who had reportedly tried to kill his wife by pushing her out of the third story of his house. Syed Khalid Shah was arrested after the statement of his injured wife who regained consciousness after seven days in coma at Soura Institute, Srinagar. Ironically, he was attending to his bruised wife in the hospital when arrested. The police have registered a case against him under the Section 307. According to the reports, Rozy Jan, was taken to hospital by her in-laws on March 2 saying that she fell from the third story of her house. She was admitted to hospital in an unconscious state and after seven days when she regained her consciousness, she revealed that she had been pushed out of the window by her husband with the intention of killing her.

The couple who had been married for last four years, had a relationship marred by quarrels and conflicts, and the birth of a child could not mend their differences. Two years back, the conflict resulted in divorce, but later a patch up brokered by their relatives resulted in their re-marriage. However, the differences could not be bridged and according to the wife, her husband was threatening to kill her daily for some time. Relatives of the victim accused Shah having developed a relationship with some other woman. (Kashmir Observer, 09 March, 2000)

Office of the Executive Engineer, R&B Division Baramulla

No: 12181-86 Dated: 05.03.2025

Shri. Ghulam Ahmad Sheikh, S/O Mohammad Abdullah Sheikh, R/O Brein Nishat Srinagar.

Subject: Sanitary work upto first manhole for Administration block of Medical College at Baramulla.

Reference: 1. Allotment No: PA/GM/K/21/222-24 dated: 01.10.2021.
2. AEE R&B Sub-Division Baramulla's letter No: AEEB/1324 dated: 04.01.2025

1. Whereas, the above subject works have been allotted in your favour vide allotment No: PA/GM/K/21/222-24 dated: 01.10.2021

2. Whereas, as per allotment you were supposed to complete the work within 60days.

3. Whereas, it has come to the notice of undersigned that the above captioned work has been abandoned by you.

4. Whereas, you have been time and again directed by the field staff/ sub-Divisional authorities to resume to the work verbally/ latest by AEE Baramulla letter No: AEEB/1324 dated: 04.01.2025.

5. Whereas, the building being a life line structure and was supposed to be attended on top priority but despite lapse of stipulated time period you have not completed the work.

6. Whereas, you are given a last chance to resume the work within two days & complete the same at an earliest otherwise, action as per the NIT/Contract shall be initiated against you, your performance security shall be forfeited & the balance work shall be put to fresh tenders at your risk & cost which may be noted.

This notice be treated as final one & no further correspondence shall be made at this end.

DIPK-12819/24 dated: 08-03-2025

Executive Engineer,
R&B Division Baramulla.

GOVERNMENT OF (U.T) JAMMU & KASHMIR

Office Of The Executive Engineer Jal Shakti (PHE) Deptt. Ground Water Division Srinagar Baghi-Ali-Mardan, Nowshara Srinagar.

E-mail:-pwegwd@yahoo.com, Tel./Fax No:-0194-2411285

Extension Notice 1st.

Subject: Procurement of Ground Water Detector/ Loggers for PHE Ground Water Division Srinagar by way of Providing, Testing and Commissioning of Bore Hole Camera System with 200 Mtr. Cable Inspection of Wells.

Reference: This office e-NIT No. 66-JS-PHE/GWDS/Mech. of 2024-25, issued vide endorsement No: JS-PHE/GWDS/24-25/Corrs./13016-23, dated: 28-02-2025. Bearing Tender ID No. 2025_PHE_273376_1.

Due to "Poor Response" for the above mentioned works advertised vide-e-NIT No. and Tender ID No's under reference. Which was scheduled to be downloaded till 08-03-2025 Up-to 11:00 AM are extended as per the details given below:-

S.No.	Item	Fresh Date
1.	Period of submission of bids	15-03-2025 Up-to 11:00 AM
2.	Date of opening of tenders	17-03-2025 11.00 AM

NOTE:
All other terms and conditions shall remain same as laid down in the aforesaid e-NIT issued vide above referred endstt: nos.

DIPK-12804/24 dated: 08-03-2025

Executive Engineer
Jal Shakti (PHE) Deptt.
Ground Water Division Srinagar.

CHINAR TAXI STAND PALHALLAN

Cell: 9908797598, 9906851080, 9906764254

Regd. No: 173-MT-BIA

Dated: 08/03/25

The Chairman of Chinar Taxi Stand Palhallan, Nazir Ah Tantray, requests the Chinar Taxi Stand Palhallan to address the following:

We have 45 Sumo vehicles. Therefore, I do not have the capacity for additional vehicles.

If anyone has a membership above 5000, they are eligible to participate in Chinar Taxi Stand Palhallan.

If anybody purchases a membership, they will be referred to the President, in accordance with legislation no. 193-MT-BIA.

The membership purchase fine will be 5000, payable through Chinar Taxi Stand Palhallan, along with an affidavit.

President
CHINAR TAXI STAND
PALHALLAN

fko

Kashmir's Degenerating Social Fabric

Kya gov malaal yeth Reshwaraey?

Dr. Ashraf Zainabi

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If Reshwaer is to breathe again, it must first be cleansed—not by force, not by authority, but by the return of honesty, by the revival of integrity, by the rediscovery of purpose

Kashmir, the Reshwaer, the land once sanctified by the footsteps of saints and softened by the words of mystics, now trembles under the weight of its own undoing. It was here that Lal Ded wandered, shedding the chains of materialism, and here that Nund Reshi's silence was mightier than a thousand decrees.

This was the land where prayers rose with the morning mist and settled like dew upon the hearts of its people. But now, what remains of that Reshwaer? What remains of that sacred breath, that divine touch?

Amir Khusrau, enamored by a Kashmir, wrote, "If there is a paradise on Earth, it is this, it is this, it is this." Paradise-like no longer exists. If he were to return today, would he still call it paradise? Or would he find himself gasping for air in a place where truth has been buried, and honor has been sold to the highest bidder?

The tragedy of Kashmir is not merely in its political wounds, nor simply in its territorial struggles. It is in its moral decay, its spiritual erosion, its betrayal of self. There was a time when Reshwaer meant humility, a land where a traveler could sleep under the shade of a chinar, unafraid of deceit or violence.

Kashmir was a place where generosity was instinctive, where a stranger was fed before he could ask, where the wealth of the valley lay not in its gold, but in its grace. Today, the same land is haunted by the ghosts of corruption. The streets that once welcomed poets and seekers now echo with cries of crime, obscene, immoral acts, the fields that once blossomed with saffron are now buried under highways and shopping malls. What was once a land of faqeers (God fearing & anti materialists) has become a playground for opportunists and psycho breed like Razak bab.

A crime against the soul

A greater crime than the theft of land is the theft of virtue. Theft is no longer done in the secrecy of night; it is a craft practiced in daylight, sanctioned by power, justified by necessity.

The youth, both men, women, young, old, once seekers of knowledge, now seek refuge in intoxication, drowning their disillusionment in a haze of substance abuse. The hands that once wove the finest Pashmina now tremble under the



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A greater crime than the theft of land is the theft of virtue. Theft is no longer done in the secrecy of night; it is a craft practiced in daylight, sanctioned by power, justified by necessity.

weight of despair.

A couplet in Kashmiri language translates into "What will the oppressor take with him? Lal Ded has shown the path". But the path is obscured, lost beneath the rubble of greed. The mosques are grander, the sermons louder, yet hearts are darker, and intentions more hollow. Faith has been reduced to performance, religion to a ritualistic routine that serves the ego more than the soul. What use are long prayers when they do not translate into honesty? What worth is a bowed head when the hands are tainted with deceit?

The streets reek not only of economic poverty but of moral bankruptcy. Corruption is no longer an exception; it is the rule. Those entrusted with justice have turned it into a commodity. Those meant

to uphold truth have auctioned it for convenience. Nepotism thrives while merit is strangled. Reshwaer has been turned into a marketplace where everything—land, faith, loyalty—is up for sale.

The destruction of the sacred land

Nature, once the valley's greatest poet, now laments in silence. The Karewas, the ancient plateaus that cradled saffron fields and almond orchards, are being razed, their soil sold by those who should have safeguarded it. Concrete suffocates what was once a breathing landscape, rivers carry filth instead of purity, lakes mirror the neglect of their keepers. If the land is lost, if the water is lost, if the air is lost—what remains of Reshwaer and the Paradise?

Of Reshwaer, it is not just the land that is being consumed; it is its identity itself. The Wular that once sustained villages now swallows its own banks (encroachment's). The Dal, once a mirror to the heavens, now reflects the ruin of our conscience. The waters that once carried the whispers of saints now carry the waste of an indifferent people, morally, environmentally corrupt. Kashmir, which once commanded reverence, is now being dissected, dismantled, and degraded, piece by piece, inch by inch.

The vanishing spirit

Once upon a time, Reshwaer was not just a land; it was a way of life. It was simplicity, it was generosity, it was truth. That spirit is now an artifact, spoken of in past tense, admired in nostalgia but abandoned in practice. This is the greatest malaal, the deepest wound—the loss of what made Kashmir more than just a valley of mountains and rivers.

"A land as beautiful as the first glimpse of paradise," wrote Sir Walter Lawrence. But what is beauty if it is hollow? What is paradise if its people live in despair? What is Reshwaer if its people list morals and lost the purpose of very being.

Is redemption possible?

We, as individuals and a society have reached a point when redemption is the only way. Can Reshwaer be saved? Perhaps. But it will take more than mourning. It will take more than mere remembrance. It demands action, reflection, and an unwavering courage to break the chains of greed, to cleanse the conscience, to reclaim the truth.

This Reshwaer didn't die overnight. Also its redemption is not possible on memory alone. If Reshwaer is to breathe again, it must first be cleansed—not by force, not by authority, but by the return of honesty, by the revival of integrity, by the rediscovery of purpose.

Until then, the question will remain unanswered. The lament will remain unresolved, and the sigh of Reshwaer will continue to echo—"Kya gov malaal yeth Reshwaraey?"

*Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer
The author is a Teacher, researcher and a freelance columnist*

NEW DELHI – Democracy is under threat around the world, but not because dictators are overthrowing elected governments and seizing power. While authoritarian takeovers still make headlines, they are no longer the greatest threat to free societies. The real danger is more insidious: a gradual yet profound transformation of our democratic systems.

On the surface, these systems appear to be functioning as they should. Elections are being held, and voters are casting their ballots for leaders and parties they believe will represent their interests. But too often, they end up electing politicians who serve only their own interests rather than those of their constituents. While gullibility is not new, it has become so pervasive that it now threatens the very foundation of democratic governance.

To understand how we got here, consider the "elé belé rule." When I was growing up in Calcutta (now Kolkata), all smart kids playing in the streets and parks knew the rule. When they played games in the neighborhood, a younger kid – usually accompanied by a dotting mother – occasionally would insist on joining them. Rather than refusing outright, the players would whisper to one another the code words "elé belé," signaling that while the new kid could play along, he was not actually part of the game. If he scored a goal, we would cheer and applaud, but we all knew the truth: his goal didn't count.

Today, élé belé has become a staple of democratic politics, with ordinary people around the world eagerly throwing their support behind demagogues who don't think they count. For these leaders, a commitment to public service is worse than irrelevant; it threatens the relentless pursuit of wealth and power for themselves and their cronies. Voters who believe they are part of the game are just being played.

The result is democratic erosion. Mainstream economists and political scientists have long relied on the "median voter theorem," which states that in a majoritarian electoral system, political leaders will naturally gravitate toward the preferences of centrist voters, as winning elections requires appealing to the ideological middle rather than the extremes. But today's deepening political polarization

Playing At Democracy

Kaushik Basu



and the growing tendency of politicians to embrace radical positions suggest that this assumption no longer holds.

While the underlying causes of this shift remain unclear, it is strongly correlated with the rise of social media. Instead of fostering informed debate, digital platforms have become powerful tools for spreading misinformation, enabling opportunistic leaders to manipulate and mislead people with ease.

Since its inception in ancient Athens, democracy has undergone numerous transformations. As technology advances, certain features of earlier democratic systems become outdated. Evolving moral standards can also lead to fundamental reforms. For example, in the Roman Republic, the votes of high-ranking officials and the wealthy carried more weight than those of ordinary citizens. We no longer

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find this acceptable.

Similarly, as democracy evolved, the need for stability became evident, leading to the introduction of constitutions. While constitutions can be amended, doing so requires more than a simple majority, ensuring that core institutions are not subject to impulsive change.

With democratic governance under increasing strain, the world once again finds itself at a critical juncture. Today's extreme inequality is eroding democracy in unprecedented ways. The rise of digital platforms and social media has provided the super-rich with new tools to shape public opinion. Voters believe they are active participants while – élé belé – real power is concentrated in the hands of the few.

Curbing inequality is thus not just a moral imperative; it is also necessary for protecting democracy against the threat of authoritarianism. To this end, we need a tax system that redistributes wealth and income without stifling innovation and entrepreneurship.

There is certainly scope for this. Once they reach a certain level of wealth, the super-rich are no longer motivated by a desire for more money per se, but rather by the desire to outdo their super-rich peers. This implies an opportunity to implement what I call an "accordion tax," which taxes high earners and redistributes the revenue to those with lower incomes in a way that preserves the relative ranking among the rich. Such a system would enable us to reduce inequality and maintain the incentives that drive ambition and innovation.

But individual countries cannot tackle extreme inequality by themselves. International cooperation is essential, given the limits of unilateral action in a globalized world. History has shown that when faced with major challenges, the world can come together to translate bold ideas into action. To save democracy, we must do so again.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. The article was originally published by Project Syndicate

Blooming Against All Odds

Dr Neelofar's Journey In Floriculture And Innovation

Hirra Azmat

Looking across the rows of vibrant flowers in the greenhouse, Chief Scientist and Dean, Faculty of Horticulture, SKUAST-Kashmir, Dr. Neelofar Banday, takes a deep breath. "You see, choosing floriculture and landscaping as a career came with its own set of challenges. Women in Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are still underrepresented, and their numbers dwindle even further in leadership positions. Naturally, I had to overcome many barriers to get here."

The youngest of four sisters, Neelofar grew up in the traditional and conservative setting of the old city. However, she was always determined to make unconventional choices, often challenging societal norms. Active in sports and an exceptional student, she completed her primary and secondary education at a government school before pursuing a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Agriculture. She later earned a Ph.D. in Floriculture and Landscaping from SKUAST-Kashmir.

Neelofar credits her father as the driving force behind her decision to pursue agricultural science. "My father was my greatest source of inspiration," she said. "From high school, he encouraged me to study science, always reminding me that women hold up half the sky and can contribute equally to STEM."

Her research focused on the "programming of tulip bulbs"—a process that refers to the process of planting them in the fall to ensure they bloom in the spring; this involves choosing the right time, location, and planting depth.

"Tulips bloom in Delhi as well, but the bulbs don't form there because the temperature is not suitable. The ones that bloom in Delhi are already programmed. Tulip bulbs require a chilling period of 2 to 2.5 months, which naturally occurs in temperate climate of Eu-



rope and Kashmir. We artificially provided this chilling temperature to tulip bulbs in August, allowing them to be cultivated outside Kashmir while still ensuring proper blooming," the scientist explained.

Neelofar's journey, however, has been long and demanding. Throughout her research, she has had to challenge age-old stereotypes that question women's ability to engage in science while balancing career aspirations with family commitments. Taking the road less travelled, she rose to become a professor, Chief Editor of



NEELOFAR'S JOURNEY, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN LONG AND DEMANDING. THROUGHOUT HER RESEARCH, she has had to challenge age-old stereotypes that question women's ability to engage in science while balancing career aspirations with family commitments

the SKUAST Journal of Research, and currently serves as the Dean Faculty of Horticulture at SKUAST-K, Shalimar.

As a floriculture scientist, she has guided 20 to 30 Ph.D. students, whose research has covered a variety of crops, including summer annual flowers and herbaceous perennials. While summer annual plants complete their life cycle within a single warm season, herbaceous perennials die back each year but regrow from their roots.

Beyond mentoring, she has worked extensively on tissue cul-

ture propagation of liliun, standardization of production technology for various flowers, and post-harvest techniques to improve flower longevity for consumers. She has also contributed valuable insights to the Tulip Garden, Srinagar, advising on blooming periods, disease control, and optimal timings for opening the garden to visitors.

Neelofar has authored more than 90 research papers in prestigious national and international journals, including the Indian Journal of Horticulture, Indian Journal of Agricultural Sciences, Journal of Ornamental Horticulture, Saudi Journal of Biological Research, and Applied Biological Research, among others.

Despite her many achievements, Neelofar has witnessed the stress and exhaustion that researchers endure. To support students facing anxiety related to research, she initiated a mental health awareness program. In collaboration with the Kashmiri American Society for Healthcare, Education & Medical Research, she helped establish a mental health counselling cell at the campus. "The goal is to protect and promote mental well-being, creating a supportive environment where students can thrive both intellectually and emotionally," she said.

Neelofar also highlighted the rapid evolution of the floriculture industry in Kashmir, where entrepreneurs and investors now generate revenues in crores. "One of the biggest advantages of floriculture is the high income per unit area. For instance, a rice crop may yield 4,000 to 10,000 rupees per Kanal, whereas floriculture can generate earnings in lakhs within the same space. Since it is an intensive form of agriculture, it can even be practiced in home corridors or small spaces," she noted.

Her advice to young women entering agricultural sciences is simple yet powerful: believe in your potential, embrace challenges, and never hesitate to carve your own path.

Youth in the Grip of Materialism

Umair Ul Umar

Materialism has deeply infiltrated the lives of young people, shaping their aspirations, behaviors, and self-worth. In an era dominated by consumer culture, social media, and the relentless pursuit of status, youth often find themselves trapped in a cycle of material desires. This obsession with wealth and possessions is not only reshaping their priorities but also affecting their mental well-being, relationships, and overall purpose in life.

The Mask of Joy: When Happiness Isn't Real

Many young individuals believe that owning the latest gadgets, designer clothes, or expensive cars will bring them happiness and social validation. However, materialism often leads to dissatisfaction. Studies suggest that the more people chase material wealth, the less content they feel. The endless cycle of wanting more creates a sense of emptiness, as true fulfillment comes from experiences, personal growth, and relationships rather than possessions. Nowadays, people are superficially happy with fake smiles. We see many students, after failing to get a government job, travel to Gulf countries, leaving their families. Though they earn hefty amounts of money, internally they are anxious. I saw a father shrieking because his only son had not returned for more than a decade from England.

The Digital Illusion: How Social Media Controls Us

Social media plays a significant role in fueling materialism among youth. Platforms like In-

stagram, TikTok, and Snapchat constantly expose young minds to a world where success is measured by expensive clothes, luxury vacations, and branded products. Influencers and celebrities showcase a glamorous lifestyle, making material wealth seem like the ultimate goal. This creates pressure among young people to keep up, often leading to financial stress, insecurities, and even unethical behaviors to afford such a lifestyle. Generation Z nowadays are big fans of vlogging. Suppose they see a person in a pool of blood; rather than helping him, they will live stream it for likes and comments to monetize their social media accounts.

The Unseen Battle: Mental Health in Crisis

The obsession with material wealth is linked to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Constantly comparing oneself with others on social media or in real life creates feelings of inadequacy. Young people who tie their self-worth to material success struggle with identity crises, leading to emotional distress and a lack of self-acceptance. Many people I have seen who are brand-obsessed walk and talk only about brands. The materialistic competition has made them solillaquists.

Emotional Distance in a Connected World

Materialism affects how young people form relationships. Many friendships and social circles become transactional, based on status and financial benefits rather than genuine bonds. The pressure to appear successful can also lead to dishonesty, pretentious behavior, and even family conflicts,



Materialism has deeply impacted the younger generation, disrupting their inner peace and contentment. The constant pursuit of luxury, branded goods, and social validation through material possessions creates anxiety, dissatisfaction, and an endless cycle of comparison

as youth prioritize material pursuits over meaningful connections. Many couples always quarrel because of these brands. Maybe the demand is beyond the income. There is friction between children and parents. Even our society is responsible. Suppose a girl is employed in government; she will never prefer an unemployed man to marry her. Similarly, most employed boys prefer to marry an employed girl.

Chained by Loans: The Dark Side of Debt Culture

Many young individuals fall into the trap of overspending to maintain a luxurious lifestyle. Credit cards, loans, and easy access to online shopping encourage excessive spending beyond their means. This results in financial instability, debt burdens, and a lack of savings for essential future needs like education, housing, and healthcare. We often see this culture skyrocketing

etc., because of competition after they see their cousins and friends with skyscrapers and Mercedes. Although they know that loans are prohibited in Islam, as one of the biggest sins, it is a mandatory evil for them because of materialism.

Disrupted Tranquility

Materialism has deeply impacted the younger generation, disrupting their inner peace and contentment. The constant pursuit of luxury, branded goods, and social validation through material possessions creates anxiety, dissatisfaction, and an endless cycle of comparison. Instead of finding joy in experiences, relationships, and self-growth, many young people equate happiness with acquiring more. This mindset leads to stress, loss of gratitude, and emotional emptiness.

Breaking Free from Materialism

To rescue the youth from the clutches of materialism, society must encourage:

Mindfulness and Gratitude:

Teaching young people to appreciate what they have rather than constantly chasing more. SAADGIEY GAEY SHAHZAAD GIEY (Simplicity is graceful elegance)

Financial Education:

Instilling responsible spending habits and the value of saving for the future.

Stronger Values and Purpose:

Encouraging focus on personal growth, meaningful relationships, and ethical living.

Digital Awareness:

Reducing dependency on social media validation and recog-

nizing its unrealistic portrayals of life.

Parental and Educational Guidance:

Parents and educators must emphasize values beyond material wealth and provide real-life role models who inspire purpose-driven lives.

Turn Towards the Teachings of Al Quran:

The Quran teaches that materialism is a temporary illusion that distracts people from their true purpose. It emphasizes that wealth and worldly possessions should not become an obsession, as they do not bring lasting peace or fulfillment. Instead, the Quran encourages gratitude, generosity, and a focus on the Hereafter. True success lies in spiritual growth and righteousness, not in accumulating material wealth. By shifting our priorities from material gains to moral and spiritual values, we can attain inner peace and a meaningful life.

Final Thoughts

Materialism is a powerful force shaping today's youth, often leading them down a path of dissatisfaction, stress, and superficiality. However, by promoting awareness, strong values, and a balanced approach to life, young people can break free from this trap and find true happiness in self-worth, relationships, and meaningful achievements.

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CT Final: 'India Favourites But Only Just Against New Zealand'

Press Trust of India

DUBAI: Former India head coach Ravi Shastri has picked India as the favourites in Sunday's Champions Trophy summit clash against New Zealand but pointed out that the advantage will be minuscule, given that the Black Caps are a formidable side.

India, who have played all their matches here, stormed into the final with an all-win record, and defeated Australia in the semifinal.

New Zealand, who finished second behind India in Group A after losing their league match, secured their spot in the final with a one-sided win over South Africa in the second semifinal in Lahore.

"If there's one team that can beat India, it's New Zealand," Shastri said in "The ICC Review".

"So India start as favourites but



only just," he said referring to the final, which will be a re-match of the 2000 Champions Trophy title clash, where New Zealand triumphed by four wickets in Nairobi.

The 62-year-old, who has

seen both teams evolve over the years, picked four players from the New Zealand squad who could make a difference in the high-stakes final.

He singled out Rachin Ravindra, calling him "immensely

talented", Kane Williamson for his "stability and calmness like a saint", and captain Mitchell Santner, whom he described as an "intelligent" leader who can influence the game alongside Glenn Phillips, who could be the

X-factor for the team.

Shastri also highlighted Virat Kohli's current form as a potential game-changer, while also acknowledging Williamson's ability to seize crucial moments.

"Now (on) current form, Kohli. When these guys get hot and you let them get their first 10 runs, then they're trouble. Whether it's Williamson, whether it's Kohli," Shastri said.

"So from New Zealand, I would say Williamson. To an extent, Ravindra, he is a fabulous young player.

"But these guys when they smell the coffee and you let them, in a final, get to that 10-15, then they're doubly dangerous."

Ravindra, at just 25, has already accumulated five centuries in ICC 50-over tournaments -- the youngest to achieve the feat.

Short TAKES

DC Srinagar Attends Real Kashmir's Training At TRC Ground



Deputy Commissioner Srinagar Dr. Bilal Mohi-Ud-Din Bhat attended a training session of Real Kashmir FC at TRC Ground here on Saturday.

During the event, Dr. Bilal interacted with the players and coaching staff, lauding their efforts in promoting football in J&K. He also congratulated the U-15 Real Kashmir team for qualifying for the AIFF Youth League.

He said that the Snow Leopards provide a significant platform for young players, preparing them for national tournaments. He attended the practice sessions in Real Kashmir's jersey.

The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from football enthusiasts, sports officials and club supporters.

The club's owner, Arshid Shawl, along with other officials, expressed gratitude to Dr. Bilal for his support and encouragement.

Real Kashmir Set To Take On Aizawl FC At TRC Today

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Real Kashmir FC will lock horns Aizawl FC in a crucial I-League encounter at TRC Ground here on Sunday.

The match, scheduled for 2:00 PM, is expected to be a high-stakes contest as the Snow Leopards eye the league title.

Real Kashmir currently stands with 29 points from 17 matches, just behind Churchill Brothers and Inter Kashi and both teams having 34 points from 18 games. With only a few games left in the season, every point matters in the title race.

Addressing a pre-match press conference on Saturday, Real Kashmir head coach Ishfaq Ahmad acknowledged Aizawl FC's strength, especially after their recent victory over Sporting Club Bangalore.

"Their confidence is high, but it all depends on how both teams perform on the field," he said.

Ishfaq highlighted the



Their confidence is high, but it all depends on how both teams perform on the field"

mounting pressure on top teams. "A single loss can change the standings and impact the title race," he added.

Real Kashmir, the only club from J&K in the I-League, is owned by Arshid Shawl and features a mix of local and foreign players. Winning the title would be a significant boost for football in the region.

The club management has urged fans to turn up in large numbers and support the team in this crucial match.



Khelo India Winter Games Kick Off Today In Gulmarg



Press Trust of India

GULMARG: Indian Army and Ladakh are set to renew their rivalry when the second leg of the Khelo India Winter Games 2025 begins at the picturesque Kongdoori slopes here on Sunday.

Indian Army will be aiming to wrest control from the first leg winners Ladakh to defend their overall title in the prestigious tournament.

The Union Territory of Ladakh finished on top in the first chap-

ter, winning seven medals, including four gold. Tamil Nadu finished second with five medals including, three gold.

Maharashtra finished with the maximum number of medals (10) but only two gold meant they finished third.

A total of 350-plus athletes from 11 states, two Union Territories and central forces -- Indian Army, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) -- will compete in the four disci-

plines of Alpine Skiing, Nordic Skiing, Ski Mountaineering and Snowboarding.

The KIWG resume after postponement due to insufficient snowfall in February. Gulmarg is now covered by a blanket of snow that promises thrilling performances.

Day 1 Schedule: Alpine Skiing - Men's Slalom; Nordic Skiing - Men's 10km, Women's 5km; Ski Mountaineering - Men's & Women's Sprint; Snowboarding - Men's Slalom.

Nottingham Forest Beats Ailing Man City 1-0 In Premier League

Nottingham Forest's improbable bid for Champions League qualification was strengthened by a 1-0 win over ailing Manchester City in the Premier League on Saturday, with winger Callum Hudson-Odoi scoring the goal in the 83rd minute.

City goalkeeper Ederson Moraes was beaten at his near post by Hudson-Odoi's shot in one of few clear-cut chances in a tight game at the City Ground. A few minutes earlier, Ederson had tipped a curling strike by Hudson-Odoi onto the post.

Third-place Forest, which was battling relegation last season, moved four points clear of fourth-place City.

Trump Will Lead 'Task Force' Preparing For 2026 FIFA World Cup

Agencies

President Donald Trump has created a task force to prepare for the 2026 World Cup, which will bring the globe's premier soccer tournament to North America at a time when his on-again, off-again tariffs have ratcheted up tensions across the continent.

"I think it's going to make it more exciting," Trump said Friday of playing the World Cup amid sharp rhetoric between leaders of the host nations. "Tension's a good thing."

The task force, which Trump will chair, will coordinate the federal government's security and planning for the tournament, which is expected to draw millions of tourists to the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"It's a great honor for our country to have it," Trump said of the World Cup after meeting with officials from FIFA, the international soccer governing body. He said he'd like to attend multiple games.

Preparations are ramping up across the continent alongside tensions between the United States and its neighbors as Trump has repeatedly threatened to impose tariffs before backing off, spooking markets and leading to



fears of a trade war and economic downturn. He also speaks pejoratively of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and muses about Canada becoming a U.S. state, which has boosted national pride north of the border.

For 2026, the World Cup will expand to 48 teams playing 104 matches, the first time that the tournament will be played across three countries. Seventy-eight of 104 matches will be played in the U.S., with 13 games each in Mexico and Canada, and as many as six matches a day. The final will be played July 19 at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino said the task force will ensure that each of the visitors who will travel from around the world

"feels safe, feels happy and feels that we are doing something special."

"So we're here to create and to make the best show on the planet ever," Infantino said. He gave Trump a personalized game ball and unveiled an elaborate trophy that will go to the winner of the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup, which will pit top soccer clubs against each other this summer ahead of next year's matchup of national teams.

Trump later brought Infantino to show off the trophy at the start of a White House cryptocurrency summit. The United States, where soccer has grown in popularity but remains a niche sport, represents a major growth area for soccer, he said.

Rohit Hasn't Spoken To Me Or Team About Future: Gill

Press Trust of India

India vice-captain Shubman Gill on Saturday said there has not been any discussion around the possible retirement of skipper Rohit Sharma, as the team is completely focused on winning the Champions Trophy.

India will face New Zealand in the final of the ICC marquee event here on Sunday.

"Till now, we have only been discussing winning the match, winning the Champions Trophy. He has not spoken to me or to the team about this decision (retirement). I don't think Rohit is thinking about it," said Gill in the pre-match press conference here.

The Indian vice-captain said the team environment has been positive ahead of the title clash.

"The team environment or the culture we're talking about, everyone motivates each other. We all motivate each other, push each other. If someone is doing good, how can he do better?" he said.