

## Amarnath Yatra Gets AI Shield Amid Terror Threats



Observer News Service

Srinagar: In a major step to bolster security for the upcoming Amarnath Yatra, Jammu and Kashmir Police have deployed facial recognition systems (FRS) along the Pahalgam route to pre-empt any potential terror threats targeting pilgrims, officials said on Monday.

The high-tech surveillance system is capable of real-time alerts. It is designed to trigger an immediate hooter alarm at the security control centre if a blacklisted individual—including active terrorists or suspected

overground workers—enters the camera's frame.

"Images of suspected individuals have been fed into the system. If a match is detected, the alert mechanism enables forces to respond swiftly," said an official involved in the security planning.

FRS works by analysing facial features captured in digital photographs or videos and comparing them against a pre-loaded database. Authorities are also working to install a similar system along the Baltal route before the yatra begins on July 3.

The 2025 | [More on P6](#)

11 Years Of Modi Govt

## India Now Fastest-Growing Economy: PM Modi

From Toilets To Tap Water: Modi Lists Milestones Of NDA Govt

KO Web Desk

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Monday that under the 11 years of his government India has not just become the fastest-growing major economy but is also a key global voice on pressing issues like climate action and digital innovation.

A clear focus on good governance and transformation, Modi said of the last 11 years as his government finished the first year of its third term on Monday.

A link shared by him noted that 60 percent of the current Union ministers are from the SC, ST and OBC categories, a message aimed at burnishing social justice credentials of his



government amid attempts by opposition parties like the Congress to paint it as working against their interests.

This is the highest ever representation of these marginalised groups in the Union Council of Ministers, it added.

In his post on X, Modi said

powered by the blessings and collective participation of 140 crore Indians, India has witnessed rapid transformations across diverse sectors.

Guided by the principle of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas', the NDA government has delivered path-breaking changes with speed, scale and sensitivity, he said.

From economic growth to social upliftment, the focus has been on people-centric, inclusive and all round progress, he added.

The prime minister said, "We are proud of our collective success but at the same time, we look ahead with hope, confidence and a renewed | [More on P6](#)

### Redefined Women-led Development: PM

A day before his government marks its first anniversary in its third term, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that the ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance has redefined women-led development in its 11 years in power.

In all sectors, including science, education, sports, start ups and the armed forces, women are excelling and inspiring several | [More on P6](#)

### Op Sindoor: PM To Meet Multi-Party Delegations

Prime Minister zNarendra Modi will meet members of multi-party delegations, who had travelled to world capitals to convey India's stand following Operation Sindoor, on Tuesday evening, sources

said. Official sources said the members will be sharing their feedback with the prime minister, whose government has praised the work of the seven delegations comprising over | [More on P6](#)

'Firewall Of Fame'

### J&K Bank Tops IBA Awards

Observer News Service

Srinagar: In a landmark achievement that underscores its growing digital stature and cyber resilience, Jammu and Kashmir Bank has swept all four major honours in the Private Sector (Medium Size) category at the IBA CISO Summit & Citations 2025, held recently in Mumbai. The Bank emerged as a standout winner at the prestigious event organized by the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) under the theme "Elevating Cyber Resilience: Protect, Adapt, and Thrive."



J&K Bank

The Bank secured top recognition in four key categories:

- Cyber Security Transformation of the Year Award
- Cyber Security Compliance Champion Award
- Cyber Security Team of the Year Award

Special Prize for Cyber Security Incident Response Mastery

These accolades place J&K Bank firmly in the spotlight for its strategic investments, disciplined implementation, and strong | [More on P6](#)

## No Respite From Heat: Sgr Hits 33.3°C

Observer News Service

Srinagar: A severe heatwave has gripped the Kashmir Valley, pushing temperatures well above seasonal norms and prompting health advisories across the region. Srinagar recorded a scorching 33.3°C on Sunday—5.3°C above the average for this time of year.

According to Kashmir Weather, Qazigund in south Kashmir was the hottest location, registering 33.6°C—an alarming 6.8°C above normal. Pahalgam, typically known for its cool summer weather, recorded 28.7°C—4.8°C higher than usual. Other notable highs included Kupwara at 32.5°C, Kokernag at 30.8°C, and even hill station Gulmarg, which recorded 23.0°C—4.3°C above average.

"This is an intense and widespread heat spell," said weather expert Faizan Arif. "Such anomalies are



Eid Celebrations: Children enjoy a lively moment on a trampoline in Srinagar. KO Photo By Faisal Khan

## A New Era Of Safe, Seamless Pilgrimage Begins: LG

### Launches Control Centre To Oversee Tourists Activities



Observer News Service

Jammu: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday launched a control centre to boost

real-time surveillance on pilgrims visiting the Mata Vaishno Devi to ensure their safety. The Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC) has | [More on P6](#)

### 'No More Accessibility Barriers'

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha inaugurated a mass distribution drive of aids and appliances for Divyangjan (persons with disabilities) in Jammu, highlighting the administration's strong commitment to empowering senior citizens and differently-abled individuals. Speaking at the event, the Lieutenant | [More on P6](#)

## Mystery Illness Strikes Rajouri Again

### 35 Hospitalised, Wells Sealed

Press Trust Of India

Jammu: Thirty-five villagers were hospitalised after falling ill due to a mysterious illness in Rajouri district, prompting the health department to collect water samples and seal the local water sources, officials said.

The incident follows a mysterious illness that claimed 17 lives from three families at Badhaal in the same district

between December 7, 2024, and January 19 this year.

"Thirty-five persons from Kotliparran village in Manjakot tehsil were admitted to the hospital after falling ill in the past few days. All are stable. Four of them have been referred to the Government Medical College (GMC) in Rajouri," a doctor heading the medical team told reporters in the village. | [More on P6](#)

## JK Cement Breaks Ground In Kashmir

### Acquires 60% Stake in Saifco Cements

Observer News Service

Srinagar: In a significant development with far reaching consequences for local cement industry, JK Cement Ltd. has acquired a 60% majority stake in Srinagar-based Saifco Cements Pvt. Ltd. for 149.81 crore. The joint venture makes it the first major Indian

cement manufacturer to establish operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

The acquisition, formalised through a shareholders' agreement, grants JK Cement management control of Saifco Cements, with immediate effect. The deal includes both payment to existing promoters and direct equity infusion into the company, according to a joint statement released by both firms.

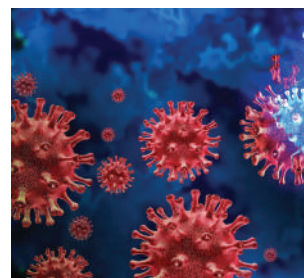
"This joint | [More on P6](#)

## Covid Milder Now, Surges Expected But No Worry: Experts

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: Covid is growing milder with time but an occasional surge in cases is expected because the virus that causes it is now endemic and constantly evolving, say scientists while assuring that there is no cause for concern.

Addressing worries over the rising incidence of the disease in various parts of the country, the experts noted that it appears to be a result of waning



immunity combined with seasonal factors such as temperature extremes, which tend to keep us in air-conditioned

spaces. They also stressed the need for caution, particularly in vulnerable sections of the population.

"With every passing year, COVID-19 is causing milder infections. It is (now) just another respiratory illness and less dangerous than flu. We can forget COVID-19 as a special case. It is not a cause of concern," global health expert Dr Chandrakant Lahariya told PTI.

"All the subvarians are similar, having a | [More on P6](#)

## Kashmir Rail Link: Joy In Valley, Jitters In Jammu

KO Web Desk

Srinagar: The launch of the long-awaited rail connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of India has been hailed as a significant step in improving transport infrastructure and economic integration across the region. As celebrations accompany the start of the service, concerns have simultaneously emerged from trade associations in Jammu, calling for thoughtful policies to ensure balanced regional development.

The new train service, described by Indian Railways as a "boost to tourism and trade,"



is expected to enhance the movement of goods and passengers, streamline supply chains, and make the Valley more accessible to domestic

and international travelers.

"It is a game changer for the economy of Jammu and Kashmir," said author and commentator Satish Verma.

"Beyond the Valley, areas along the route are also likely to benefit from improved logistics and mobility."

While the rail link is poised to enhance the transport of Kashmir's famed apples, walnuts, almonds, and saffron to markets across India — cutting transit time to metros like Mumbai to under 36 hours — voices in Jammu have urged the government to consider the broader economic picture.

Neeraj Anand, president of the Jammu Traders' Association, welcomed the infrastructural milestone but called attention to its ripple effects. "We congratulate the

prime minister on this historic step. It will provide Kashmir with all-weather connectivity. But it will inevitably affect business in Jammu. The government must look into this aspect."

Jammu businessman Sudarshan Singh echoed the sentiment, advocating for measures to safeguard regional livelihoods. "It's not just about commerce — this affects tourism, travel, and the everyday life of people in Jammu. A policy response is needed to balance the benefits," he said.

Experts suggest that complementary economic planning could | [More on P6](#)

'No More Delays'

## CS Dulloo Pulls Up Agencies Over AIIMS Kashmir

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo today chaired a high-level meeting to review the progress of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) project in Kashmir and address operational concerns raised by AIIMS Jammu officials.

Expressing strong dissatisfaction over the slow pace of construction at AIIMS Kashmir, the Chief Secretary directed officials and contractors to expedite work and meet the firm deadline of November 2025. He stressed accountability

and urged immediate remedial measures to avoid further delays, highlighting the project's national importance and close monitoring by the Prime Minister's office.

Currently, about 64% of the AIIMS Kashmir project is complete, with 480 workers on-site, a number expected to increase to 1,500 by the end of this month. Procurement and installation of medical equipment are underway to ensure timely operationalization, with OPD services expected by April 2026 and IPD services by December 2026. The first batch of MBBS students | [More on P6](#)







## Daily Dog Bites

# Kashmir’s Stray Dog Problem Worsens

Observer News Service

Srinagar: With an alarming average of 18 dog bite cases reported each day, the stray dog menace continues to threaten public safety across Kashmir, sparking growing concern among residents and health authorities alike.

Official data indicates that Kashmir records between 6,000 and 6,500 dog bite incidents annually. A senior official from the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) highlighted the urgent need for stray dog population control and stressed the importance of eliminating open garbage dumping points. “Poultry waste and other food leftovers in open garbage bins attract dogs. It is essential to enforce responsible waste management to protect public health,” the official said, urging community vigilance, especially for vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly.

Locals from different parts of Srinagar say fear of stray dogs is becoming a daily struggle. Shabir Lone, a resident of Qamarwari, expressed his concern: “Children hesitate to go to school, and the issue has persisted for years without resolution.”

In Rajouri Kadal, Ghulam Rasool described the situation as dire: “After sunset, the lanes belong to the dogs. We avoid going out even for prayers early morning or late evening. It’s unsafe.”

The crisis extends to key public institutions. Hospitals like JLNM Rainawari and SMHS are witnessing stray dogs frequently entering their premises, often chasing attendants and scavenging near patient

wards. “It’s terrifying. We bring food for patients, but packs of dogs follow us and growl at everyone,” said Fayaz Ahmad, an attendant at SMHS.

At SKIMS Soura and Kashmir University, students and staff also report an unsettling presence of stray dogs roaming freely.

In densely populated localities such as Bhorikadal, Khanyar, Eidgah, Nawakadal, and Dalgate, residents say their daily routines have been upended. Zahid Mir, a shopkeeper from Khanyar, shared, “Our children are scared to attend tuition alone. Packs of dogs chase people and sometimes even bite them. Authorities have been repeatedly informed, but no serious action is taken.”

The problem, locals argue, is deeply linked to uncollected garbage. Overflowing bins and roadside waste have become feeding grounds for dogs. “The only way to curb this menace is through a robust waste disposal plan,” said Sameer Hussain, a resident of Nawakadal. Healthcare professionals are also raising concerns. Dr. Imran Shah, from a Srinagar-based hospital, warned about the looming health crisis. “Rabies is fatal. With this frequency of dog bites, the demand for anti-rabies vaccines is rising. It could overburden our health system.”

Residents across the valley demand immediate intervention from authorities. “We aren’t against animals. But this is a matter of human lives. Children, elders, everyone is at risk. The government must act decisively before this turns into a public health emergency,” said a resident from Dalgate.

## Pedalling Nowhere

# City’s Costly Cycle Scheme Fails To Attract Riders

Observer News Service

Srinagar: A year after its much-hyped launch under the Smart City Mission, Srinagar’s public bicycle-sharing project is under fire for poor performance and meagre revenue returns, despite significant public investment.

As per official data, the project, operational since May 20, 2023, has earned only 4.48 lakh till early 2025. from user fees. This figure stands in stark contrast to the 13.20 crore pumped into the project through infrastructure development and viability gap funding.

Of the total expenditure, a substantial 9.06 crore was allocated for dedicated cycle tracks across key constituencies—Bataloo, Hazratbal, and Lal Chowk. These tracks were developed as part of larger urban transformation plans including the Lakefront Development Project along Dal Lake’s northern foreshore and the Complete Street Projects in Batamaloo and Lal Chowk.

To bolster the project’s viability, the government approved an additional 4.14 crore as Viability Gap Funding (VGF) for the scheme being executed via a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. Out of this, 1.2 crore has already been disbursed to the private agency responsible for running the service.

Under a five-year contract, the private partner is mandated to manage a fleet of 900 bicycles and 100 docking stations strategically located across the city. Zones covered include Lal Chowk, Dal Gate, Hazratbal, Eidgah, Chanapora, and Bemina, with the highest cluster of docks placed in Lal Chowk, Hazratbal, and Chanapora, in sync with Smart City Mission goals to enhance non-motorised mobility and last-mile connectivity.

However, despite this expansive rollout, the disappointing revenue figures have raised red flags among stakeholders, fuelling concerns about the project’s public acceptance and long-term sustainability.



Locals, especially morning walkers, urge removal of the mini yacht from Boulevard footpath. KO Photo: Syed Mohammad Burhan

# KU Achieves Historic A++ NAAC Accreditation

Observer News Service

Srinagar: In a historic stride for higher education in Jammu and Kashmir, the University of Kashmir (KU) has secured the coveted A++ grade in the latest National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) re-accreditation cycle, with a record Institutional Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 3.68. This places KU among the top-tier universities in India and makes it the first university in J&K to be accredited under NAAC’s revamped and more rigorous assessment framework.

This is KU’s fourth cycle of NAAC accreditation. The university previously earned ‘A’ grades in 2002 and 2011, followed by an ‘A+’ in 2019. The recent A++ recognition reflects not only consistency in quality but also remarkable institutional progress.

KU Vice-Chancellor Prof. Nilofer Khan, expressing gratitude, said the milestone is a result of years of collective effort. “This is a moment of pride for our academic community. We are aligned with the vision of NEP 2020 and have made substantial progress in offering flexible, innovative, and globally relevant academic programs,” she said.

During the evaluation by NAAC’s seven-member Peer Team—two on-site and five virtual—from May 29 to May 31, 2025, KU was commended for its advanced research output, student-friendly governance, robust IT infrastructure, and curriculum modernisation.

Among the highlights was the university’s adoption of the Design Your Degree (DYD) initiative, pioneering academic disciplines such as Artificial Intelligence and Data Science, and digital integration with platforms like DigiLocker and NAD for streamlined academic record-keeping. The university also runs a NewGen IEDC centre to promote entrepreneurship among youth.

The Student Satisfaction Survey conducted by NAAC showed a high satisfaction rate of 78%, reflecting strong mentorship, quality teaching, and support systems.

The university’s infrastructure includes 232 smart classrooms, 186 labs, and the fully automated Al-lama Iqbal Library. NAAC evaluators praised KU’s commitment to green campus practices, energy efficiency, and facilities for differently-abled students.

On the research front, KU has published over 3,300 high-impact pa-

pers, secured 22 patents, supported 87 grassroots innovations, and attracted more than 112 crore in research funding. It houses Centres of Excellence in Himalayan Biodiversity (UGC) and Glaciology (DST), alongside its dynamic Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Innovations (CIRI).


Administrative reforms like zero-based budgeting, transparent fund mobilisation, and decentralised governance also received commendation from NAAC, especially KU’s efforts to ensure academic calendar restoration and timely examination processes.

Furthering its societal responsibilities, KU runs several community outreach programmes, including women’s skill development through USHA Silai Schools, menstrual hygiene campaigns, and urban resilience projects.

With campuses spread across Hazratbal (Main), Zakura, Delina (North Campus), and Anantnag (South Campus), the university continues to be a beacon of higher education in the region.

The landmark A++ accreditation underscores KU’s role as a forward-looking institution committed to academic excellence, innovation, inclusivity, and national relevance.







I did wash my hand ... but.... did I clean it enough? ?Wash it again? is it clean now?

It's not just RECURRENT HANDWASHING AND CHECKING BUT UNSEEN PAIN myths and stigma associated with OCD

KASHMER /Kashmir American Society of Healthcare, Medical Education & Research in collaboration with HPVT /Help Poor Voluntary Trust/ is initiating a **free 8 weeks Group therapy** for the individuals suffering with OCD by a team of counselling clinical psychologists led by leading consultant clinical psychologist of J&K.

If you or some one you know is experiencing symptoms of OCD, seeking professional help is crucial.

You do not have to fight your battles alone.

There is no need for referral , simply call us for registration.

Happy & Healthy minds Office, HPVT Building (1st Floor), Daresh Kadal Chowk, Srinagar 9070806160





رسم چہارم

یہ اطلاع نہایت دکھ کے ساتھ دی جاتی ہے کہ ہمارے والد محترم معراج الدین شاہ ولد مرحوم محمد مقبول شاہ ساکنہ رام باغ پائین سرینگر انوار بھٹا طبق 8/ جون 2025ء کو اس دار فانی سے رحلت کر گئے۔ (انا اللہ! انا لیلہ راجعون)۔ مرحوم ایک نہایت ہی ملمسار، دیندار اور شفیق انسان تھے۔ اللہ مرحوم کو جنت الفردوس میں اعلیٰ مقام عطا کرے۔ (آمین) ان کا رسم چہارم بدھوار 11 بجے بھٹا طبق 11 جون 2025ء کو آبائی مقبرہ باغات کئی پورہ سرینگر میں انجام دیا جائے گا۔




**نوٹ:** مستورات سے گزارش کی جاتی ہے کہ وہ اپنے سے میوہ وغیرہ نہ لائیں۔


سوگواران:

حاشر محمد شاہ، احید محمد ثاقب، شبیر حسین ربانی

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

AIRPORTS	
SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311	
RAILWAYS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SRINAGAR: 0194-2103259</li> <li>ANANTNAG: 01932-228243</li> <li>BARAMULLA: 0194-102029</li> <li>BIJBHERA: 01932-228243</li> <li>PAMPORE: 01933-294132</li> <li>PATTAN: 01954-293507</li> <li>QAZIGUND: 01951-296153</li> </ul>	
HIGHWAY STATUS	
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sgr-Jammu highway - ( Open )</li> <li>Mughal Road - ( Open )</li> <li>Srinagar- Leh- (Open)</li> </ul>	

	PRAYERS
<b>HIJRI</b> <b>CALENDAR</b> 13 Zil-Hajj 1446	FAJR 3: 34
	ZUHR 12:30
	ASR 5: 29
	Magrib 7:44
	ISHA 9: 24

## This Day In History

- 1190-Third Crusade: Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa drowns while crossing the Saleph River (modern Turkey) leading an army to Jerusalem
- 1358 - French Jacquerie peasant leader Guillaume Cale captured at the Battle of Mello
- 1538 - Catholic German monarchy signs League of Neuremberg
- 1539 - Council of Trent: Paul III sends out letters to his bishops, delaying the Council due to war and the difficulty bishops had traveling to Venice.
- 1538- Catholic German monarchy sign League of Neuremberg
- 1605 - False Dimitri I, an impostor, crowned Russian tsar (rules 1605-1606)
- 1610 - Thomas West, Baron de La Mar, is appointed governor of Virginia
- 1610 -1st Dutch settlers arrive (from NJ), to colonize Manhattan Island
- 1619 - Thirty Years&#39; War: Battle of Záblatí, a turning point in the Bohemian Revolt.
- 1624- Netherlands & France sign anti-Spanish Treaty of Compiègne
- 1760- NY passes 1st effective law regulating practice of medicine
- 1786- A landslide dam on the Dadu River caused by earthquake ten days earlier collapses, killing 100,000 in the Sichuan province of China
- 1801-Tripoli declares war on US for refusing tribute
- 1902- Patent for window envelope granted to H F Callahan
- 1907- France and Japan sign an agreement to maintain the independence and integrity of China, equality for all nations in trading with China, and the status quo in the Far East
- 1915- British/French troops conquer German colony of Cameroon
- 1916-Great Arab Revolt begins against ruling Ottoman turks
- 1931- Norway occupies East Greenland
- 1934-USSR & Romania re-establish diplomatic relations

## From KO Archives

# Muezzin Murdered Inside Mosque

## Brutality Gives Blood-Soaked Kashmir Another First

Observer News Service

S RINAGAR- In an indication of the heights, brutality has scaled in Kashmir, a 40 year old villager was done to death in a local mosque in a Shopyan village on Friday night, and his bleeding body left on the floor for the locals to discover.

The victim, Muhammad Yaseen, was the muezzin (one who gives the call for prayer) for the Harpora village, who at usual, had left home to offer night prayers in the local mosque. Concerned when he didn’t return by 10 pm, Yaseen’s family set out to search for him and were told by sev-eral villagers that he had been seen at prayer in the mosque.

When a group of people entered the premises, they found the muezzin lifeless on the blood-spattered floor.

On being informed, the local po-lice took the body for an autopsy.

The police said that Yaseen, a farmer by profession, had been killed by a heavy, sharp-edged weapon, probably an ace, as could be judged from the wounds on his head.

The body was handed over to his family after a post-mortem and other police formalities.

The police has registered a case under section 302 and started investigation, but no arrests had been made when reports last came in.

Sources said that police had ob-tained some vital clues, and taken down the statement of several villag-ers.

The police expects to unearth the facts about the murder in the coming few days.

The wave of grief swept across the village when the Yaseen’s body was handed over to his family. Hundreds of people attended his funeral prayers, and staged demonstrations demand-ing the swift exposure of the killers.

Top police officers have assured the family that the guilty would be arrested within the coming few days.

(Kashmir Observer, 10 June, 2007)



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KO VIEW

Tourism Hopes Rise

The inauguration of Vande Bharat Express by prime minister Narendra Modi on June 6 has for the first time linked Srinagar directly to the rest of India by rail. But the arrival of this train is more than a logistical milestone, as it comes just weeks after the brutal terror attack in Pahalgam that killed 25 tourists and one pony operator. So, this is the new ray of hope for tourism, which is expected to revive in the days and months to come.

For over three years, tourism in Kashmir has been consistently on the rise. So much so, it became not just a symbol of the prevailing normalcy but also underpinned it. In 2024, 2.95 million tourists visited Kashmir - 43,000 of them foreigners - up from 2.71 million in 2023 and 2.67 million in 2022. This year, the government expected to beat this record but the Pahalgam attack has put paid to such hopes.

This sudden collapse in tourism, a sector that had flourished in recent years thanks to a lull in violence, has threatened to hit the livelihood of a large number of people deeply dependent on visitors drawn to Kashmir's pristine lakes and resorts. This even as the booking sites show deep price cuts, but the tourism stakeholders have little hope.

The arrivals from the northern states have by and large come to a halt but those from the southern states have continued to trickle in, brushing aside the fresh security concerns. There are also reports that the number has started picking up again. Tourism stakeholders are already reporting a slow but steady uptick in inquiries and bookings since the train's launch. Houseboat owners in Dal Lake, pony-wallahs in Gulmarg, and handicraft sellers in downtown Srinagar—many of whom saw their incomes wiped out in April—now dare to hope again. The train, quite literally, brings business back on track.

There's also a deeper psychological shift underway. For decades, Kashmiris have felt physically and metaphorically cut off from the rest of the country. And the lack of a seamless connectivity was a major reason for this. A direct train challenges that perception. It makes the idea of unity feel less abstract and more tangible, as the rail moves steadily across mountains once thought impassable. One biggest benefit of the train connectivity will be in the drastic reduction in the cost of reaching Kashmir for the country's middle class. Here's to Kashmir getting back on track - literally and figuratively.

FINANCIAL FIX

Betting on the Wrong Future

Online gaming promises quick wins, but slowly drains Kashmiri youth of time, money, and purpose.

Irshad Mushtaq

It usually starts as a joke among friends. "Try Dream11," someone says. "You might win big." For many young people in Kashmir, it's the beginning of a habit that slowly and silently eats into their days, their bank accounts, and sometimes their hopes.

Online gaming platforms have become part of daily life for teenagers and young adults. The ads promise thrill and reward. The reality? It's often late nights, rising debts, and slipping grades. Most don't realize that these platforms aren't even fully regulated in India. There's little accountability, and when things go wrong, there's no real safety net.

You start with Rs 100, thinking it's harmless. Then you add more to recover what you lost. The line between a game and gambling blurs fast. The money disappears, but so does something more valuable: focus, time, and motivation.

What if all that screen time went somewhere else? YouTube has thousands of free tutorials, courses, and tools that can help someone learn coding, editing, design, or even languages. Some teens are already doing this—building websites, editing videos, helping local businesses grow online. But they're still the exception.

We don't need to ban games. We need to give better choices. Schools and parents can talk more openly about money—what savings mean, how investments work, what "regulated" even means. Right now, many teenagers think of finance as something adults do, not something they need to understand.

But they do. Because every rupee they lose chasing luck is a lesson missed in building something real.

The change won't come overnight. But if more Kashmiri youth trade gambling apps for learning apps, if more conversations at home include money and growth, then maybe we'll see a shift—from betting on games to betting on themselves.

The author is a Srinagar-based reputed financial advisor.

Malik Daniyal

“

True freedom is not about what you remove. It's about what you allow. It means creating space for all expressions of identity, even ones you don't personally choose. It means respecting choice even when it doesn't match your definition of progress.

The Valley Wears Its Voice

In Kashmir and beyond, the fight over the hijab isn't about freedom, it's about who gets to define it. For many Muslim women, modesty is not a surrender, but a stand.

What does it mean to be free?

In every speech, slogan, and classroom, we're told freedom means choice. It means living life on your own terms. But when a woman in Kashmir, or anywhere, chooses to wear the hijab, that freedom suddenly becomes a problem.

We see it time and again. In France, the hijab is banned in schools. In parts of India, students are barred from exams or classes for covering their heads. On television panels and social media, the debate rages about "oppression," "modernity," and "liberation." But rarely do we stop to ask: what if the woman wearing the hijab has already made her choice?

In Kashmir, women move through a space filled with both visible and invisible boundaries. We learn early that the world looks at women through a particular lens—one that tries to define us by what we wear, how we look, how much we reveal. The hijab, in that world, is not a hiding. It's a message. One that says: I am not here for your approval. I am not here for your gaze.

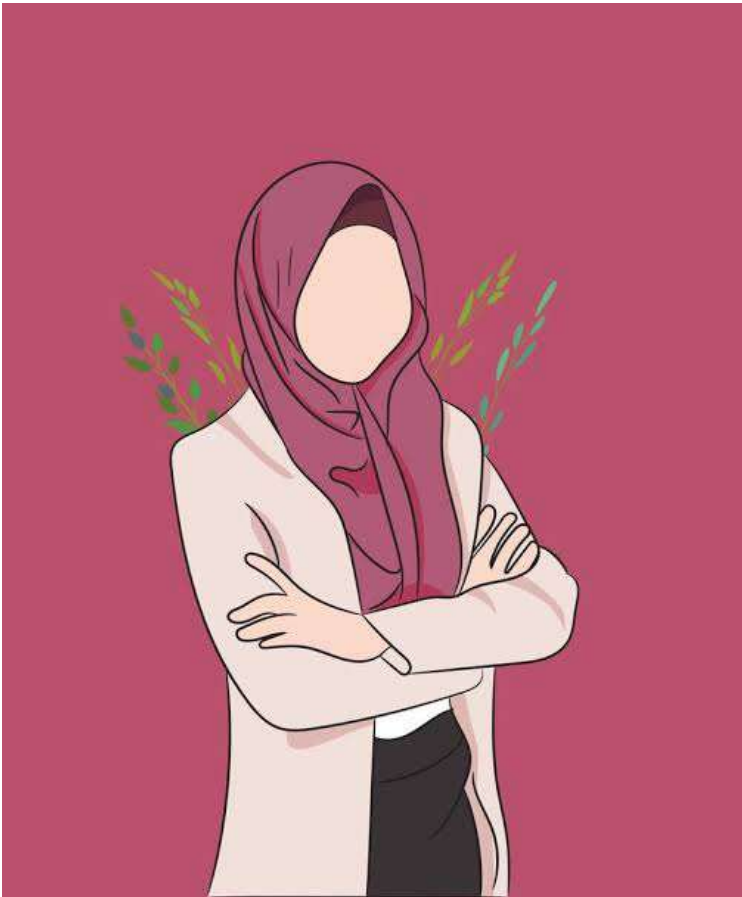
Still, the pressure to conform to someone else's idea of freedom is strong. It comes dressed as progress, often in the name of gender rights. But it tells us only one story: that to be free, a woman must shed layers—of fabric, of tradition, of faith. That to be empowered, she must be visible in a certain way, preferably for the world to consume.

This idea isn't just Western. It has echoes here too. On campus, in markets, in offices, even in our homes. The assumption is often the same: a woman who covers must be forced, submissive, or somehow lacking awareness. The hijab is read not as a personal decision, but as a symbol of backwardness. This thinking forgets one crucial thing. Many of us choose it—freely, thoughtfully, and with full awareness of the world's opinions.

The hijab is not a contradiction to freedom. It is a form of it.

And yet, public discourse keeps twisting the story. There's little room for complexity. You're either "liberated" or "oppressed." You're either in line with modern values or you're resisting progress. There is hardly any space in between. The real lived experience of millions of Muslim women—each with her own reasons, feelings, and beliefs—gets lost in this noise.

In Kashmir, women's lives are already shaped by layers of control—strife, curbs, gender norms. The choice to wear the hijab within that space becomes even more layered. It can be a reclaiming of control over one's own body. A decision to step out into a public space without being forced to offer



yourself up for evaluation. It's not an escape from society, but a way of facing it, on your own terms.

Data tells an important story. According to a 2022 Pew survey, the majority of Muslim women in India said they wore the hijab as a matter of personal belief—not community pressure. In Kashmir, where situation has long shaped identity, clothing can be a kind of statement. Not against modernity, but against being constantly told who you're supposed to be.

We need to ask a simple question. Why does the sight of a woman in a hijab make some people so uncomfortable?

It's not because she's hidden. It's because she refuses to perform. She's not playing the role the world wants her to. She disrupts the idea that a woman must be constantly seen, judged, and validated. That's what makes her political, even if she doesn't intend to be.

This discomfort reveals the hollowness of many freedom narratives. They say they value choice, but only the choices they understand. They say they support women, but only the women who fit into their definitions. They speak of diversity, but get nervous when difference walks into the room and doesn't ask for permission.

We see this contradiction every time a woman in hijab is told she's "too visible" to work in public institutions, too "religious" to fit in with secular ideals, or too

"covered" to be fashionable. These aren't rules of liberation. They're rules of conformity.

And while the debate rages in columns and courtrooms, the women in hijab keep moving. To school, to work, to vote, to live. Most don't have the time or energy to defend their decisions in public. But every time they step outside, they assert something quietly powerful: I decide.

That's what makes the hijab political. Not the fabric. Not the shape. But the act of deciding, of choosing it, despite the noise, the mockery, the suspicion. It's an act of freedom, even if the world refuses to see it that way.

True freedom is not about what you remove. It's about what you allow. It means creating space for all expressions of identity, even ones you don't personally choose. It means respecting choice even when it doesn't match your definition of progress.

So the next time you see a woman in hijab walking through Lal Chowk or on a university campus in Delhi, don't assume she's hiding. Maybe she's more visible than ever. And maybe her visibility doesn't depend on being seen the way you want her to be.

Because she's not there for your gaze. She's there for herself.

Malik Daniyal is an undergraduate student at Delhi University. He can be reached at mdaniyal.054@gmail.com.



Letter to Editor

The Fight for Fairness in Ramban Schools

In Ramban, the teachers' voices are growing louder. But they are not just asking for perks or privileges. They want something far more fundamental—fairness, respect, and transparency in the very systems that govern their careers. This is about justice for the people who shape our future every single day.

The issues at hand might sound technical—transfers, promotions, job security—but they strike at the heart of what it means to be a teacher.

Each year, teachers face an annual transfer process that can turn their lives upside down. Families are disrupted, communities lose continuity, and schools face sudden gaps. Yet, the process remains a black box. Who decides where a teacher goes? On what basis? These questions go

unanswered. Without transparency, transfers become a source of fear rather than opportunity.

Then there are promotions, a lifeline for teachers' careers. But promotions are often stuck in limbo because the committees that approve them don't meet on time or act slowly. Imagine working hard for years, only to see your growth halted by bureaucracy. It crushes motivation and breeds frustration. When teachers' careers stall, the quality of education inevitably suffers.

Job security is another shadow looming over many teachers, especially those in junior grades or on contractual arrangements. Without clear policies or timely decisions, teachers live in constant uncertainty. Can they plan their lives? Can they focus on teaching? Or are they always

worried about their future? This insecurity is a silent crisis few outside the education community see.

But why should anyone outside Ramban care? Because education is not a private matter, it's a public good. When teachers are demoralized, students lose out. The classrooms become places of instability. Parents grow anxious. And the social fabric weakens.

The demands of Ramban's teachers are clear and urgent: they want a system that treats them with dignity, fairness, and respect. They want transparent rules, fair and timely transfers, and promotions that recognize their work without endless delays. These are not lofty ideals but the basic rights of every educator.

If we want better schools, stron-

ger communities, and a brighter future, we must start by fixing how we treat our teachers. Their fight in Ramban is a wake-up call. It shows that without fairness at the core, the whole education system falters.

Teachers are the foundation. When that foundation shakes, everything built on it feels the tremors. Ramban's educators have spoken. It's time we listen and act. Not just for them but for all of us.

Because the future belongs to the students, and the students depend on teachers who feel secure, valued, and respected.

Sincerely,

Rakesh Kumar  
Ramban



# She Left for 'Freedom'. Now She's Alone.

In a world that applauds breaking free, one Kashmiri woman's story reveals what's lost when love, loyalty, and home are traded for independence.

Syed Majid Gilani

Nahid wasn't always like this. Yawar remembers the early days. How she'd laugh at his jokes, hold his hand when they crossed the street, text him sweet nothings even if he was just in the next room. She used to be warm, light-hearted, easy to be around. He thought they'd grow old together. That's how it usually begins, doesn't it?

"She changed slowly," he says, his voice low, like he's afraid to disturb something. "Like winter coming in one quiet morning."

It didn't happen overnight. But one day, she stopped sharing meals with him. Then she stopped smiling when he walked into the room. She started answering calls in the middle of their dinners, conversations stretching late into the night. He thought it would pass. It didn't.

And then came the words that always signal the beginning of the end: "I need space."

Yawar isn't perfect. But those who know him describe him as steady. A man who works hard, shows up, and doesn't look elsewhere. He bought Nahid a car when she asked. He paid for her classes. Took her on trips. "He never even raised his voice," a neighbour once said. "All he wanted was for her to be happy."

But happiness, it seems, meant something different to Nahid. Something noisier. Something shaped by YouTube vlogs and influencer captions. Her social media was a world Yawar never got to see. For years, she kept him blocked. He thought she wasn't online. She was. Just not with him.

"She said she didn't like social media," Yawar says. "I believed her."

One afternoon, a colleague showed him Nahid's Instagram. There she was—smiling, dressed up, posing with filters and quotes about "self-love" and "independence." It didn't feel like her. Or maybe, he thinks now, it was her all along, and he had been in love with the version she left at home.

What tore him up most was not the photos or the captions. It was knowing she'd chosen to share her life with strangers and kept him



Nahid wanted a life of her own. And she got it. But she also got silence. She scrolls through messages, posts carefully curated selfies, replies with hearts and smileys. But when her phone dies at night, she sleeps alone. Not just in her bed, but in her heart.

in the dark. "I was never even in a single post," he says.

Her parents never liked Yawar much. "They thought I wasn't modern enough," he says, shrugging. "They said I was holding her back."

It started small. Complaints about his family visiting too often, or how

he didn't take her side enough. But soon, Nahid didn't want his parents around at all. "She said they made her uncomfortable."

He tried to compromise. But the more he gave, the more she took. One day she said, "Either they go, or I do." He hesitated. She packed her

bags.

"She told the court I was controlling," he says. "That I didn't let her go out, didn't let her dress how she wanted." He looks at the floor when he says it. "I only ever asked her to remember we're a family. That was my mistake."

It's been two years now. The cases are still ongoing. Maintenance petitions, custody hearings, protection orders. Yawar shows up, silent and tired. Nahid often arrives with heavy makeup and cold eyes. They don't speak.

She still accepts the money he

sends. For the children. For her. "I never stopped sending it," he says. "Even when she filed false cases. Even when she lied."

Nahid now lives with her parents again. But things aren't easy. "Her sisters visit with their husbands," a relative says. "She does the cooking, the serving. No one wants to be around her too long." The rooms that once welcomed her now feel tight. Her siblings have moved on. Their lives full. Hers paused.

"She thought the world would cheer her on forever," Yawar says. "But they just moved on. Social media attention doesn't pay rent."

The children are caught in the wreckage. Their drawings now have two houses, not one. Their birthdays are divided. The little one once asked, "Why can't we all just sit together again?" No one had an answer.

Nahid wanted a life of her own. And she got it. But she also got silence. She scrolls through messages, posts carefully curated selfies, replies with hearts and smileys. But when her phone dies at night, she sleeps alone. Not just in her bed, but in her heart.

People often ask Yawar why he still cares. He doesn't have a clear answer. Maybe love doesn't vanish like that. Maybe it lingers in old photos, old recipes, the smell of her favourite shampoo on the pillow she left behind.

"She had everything," he says, still stunned by the loss. "I would've given her anything. All I wanted was her."

Sometimes, he wonders if she'll ever come back. He doesn't hope. But he wonders.

And Nahid? She posts new photos. Quotes about strength and surviving storms. And yet, those closest to her say she cries often, late at night, quietly, when no one is looking.

Because being right doesn't always mean being happy. And freedom, if chosen the wrong way, can taste a lot like loneliness.

*The author is a government employee and writes about human relations. He can be reached at syedmajid667@gmail.com*

# The Woman Who Held Us Together

In the hush left behind by my grandmother's passing, I hear the voice of her life: steady, kind, and full of grace.

Peerzada Mohsin Shafi

It happened four days before Eid ul Azha. The house was already carrying the scent of preparations, laughter here and there, the usual hopeful mess that comes before a festival. And then came the phone call.

My grandmother had passed away.

Even now, it feels strange to say it. She was the kind of person you thought would always be there. Sitting in her spot, calm, wrapped in a soft shawl, watching the world with eyes that had seen much more than they ever let on.

I grew up under the same roof as her. A joint family means shared meals, shared rooms, and sometimes, shared toothbrushes if you're unlucky. But it also means you get to live inside the warm circle of someone like her for years. My cousins and I were always around her, always orbiting that still, steady presence. She was never loud, never rushed. But when she spoke, we listened. Because when she spoke, it meant something.

She didn't believe in long lectures. She believed in small things. Like the way she'd make lunch during our school breaks: a chutney that tingled your tongue, hot rice mixed with mustard oil, served just right. I can still taste it if I close my eyes. Her food never tried to impress, but it always made you feel taken care of. It wasn't about spice or richness. It was about knowing what you needed and giving it with love.

The courtyard of our house used to echo with our shrieks after school. We'd tear around the place like wild things. Then she'd appear at the doorway with mock seriousness and say, "Yette maa tulev dumm!" Don't make so



much noise.

We'd go quiet for all of two minutes. But she never scolded us, not really. If we fought, she'd step in and settle it with one sentence, sometimes with just a glance. She had that rare skill: bringing calm without force. It was as if peace followed her around.

My grandmother wasn't educated in the formal sense, but there was wisdom in her that no textbook could teach. She could read people. She knew when someone was lying, when someone was hurting, when someone needed to

be left alone. She didn't meddle, but she watched. And if you asked her what to do, her answer was usually simple and true. She didn't talk much about the world, but she seemed to understand it better than most of us.

As time moved forward and our lives scattered into different homes, she remained the center. We'd keep coming back. For her food, yes, but also for the way sitting beside her made everything slow down. You'd walk in with a hundred things on your mind, and after a cup of tea near her, you'd

leave lighter. She didn't ask many questions. She just listened.

That bundle of joy had no jealousy in her. None of that comparing or complaining you often hear in old age. If a neighbour's child got a job or topped a class, she'd smile and pray for them. Always. Her prayers were constant: soft, whispered, heartfelt. She'd often say, "May Allah make my grandchildren successful in this world and the next." You could hear how real that hope was in her voice.

In her later years, her health began to slip. But she never let pain

steal her grace. She fasted, she prayed, even when her body resisted. She once told my uncle she needed new glasses. Not to watch TV or read newspapers, but to read the Quran more clearly. That was the kind of devotion she had.

She looked forward to the hereafter. She spoke of it not with fear, but with longing. "When will I meet my Allah?" she would say, her eyes faraway.

I never knew how strong she was until I saw her fall silent in sickness and still radiate peace. She didn't leave us with regrets or unresolved words. She had said all she needed to, in a lifetime of care and prayer and kindness.

Her life wasn't loud. It was steady, like the pulse of a clock in a silent room. You only notice how much it held the space together once it stops.

This Eid, the house filled again, but her chair stayed empty. A pair of slippers near the bed that no one dares move. Her voice lingers in the walls, in the smells of food, in the pauses of our conversations. She is gone, yes. But she has not left.

There are people who change the world with their fame or power. And then there are people like her, who change the world inside a home. Who raise generations, hold families together, pray for us when we don't even know we need it. She lived for others, without asking for anything in return.

I miss her more than I can say. But I am also grateful beyond words that I got to be her grandson. That I got to live with her, learn from her, eat her food, hear her prayers, feel her hands on my head.

May Allah grant her the highest place in Jannah. She deserves that, and so much more.

*- The author is a research scholar and columnist, from Anantnag.*



# Israeli Forces Seize Aid Boat, Detain Greta Thunberg

Agencies

Jerusalem: Israeli forces seized a Gaza-bound aid boat and detained Greta Thunberg and other activists who were on board early Monday, enforcing a longstanding blockade of the Palestinian territory that has been tightened during the war on densely populated enclave.

The activists had set out to protest Israel's ongoing military onslaught on the Gaza Strip, which is among the deadliest and most destructive since World War II, and its restrictions on the entry of humanitarian aid, both of which have put the territory of some 2 million



Palestinians at risk of famine.

The Freedom Flotilla Coalition, which had organized the voyage, said the activists were "kidnapped by Israeli forces" while trying to deliver desperately needed aid to the territory.

"The ship was unlawfully boarded, its unarmed civilian crew abducted, and its life-saving cargo— including baby formula, food and medical supplies— confiscated," it said in a statement.

Israel's Foreign Ministry cast the voyage as a public relations stunt, saying in a post on X that "the 'selfie yacht' of the 'celebrities' is safely making its way to the shores of Israel." The boat was expected to arrive at the Israeli port of Ashdod later on Monday.

The Foreign Ministry said the activists would return to their home countries and the aid would be sent to Gaza through established channels. It circulated footage of what appeared to be Israeli military personnel handing out sandwiches and water to the activists, who were wearing orange life vests.

A weeklong voyage

Thunberg, a climate campaigner, was among 12 activists aboard the Madleen, which set sail from Sicily a week ago. Along the way, it had stopped on Thursday to rescue four migrants who had jumped overboard to avoid being detained by the Libyan coast guard.

"I urge all my friends, family and comrades to put pressure on the Swedish government to release me and the others as soon as possible," Thunberg said in a pre-recorded message released after the ship was halted.

Rima Hassan, a French member of the European Parliament who is of Palestinian descent, was also among the volunteers

on board. She has been barred from entering Israel because of her opposition to Israeli policies toward the Palestinians.

After a 2½-month total blockade aimed at pressuring Hamas, Israel started allowing some basic aid into Gaza last month, but humanitarian workers and experts have warned of famine unless the blockade is lifted and Israel ends its military offensive.

An attempt last month by Freedom Flotilla to reach Gaza by sea failed after another of the group's vessels was attacked by two drones while sailing in international waters off Malta, organizers said. The group blamed Israel for the attack, which

damaged the front section of the ship.

An 18-year blockade Israel says the blockade is needed to prevent Hamas from importing arms, while critics say it amounts to collective punishment of Gaza's Palestinian population.

Israel sealed Gaza off from all aid in the early days of the war ignited by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, but later relented under US pressure. In early March, shortly before Israel ended a ceasefire with Hamas, the country again blocked all imports, including food, fuel and medicine.

## CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

### Amarnath Yatra

edition of the pilgrimage, which will culminate on August 9—coinciding with Raksha Bandhan—has been shortened to 38 days from last year's 52-day schedule. Despite security concerns following the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam, over three lakh pilgrims have already registered.

"Given the history of attacks on Amarnath pilgrims, fool-proof arrangements are essential. Lakhs of devotees travel to the holy cave each year, and ensuring their safety is our top priority," the official added.

Past security measures have included tagging pilgrims and vehicles with Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology and placing the entire Jammu-to-cave route under CCTV surveillance.

Amarnath Yatra has been targeted multiple times in the past. In 2000, 32 people, including 24 pilgrims, were killed in an attack at Nunwan base camp. Attacks in 2001, 2002, and 2017 claimed several more lives at different yatra base camps.

This year, authorities say they are determined not to leave anything to chance.

### India Now

resolve to build a Viksit Bharat." He used the hashtag of "11 year of seva" (11 years of service) with the post, while sharing links to the details of changes effected in different sectors.

It said Modi has brought the politics of development, 'Vikasvaad' into the mainstream, making it the focal point around which political discourse and policy action now revolves.

Since assuming office in 2014, 'India First' has guided his every policy and action, it added.

It noted that over 81 crore people are getting free food grains, over 15 crore households have got tap water connections, over four crore houses built for the poor, 12 crore toilets were built, 68 lakh street vendors got loans, 52.5 crores loans given to small entrepreneurs, and 20 crores women were given cash assistance during Covid under different schemes.

### Redefined Women-led

people, Modi said on X.

He cited a number of welfare programmes which, he noted, have benefitted women immensely.

Various initiatives, from ensuring dignity through Swachh Bharat to financial inclusion via Jan Dhan accounts, the focus has been on empowering the women, he said.

If 'Ujjwala Yojana' brought smoke-free kitchens running on gas cylinders to the poor households, 'MUDRA' loans enabled lakhs of women entrepreneurs to pursue dreams on their own terms. Houses under the women's name in PM Awas Yojana too have made a remarkable impact, he added.

'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' (save daughter, educate daughter) programme ignited a national movement to protect the girl child, he said.

The prime minister shared a thread of a government-run citizenship engagement platform, which listed benefits brought to women by several government schemes.

It said the maternal mortality ratio declined to 93 per lakh live births in 2019-21 from 167 in 2011-13, and the households with tap water connections zoomed to 15.64 crore in May 2025 from 3.23 crore in August 2019.

Over 10 crore cooking gas connections were given under the Ujjwala scheme, it said, while highlighting several other welfare measures targeting women.

In the run up to the anniversary, Modi has been highlighting his government's work for different sections of society, including the poor, farmers and youths

### Op Sindoore: PM To Meet

50 persons, mostly current MPs.

Former diplomats were also part of these delegations that visited 33 foreign capitals and the European Union.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has already met the delegations and praised their efforts in conveying India's strong stand against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism.

Four delegations were led by the ruling alliance, including two BJP MPs, one JD(U) MP and

one of Shiv Sena, while three were led by opposition MPs, one each of the Congress, DMK and NCP(SP).

### J&K Bank Tops

leadership in the cybersecurity space—an area that has become increasingly critical amid rising digital threats and the rapid expansion of digital banking services. Prestigious Recognition

The awards were received by Muneer Hassan KongaWani, the Bank's Chief Information Security Officer (CISO), from a distinguished jury panel comprising industry veterans such as Anil Bhandari (Advisor to NCIPC and Ex-CGM/CISO, SBI), Dr. Sriram Birudavolu (CEO, Cyber Security Centre of Excellence, Telangana – DSCI), and Pravin Kumar (Chief Market Information Security Officer & DPO, NPCI). The event also witnessed the presence of Gopal Murli Bhagat, Deputy Chief Executive of IBA, and K Srinivasa Rao, Senior Advisor, IBA.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, KongaWani expressed pride in the Bank's performance and noted that these awards reflect not only the Bank's proactive cybersecurity framework but also its people-driven approach to secure banking.

Leadership Response

J&K Bank's MD & CEO Amitava Chatterjee lauded the Bank's IT and Information Security (IS) teams, calling the achievement a "collective success story of dedication, foresight, and technical excellence."

"Cybersecurity is at the core of our digital transformation journey," Chatterjee said.

### No Respite From

becoming more frequent in Kashmir's summer patterns, and people should take necessary precautions."

In the Jammu region, temperatures also soared. Jammu city recorded a sweltering 44.3°C–4.7°C above normal—while Katra hit 40.2°C. Batote, Banihal, and Bhaderwah registered 33.6°C, 32.8°C, and 33.0°C respectively. The high-altitude desert of Ladakh, too, felt the heat, with Leh and Kargil logging unseasonal highs of 26.9°C and 27.9°C.

Health officials have advised the public to stay indoors during peak hours, remain hydrated, and avoid outdoor exertion. Special caution has been urged for children, the elderly, and outdoor workers.

With no immediate respite forecast, the local administration is expected to issue further advisories if the high temperatures persist in the coming days.

### A New Era

been set up at the cave shrine in Reasi district.

"The security forces had conducted a joint review of the route and all aspects related to security, safety, and smooth yatra. Based on the joint suggestions made by the Police, Army, and CRPF, an Integrated Command and Control Centre has been set up here from a security perspective," Sinha told reporters in Katra.

Built at a cost of Rs 20 crore, the centre will unravel "a new era of safe and seamless pilgrimage begins," he added.

The ICCS has been housed at the Spiritual Growth Centre in Katra, Chief Executive Officer of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, Anshul Garg said.

The centre has a network of 700 CCTVs, with features like gesture recognition, facial recognition, and PTZ (pan-tilt-zoom), he said.

### 'No More Accessibility

Governor praised the Directorate of Social Welfare, Jammu, for implementing two key centrally sponsored schemes — Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY) and Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP). These initiatives aim to improve the quality of life for senior citizens with disabilities and provide necessary assistive devices to enable greater independence.

"I strongly believe that people with disabilities have special abilities and unique strengths. Their resilience, problem-solving skills, and empathy enrich our society," the LG said. "I assure our Divyangjan that the administration is committed to ensuring equality and equal opportunity in every sphere of life. They will

always be treated as equals in terms of rights, access, and dignity."

Emphasizing the importance of inclusion, Sinha urged officials to adopt practical solutions leveraging evolving technology to promote accessibility. "I have always dreamt of building a caring society. Welfare and rehabilitation of Divyangjan is my top priority," he added, reiterating his personal commitment to safeguarding the dignity and participation of differently-abled individuals in all walks of life.

The Lieutenant Governor also announced the disbursement of pension arrears amounting to Rs. 6.14 crore to 12,660 beneficiaries under the Integrated Social Security Scheme (ISSS). The pending arrears, which had been held up due to Aadhaar non-seeding, will now help elderly, widows, and differently-abled individuals access financial support seamlessly. He also revealed plans for a revolutionary app to integrate eligible senior citizens into the pension system, further facilitating financial inclusion.

In a significant move to address mental health rehabilitation, Sinha inaugurated a 50-bedded Half-Way Home at Lower Chowadi, Jammu, established under the Deendayal Divyangjan Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS) at a cost of Rs. 4.39 crore. The facility will provide psycho-social support and structured care for individuals recovering from mental illness, helping them reintegrate into society.

The LG assured continued support for self-employment initiatives for Divyangjan and directed officials to propose the creation of a dedicated park for differently-abled persons to the Government of India.

Furthering his commitment to vulnerable groups, Sinha dedicated the Parisha Child Care Institution for Girls in Mandi Gurglian, Samba, a Rs. 3.03 crore facility designed to provide a safe and nurturing environment for girls in need. He applauded the efforts of those associated with the initiative, highlighting its importance for the future of girl children in the region.

The mass distribution drive, organized by the Directorate of Social Welfare Jammu in collaboration with the Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO), has conducted 112 assessment camps across all ten districts of Jammu Division. So far, 2,939 persons with disabilities under the ADIP scheme and 2,756 senior citizens under the RVY scheme — a total of 5,918 beneficiaries — have been identified to receive more than 19,960 aids and appliances during the ongoing drive.

### Mystery Illness

A team from the health department has visited the village, collected water samples, and sent them for testing, he said.

The patients exhibited symptoms of water-borne disease, prompting immediate medical attention, officials said. While investigations are underway to ascertain the exact cause of the illness, health officials suspect contaminated drinking water.

"A team from GMC Rajouri collected water samples from three local wells. The district administration has sealed the wells pending test results," the medic said.

"It can be a possible outbreak of acute gastroenteritis, according to the information received from the community medicine department. The symptoms included stomach pain, fever, dehydration, and diarrhea," he added.

Health officials are closely monitoring the situation after assuring the public that appropriate measures are being taken to ensure public safety.

Seventeen people, including 13 children and four adults, died within 50 days due to a mysterious illness at Badhaal village from last December till January this year.

The authorities declared the entire village a containment zone and shifted the residents to a quarantine centre, where they were released after over a month-long stay.

### JK Cement Breaks

venture marks a historic milestone for JK Cement," said Dr. Raghavpat Singhania, Managing Director of JK Cement Ltd. "With the support of the Government of Jammu & Kashmir and the Hon'ble Lt. Governor, we are confident this partnership will spur local employment, sustainability, and self-reliance."

Founded in 1997, Saifco Cements operates an integrated cement manufacturing facility in Khonmoh, Srinagar, with an installed clinker capacity of 0.26 million tonnes per annum (MnTPA) and grinding capacity of 0.42 MnTPA. The company posted a turnover of 73.17 crore for FY 2024-25.

With this acquisition, Saifco becomes a subsidiary of JK Cement, which will reconstitute the board by appointing three additional directors from JK Cement, while two will continue to represent the Saifco promoter group.

The facility also includes captive limestone reserves, laying a strong foundation for long-term scalability and industrial stability in the region.

JK Cement emphasized that the deal aligns with its long-term vision of sustainable and inclusive growth. The company plans to implement eco-friendly manufacturing practices to reduce the carbon footprint of cement production while actively generating direct and indirect employment opportunities in the region.

"The Jammu & Kashmir market has untapped potential," said Madhavkrishna Singhania, Joint MD & CEO of JK Cement Ltd. "We aim to replicate our best sustainability and efficiency practices here, creating an industry benchmark and fostering further investments in the state."

The acquisition is not just a corporate expansion but also a regional development initiative. Suhail Manzoor Guna, Director of Saifco Cements, called the partnership a "natural alignment of shared goals."

"JK Cement's legacy and inclusive approach resonate deeply with our belief in a self-reliant Kashmir," Guna said. "Together, we aim to unlock new potential and drive lasting progress in the Valley."

Strategic Expansion in the North

JK Cement currently has a grey cement capacity of 24.34 MnTPA, along with 1.12 MnTPA of white cement and 1.33 MnTPA of wall putty capacity, making it one of India's leading cement producers. The move into J&K strengthens its foothold in northern India and supports the central government's vision for infrastructure-led development in the Union Territory.

The partnership is expected to act as a catalyst for industrial investment in the Valley, inviting interest from other national players seeking to tap into the region's economic promise.

JK Cement's 150 crore acquisition of a majority stake in Saifco Cements not only boosts its capacity and northern India presence but also marks a transformative moment for Jammu & Kashmir's industrial landscape. With sustainability, employment, and empowerment at the core, the joint venture paves the way for a stronger, self-reliant Valley.

### Covid Milder Now

lower virulence but high infectivity. While highly susceptible people can still get severe disease, the vast majority don't, especially those who have had prior infections or vaccines," added Anurag Agarwal, dean of biosciences and health research, Trivedi school of biosciences at Ashoka University, Haryana.

The World Health Organization declared an end to COVID-19 as a 'public health emergency' two years ago in May 2023. Health experts characterise the disease as 'seasonal', 'endemic', here to stay, or 'restricted to a certain region'.

Active cases in the country crossed 5,300 as of June 6, with nearly 500 added in the past 24 hours. Of these, over 4,700 have recovered. The death toll is 55 in the current surge which started January this year, primarily among individuals with pre-existing illnesses, according to the Union Health ministry.

"People with pre-existing illnesses and those older than 65 should follow standard precautions, as they would against any other respiratory infection — not just for COVID-19," explained Lahariya, a consultant physician and former staff member of WHO.

Kerala is the most affected with over 1,600 cases, followed by Gujarat, West Bengal, Delhi and Maharashtra, ministry data shows.

The case surge in India is part of a wider wave impacting parts of Southeast Asia, including Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Hong Kong, which have been seeing a rise in infections over the past months.

Wastewater surveillance by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) has detected presence of SARS-CoV-2 — which causes COVID-19 — in samples from 10 sewage treatment plants in Pune, the Times of India reported.

Patterns are similar to those seen in the weeks preceding earlier surges, NCL scientists were quoted as saying.

Genome sequencing of samples from India's west and south have shown links to the sub-variants of Omicron — LF.7, XFG, JN.1 and NB.1.8.1. The cases are not severe and there is no need to worry, Director General of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Rajiv Behl said earlier this week.

LF.7 and NB.1.8.1. have been classified as

'variants under monitoring' (VUM) by the WHO to alert public health authorities that a variant of SARS-CoV-2 requires prioritised attention and monitoring. JN.1 has been circulating in India since November 2023.

The current situation, Behl stressed, is being monitored.

Immunologist Satyajit Rath explained that the subvariants driving up case numbers indicate that they are probably better at binding themselves to human cells, despite pre-existing antibodies created in response to a prior infection or vaccination — or 'infectivity'.

"However, the important issue here is not their infectivity, but their tendency to cause severe disease, or 'virulence'," Rath, former scientist at New Delhi's National Institute of Immunology, told PTI.

"Since selection pressure among the virus strains depends on infectivity and transmissibility — and not on virulence — there is no reason to expect a steady increase in the virulence of the emerging virus strains, which, in fact, has not at all been seen either," he added.

Moreover, given that the COVID-19-causing virus is now endemic and constantly 'mutating' or evolving, ups and downs in infections in the population are expected, the health experts said.

"People need not worry themselves until they are informed of a new 'variant of concern'. VUM is not relevant to the public, but only to public health authorities," Agarwal said.

Lahariya advised the public to gather information from reliable sources and not to forward unverified messages, while Rath suggested that citizens keep a watch for the virulence of newly emerging strains.

The experts also stressed on the role of authorities.

"National and state governments in India should keep a watch on cases, monitor the trends in new cases and share data widely. The linkage between infections and clinical outcomes should be explored to understand the clinical features of the variants in circulation," Lahariya said.

Rath drew attention to systemic issues that remain regarding preparedness of public health systems and availability of healthcare facilities across sections of the society should a virulent variant emerge.

"The catch is, how efficiently, systematically and rigorously are our public health systems tracking virus strains, their infectivity and their virulence, not only for SARS-CoV-2 but for any other infection?" he asked.

"Are we making next generation Covid vaccines at all? Are we making them available widely and affordably? Are we even carefully tracking evidence to see how well or poorly the current vaccine-induced immunity functions against emerging strains?" he added.

The poor and vulnerable would need special protection "but are masks being made widely and freely available?"

"And if not, are we throwing poor communities onto their own resources even for taking such simple precautions, and that is a systemic problem," Rath said.

### Kashmir Rail

ensure that both regions thrive. The enhanced rail network has the potential to open new avenues in logistics, regional tourism, and agro-industrial trade across northern India. Stations along the new route may serve as hubs for regional development, not merely transit points.

Dilip Kumar, Executive Director of Railways, highlighted the train's economic promise: "Agricultural products from Kashmir will now reach distant markets faster, helping farmers secure better prices. Similarly, direct train access for tourists will boost the entire sector."

Local officials noted that the improved connectivity also addresses long-standing mobility issues. "People no longer need to travel to Jammu to board a train. This improves access, reduces travel costs, and eases everyday life," one official said.

As the region enters this new phase of connectivity, stakeholders from both Jammu and Kashmir are urging a shared focus — one that ensures the benefits are distributed fairly and sustainably, fostering inclusive growth across the Union Territory.

### CS Dulloo Pulls

is slated to join by July/August 2026.

The meeting also addressed expansion and infrastructure needs at AIIMS Jammu, including water and power augmentation, construction of an underpass, land allotment, and establishment of a police post and fire station. The Chief Secretary assured full government support for fast-tracking these requirements.

Reiterating the administration's commitment to strengthening healthcare infrastructure, Atal Dulloo called for proactive coordination to develop both AIIMS campuses into world-class medical institutions, ensuring accessible and affordable healthcare for Jammu and Kashmir residents.





## Centre Clears ₹25 Cr Aid For Homes Damaged In Pak Shelling



Observer News Service

**NEW DELHI:** The Centre on Monday approved an additional amount of Rs 25 crore as compensation for houses damaged in the border areas of Jammu and Kashmir due to Pakistani shelling during Operation Sindoor.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently announced the additional compensation amount for the houses damaged by Pakistani shelling.

According to PTI, as a special case, Modi said an additional compensation amount of Rs 2 lakh will be given for each fully-damaged house and Rs 1 lakh for each partially-damaged house.

Following the prime minister's announcement, Union Home Minister Amit Shah ensured swift action by facilitating an additional provision of Rs 25 crore from the Ministry of Home Affairs for 2,060 houses, an official statement said. A similar compensation amount will also be provided in the border areas of Punjab, it added.

The home minister visited the border district of Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir on May 29-30.

During the visit, he handed over appointment letters on compassionate grounds to the family members of those who

lost their lives due to the cross-border firing.

According to norms, compensation for the damage caused by the cross-border shelling was provided immediately.

After Operation Sindoor, several incidents of cross-border shelling were reported from the border districts of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Hundreds of families suffered due to the shelling on residential areas, schools, religious structures, including gurdwaras, temples and mosques, and commercial properties.

The administration took proactive measures to anticipate possible events and ensure an effective response.

A total of 3.25 lakh people were evacuated from the border districts, of whom about 15,000 were accommodated in 397 shelter sheds and accommodation centres, equipped with facilities like food, water, healthcare services, electricity etc.

A total of 394 ambulances were deployed in the border districts to ferry patients to hospitals, including 62 ambulances in Poonch alone, the statement said.

A total of 2,818 civil-defence volunteers were also deployed for services related to health, fire and emergency, livestock, essential supplies etc., it added.

## Youth Dies By Drowning In Chanibal Pattan

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** A tragic drowning incident claimed the life of a young man in the Chanibal area of Pattan, located in North Kashmir's Baramulla district, on Monday.

Authorities identified the deceased as Tajamul Hussain Dar, a local resident of Chanibal, Pattan. According to locals, he was discovered unconscious after drowning and was rushed to the hospital, where medical staff declared him dead on arrival.

Following the incident, officials have taken cognizance and initiated an investigation to uncover the circumstances surrounding the death.

Expressing his grief, former MLA Pattan took to social media platform "X" formerly Twit-

ter to share his condolences: "I am deeply saddened by the untimely death of young Tajamul Hussain Dar of Chinabal (Pattan). May Allah (SWT) grant him the highest place in Jannah and provide strength to his family in this difficult hour."

He further urged the Jammu and Kashmir Police to conduct a thorough and transparent probe into the matter, questioning the events leading to the drowning. "Why was he being chased? How did he end up drowning? Who is responsible?" he asked, stressing the need for truthful answers and accountability.

The former legislator appealed to the locals of Chinabal to maintain peace and assured that justice will be served promptly.

## DC Gbl Reviews Muharram Arrangements

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** In view of the upcoming Muharram-ul-Haram, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ganderbal, Jatin Kishore today chaired a comprehensive meeting to review and finalize the necessary arrangements for the smooth and peaceful observance of Muharram in the district.

The meeting was attended by Additional District Development Commissioner, Manzoor Ahmad Bhat; Chief Planning Officer, various district and sectoral officers, heads of line departments and representatives from Shia associations.

On the occasion, a detailed discussion was held regarding the arrangements to be put in place like uninterrupted drinking water and power supply, adequate ration, health facility, sanitation, traffic management, fire wood especially during the auspicious days and other related facilities.

Representatives from Shia associations highlighted several issues in Dab and Kulan areas, including the repair of street lights, macadamization of roads, provision of firewood, fencing upgradation of Maqboozia Ahli

Islam Dub, and availability of poultry birds.

Rural development departments and municipal authorities were instructed to undertake thorough sanitation drives at key religious locations including Imam Baras, shrines and masjids.

Executive Engineers from PMGSY and R&B were directed to ensure repair of potholes and take up macadamization works on all major roads where Muharram processions are expected.

KPDCL was tasked with ensuring the installation of necessary street lighting and providing uninterrupted power supply during the period.

Addressing the meeting, DC directed all concerned departments to ensure that adequate and timely arrangements are made, particularly in Shia-dominated areas, to ensure smooth and dignified observance of Muharram-ul-Haram.

DC also assured the representatives of the Shia community that the administration is committed to putting all required measures in place well in time to facilitate the peaceful and smooth conduct of all religious events and processions.

## ‘WE SKIPPED QURBANI’: Eid In Kashmir Felt Different This Year

Syed Mohammad Burhan

**SRINAGAR:** The sun came up slowly over Srinagar on Saturday. The sky was clear, the breeze light. It should have been a loud morning. The kind where sheep bleat in every lane and smoke rises early from kitchens. But this time, the city felt still.

Eid-ul-Azha, one of the most important days on the calendar, passed like a whisper through the Valley.

At the Hazratbal Shrine, thousands gathered for prayer. The lawns were full, the imam's voice echoed across the lake. Afterward, people packed their mats and left quietly.

"I was thinking about how different it was last year," said Shabir Ahmad, a tailor from downtown Srinagar. "There was more laughter then. This time, everything felt low."

The streets stayed calm. There were fewer door knocks, fewer greetings, fewer children playing in new clothes.

"We skipped Qurbani this year," said Mushtaq Wani, a travel agent from Srinagar. "Poor business and mounting EMLs have pushed most people in Kashmir into survival mode."

In Sopore, Naseema Bano said her family didn't receive any meat parcels from neighbours until late afternoon. "That's never happened before," she said. "We didn't even hear the usual Eid sounds."

Across towns and villages, fewer animals were sacrificed. In past years, butchers rushed from house to house. This year, many had time on their hands.

"I was done by lunchtime," said Firdous Mir, a butcher in Anantnag. "Usually, I take bookings days ahead. This year, people cancelled. Some said they didn't feel up to it. Others simply couldn't afford it."

Prices of livestock had gone up sharply. A decent-sized sheep cost around ₹25,000. For many, that was out of reach.

In Ganderbal, three families came together to buy one goat. "It's the only way we



“In past years, butchers rushed from house to house. This year, many had time on their hands.”

could manage," said Imtiyaz, a school clerk.

In Baramulla's markets, people walked around but bought very little. "Mostly window shopping," said Manzoor, who sells dresses. "We opened the shop, but the mood wasn't there. Sales dropped by half."

Many parents skipped new clothes for their children. In Kupwara, Roohi Jan said she had to say no to her daughter. "She wanted a dress. I told her, some other day."

In downtown Srinagar, shops were mostly shut. The streets felt empty. "I've never seen Eid like this," said Bashir Lone, a fruit vendor. "I barely made enough this week to buy vegetables, forget a goat."

Eid is meant to be about sharing. But this time, few had enough to give.

Officials offered their greetings. The Lieutenant Governor asked people to show love and kindness. District offices shared similar messages. The city police chief arrived with sweets at Kashmir's grand

sanctum. But inside homes, the usual bags of meat and plates of food didn't arrive.

In the background, a familiar scene repeated itself. For the seventh year in a row, Srinagar's Jamia Masjid remained shut on Eid morning. No prayers. No crowd. Both the chief cleric and the former chief minister criticized the decision.

An old man passed by and glanced at the closed gate. "It's like a new tradition now," he said. "Locked doors on Eid."

Still, some people found ways to mark the day. In Budgam, a few young men gave out dates and juice at the hospital. In Baramulla, children ran through narrow lanes with plastic water guns, giggling and soaked.

"It's still Eid," said one boy, aiming at his friend.

At Hazratbal, Omar Abdullah joined the devotees. Speaking afterward, he said, "This is a peaceful Eid. We should have more trust in the people."

Later in the day, smoke rose slowly from a few rooftops. The smell of grilled meat floated over the courtyards. Not much, but enough to know what day it was.

Small family meals took place in silence. Some neighbours smiled at each other. Others stayed indoors.

By dusk, the Valley lay still. Hardly any fireworks lit the sky. Empty roads echoed with silence. It was Eid only in name, nowhere in spirit.

## LG Inaugurates CCTV Surveillance System For Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine



Observer News Service

**KATRA:** Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha inaugurated "CCTV Surveillance System with Integrated Command & Control Centre" for Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine.

"Cutting-edge technology will enable real-time monitoring and crowd management for safety, security of devotees and it will ensure hassle-free pilgrimage," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that Actionable insights gleaned from the system will enable prompt response in emergencies. The Command & Control Infrastructure including AI-powered surveillance ecosystem will provide comprehensive situational awareness, optimize operations and Quick and efficient coordination with emergency responders.

The large-scale, technology-driven surveillance and crowd management initiative will significantly enhance the safety and security, improve crowd control measures and operational efficiency within the Shrine area.

Under the project, One Integrated Command & Control Centre (ICCC) located at Katra and 7

Sub-Control Centers along the pilgrimage track for localized monitoring and coordination have been established which will ensure 24x7 monitoring of all vulnerable and high-traffic zones and enable proactive and prompt response to crowd build-up, security breaches, or medical emergencies.

Over 700 cameras have been deployed across the Shrine Area, including 170 new high-definition IP cameras and integration of more than 500 existing cameras, covering all critical and vulnerable locations including entry/exit points, gathering areas, and the pilgrimage track.

The Project also featured AI-Based Analytics & Advanced technology mechanisms like Gesture Recognition, Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR), Facial Recognition, Intrusion Detection System, Crowd Management Tools.

Shri Anshul Garg, CEO, SMVDSB gave a detailed presentation on the Integrated Command & Control Centre's technical features and its anticipated benefits in day-to-day shrine functioning. He informed that the Centre is equipped to generate automated alerts for

crowd congestion, route blockages, landslides or emergencies, thereby enabling swift decision-making and response.

The Lieutenant Governor also interacted with the engineers and operational staff at the Centre. He emphasized the need for regular training of staff and seamless collaboration with security agencies and other stakeholders to maximise the Centre's utility.

Notably, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board has recently provided advanced security equipments to the security agencies deployed for the yatra management including X-Ray Baggage Scanners, Door Frame Metal Detectors, Hand-Held Metal Detectors, and Under Vehicle Search Mirrors/Scanners, to enhance robust security measures in the Shrine area, in pursuance to joint security review conducted last year on the directions of the Lieutenant Governor.

Dr. Ashok Bhan, Member, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, Shri Bhim Sen Tuti, IGP Jammu, Ms Nidhi Malik, Deputy Commissioner Reasi and other senior officers of Police, Security Agencies and Shrine Board were also present.

## Judges' Visit Quietly To Boost Kashmir Tourism

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Eight Judges from the Punjab and Haryana High Court, accompanied by their families, are currently on a tour of the Kashmir Valley. Their visit is being viewed as a significant gesture of confidence in the region's safety, serenity, and enduring appeal.

The visiting dignitaries include Justice Vinod S. Bhargava, Justice Pankaj Jain, Justice Jasjit Singh Bedi, Justice Nidhi Gupta, Justice Harkesh Manuja, Justice Aman Choudhary, Justice N.S. Shekawat, and Justice Vikram Aggarwal.

Their itinerary features visits to Kashmir's well-known attractions. They have explored the majestic Mughal Gardens of Shalimar and Nishat, enjoyed a serene sunset shikara ride on Dal Lake, taken a historical walk through Pari Mahal, and experienced the local vibrancy of Polo View Market.

The judges' high-profile visit comes shortly after a recent incident in Pahalgam. Their presence is seen as a form of reassurance for those considering travel to the Valley.

Stakeholders across the Valley—including hoteliers, travel agents, craftsmen, and local guides—have noted the attention garnered by the visit.

"Their presence is significant; it conveys a message to the rest of the country and beyond that Kashmir is welcoming, peaceful, and safe for all visitors," said a tour operator in Srinagar.

Justice Vikram Aggarwal, a member of the visiting delegation, expressed satisfaction with the security and other arrangements in the Valley. He encouraged tourists from across the country to visit Kashmir and experience its unmatched scenic beauty and hospitality.

The visit is widely noted as a notable development for the local tourism sector. As Kashmir's breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage continue to attract attention, such gestures from notable figures play a role in reaffirming its status as a cherished travel destination.

## CS Reviews Strategic Road Projects With BRO Chief

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Director General, Border Roads Organisation (BRO), Lt Gen Raghu Srinivasan called on the Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo, to review the progress on various strategic road infrastructure projects currently underway in the Union Territory, particularly in border areas.

During the meeting, they held an in-depth discussion on the ongoing strategic road projects being implemented in remote and sensitive border regions of J&K. These vital projects are crucial for ensuring year-round connectivity to far-flung areas, improving mobility for civilians and facilitating the operational readiness of the security forces.

Lt Gen Srinivasan also apprised the Chief Secretary of certain challenges being faced by BRO on the ground, especially issues related to land acquisition and forest clearances that have hindered progress at several locations.

The Chief Secretary gave his full assurance that the J&K administration will provide all necessary support to resolve these matters promptly. He directed the concerned departments to streamline the clearances and coordinate closely with BRO authorities to remove any bottlenecks.

Dulloo also impressed upon the DG to expedite the execution of these critical infrastructure projects, reiterating their strategic and developmental significance for the region. He underscored the need for achieving zero-mile connectivity and smooth movement of both civilians and defence personnel, particularly in frontier areas prone to weather-induced isolation.

Lt Gen Srinivasan, while expressing gratitude for the administration's continued co-operation, assured that BRO is fully committed towards timely completion of all ongoing projects and will continue to work in mission mode to meet the set timelines.

## Rajouri Admin Pays Tributes To Martyr ADDC Dr. Raj

Observer News Service

**RAJOURI:** In a solemn and heartfelt tribute, the District Administration Rajouri, under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner Abhishek Sharma, organized a memorial function to pay homage to Martyr Additional District Development Commissioner (ADDC) Dr. Raj Kumar Thapa, who laid down his life in the line of duty amid enemy shelling.

The event was marked by the presence of the bereaved family of the martyr and attended by District Development Council Chairperson Advocate Naseem Liaquat, senior officers and officials of the district administration.

The homage paying began with the observance of a two-minute silence as a mark of respect and condolence. Deputy Commissioner Abhishek Sharma expressed deep sorrow over

the untimely demise of Dr. Thapa and shared poignant memories of his dedicated service and personal association with him.

DDC Chairperson Advocate Naseem Liaquat also paid a heartfelt tribute and conveyed condolences to the bereaved family.

As a gesture of lasting remembrance, the Conference Hall at Dak Bungalow Rajouri was officially named after Martyr Dr. Raj Kumar Thapa.

The family members expressed their gratitude to the District Administration for the tributes and for preserving his memory by naming the hall after him.

Later, the family visited the residential quarter where Dr. Thapa spent his final moments. A commemorative tree was planted in the lawn of the quarter as a living memorial to his service and sacrifice.

## Sharma Inaugurates Bus Service From Baba Nagri To Rajouri

Observer News Service

**KANGAN:** Minister for FCS&CA, Transport, IT, Youth Services and Sports, Satish Sharma visited the revered Baba Nagri Shrine Kangan, in Ganderbal district, on the eve of 129th annual Urs of Hazrat Mian Nizamud Din Kiyarvi (RAZ), where he paid obeisance and interacted with the local devotees and shrine management.

The Minister took stock of the facilities being made available to the pilgrims at the Shrine. He acknowledged the significant spiritual and cultural importance of Baba Nagri in the region.

As a major highlight of his visit, the Minister inaugurated a dedicated JKRTC bus service connecting Baba Nagri, Kangan to Rajouri via TRC Srinagar. The move was aimed at improving accessibility for the devotees

from far-flung regions, especially in the Pir Panjal area.

Member of Parliament, Mian Altaf and Local MLA, Mian Mehar Ali besides officers and officials of JKRTC were present on the occasion.

"Baba Nagri holds a special place in the hearts of thousands across Jammu and Kashmir. By launching this bus service, we aim to strengthen inter-regional connectivity, promote religious tourism and ease the travel burden for the devotees," said the Minister while addressing the gathering.

He emphasised that the Omar Abdullah led government is committed to rapid development of religious and remote areas. He assured continued efforts to improve road connectivity, transport infrastructure and public amenities in the region.



**CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY WILL ENABLE REAL-TIME MONITORING and crowd management for safety, security of devotees and it will ensure hassle-free pilgrimage.**



WTC FINAL

Australia's Pedigree Faces South Africa's Gritty Ambition

Associated Press

**LONDON:** When it comes to major cricket finals, Australia is in a league of its own. Only Australia has won all four men's global trophies. It is hard to beat in finals, having won 10 of 13 across the 50-over World Cup, 20-over World Cup, Champions Trophy, and World Test Championship. And let's not get started on the women's team, which is even more dominant. The men go for world title No. 11 from Wednesday in the WTC final against South Africa at neutral Lord's. That ruthless focus Australia brings on the biggest stages is in marked contrast to South Africa, a perennial underachiever. The Proteas have won just one of cricket's major international titles, the Champions Trophy's inaugural predecessor in 1998, when most of the current Proteas were toddlers. An experienced squad — average age 29 1/2 — compensates with a bond that can't be underestimated, a determination to have each other's backs. That showed often in the 2023-25 WTC cycle as the Proteas, who used 30 players — more than any other team — found a run-scorer or wicket-taker at just the right time. They won their last seven tests and were first to qualify for the final.



"We haven't been super dominant in our performances," South Africa captain Temba Bavuma said when the team qualified in December. "We definitely haven't been clinical

or ruthless when the opportunity or the situation is called upon. But I think what we've done is that we've found ways to make sure that the result is on our side."

Who Opens With Khawaja?

Australia already had a veteran team when it won the 2023 final by crushing India by 209 runs at the Oval. Ten of that 11 are back. Only David Warner is missing, retired from the test format. Medium-pace bowler Josh Hazlewood was injured and didn't play, but he's expected to replace one of the 2023 stars, Scott Boland. Hazlewood overcame a shoulder injury to spearhead Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a first Indian Premier League title last week with 22 wickets in 12 innings. Warner's permanent replacement at opener still hasn't been settled. Sam Konstas made an audacious debut at age 19 in December against India, but Travis Head was preferred in Sri Lanka in February. They seem to be the main candidates. Marnus Labuschagne has opened only once since 2016, and his form has dropped to the point of concern. He averaged just 28.33 in the WTC cycle and attempts last month to spark form at Glamorgan in the second tier of the English County Championship fell flat. It may not matter. Australia has four of its top 10 all-time leading wicket-takers in Nathan Lyon (553, third), Mitchell Starc (382, fourth), captain Pat Cummins (294, eighth), and Hazlewood (279, 10th).

Dhoni Among 7 Inducted Into ICC's Hall Of Fame

Former India captain MS Dhoni was on Monday inducted into the ICC's Hall of Fame for the year 2025 along with Australian great Matthew Hayden and South Africa's Hashim Amla. The International Cricket Council (ICC) will be inducting seven cricketers — five men and two women — in its Hall of Fame 2025. "Celebrated for his calm under pressure and unmatched tactical nous, but also a trailblazer in the shorter formats, MS Dhoni's legacy as one of the game's greatest finishers, leaders and wicketkeepers has been honoured with his induction into the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame," said the ICC statement. "With 17,266 international runs, 829 dismissals and 538 matches across formats for India, Dhoni's numbers reflect not just excellence but extraordinary consistency, fitness and longevity," it said.

ENG v IND: Bumrah Unleashes Fire In Beckenham Nets

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is up and running in Beckenham, putting in the hard yards before the upcoming five high-stakes Tests against England, slated to kick off on June 20 at Headingley. During India's training session in Beckenham, Kent's second home venue, Bumrah displayed his unparalleled mastery in the art of pace bowling. With the ball in his hand, Bumrah showed signs of breaking the notion of requiring assistance from the surface to wreak havoc. Deemed to be the world's current best, Bumrah extracted significant seam movement and constantly tested the outside edge of batters. He constrained the batters inside the crease with his searing yorker-length deliveries, according to ESPNcricinfo. The 31-year-old could be heard chatting with India bowling coach Morne Morkel about his two five-fors at Trent Bridge, according to ESPNcricinfo.

India A v England Lions Unofficial Test Ends In Draw

Tanush Kotian (90 not out) and Anshul Kamboj (51 not out) scored half-centuries as India A's second unofficial four-day Test against England Lions ended in a tame draw here on Monday. India A declared their second innings at 417/7 to set the England Lions a winning target of 439 in the post-tea session on the final day. England Lions scored 32/3 in 11 overs in the second essay. The first unofficial Test in Canterbury too had ended in a draw. Kotian struck 10 fours to reach 90 not out off 108 balls. In a wicket-less post-lunch session, the Mumbai all-rounder put on a 149-run unbeaten stand for the eighth wicket to frustrate England Lions' bowlers. Kamboj also made the most of his time out in the middle against a tiring bowling attack with a solid knock as England Lions were forced to turn to their part-time bowlers to push for wickets.

Racing Prodigy Atiq Mir Secures Top-10 Finish At Rotax Euro Trophy

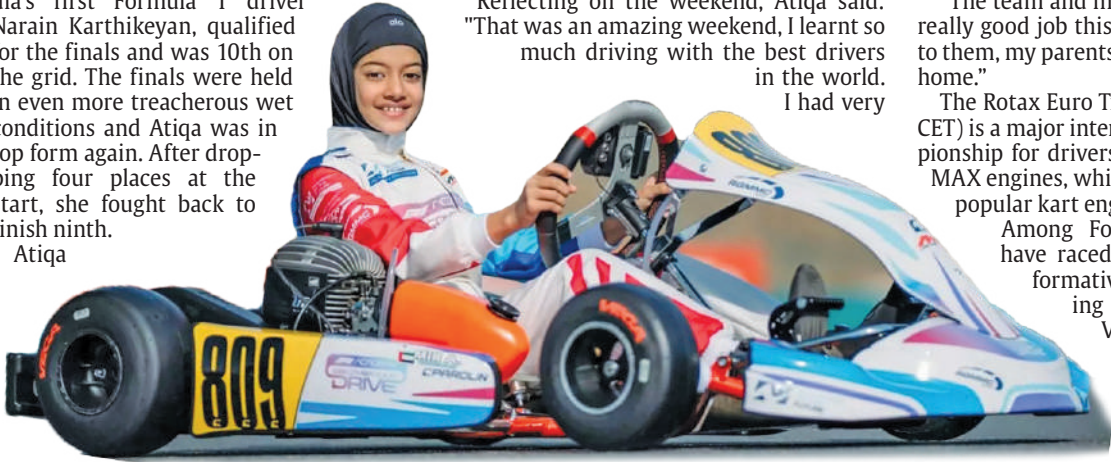
Press Trust of India

**TRINEC (CZECH REPUBLIC):** Ten-year-old Indian racing sensation Atiq Mir added another first to her name by securing a creditable top-10 finish in the Rotax Euro Trophy, a major international karting series. The Akcel GP-backed driver finished ninth in the Rotax Euro Trophy Round 2 staged at Steel Ring Circuit over the weekend. Atiq, the first Indian to get financial and technical support from Formula 1, had a strong qualifying, finishing seventh in her group. She had the misfortune of having two bumper penalties but despite that, she finished in 10th place after the heats. In the pre-finals on Sunday, the heavens opened up and with no prior experience of driving in the wet on this track, Atiq showed her exceptional natural talent and fought

hard with the best drivers in the world. Atiq, who is mentored by India's first Formula 1 driver Narain Karthikeyan, qualified for the finals and was 10th on the grid. The finals were held in even more treacherous wet conditions and Atiq was in top form again. After dropping four places at the start, she fought back to finish ninth. Atiq

ended as the highest placed Indian and Asian in the highly-competitive field. Reflecting on the weekend, Atiq said: "That was an amazing weekend, I learnt so much driving with the best drivers in the world. I had very

good pace in the dry and my progress in the wet was good. "The team and my mechanic Adam did a really good job this week and I'm thankful to them, my parents and all the people back home." The Rotax Euro Trophy (often called RM-CET) is a major international karting championship for drivers who race using Rotax MAX engines, which are some of the most popular kart engines globally. Among Formula 1 drivers who have raced in this series in their formative years include reigning world champion Max Verstappen, George Russell, Lando Norris and current championship leader Oscar Piastri.



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