

RED ALERT

J&K Braces For Intense Rainfall



Observer News Service

Srinagar: Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir have issued a red alert for the next 24 hours as the region braces for intense weather activity, triggered by the convergence of active monsoon winds and a western disturbance.

According to the Kashmir Weather Forecast, the weather system is expected to bring widespread heavy to very heavy rainfall across the Union Territory, with the most severe impact likely in Jammu division and parts of South Kashmir.

Officials have warned that the upcoming spell may cause flash floods in low-lying and hilly areas, particularly those already vulnerable due to

past flooding or poor drainage infrastructure.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has urged residents to remain indoors where possible, avoid travel through flood-prone routes, and closely monitor updates from official weather channels. Travelers heading to the Valley or hilly regions have been advised to postpone non-essential movement.

Director of the Meteorological Department (MeT), Dr Mukhtar Ahmad, earlier said that generally cloudy weather is expected, with the possibility of intermittent spells of light to moderate rain and thundershowers at many places, with intense showers and [| More on P6](#)

RESIDENTS IN FLOOD-PRONE BELTS have been asked to stay alert and report any unusual rise in water levels to the nearest authorities.

Poet Shahid Budgami Passes Away

KO Web Desk

Srinagar: Kashmir's literary and cultural fraternity is in mourning following the death of Shahid Budgami, one of the Valley's most revered poets and cultural custodians. Born as Ghulam Mohammad Bhat,



he passed away at his ancestral home in Budgam on Monday after a prolonged illness. He was 90.

Shahid Budgami carved a unique place in Kashmiri literature with his romantic and lyrical poetry that graced Radio Kashmir Srinagar [| More on P6](#)

Shukla's Feat Has Inspired A Billion Dreams: PM

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday that Shubhanshu Shukla has inspired a billion dreams with his dedication, courage and pioneering spirit, as the astronaut returned to the Earth after an 18-day stay at the International Space Station.

Modi said on X, "I join the nation in welcoming Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla as he returns to Earth from his historic mission to Space."

He lauded Shukla's feat, noting that he is the first Indian to have visited the International Space Station. The prime minister said it marks [| More on P6](#)

'Urdu Language Row'

JKSSB Defers NT Recruitment Following CAT Directions

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir Services Selection Board (JKSSB) has deferred the recruitment process for the posts of Naib Tehsildar in the Revenue Department, in compliance with an interim order issued by the Hon'ble Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), Jammu.

The JKSSB stated that the invitation process for these posts is "hereby deferred till further intimation/orders." The decision was officially



conveyed through a notice issued by JKSSB.

The online application process started on June 16, 2025, and the last date for submission of applications was July 15, 2025.

On Monday, The Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), Jammu, had stayed Urdu language compulsion and ordered Jammu and Kashmir Services Selection Board (JKSSB) to accept applications for the post of naib tehsildar from candidates who have graduation with knowledge of any of the five official languages enumerated in the Jammu and Kashmir Official Languages Act, 2020, which includes Hindi, Kashmiri, English, Dogri and Urdu



nearly 2.9 lakh cubic meters of silt—experts say this cannot substitute for full-scale dredging of the Jhelum, which

remains the Valley's main flood drain. Further, the RTI response has revealed alarming figures

on illegal encroachments along the river and its flood channels. Across divisions including Srinagar, Baramulla,

Health & Education Pillars Of J&K's Progress, Prosperity: CM Inaugurates 120-Bedded Block At B&J Hospital

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Tuesday inaugurated a 120-bedded state-of-the-art additional block at the Bone & Joint Hospital, Srinagar, reaffirming his government's firm commitment to strengthening the two foundational pillars of development—health and education.

Post inauguration, the Chief Minister also took a round of the operation theatres, staircase, ramp and wards, and interacted with the hospital staff and faculty members.

Addressing a large gathering on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that no



amount of infrastructure development—be it roads, power projects, or commercial complexes—can substitute for quality healthcare and education. "Without robust schools,

colleges, universities and hospitals, our progress as a society will remain incomplete," he stated.

Recalling the rich legacy of the Bone & Joint Hospital, CM Omar

said that the institution has faced extraordinary challenges over the past 30–35 years. "From natural disasters to tragic accidents, this hospital has stood as a symbol of resilience and commitment," he said.

He reminisced about the 2014 floods, when floodwaters first breached the Bone & Joint Hospital. "I vividly remember standing under this bridge, trying to protect the hospital from being overrun. Despite the devastation, this hospital never turned its back on people—it continued to provide treatment," he said.

The Chief Minister also referred to the 2022 fire that destroyed major [| More on P6](#)

a doctor.

"From robotics to artificial intelligence, the medical profession is now at a crossroads of human care and machine efficiency," Omar said, addressing a hall full of medical professionals, graduates, faculty, and families. "While tools [| More on P6](#)

Amarnath Yatra Crosses 2.34 Lakh Mark Over 51 Lakh Yatris Visit In 15 Years

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Despite overcast weather in the higher reaches of Kashmir, the annual Amarnath Yatra continues without major disruption, with over 2.34 lakh pilgrims having performed darshan at the holy cave since the pilgrimage began this year.

According to official figures, a total of 13,490 devotees performed darshan on July 15 alone. The pilgrims included



9,096 men, 3,546 women, 199 children, 67 sadhus, and 14 sadhvis. Additionally, 568 security personnel also availed the darshan at [| More on P6](#)

Police Mock Drills Conducted Along Yatra Route

Mock drills were conducted on Tuesday along the Amarnath Yatra routes in several districts of Kashmir to strengthen the security forces for the ongoing pilgrimage, police said. A police spokesman said these mock [| More on P6](#)

Delhi HC Rejects Bail For TRF Operative

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court has refused bail to an alleged operative of "The Resistance Front" terror outfit underlining his "influence" and a high possibility of tampering with the evidence.

A bench of Justices Subramonium Prasad and Harish Vaidyanathan Shankar found sufficient material against accused Arsalan Feroze Ahenger, stated to be in his early 20s, saying he posted photos of terrorists and incited people to commit terrorist acts.

"It cannot be said that there is no evidence [| More on P6](#)

Court Reserves Order On Er Rashid's Bail Plea

Observer News Service

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Tuesday reserved its order on Baramulla MP Engineer Rashid's plea seeking permission to attend the monsoon session of Parliament starting July 21.

Additional Sessions Judge Chanderjit Singh reserved the order for July 21. Rashid has sought either interim bail or custody parole to attend the session in his capacity as a parliamentarian.



His counsel, Vikhyat Oberoi, argued for interim bail, alternatively requesting custody parole without travel cost. He said Rashid had earlier been granted bail to campaign during state polls and posed no security risk.

The NIA opposed interim bail, suggesting custody parole could be considered only if travel expenses were paid.

Rashid has been in Tihar Jail since 2019 after being arrested in a terror funding case under UAPA. He defeated Omar Abdullah in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

3 Dead In National Highway Mishaps

At least three people lost their lives, while eight others including three Amarnath pilgrims were injured in three separate road accidents that occurred along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway, from Ramban to Pulwama district, on Tuesday. Two persons were killed and two others, including a woman, [| More on P6](#)

Five Years, No Dredging: RTI Reveals Stark Inaction On Jhelum Flood Plan

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Despite repeated flood scares in Kashmir and the devastating 2014 deluge still fresh in public memory, the government has failed to carry out any dredging in the River Jhelum or its flood spill channels since March 2020. This shocking revelation has come to light through a recent Right to Information (RTI) reply by the Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC) Department.

The reply shows that the Comprehensive Flood Management Plan (CFMP), sanctioned in 2015 under the Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP), remains far from complete. Designed to protect the Valley from future

flooding, the project was supposed to enhance the river's discharge capacity. A decade later, only around 80% of the work has been finished.

Phase-I of the CFMP was launched with an allocation of 399 crore to improve Jhelum's flow and flood-handling capacity. Of the 31 projects tendered under this phase, only 16 have been completed, with the rest still pending. The department confirmed that 114.29 crore of central assistance has already been fully spent.

However, no new capital dredging work has taken place in the past five years. While the department mentioned desilting of 670 km of irrigation canals in 2023–24—removing



nearly 2.9 lakh cubic meters of silt—experts say this cannot substitute for full-scale dredging of the Jhelum, which

remains the Valley's main flood drain. Further, the RTI response has revealed alarming figures

on illegal encroachments along the river and its flood channels. Across divisions including Srinagar, Baramulla,

Anantnag, and Kupwara, 1,884 encroachments have been identified—ranging from 283 semi-permanent structures and 1,233 illegal boundary walls to 215 trees planted on embankments.

Despite repeated official orders, only two boundary walls and 200 trees have been removed so far, indicating weak enforcement. Encroachments in flood-prone districts like Sopore, Pulwama, Bandipora, and Shopian continue to choke natural water flow, raising serious questions about disaster preparedness.

The department admitted that no new Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been submitted in recent years, although the Jhelum Tawi Flood

Recovery Project (JTFRP) has conducted a fresh flood study. A new DPR is reportedly being prepared but is yet to be placed before the government.

A senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "There is a glaring disconnect between the urgency of the flood threat and the pace of official action."

The last major dredging effort, by M/s Reach Dredgers, Kolkata, was marked complete, but no new tenders have been floated since then. This is despite the 2018 recommendations by the Central Water and Power Research Station (CWPRS), which had warned of serious risks and called for urgent dredging along the Sangam-Asham [| More on P6](#)



CM Omar Vows To Make Srinagar A 'Real' Smart City

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Tuesday emphasized the need for genuine urban transformation in Srinagar, stating that the city must become an "actual" Smart City — one that addresses core issues like waterlogging, healthcare, and infrastructure in a meaningful way.

Speaking at the inauguration of a new 120-bed building at the Bone and Joint Hospital in Srinagar, the Chief Minister said the recent hour-long rainfall had exposed the poor condition of city roads. "I wonder where the funds allocated over the years have gone," he remarked. "As head of the Housing and Urban Development Department, I have asked for a thorough study on waterlogging so we can develop a detailed project to address it and truly make Srinagar a Smart City."

Abdullah admitted that part of the problem lies in governance itself. "We are also at fault for not enforcing guidelines strictly and neglecting road maintenance," he said.

Underscoring the importance of strong public services, Abdullah said infra-

structure alone is not enough. "No matter how many roads or power projects we build, they cannot substitute quality education and healthcare. A society can only move forward with robust hospitals, schools, and universities."

Reflecting on the legacy of the Bone and Joint Hospital, he praised its resilience over the past 30 to 35 years. "This hospital has weathered everything—from natural disasters to accidents. During the 2014 floods, I remember standing under this bridge, trying to prevent it from being inundated. Despite the odds, this institution never turned its back on the people," he said.

He also recalled the devastating 2022 fire that damaged vital areas of the hospital. "Even after losing operation theatres, teaching spaces, and wards, our doctors resumed surgeries within days. Their commitment is truly admirable."

Omar Abdullah took pride in continuing the vision of his grandfather, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who inaugurated the hospital in 1982. "Today, this hospital serves not only Srinagar but patients from the Chenab region, Pir Panjal, and even Kargil," he noted.

City Grapples With 'Signal Failures' Amid Modernisation Drive

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Despite ongoing initiatives to enhance road safety and ensure public security, Srinagar continues to face challenges due to malfunctioning traffic signals across the city.

Officials from Traffic Police Kashmir, the Regional Transport Office (RTO) Kashmir, and other agencies have been active on the roads for an extended period. However, the problem of non-functional traffic lights remains unresolved, even after the costly installation of a smart traffic management system last year.

Residents from various parts of Srinagar, speaking to KNO expressed frustrations,

saying outdated and broken traffic signal infrastructure hampers smooth traffic flow.

Many localities, including Barabar Shah, said traffic lights are either entirely out of order or only intermittently functioning. "The traffic lights in Srinagar are not working at several places. In Barabar Shah, they are completely out of order; sometimes blinking, sometimes not working at all," said a local resident.

Similar issues are reported in both the uptown and downtown areas, with many signals either non-operational or only partially functional. Some signals lack countdown timers, and in several places, basic signals are missing altogether.



Initiative Launched To Save Kashmir's Musical Heritage

Syed Mohammad Burhan

Srinagar: A significant step toward preserving Kashmir's rich musical heritage was marked on Tuesday where the Anant Centre for Documentation and Development of Crafts (ACDC), Anant National University, Ahmedabad, in collaboration with the Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages inaugurated a pioneering project to document, train, and understand the designing and making of musical instruments used in Sufiana Mausiqi.

The event also witnessed the formal announcement of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Anant National University and Tulkul Arts and Media Collective, Kashmir. The MoU aims to preserve and revive the traditional instruments of Sufiana Mausiqi, a centuries-old classical tradition central to Kashmir's cultural identity.

The event was attended by musicians, students, academicians, cultural workers, and local community members. Speaking on the occasion, MLA Bijbehara Dr Bashir Ahmad Veeri, emphasized the need for global cultural exchange to safeguard and evolve indigenous traditions.

"We, as Kashmiris, need to open up to the world and get away

from the notion that only we are the best," he said. "The world is opening up, and so should we. Cultural exchange is essential if we are serious about preserving our Sufiana heritage."

B M Sharma, Principal Secretary, Department of Culture, praised the initiative as timely and important, commending the efforts to preserve Kashmir's unique spiritual and musical traditions.

"Kashmir has a profound and rich Sufi history that must be cherished and passed on to future generations," Sharma said. "This initiative to preserve the instruments of Sufiana Mausiqi is highly praiseworthy and reflects a sincere commitment to cultural preservation."

The project will create a design archive of rare and endangered musical instruments, explore their cultural and historical contexts, and offer training platforms for students and craftsmen. As part of the collaboration, a two-way knowledge exchange will take place: Kashmiri artisans will travel to Anant University to teach students, while students will immerse themselves in fieldwork in Kashmir, engaging directly with master craftsmen and musicians.

Prominent social activist Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat urged the government to extend institutional support to such efforts.

"This is a great initiative taken

by Anant National University, and the J&K government must carry this forward on a larger scale," said Dr Bhat.


Dr Sukamal Deb, Head of ACDC, noted that the initiative is aligned with ACDC's mission to revive India's endangered crafts by promoting preservation through documentation, archiving, and community collaboration.

Anant University's Provost, Dr Sanjeev Vidyarthi, underscored the value of introducing students to India's deep-rooted cultural knowledge systems.

"Preserving a traditional art form is not just about archiving artefacts," he said. "It is about carrying forward centuries-old legacies by introducing them to the young minds who will shape our tomorrow."

The collaboration will include field research, oral history documentation, instrument-making workshops, and academic exchange programs. Tulkul Arts, known for its grassroots work in cultural revival through performance and storytelling, will lead community engagement activities to ensure artisans' voices remain central.


The project represents a unique fusion of academic design innovation and indigenous knowledge preservation, rooted in respect for tradition and driven by sustainable development goals.




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HIGHWAY STATUS



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



HIJRI
CALENDAR

20 Muharram
1447

PRAYERS

FAJR	3: 49
ZUHR	12:37
ASR	5: 35
Magrib	7:46
ISHA	9: 24

This Day In History

- 1809- La Paz, Bolivia declares its independence from the Spanish Crown and forms the Junta Tuitiva led by Pedro Domingo Murillo, the 1st independent government in Spanish America
- 1894- Treaty of Aoki-Kimberley signed between Japan & England
- 1900- Russia launch an offensive against the Chinese in Manchuria
- 1901- The Fawcett Commission headed by Millicent Fawcett is established as a result of an outcry against the treatment of Afrikaners in concentration camps during the South African War
- 1914- Socialist conference in Brussels (Kautsky, Trotsky & Rosa Luxemburg)
- 1921 Encouraged by the British, King Constantine of Greece launches a drive to take Asia Minor from nationalists under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk
- 1925- The first parliament in Iraq opened by King Faisal in Baghdad
- 1926- National Geographic takes 1st natural-color undersea photos
- 1927- Augusto César Sandino begins 5½ year war against US occupation of Nicaragua
- 1936- 1st x-ray photo of arterial circulation, Rochester, NY
- 1940- Adolf Hitler orders preparations for the invasion of Britain (Operation Sealion)
- 1942 - French police arrest 13,152 Jews in Paris
- 1945 - Cruiser Indianapolis leaves SF with atom bomb
- 1956 - Karelo-Finnish SSR becomes part of Russian SFSR
- 1956 - King Faisal of Iraq begins visit to England
- 1966 - Nigeria becomes the first Anglophone independent state in Africa to become an associate member of European Economic Community
- 1969 - Apollo 11 launched, carrying 1st men to land on Moon
- 1971 - Franco appoints prince Juan Carlos as deputy in Spain
- 1979 - Premier/pres al-Bakr of Iraq is succeeded by Saddam Hussein
- 1980 -Polish railway workers block railway to Russia
- 1981 - India performs nuclear Test
- 1982 - NASA launches Landsat 4 to thematic map the Earth
- 1982 CDC report on AIDS symptoms in three hemophiliacs
- 1983 - 20 killed in Britain's worst helicopter accident
- 1983 - Sikorsky S-61 disaster: A helicopter crashes off the Isles of Scilly, causing 20 fatalities.
- 1985 - Bill to abolish Greater London Council receives royal assent
- 1987 - Great Britain performs nuclear Test at Nevada Test Site
- 1989 - South Africa's largest labour federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, holds its third annual congress and intensifies its campaign against apartheid
- 1990 - 400 die in a (7.7) earthquake in Philippines
- 1990 - Ukraine declares independence
- 1999 - John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, and sister-in-law Lauren Bessette are killed in a plane crash off the coast of Martha's Vineyard. The Piper Saratoga aircraft was piloted by Kennedy.
- 2004 - Millennium Park, considered the first and most ambitious architectural project in the early 21st century for Chicago, is opened to the public by Mayor Richard M. Daley.
- 2007 - An earthquake of magnitude 6.8 and aftershock of 6.6 occurs off the Niigata coast, Japan, killing 8 people with at least 800 injured and damaging a nuclear power plant. See 2007 Chetsu offshore earthquake.
- 2013 -27 children are killed and 25 are hospitalized after eating lunch contaminated with insecticide in India
- 2014 - Death toll within Gaza surpasses 200 people following air strikes by Israel
- 2014 - Hamas and Islamic Jihad offer Israel a 10-year truce with 10 conditions, which include lifting the blockade and the release of prisoners; it is rejected


SAD DEMISE

With profound grief and sorrow, we inform the sad demise of Rehana Sultan Khan, D/o Late Mohammad Sultan Khan, R/o Maloor, Sheltang, who passed away on 14th July 2025. Her Fateha Khawani will be observed on Thursday, 17th July 2025 at 10:30 AM at the ancestral graveyard located at Mallateng, Dalgate, Srinagar and there will be no gathering at home after the Fateha Khawani.

In Grief:

Wasim Sultan Khan (Brother)

Saleem Qadir Khan (Brother-in-law)



J&K Bank

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POSSESSION NOTICE

Notice under Section 13 (4) of the SARFAESI ACT, 2002 read with Rule 8 (1) of the Security (Enforcement) Interest Rules, 2002

Whereas the Authorized Officer of the Jammu & Kashmir Bank Limited under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers under Section 13(2) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued Demand Notice dated 06.01.2023, thereby calling upon the Borrowers namely 1) Mr. Parvez Ahmad Sofi S/O Ghulam Nabi Sofi R/O Islamyabal, Pather Masjid, Sgr.(Proprietor of M/s Paradise Electronics) (Borrower/Mortgagor), 2) Mr. Nazir Ahmad Charloo S/O Ghulam Qadir Charloo R/O Shah Mohalla, Nawabbazar, Sgr (Guarantor) and 3) Mr. Mohammad Hashim Wani S/O. Mohammad Ismail Wani R/O Solina Payeen, Sgr. (Guarantor) to repay an amount of Rs. 49,89,365.38 (Rupees Forty Nine Lacs Eighty Nine thousand Three hundred Sixty Five seven and paisa Thirty Eight only) being the balance outstanding as on 31.12.2022 in the account of the borrower, within 60 days from the date of the said notice together with the future interest and other charges thereon.

The said borrowers having failed to repay the said amount, notice is hereby given to the said borrowers in particular and the public in general that the undersigned being authorized officer of the J&K Bank Ltd. has taken possession of the mortgage property described herein below, in exercise of the powers conferred on me under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules, on 14th day of July, 2025.

The borrowers in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned against dealing with the said property in any manner whatsoever and any dealings with the said property will be subject to the charge of the J&K Bank Limited for the amount in aggregating to Rs.30,80,472/- (Rupees Thirty Lacs Eighty Thousand Four Hundred and Seventy-two only) together with future interest thereon from 01.07.2025 and other charges incurred or to be incurred.

The borrower's attention is invited to the provisions of Sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of the time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Description of the Immovable Property

Land measuring 561 Sft alongwith newly constructed block falling under Khasra No. 1052 min , Khata No. 342 and Khewat No. 139 situated at Mouza Tashwan, Tehsil Khas District Srinagar standing in the name of Mr. Parvez Ahmad Sofi S/O Ghulam Nabi Sofi R/O Islamyabal, Pather Masjid, Srinagar.

ab

Authorized Officer

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KO VIEW

CM's Unfair Swipe

In a region where journalism often comes at the cost of safety, stability, and even freedom, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's remarks on local media coverage around Mar-tyrs' Day are deeply disappointing. His recent post on X, lashing out at Jammu and Kashmir's press, accusing some outlets of cowardice and others of being "sellouts," is a serious and unfair accusation against editors and journalists who have pursued this profession with all its uncertainties and lack of economic utility.

As the situation of the past over three decades makes it clear, journalism in Kashmir is not an easy job. It never has been. Reporters, editors, and photographers have long worked under extraordinary pressures to report the situation, under-terred by an atmosphere clouded by surveillance, internet shut-downs, and threats from multiple sides. We may not have been perfect, but overall many of us have acquitted ourselves well. We have generally followed balance, truth, and fairness in our coverage. These are not the actions of cowards, but acts of professional courage.

To publicly accuse newspapers of burying a story because they lacked "guts," and worse, to imply that some may have been paid off with "the size of the envelope," is sad. Criticism of the press is fair and even necessary in a democracy, but blanket accusations, especially from someone who knows the place as intimately as Omar Abdullah does. He knows what Kashmir has been through. Not acknowledging this is sad and only goes to weaken the very institutions we rely on for accountability and discourse.

Instead of shaming journalists, political leaders should recognise that media houses in Kashmir are operating under mounting risks. And yet, newspapers and journalists have kept going, reporting as best as they can within a rapidly narrowing space. To turn around and suggest they are betraying their readers or being bought out is both unjust and unkind.

More importantly, such language is dangerous, coming as it does from the chief minister. It directly attacks the credibility of journalists and makes them fair game for the people in authority not happy with media scrutiny. It sends a message that criticism of the government can be interpreted as betrayal or loyalty, depending on the convenience of the powers that be. If anything, it doesn't help the cause of journalism in Kashmir, let alone the freedom of the press.

Omar Abdullah has every right to be angry if he feels the media did not do justice to an important political development. But his grievance would have been better served by a reasoned critique rather than an emotional outburst peppered with insults. Kashmir's press deserves better from the government, from the opposition, and from the people. They've earned that respect the hard way.

FINANCIAL FIX

Don't Let Your Money Sleep

Hard work alone isn't building wealth anymore. If Kashmiris don't learn to invest, they'll keep falling behind.

Irshad Mushtaq

Most Kashmiris know how to earn. Few know how to grow what they earn. And that gap is becoming dangerous.

Every morning, the valley wakes up to work. Shopkeepers lift shutters, orchard owners check crops, employees log into offices. Yet, by nightfall, almost no one asks: What is my money doing while I sleep?

For decades, real estate was the answer. A small investment in land, made in the '80s or '90s, turned into a fortune by 2024. That success built homes, paid dowries, funded education. It also built complacency.

Today, land is no longer enough. The economy is moving faster than property prices. Wealth now grows in markets—stocks, mutual funds, bonds, digital assets. Most Kashmiris are watching from the sidelines, unsure, unprepared, and un-informed.

This is not a problem of poverty. It is a problem of mindset. In a region known for resilience, risk-taking ends at shopfronts and apple farms. When it comes to financial markets, even the educated avoid what they don't understand.

And yet, they must, because the rules have changed. A savings account will not protect your future. A fixed deposit will not beat inflation. A single income cannot cover a child's education abroad or unexpected medical bills. Invest-ment is no longer an option. It is survival.

The good news is you don't need to be rich to begin. You need intent. A monthly SIP, a basic stock account, and a short call with a financial advisor are not difficult. They are just de-layed. And every delay is money lost.

Kashmir has no shortage of hard work. It now needs finan-cial awareness to match. Wealth is no longer about what you own. It's about what you understand.

The author is a Srinagar-based reputed financial advisor.



Dr. Raja Muzaffar Bhat

In March this year, the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) assured India's top environmental court that it was finally ready to clean up the Achan landfill.

A detailed action plan was submitted to the National Green Tribunal (NGT). Promises were made: a non-functional leachate treatment plant would be revived, the nauseating odour would be neutralized, and dangerous legacy waste would be treated using scientific methods.

Four months later, those promises lie in the same place as the landfill's garbage: untouched, decomposing, and dangerous.

I've been visiting and documenting the Achan landfill for years. The latest images and videos I obtained just days ago reveal the same horrifying truth I've seen repeatedly: untreated leachate continues to leak from the mountain of waste and is being pumped directly into nearby agricultural land, wet-land areas, and into a drain leading to Anchar Lake.

This is the same site where over 11.5 lakh metric tons of unpro-cessed municipal waste has been dumped for decades. This is also where a treatment plant exists only in theory, and public health con-cerns are ignored year after year.

Leachate is more than a foul-smelling liquid. It's a chemical cocktail, born when water perco-lates through waste, absorbing bacteria, heavy metals, and toxins. It seeps into groundwater, contami-nates surface water, and destroys soil fertility.

At Achan, leachate has been flowing freely into Kashmir's frag-ile ecology. It is endangering An-char Lake, Khushal Sar, Gilsar, and even the Shalbugh wetland, a Ramsar site meant to be protected under international convention.

In December 2024, the NGT di-rected the Commissioner of the SMC to file a detailed and time-bound remediation plan. The SMC did just that: promising to opera-tionalize the leachate treatment facility between January and June 2025 and to tackle the pervasive odour with bio-enzymes and anti-odour chemicals. This was submit-ted to the court through an affida-vit, no less.

It is now mid-July, and none of that work has started.

The environmental damage isn't just anecdotal. It's been con-firmed by a committee appointed by the NGT last year, which in-cluded experts from the Central

The Rot
Beneath Srinagar

Years of waste mismanagement at Kashmir's largest landfill is now poisoning lakes, wetlands, and people. The law has spoken. Why won't the government act?



Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the J&K Pollution Control Com-mittee (JKPCC), the National Wet-lands Committee, and the Deputy Commissioner of Srinagar.

Their joint report couldn't have been clearer. On page 455, it reads: "There was no arrangement found for collection of leachate waste at the site as the leachate treatment facility established at the site was found non-functional and leachate was observed to be flowing in the drain leading to Anchar lake."

Two pages later, it goes further: "The leachate treatment plant and air pollution control system at the site were found defunct and the facility remained continuously in violations under different provi-sions of the Water (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and the Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1981."

This is not negligence. It is open defiance of environmental law.

The NGT took a strong stand. In March 2025, it imposed a 12.62 crore penalty on the SMC for vi-olating waste management norms. It also ordered legal action against eight former Commissioners of the municipal body under the Environ-ment (Protection) Act, 1986. The names include senior officials who were in charge between 2020 and 2025. They had one job: enforce the Solid Waste Management Rules of 2016. They failed.

SMC's current estimate pegs the city's accumulated waste at 11.5 lakh metric tons. It now says it will

We are dealing with a crisis that has been worsening for more than a decade. If the laws we already have are not implemented, and if even binding court orders are brushed aside, what hope do ordinary citizens have?

take at least two more years to clear it. The clean-up plan is divided into four phases, with a 2027 deadline for full remediation.

The new roadmap includes op-erationalizing the dormant leach-ate treatment plant, initiating

bio-mining, expanding composting units, and constructing facilities for refuse-derived fuel (300 tons per day) and compressed bio-gas (459 tons per day).

Meanwhile, the Pollution Con-trol Committee reports that SMC has been in violation of environ-mental laws for 1,800 consecutive days, from April 2020 to March 2025.

That's nearly five years of un-scientific waste handling, ground-water contamination, and toxic air. That's five years of health risks to residents of downtown Srinagar who live near the landfill.

This problem has long passed the threshold of bureaucratic delay. It is now about accountability.

In 2019, the J&K Pollution Control Committee issued a for-mal warning to SMC through official communication SPC/ NGT/11/17/391-92 dated June 17, 2019. It clearly stated that the leachate from Achan land-fill posed a major risk to Anchar Lake. No action followed.

The treatment plant remains idle. The odour continues. And ev-ery day, untreated leachate flows through the veins of the city.

The Commissioner who as-sured the NGT of compliance ear-lier this year, Dr. Owais Ahmad, has since been transferred. It is likely that the new appointee will seek more time when the matter is heard again on July 18.

This is a familiar cycle: one of-ficer drafts the roadmap, another faces the court, a third claims in-nocence, and the people of Srinagar continue to suffer.

This isn't just about cleaning up a landfill. It's about confronting a culture of impunity. Kashmir's ecology is delicate. Its water bod-ies are already gasping. And yet, the most basic responsibilities, like running a waste treatment plant, are deferred, ignored, or delib-erately abandoned.

Some will argue that systems take time. That change comes slow-ly. But that excuse no longer holds.

We are dealing with a crisis that has been worsening for more than a decade. If the laws we already have are not implemented, and if even binding court orders are brushed aside, what hope do ordinary citi-zens have?

I will present these facts again before the National Green Tribu-nal. I have no political affiliation. I hold no office. But I have docu-ments, photos, and a growing stack of broken promises. I will not stay silent while Srinagar's groundwa-ter is poisoned and its wetlands fade away.

The rot beneath Srinagar is not just in its garbage. It's in the gover-nance that allows it to grow.

Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat is an Acumen Fellow and Chairman Jammu & Kashmir RTI Movement. Views expressed in this article are author's own and don't necessarily reflect KO's editorial policy.

Letter to Editor

Is Rising Temperature Waking Up Snakes in Kashmir?

Earlier this month, a snake slithered through a village in North Kashmir and straight into the social media spot-light. The reptile's slow, eerie crawl, captured on video, sent panic through the area, and sparked yet another re-minder: snakes are now a regular fea-ture in the valley's summers.

These sightings are no longer rare. Farmers in Pulwama are find-ing snakes near water pumps. Chil-dren in Baramulla have been rushed indoors after reptiles were spotted in schoolyards. Families in Anant-nag are discovering them under beds and verandahs.

The season of serpents, once lim-ited to the fringes of Kashmir's wet-lands and woodlands, is now creeping

closer to home.

Behind these encounters is a shift few can ignore: the valley is heating up.

Over the past two decades, Kash-mir's average summer temperature has risen by more than 1.2°C. As the snowline retreats and ground temper-atures rise earlier each year, reptiles are waking sooner from hibernation.

Longer warm seasons mean longer active periods for snakes, and more chances of crossing paths with people.

But warmer weather is only one part of the story.

Urban sprawl and land-use chang-es have shrunk wild habitats, forcing snakes into human spaces in search of shelter and prey. Open drains, piles of firewood, and crop fields now offer perfect hiding spots. The once-clear

boundaries between the forest and the home are blurring fast.

What makes this even more dan-gerous is Kashmir's lack of prepared-ness. Though some antivenoms are available, few rural health centers are equipped to treat snakebites quickly.

Most cases go unreported, while many victims turn to local remedies. The valley still lacks a robust surveil-lance system to track snake popula-tions or bite patterns.

Meanwhile, awareness remains low. In the absence of knowledge, fear fills the void. Snakes are killed on sight. Folk myths persist. And cli-mate change continues to silently ex-pand their range.

Kashmir must treat this as more than a seasonal nuisance. Schools

need to educate students on snake safety. Villages must learn first aid protocols. Healthcare workers require better training. The wild-life department needs resources to study reptile behaviour in chang-ing climates.

Snakes are not the problem. Ris-ing heat, vanishing habitats, and a weak public health response are.

As the valley warms, these en-counters will only rise.

But on this World Snake Day, the choice now is between panic and pre-paredness.

And the time to choose is running out.

Sincerely,
Dr. Seerat Misgar
Srinagar

91 Pilgrims, One War, A Daring Escape

With missiles overhead and embassies overwhelmed, one group of Indian pilgrims faced a question: Do we wait, or move?

Abbas Muzafar

We arrived in Iran on the 3rd of June, 2025, as a group of 91 people of all ages. The oldest among us was my 83-year-old mother, still recuperating from a hip replacement surgery, and the youngest was three-year-old Sakina. This was a pilgrimage to two of the most sacred shrines for Shia Muslims in Iran—one in Mashhad and the other in Qom. The former is the shrine of Imam Raza, the 8th Imam of Shia Muslims, and the latter is that of his beloved sister Fatima, revered as Lady Qom.

Our return was scheduled for the 13th of June from Tehran Airport. On the intervening night between the 12th and 13th, I had almost finished segregating the luggage in preparation for an early morning departure to the airport. We were staying in Qom, around 100 km south of Tehran. I checked the time—it was 3 a.m. My mother was fast asleep, and I realized it made no sense to sleep now, so I decided to take a shower to stay awake.

Sometime later, I received a message from a journalist friend, Aamir Abbas Rizvi, based in Mumbai. Israel had launched a major attack on Iran, killing several top military leaders. It sounded like a precise strike intended to leave Iran's defense forces rudderless. All airports were closed indefinitely. My immediate thought was: we're stuck—indefinitely.

We had to check out of Hotel Zavel Qorba in the morning, as a new group of pilgrims with a prior booking was scheduled to take our place. Ninety-one of us were now in a precarious situation.

We began looking for alternative accommodations in Qom ourselves. With few options available for such a large group, and most of us having exhausted our funds expecting to return home that day, the situation was dire. By evening, we managed to find basic lodging and food to survive the coming days.

The next day, the situation escalated further when an Israeli missile struck Fordow, a nuclear site just 20 km from us. Tension and uncertainty were now palpable. Some members of our group broke down



emotionally. I realized that despair wouldn't help—we needed a way out, and fast.

I remembered that a Serbian colleague, Petar Popvic, had recently traveled into Iran via the Azerbaijan land border. With the internet now slow and intermittently cut off, I left him a message on WhatsApp. He replied an hour later, saying that the Azerbaijan border allows only one-way entry; exiting Iran via that route was not permitted.

Another Serbian colleague, Konstantin Novanovic, was also traveling in Iran. We had planned to meet in Tehran. I messaged him, and he responded that he had already boarded a cab from Tehran toward the Turkish border. That route, however, was not an option for us—Indian passport holders require a Schengen or US visa to cross, which we didn't have.

Next, I considered Turkmenistan—a country we used to jokingly compare to North Korea. That left Armenia, a country with friendly ties to India, and the possibility of exiting by sea from Bandar Abbas Port. There is a train from Qom to Bandar Abbas, so I immediately reached out to my travel agent and friends to try procuring UAE and Armenian visas for us.

Meanwhile, I contacted a friend in the merchant navy, Captain Naim Zaidi, who often travels through Bandar Abbas. A few hours later, he informed me that the passenger ferry from Bandar Abbas to Sharjah had ceased operations following the Israeli strike. The Armenian visa, despite being an online process, turned out to be too cumbersome. I even looked into an Iraqi visa, but that had a minimum waiting period of 7–8 days.

It was turning into an increasingly difficult situation. Days were passing, and the tension was only intensifying, especially in Tehran. Just as hope began to fade, I received a message from Laalit Lobo, a dear friend and batchmate from my film school days at the Mass Communication Research Center, Jamia Millia Islamia. He was the first to reach out to me as a solid support system. Through a friend, he contacted the Indian ambassador in Tehran. He shared the contact of the Deputy Chief of Mission, Mr. John Mai.

I immediately called Mr. Mai. Though he was in the middle of a transfer posting and had packed his own bags to leave, he was still stuck in Tehran like us. Despite that, he was incredibly helpful. He advised us to stay put in Qom, which was

relatively safe, and promised to update me on any evacuation plan.

I remained in touch with Mr. Mai from the 14th of June onwards. On the 17th, he gave me good news: the evacuation process would begin shortly. That evening, our group's travel manager came with a confusing update. He claimed that embassy officials had asked us to organize our own bus and travel to Mashhad—1,000 km east of Qom—where we might have to stay a few days before proceeding to Kazakhstan.

That plan sounded absurd to me. It would involve crossing into Turkmenistan and then Uzbekistan—two international borders—from a foreign land, during wartime. I lost faith in our group management.

On the morning of the 18th, around 11 a.m., our group of 91 held a meeting to discuss extended boarding and lodging, as the situation looked increasingly indefinite. Some suggested moving out of the hotel and renting apartments to cut costs. I was unimpressed by such ideas, especially with the war escalating.

A couple of hours later, I inadvertently called Mr. John Mai again. He asked, alarmed, where I was and why I hadn't reached the evacuation bus. I told him no one had informed

me. He said if I still wanted to board, I should immediately contact Benjamin, the embassy staffer coordinating the evacuation from Qom.

I called Benjamin at once. He told me to reach the bus terminal—about 7–8 km away—in 10 minutes, tops. I was with my 83-year-old mother and four family friends who decided to come with us. We frantically looked for a large taxi to accommodate six people and all our luggage. A foreign student studying in Qom helped us hail one. In about seven minutes, we were en route to the bus, updating Benjamin constantly.

I told our travel group manager that if I missed the bus or couldn't get a seat, I would return to the hotel. The remaining 85 people in the group looked puzzled by my decision—some even thought it was too risky. I decided to take the plunge regardless.

By 3 p.m., we reached the bus terminal. Benjamin made the bus wait and ensured we were all boarded. There were still about a dozen vacant seats; some people who were supposed to join us had backed out due to the risks. The bus immediately departed for Mashhad.

As we drove, the roads were largely deserted. At several checkpoints, guards stopped us briefly before letting us through, understanding that we were stranded pilgrims. Around 7 p.m., we halted at a highway eatery for dinner. While eating, some fellow travelers noticed an interception of an aerial weapon in the sky.

Just then, I received a call from other group members still in Qom. They too reported seeing aerial interceptions. I urged them to contact Benjamin and board the next evacuation bus if they wanted to leave early. Thankfully, they listened—and the next morning, the remaining 85 members of our group left for Mashhad as well.

As our bus crossed the outskirts of Tehran via a bypass, the city looked bright and glittering, like any major metropolis. We passed beautiful mountains and valleys, finally reaching the Mashhad bus terminal around 7 a.m.

I didn't see any embassy official there at first, so I called Benjamin. He gave me the local contacts, and

within 10 minutes, embassy personnel arrived. They transferred us to a hotel in Mashhad, close to the Turkmenistan border. I assumed we would be evacuated from there.

Concerned about my mother's health, I called Mr. Mai again and asked if I could hire a private taxi to the Turkmenistan border. He advised against it and reassured me that the embassy would take care of us. Over the next three days, they truly did—providing hotels, food, and finally transportation to the airport.

Surprisingly, it turned out to be Mashhad Airport—just 10 minutes away from our hotel. The airport had been made functional solely for evacuation purposes. As we checked in our luggage, I spotted the Indian ambassador, Rudra Gaurav Shresth, calmly sitting in a corner of the departure lounge, overseeing the evacuation. The embassy staff worked tirelessly and efficiently to ensure everything went smoothly. Most of those being evacuated were students.

Before boarding, I called Mr. Mai to thank him and asked if he could prioritize the remaining 85 people from our group. He assured me that everyone in Mashhad would be evacuated soon.

Our flight was scheduled for 11:30 a.m.—Mahan Air, flight number 0071, a private Iranian airline. The flight took off around noon. Soon after, the flight steward began serving us sumptuous Iranian food and drinks. I asked his name in my broken Persian—he said, "Mahmud." I asked if he would return to Mashhad after dropping us in Delhi. He smiled and said, "Of course, I have my children and family there." I asked if he was scared. He just smiled again.

I looked at the navigation display—our flight was now in the middle of Pakistani airspace, approaching the Indian border. My mother was already asleep.

The writer is a former Senior Director BBC World Service Trust, currently working as a Professor of Media at Webster University in Tashkent, he was a part of Indian pilgrims evacuated from Iran.

On This Kashmir Hill, The Past Still Whispers

Up here, the lines between faith, memory, and silence begin to blur. And that's where the real conversation begins.

Shereen Naman

Some climbs don't feel like exercise. They feel like a return. And that's what happened the day I walked up Takht-i-Sulaiman – Shankaracharya Hill, as many call it.

I wasn't looking for a view, but for a moment of stillness in a place that carries more than just reverence.

The hill rises just above Srinagar. From the base, it looks unshakable, like it's always been watching. The city still slept when I began, its noise tucked under the early light. A few stray dogs stretched along the roadside. Dal Lake mirrored the sky.

The steps curved up through pines and rocks, each one carved deeper by time than the last.

They say this hill was once a throne for Solomon. Others say it was a sun temple long before gods had names. For Hindus, it's sacred to Shiva. Adi Shankaracharya climbed it centuries ago, and now the temple bears his name.

But the hill itself holds all these stories without needing to choose.

Halfway up, my legs slowed. I turned around. Below me, Srinagar spread out like a page I'd once written on: a familiar tangle of rooftops, lanes, and memory.

The lake lay still, its surface catching the sun like molten glass. I could make out the old bakery where we bought kulchas as children, and the school where I once recited poems I didn't yet understand.

A few steps higher, the air changed. There's a moment on that climb when the sound of the city fades completely. You hear only birds, leaves, and the soft crunch of your own feet.

That silence doesn't ask for rev-



erence. It offers it.

At the top, the temple stands simple and strong. Black stone, a modest dome, and steps polished smooth by centuries of bare feet.

Up there, a structure has stood through empires and earthquakes.

But unlike the flock of faithful, I was there to seek some meaning. I sat near the edge and looked out. A monk sat nearby, eyes closed. A woman lit a small lamp and placed it on the wall. A group of boys took selfies, smiling at first, then silent as they turned toward the view.

From that height, the valley feels suspended. The houseboats on Dal Lake look like scattered petals. The Zabarwan range stands behind them like a deep breath held for centuries. Up there, things don't feel smaller. They feel sharper. What matters becomes clear.

It's not the height that stays with you. It's the feeling the place gives. It's a soulful serenity that settles inside you and asks nothing.

It's a calm that doesn't depend on belief. It's a presence and just the act of being there, that stays with you.

The wind was picking up when I stood to leave. The sun had begun its slow descent. On the way down, I passed an old man sitting on a stone wall, sipping tea from a metal cup. He looked up.

"You've seen the view now," he said. "Different, isn't it?"

I smiled. "Yes. Everything feels a little more alive."

He nodded. "That's what the hill does. It doesn't change things. It reminds you what's already there."

I kept walking. The city waited below, ready to fold me back into its rhythm.

But something had shifted. I felt lighter, less scattered, as if the climb had returned a piece of me I hadn't realized was missing.

The author is a cultural activist by passion and scribe by profession.

Trek to Labkhal

Far from Wi-Fi and weekend traffic, Labkhal is a place where spring climbs higher, and life runs on cattle bells and stories.

Sahil Manzoor

I first heard of Labkhal from a herdsman near the Shaliganga River, where conversations happen in half-whispers and gestures. He had described it as a place "where cattle rest like kings, and water sings all day."

I held on to that description like a compass. And now, with my backpack light and my boots broken in, I was ready to follow the trail.

On the morning of my journey through Doodhpathri, the air felt cleaner, cooler, like spring had somehow overstayed its welcome. I didn't linger and crossed the Shaliganga on foot, feeling the icy shock of its current even through my shoes.

The river was swollen from the melting snows of early summer, and the woods on the other side smelled of pine resin and damp bark. I turned left, where the forest grew thicker. No signboards pointed the way. Only instinct, memory, and the muffled sound of cattle bells somewhere ahead.

The climb to Labkhal took about an hour and a half. It wasn't steep, but it asked for patience. Wildflowers poked through patches of grass. Sunlight scattered across the forest floor in flickers.

There were moments I felt completely alone, until a goat darted past or a shepherd's call echoed through the trees. In Kashmir, even the silence speaks in layers.

And then, as the trees thinned, I stepped into a vast, green basin. Labkhal.

The meadow stretched like a giant quilt, stitched together with wild grass, hoofprints, and tiny rivulets. Horses grazed near a circle



of huts: mud-and-wood structures known locally as Kothas.

Their slanted rooftops seemed stitched into the landscape, smoke curling from some chimneys, firewood stacked outside others. Chickens scratched the earth. Cow dung patties dried in neat rows. The entire place had the texture of a life lived slowly and with purpose.

The Gujjars and Bakarwals had already set up their seasonal homes here. These nomadic tribes are Kashmir's original mountain dwellers. Every summer, they leave their lower-altitude villages and migrate with their cattle towards the upper meadows. Their journey is long and difficult, but they do it without fuss. With them, they carry generations of wisdom, their kitchens, children, and faith in the hills.

One elder, sitting on a wooden plank outside his Kotha, told me they arrive as soon as the snow melts. "This is our June," he said, "our season of grass and sky."

I noticed how even the children seemed skilled at mountain life: milking cows, chopping kindling, navigat-

ing slopes without shoes. They were completely at ease, even as the cold breeze picked up by evening.

Despite this beauty, it was impossible to ignore what was missing.

The stream water here is fresh, but glacial-cold, too harsh for bathing or washing utensils. There are no toilets. Women and children walk far into the forest when nature calls.

After sunset, the pasture goes dark. There's no light to tend to sick animals or restless infants. And if a sudden storm hits, shelter is minimal and fragile.

Solar panels could light up a hut. Mobile toilets would give these families privacy and hygiene. Warm water, even if boiled over fire, could make daily life a little easier. None of this is extravagant. These are the bare bones of dignity.

Tourism in places like Doodhpathri is growing. People want to feel the grass under their feet and breathe air that hasn't passed through machines. But few step beyond the tourist zones. Fewer still know about places like Labkhal, where the real story of these mountains lives.

If these gypsies were

trained as mountain guides, imagine the possibilities. They know every bend in the trail, every mood of the weather. Their stories are rooted in the land. Eco-tourism isn't about building resorts on meadows. It's about listening to the people who've lived there for centuries and building partnerships that benefit both trekkers and locals.

Before I left, I sat with a family near their hut, drinking tea boiled with salt and butter. Their youngest daughter, barely six, was holding a lamb in her lap and singing something under her breath.

The sun was beginning to dip, and shadows stretched long across the grass. Smoke curled upwards from distant Kothas. It was one of those moments where everything feels still and fleeting, like a painting you walk through and leave behind.

The walk back through the forest felt different. I had seen the meadow, touched its soil, and met its people. And I knew I'd return.

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1900 Govt Schools In J&K Lack Separate Toilets For Girls

8.5% schools without electricity; 50% without benches, desks

Agencies

Srinagar: In Jammu and Kashmir at least 1900 government-run-schools lack basic amenities of separate girls toilets while 8.5 percent schools are without electricity.

Besides, at least 184 'Hanging Schools' upgraded from time to time without creation of staff and are functioning through internal arrangement.

Education Minister Sakina Itoo in a review meeting about the basic amenities such as functional girls toilets, drinking water and power supply was informed that "Still 1900 schools are without separate girls toilets and 8.5 percent schools are without electricity."

The minister directed all the CEOs to ensure the availability of girls toilets within four months. "Besides, all the Hols shall be designated as estate officers of their schools with the responsibility of ensuring the availability of basic facilities and proper maintenance of the institutions."

In the meeting, Itoo while reviewing the availability of

school buildings and basic infrastructure, it was appraised that some schools do not have own school buildings and are functioning in rented buildings.

The minister in this regard directed the both the directors to furnish the proposals for construction of school buildings within available funds to ensure that all schools have their own buildings and sufficient class rooms.

"Besides this, both the directors shall share the list of building less schools and schools with deficient infrastructure with the Project Director, Samagra Shiksha, J&K for their projection in the PAB of Samagra Shiksha," she said.

About the availability of desks, the minister was appraised that only 50 percent desks are available in the schools.

"Both the directors of Jammu and Kashmir divisions shall workout the deficiency with regard to availability of Desks for their respective divisions and shall formulate a District-wise proposal for providing of school desks of appropriate size. Besides, both the directors shall expedite the procurement of school desks for which funds are available with the CEOs so that students may not suffer any more," the minister directed.(KNO)

'Better Late Than Never': CM On LG's Pahalgam Remark

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Tuesday said it was better late than never that Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha admitted intelligence failure for the Pahalgam attack, and called for fixing responsibility for the terror incident in which 26 persons were killed.

Omar was reacting to Sinha's reported remarks in an interview with a leading daily that he takes full responsibility for the Pahalgam attack.

"After 80 days, it is better late than never. We did not say it (earlier) even knowing that such a big attack could not have taken place without (intelligence) failure," Omar told reporters on the sidelines of an event here.

He said now that the failure has been acknowledged, responsibility should be fixed.

"He (Sinha) has perhaps said there was an intelligence failure. If that is so, then who is responsible for that? It cannot happen that 26 people lose their lives and



there is no progress. When we accept there was an intelligence failure, then someone has to be held responsible for that," he added.

On the Monday's events in which police tried to stop leaders from paying tributes at the Naqshband Sahib graveyard to 22 people killed by the Dogra army on July 13, 1931 outside Srinagar's central jail, he said it was unfortunate and should not have happened.

"This should not have happened. It was unfortunate because we were not breaking any law. The restrictions were for (July) 13 and not 14. It should not have happened," he said.

He expressed gratitude to the political leaders including his counterparts from

West Bengal and Tamil Nadu for showing support.

Earlier, while addressing a function at the Bones and Joints Hospital here, the chief minister said his politeness should not be construed as his weakness.

"Some people think that we are weak because we don't indulge in threats and intimidation, but I want to tell them that we are not weak. Don't mistake our politeness for weakness.

"We will not trade the dreams and aspirations of the people of J-K. We are not here due to someone's favour. If anyone has done us a favour, it is the Almighty and the voters of J&K," Omar said.

Omar inaugurated the new block of the hospital at Barzulla.

"Chief Minister inaugurated the new block of Bone & Joint Hospital, Barzulla, a significant step towards strengthening specialized healthcare infrastructure in J&K. The upgraded facilities will greatly enhance patient care and medical services in the region," the CM said in a post on his official X handle.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

J&K Braces

heavy rain at a few locations until 17 July.

He said that fresh spells of rain and thunder-showers are expected at scattered places from 18 to 21 July. Meanwhile, the Srinagar district administration has issued a weather advisory in view of the forecast of heavy rain, thunderstorms, and strong winds till 17 July across parts of Kashmir, including Srinagar.

Officials have advised residents, especially those living near the Jhelum River, its tributaries, and nearby streams, to stay away from water bodies during this period.

The advisory issued by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, Office of the District Magistrate Srinagar, states that in light of the forecast of heavy rain and thunderstorms with strong winds, tourists, Shikara riders, sand extractors, and boat operators are advised to avoid travel on Dal Lake, the Jhelum River, and other water bodies until weather conditions improve.

It has urged people to remain alert and follow safety instructions. In case of emergencies or queries, the public can contact the District Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC), the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS), or the Police Control Room.

The important helpline numbers are: 0194-2457543 / 0194-2483651 / 0194-2457552; 9103998355 / 9103998356 / 9103998357; 112; and 0194-2477567

Local administrations have been put on high alert. Rescue teams, disaster management forces, and emergency response units have been instructed to remain on standby. "We are coordinating with district-level officials to prepare for any eventuality," said an official from the Divisional Commissioner's office.

The heavy rainfall could also trigger landslides and disrupt electricity and communication lines in vulnerable hilly areas.

Residents in flood-prone belts of Anantnag, Kulgam, Kathua, Poonch, Rajouri, and Ramban have been asked to stay alert and report any unusual rise in water levels to the nearest authorities.

Poet Shahid Budgami

for decades and was rendered by some of the most celebrated Kashmiri vocalists. His verses, marked by classical subtlety and emotional depth, continue to echo across generations.

In the 1970s, Budgami ventured into cinema as Assistant Director in the landmark Kashmiri feature film Shair-e-Kashmir Mehjoor, working alongside cinematic legends Balraj Sahni and Prabhat Mukherjee. The film, a biopic of legendary poet Mahjoor, marked a cultural milestone as the second-ever feature in the Kashmiri language.

As a literary historian, he made remarkable contributions through works like "Kashri Marsi Hund Tawareekh", a foundational text chronicling the elegiac tradition of Kashmir (Marsiya). His multiple poetry collections enriched the region's literary archive.

After retiring as Assistant Commissioner Development and District Panchayat Officer, Budgami remained an active figure in the cultural scene, publishing and editing the respected politico-literary journal Budshah. His home became a hub for poets, broadcasters, artists, and cultural thinkers. (JKNS)

Health & Education

sections of the hospital, including four operation theatres, referral rooms, teaching areas, and multiple wards. "Even without a roof for six months, our doctors and administrators resumed surgeries within days. Their dedication is commendable," he added.

Highlighting the vision of Sher-e-Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who had inaugurated the hospital in May 1982, the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah expressed pride in carrying that vision forward. "Today, we are opening a new chapter in the hospital's journey—one that will serve not just Srinagar, but patients from every corner of the Valley, and even from Chenab, Pir Panjal, and Kargil," he said.

Sharing a personal anecdote, CM Omar revealed that he, too, had been a patient at the hospital following a cycling accident five years after its inauguration. "Thanks to the skill of the surgeons here, I can still run 10–12 kilometers at the age of 55. That's the quality of care this hospital

provides," he remarked.

The Chief Minister emphasized the urgent need for staffing in the newly inaugurated facility and directed concerned departments to expedite the creation of required posts. "We didn't cut this ribbon for a photo opportunity. It will only be meaningful when these beds are occupied, OTs are functional, and our faculty is teaching future doctors," he asserted.

As Minister for Housing & Urban Development, Omar Abdullah also announced a special survey to identify water-logging hotspots in Srinagar. He said a comprehensive project will be framed to address the issue, drain by drain, to make Srinagar a true smart city.

He further assured that two to three major infrastructure projects will soon be launched to ease traffic congestion in the city.

The Chief Minister extended his congratulations to the Principal of Government Medical College Srinagar, faculty members, doctors, staff, and administration of Bone and Joint Hospital. "This hospital is not just a building—it's a beacon of hope and healing. Together, we will ensure it continues to serve generations to come," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary reaffirmed that the mission and vision laid down by Sher-e-Kashmir will continue with renewed focus and energy under the able leadership of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah.

Minister for Health & Medical Education, Sakeena Itoo, in her address, said that following the formation of the present government under the leadership of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, the Bone & Joint Hospital project has witnessed significant progress and was successfully completed.

She further emphasized that medical care facilities across Jammu and Kashmir are being continuously upgraded. "From MRI facilities to Cath Labs and other advanced diagnostic and treatment services, our aim is to provide world-class healthcare through our Government Medical Colleges and associated hospitals," she said.

Advisor to the Chief Minister, Nasir Aslam Wani, MLA Lal Chowk Sheikh Ahsan Pardesti, and Secretary Health & Medical Education, Dr. Syed Abid Rashid Shah also addressed the gathering, lauding the efforts of the administration and healthcare workers involved in the project.

The event was attended by several legislators from across Kashmir, Principal GMC Srinagar Dr. Iffat Hassan, Medical Superintendent Bone & Joint Hospital, senior faculty members, doctors and a large number of citizens.

'AI Can't Replace the

like ChatGPT can simulate empathy and generate treatment suggestions, they can never replace the human touch that defines this profession."

In a speech that blended personal reflection with pointed policy observations, Omar recalled nearly pursuing medicine himself before shifting to commerce due to a fear of cadaver dissection. "I lacked the aptitude and courage to become a doctor—but I have always had the utmost respect for those who do," he said.

He urged newly inducted doctors to view their degrees as a starting point, not the destination. "I meet aspirants who want government jobs but are unwilling to serve even a few kilometers from their homes. That mindset needs to change," he said, calling on young doctors to serve underserved and rural communities with the same passion they show in urban hospitals.

The former Chief Minister also reaffirmed his support for healthcare reforms and budget prioritization for health and medical education. He warned, however, that infrastructure alone is not enough. "If we are referring normal deliveries and minor surgeries to tertiary hospitals due to staff shortages in rural areas, we are failing our system," he said.

Omar lauded the leadership of the institution's Principal, Dr. Fazlul Qadir Parray, for earning the trust of students and faculty in a remarkably short time, calling it a "rare achievement."

During the event, graduating students of the 2019 batch were presented with certificates. The families of deceased faculty members were also felicitated in recognition of their invaluable service.

The function was attended by several dignitaries, including Minister for Health & Medical

Education Sakina Itoo, Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani, Secretary H&ME Dr. Syed Abid Rashid Shah, Director SKIMS Soura Prof. Mohammad Ashraf Ganaei, and various former directors, MLAs, faculty members, and parents.

Omar concluded by reminding the audience of the sacred trust placed in doctors. "Patients in our region place their utmost faith in their doctors—almost as much as they place in Allah. We must uphold that trust with integrity and compassion."

7 Killed, 17 Injured

He assured adequate relief measures as per the rules to the families of the deceased and best possible treatment to the injured.

Lt Governor Manoj Sinha, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, and Democratic Progressive Azad Party president Gulam Nabi Azad have condoled the loss of lives in the tragic accident.

In a condolence message, the Lt Governor has said, "Pained by the loss of lives due to tragic road accident in Doda. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families in this hour of grief. Praying for a speedy recovery of the injured."

In a post on X, the office of the Chief Minister said "...the administration has been directed to ensure immediate medical assistance and support to all affected."

The Chief Minister extends heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prays for the speedy recovery of the injured.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh said he spoke to Deputy Commissioner Doda Harvinder Singh upon receiving the information about the accident.

"All possible help and medical aid being provided. DC is personally supervising the entire exercise and giving me regular updates. Any further assistance, as required, will also be provided," Singh said in a post on X. He expressed condolences to the families of the deceased.

Meanwhile, three other road accidents in Doda and Ramban districts claimed one life and left four others injured on Tuesday.

One person was killed when his vehicle collided with another vehicle inside a tunnel in Banihal along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway in Ramban district, the officials said.

A couple was injured when a private SUV turned turtle at Bhagwa village of Doda, while two persons were injured when a bus carrying Amarnath pilgrims hit an iron railing inside Kela Morh tunnel in Ramban, the officials said.

3 Dead In National

were critically injured after an Alto car collided with a truck near Dangerpora Padgampora area of Awantipora on Tuesday evening.

The victims, all residents of Kulgam district, were travelling in the Alto when the accident occurred.

Rouf Gull, son of Gul Mohammad Lone from Dardgund, died on the spot. Abdul Rashid Sheikh, son of Gulham Hassan Sheikh from Devsar, was declared dead on arrival at SMHS Hospital in Srinagar.

The injured have been identified as Showkat Ahmad Lone from Dardgund, who is undergoing treatment, and Firdousa, wife of Aijaz Ahmad Lone from Devsar, who remains in critical condition at SMHS Hospital.

In Banihal, one person died and three others were injured when a car collided with a crane, hydra working inside the Navyug Tunnel.

Officials said the injured were rushed to a nearby hospital, where one critically injured person succumbed to his injuries.

The deceased was identified as Tariq Ahmad, son of Abdul Aziz Wani of Banihal, an employee of the Health Department.

The remaining two injured persons are undergoing treatment at GMC Anantnag.

In Ramban, three Amarnath yatriss were injured after a bus, part of the Baltal down convoy, met with an accident inside Tunnel T-1 at Kela Morh in Ramban district.

The incident occurred as the convoy was passing through the tunnel. The injured were immediately taken to District Hospital Ramban for treatment.

Meanwhile, police have taken cognizance of all the three accidents.(KNO)

Govt To Discuss

candidates, who often join their ranks after

winning.

The Jammu and Kashmir State Election Commission has already begun the groundwork.

A formal election notification is expected, depending on the overall security situation.

According to Rule 7 of the J&K Panchayati Raj Rules, 1996, the government must consult the Election Authority before announcing Panchayat polls. Similarly, under Rule 3 of the J&K Municipal Corporation and Municipal (Elections) Rules, 2003, the State Election Commission must prepare electoral rolls before holding ULB elections once it receives instructions from the government.

Thousands of security personnel are currently deployed for the smooth conduct of the Amarnath Yatra, making it difficult to hold elections during this period. Once the Yatra concludes, these forces can be redeployed for election duties.

Political parties and civil society groups across the Union Territory have repeatedly urged the government to hold elections, stating that the absence of elected bodies has slowed down development works and weakened grievance redressal systems. Reports from various districts suggest that essential services and public works have suffered in the absence of elected Panchayats and municipal bodies.

Experts believe that the return of elected representatives will help improve delivery of government schemes related to sanitation, housing, rural employment, and water supply. It will also help restore local accountability and increase citizen participation in development planning.

Amarnath Yatra

the sacred shrine.

Fresh batches of pilgrims continue to depart daily from the Jammu base camp. On Tuesday, 6,388 yatriss left for the Kashmir Valley in the 14th batch—2,501 via the Baltal route and 3,887 through the traditional Pahalgam axis. The convoy comprised 248 vehicles, including 129 buses and 73 light motor vehicles.

Among the batch were 4,886 males, 1,300 females, 15 children, 158 sadhus, and 21 sadhvis.

Authorities said that despite intermittent rainfall and cloudy conditions, the yatra continues to proceed peacefully. Medical facilities, security arrangements, and traffic regulation have all been intensified along the twin routes.

15-Year Footfall Tops 51 Lakh

Over the past 15 years, the Amarnath Yatra has attracted more than 51 lakh pilgrims, according to official data reviewed by KNO. The pilgrimage saw a major spike in participation in 2011 and 2012 with over 6 lakh devotees each year. However, turnout dropped in the following years due to weather, unrest, and logistical hurdles, reaching a low of 2.21 lakh in 2016.

After a complete suspension during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the Yatra resumed in 2022 with a modest count of 3.04 lakh. In 2023, the number rose to 4.5 lakh, and 2024 recorded a decade-high of 5 lakh pilgrims—marking the highest turnout since 2012.

The duration of the pilgrimage has also varied over the years—from 43 days in 2022 to 62 days in 2023, and 52 days this year. The upward trend in participation has been attributed to improved facilities, stronger security protocols, and greater outreach to both domestic and international pilgrims.

Officials say that if the current pace continues, this year's yatra may surpass last year's total. The pilgrimage is scheduled to conclude on August 19, coinciding with the Raksha Bandhan festival.

Police Mock Drills

drills were conducted without causing inconvenience to the yatriss or the general public, and the cooperation of citizens and pilgrims was appreciated.

To ensure the safety and security of pilgrims undertaking the yatra, the police conducted mock drills along the designated yatra routes in several districts of the Kashmir valley, including Srinagar, Ganderbal, Budgam, Pulwama and Kulgam, the police spokesmen said.

He said the exercises were carried out at strategically significant points to assess the alertness, preparedness and coordination among different security agencies deployed for yatra duties.

The mock drills simulated scenarios of stand-off fire, attempted fidayeen attack, IED detection, convoy stoppage, emergency evacuation, crowd

HDFC Bank Positioned for Accelerated Growth After Merger Milestone: CEO Sashidhar

Srinagar: HDFC Bank Limited is entering a phase of accelerated growth, having completed its first full financial year post the landmark merger with HDFC Ltd., according to Sashidhar Jagdishan, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer. In his annual address to stakeholders, published in the bank's Integrated Annual Report for FY 2024–25, Jagdishan reflected on a year of consolidation, resilience, and strategic recalibration amid a turbulent global backdrop.

"FY25 has been a year of progress and consolidation for the merged entity, with the integration phase well behind us. We are now poised for the next phase of growth," said Jagdishan, noting the bank's success in navigating global headwinds, rising inflation, and geopolitical uncertainties.

HDFC Bank reported a Net Profit of Rs 67,347.4 crore, marking a 10.7% growth, while Net Interest Income rose by 13% to Rs 1,22,670.1 crore. The bank's Net Interest Margin stood at 3.48%, and Gross NPAs remained at a healthy 1.33%, underscoring strong asset quality. The total balance sheet

grew by over 8% to Rs 39.1 lakh crore, while deposits surged by 14.1%—outpacing system-wide trends.

Jagdishan highlighted that the bank's credit-to-deposit ratio was brought down to 96% from 110% at the time of the merger. "We consciously calibrated loan growth in FY25 to reposition the balance sheet. Our deposits grew 2.5 times faster than loans, helping us significantly reduce high-cost borrowings," he stated.

Technology continues to be a cornerstone of the bank's strategy. Jagdishan spoke extensively about the "Hollow the Core" programme and other digital initiatives that are transforming HDFC Bank into a future-ready institution. With a focus on AI, customer experience, and cyber resilience, he revealed that the bank has already implemented over 15 GenAI-based projects aimed at boosting productivity and improving service delivery.

"We are not just exploring GenAI—we are deploying it meaningfully to solve real business problems and to enhance customer and employee experience," he said.

management and disaster scenarios due to earthquake, landslides and the likes, the spokesman said.

Senior police officers supervised these mock drills, ensuring that the standard operating procedures (SOPs) were followed and refined where necessary, he said.

Special focus was laid on critical areas prone to congestion or high footfall to test the efficiency of response teams and quick reaction units, he added. (PTI)

Shukla's Feat Has

another milestone towards India's own human space flight mission - Gaganyaan.

The Dragon 'Grace' spacecraft carrying Shukla and three others made a splashdown off San Diego coast in southern California on Tuesday, capping a 22.5-hour journey from space.

Delhi HC Rejects

against the appellant (Ahenger) that he was closely associated with slain terrorist Mehran Yaseen Shalla or that he has actively participated in the terrorist activities himself," the July 7 order said.

The court, as a result, dismissed his appeal against a trial court September 2024 order denying him bail in the case.

Ahenger was arrested on December 30, 2021.

The NIA alleged in the backdrop of abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, conspiracies were being hatched by various terrorist organisations like Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and TRF for targeted attacks on minorities, security forces, political leaders and other important persons.

Some of these conspiracies were allegedly planned and have also been executed to create unrest, instability and fear in the region of Kashmir and other parts of the country, it added.

Crucially, Ahenger was alleged to be associated with one Mehran Yaseen Shalla, who was linked to TRF/LeT.

Shalla along with two other persons was killed in an encounter on November 24, 2021, the NIA said.

Under Shalla's influence, the agency said, Ahenger was digitally active on various social media platforms, on which radical content was shared.

He was alleged to have also created certain groups on social media like Ansar Gazwat-Ul-Hind and Shaikoo Naikoo and created multiple gmail IDs though which radical views were expressed, thereby motivating and radicalising vulnerable youth to join terrorist groups like TRF.

For this purpose, he used social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram and Twitter, the NIA said.

Seeking bail, his counsel argued that the trial court failed to appreciate there was no material on record indicating his association with TRF and therefore UAPA was not attracted against him.

The NIA opposed the plea saying the material on record showed the active involvement of the accused in propagating radical information on social media, with the intent of compromising the safety and security of the nation.

The bench observed Ahenger abetted and incited the commission of terrorist act in the country which is punishable under Section 18 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

"The material on record also indicates that the messages that have been shared by the appellant have the tendency to incite people to join terrorist activities. The appellant has also used images, videos, etc., of slain Mehran Yaseen Shalla for glorifying the terrorist activities and the appellant has also been propagating radical ideology of TRF to create unrest within the country," the court said.

Ahenger was also observed to have disseminated information for inciting local youths to participate in activities of terrorism sufficient to bring him in the ambit of Section 18 of UAPA, sufficient to reject his bail plea under law.

Five Years, No

stretch of the river.

With the monsoon season now underway and thousands still haunted by the trauma of the 2014 floods, experts and citizens alike are worried. The Valley's key flood management infrastructure remains underprepared, leaving it dangerously exposed to yet another disaster. (inputs from KNO)

From Chalk to Code: Kashmir College Embraces AI, Nano, and More

As Kashmir gears up for a research-intensive fourth year under the new education policy, a week-long development program at GCW M.A. Road brings together faculty, policymakers, and innovation in science.

KO Web Desk

SRINAGAR: Inside the sunlit auditorium of Government College for Women, M.A. Road, Srinagar, more than a hundred faculty members gathered Tuesday morning for the launch of a week-long Faculty Development Programme (FDP) that aims to steer science education in Kashmir toward research, relevance, and reform.

The initiative, titled “Emerging Research Trends in Science,” comes at a turning point for higher education in the region.

Beginning this academic session, colleges across Jammu and Kashmir will implement the fourth year of undergraduate studies under India's National Education Policy (NEP-2020).

The New Year brings a research vertical, an unfamiliar terrain for many faculty members and institutions.

“This is not just about extra credits,” said Prof. (Dr.) Sheikh Ajaz Bashir, Director Colleges, addressing the gathering as chief guest. “It’s about reshaping how we engage with our students. The job isn’t to mark attendance and leave. The job is to mentor, to help them ask questions that matter.”

For decades, science education in Kashmir colleges has relied on traditional lecture models. Now, with interdisciplinary research fields like artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and sustainability moving fast, the gap between classrooms and scientific relevance is widening.

The FDP at M.A. Road attempts to bridge it.

“We are not merely preparing for a new academic year,” said Prof. Seema Naz, Nodal Principal for Kashmir colleges and Dean of Academic Affairs at Cluster University Srinagar. “We are preparing for a future where our students become contributors, not just consumers of knowledge. And for that, our teachers need to lead the way.”

This year, over 54,000 students have registered for college admissions across Jammu and Kashmir, a record that reflects both growing demand and new challenges.

“If we guide them well,” said Prof. Ajaz, “they can be the force that changes our society.”

At the core of this transition is the shift from textbook learning to inquiry-based exploration.

Prof. Yasmeen Farooq, Principal of GCW M.A. Road, said that emerging technologies and cross-disciplinary approaches are changing how research happens.

“It’s moving at a pace we can’t ignore,” she said. “Our faculty needs to stay ahead of the curve for their students.”

The college has long been one of Kashmir’s leading women’s institutions. With this new programme, it signals its intent to be more than a finishing school for degrees. It wants to be a launchpad for research.

Course Coordinator Prof. Majida Maqbool, who heads the Chemistry Department, introduced the themes of the week: Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, Advances in Life Sciences, Nanotechnology, Environmental Research, and more.

Each day will include two expert-led sessions and a panel discussion to reflect on the ideas. “Science is no longer confined to labs. It’s out in the world, predicting floods, designing new medicines, securing digital systems,” Prof. Majida said. “If our students are going to be part of that world, this is where it starts.”

Several moments during the event underscored how innovation is already blooming in Kashmir’s college corridors.

Dr. Momina Nazir from the Chemistry Department was recognized for earning a patent on a nano-based fungicidal compound. So was Dr. Parsa Sarosh from Electronics, who received a patent for a headlight system that adapts to real-time driving conditions.

Their achievements, once rare in Kashmir’s college circles, are now becoming reference points for what’s possible.

A coffee-table book chronicling the journey of the college was unveiled, alongside a newly published title on Machine Learning and Cybersecurity by Prof. Raashid Ashraf Malik and Dr. Asif Iqbal Kawoosa from the Computer Sciences department. “The point is not just to celebrate milestones,” said Prof. Seema. “It’s to tell every teacher and student that research belongs here. In Kashmir. In our classrooms.”

With NEP’s fourth year looming, much remains to be figured out: labs, mentorship models, evaluation criteria.

Yet, for the faculty members who turned up at the FDP, the spirit was less about confusion and more about opportunity.

“There’s nervousness, yes,” said a young assistant professor in the crowd. “But there’s also a sense that something bigger is being built. We’re finally talking about research as part of teaching, not something you do on the side.”

MMU Forms Panel To Address Sectarian Provocations

Meeting Reaffirms Sanctity of Sahaba and Ahl al-Bayt



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Muttahida Majlis-e-Ulama (MMU), the apex body representing major Sunni and Shia religious organisations in Jammu and Kashmir, convened a crucial meeting in Srinagar on Tuesday to address growing concerns over sectarian tensions in the wake of recent controversial remarks and the subsequent public outcry.

The meeting, according to an MMU statement, was called to discuss the ‘provocative and widely condemned’ remarks made by senior Peoples Conference leader Imran Raza Ansari, their reverberations across the Valley, and the heated reaction they provoked, particularly on social media platforms.

The gathering was attended by prominent religious leaders including Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Grand Mufti Nasir-ul-Islam, Agha Syed Hassan Al-Moosvi, Maulana Masroor Abbas Ansari, Agha Syed Mohammad Hadi, Mufti Nazir Ahmad Qasmi, Maulana Showkat Hussain Keng, Maulana Rahmatullah Qasimi and Mufti Mohammad Yaqoob Baba.

In a unanimous resolution, the MMU reaffirmed that the sanctity and honour of the Sahaba (the revered Companions) and the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet’s noble family) are core tenets of Islamic faith, deeply revered by all Muslims.

These personalities, the statement noted, are not only religious figures but pillars of Islamic identity, and any disrespect or provocative speech against them—regardless of source—will not be tolerated.

Acknowledging the diversity of theological opinions within the Muslim Ummah, the MMU emphasised that such differences must never be exploited to sow division or disrespect. MMU highlighted that the unity of Muslims in Kashmir, which is rooted in centuries of peaceful coexistence, shared heritage, and mutual respect, is a religious and moral obligation that must be preserved at all costs.

The MMU also praised the principled stance of senior Shia scholars — Agha Syed Hassan Al-Moosvi, Maulana Masroor Abbas Ansari, and Agha Syed Mohammad Hadi — who made it unequivocally clear that Mr. Imran Raza Ansari’s remarks represent his personal opinion and do not reflect the beliefs or teachings of the Shia school of thought. They cited the clear guidance of eminent Shia Maraji (religious au-

Shia Leaders Reject Grand Mufti’s Statement

SRINAGAR: Prominent Shia religious leaders in Kashmir have strongly rejected the statement made by Grand Mufti Nasir-ul-Islam during a press conference on Tuesday, calling it unilateral and lacking consensus.

In a joint rebuttal, Agha Syed Hassan Al-Moosvi, Agha Syed Mohammad Hadi Al-Moosvi, and Maulana Masroor Abbas Ansari criticized the Grand Mufti for deviating from the collective stance agreed upon during a meeting of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Ulema (MMU) held at Mirwaiz Manzil, Nigeen.

The Shia clerics stated that the Grand Mufti, being in a responsible religious position, should have adhered to the joint resolution passed at the council meeting — a resolution that was later released as an official statement. According to them, the Mufti’s recent remarks were not only lacking in mutual agreement but also risked sowing discord and unrest within the broader Muslim community.

“We neither endorse nor accept this one-sided and fabricated statement. Rather, we strongly reject it,” the statement by the Shia scholars read. They reaffirmed their commitment to the shared stance

on respecting religious sanctities, including those of both Shia and Sunni traditions, the Ahl al-Bayt, and the esteemed companions of the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh).

The leaders emphasized that during the earlier council meeting, it was unanimously agreed that while theological and jurisprudential diversity exists within the Muslim Ummah, such differences should never lead to division or disrespect. They cited edicts from top Shia religious authorities, including Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei and Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Sistani, who have explicitly prohibited any derogatory speech against Sunni sacred figures, especially the Rightly Guided Caliphs.

They also expressed concern over the Grand Mufti’s alleged endorsement of a historically controversial figure, stating they do not support such claims. The scholars concluded by underlining the importance of centuries-old inter-sect harmony in Kashmir, stating that promoting mutual respect and unity remains a shared religious and moral duty.

“Any attempt to harm this unity will be firmly resisted,” the statement affirmed.

Instead, they were encouraged to promote messages of unity, mutual respect, and the shared values of Islam.

The body reiterated that while each sect or maslak is free to practice its beliefs and rituals within its own traditions, criticism or condemnation of others is strictly prohibited. Violation of this principle, the MMU warned, will result in ‘social and religious boycotts’, as preserving the unity and honour of the Muslim community is a ‘sacred and non-negotiable duty’.

To further consolidate these decisions and ensure their consistent implementation, a broader session of all MMU constituent bodies will be convened in the coming days. This session aims to reinforce the directives across the religious and social landscape of Kashmir.

MMU also called upon all scholars, clerics, and the wider Muslim community in Kashmir to act with wisdom, restraint, and a deep sense of collective responsibility. It declared the honour of the Sahaba and the Ahl al-Bayt as a red line, and reaffirmed that the unity of the Ummah is a sacred trust that all must strive to uphold.

Mock Drill Conducted For SANJY-2025

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: In yet another assertive move to ensure robust emergency preparedness during the upcoming Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra (SANJY) 2025, Srinagar Police Tuesday conducted a large-scale Mock Drill in collaboration with multiple key agencies at various strategic locations along the Yatra route in the district.

The exercise was aimed to evaluate operational readiness, inter-agency coordination, and communication mechanisms in the event of critical incidents, a police spokesman said in a statement issued to Kashmir Observer.

The main objectives of the Mock Drill were to assess emergency response procedures and protocols, to evaluate coordination among agencies including J&K Police, Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), Fire and Emergency Services, Ambulance Services,

Health Department, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), the Traffic Department and Civil Administration, to test the effectiveness of communication systems and rescue operations and to ensure real-time response monitoring and procedural adherence.

“Before the drill commenced, all the participating agencies were thoroughly briefed on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) by Zonal and Sector Officers of J&K Police. Emphasis was laid on real-time monitoring of response times, communication flow, and coordinated action.”

In anticipation of any exigency, arrangements for food, shelter, and medical assistance have been streamlined through coordinated efforts by the CAPD, Revenue, and Health Departments, under the unified command of the Joint Police Control Room (Joint-PCR), the statement added.

The drill was conducted across multiple strategic locations, simulating various emergency scenarios like Road Traffic Accidents, Fidayeen attack, Law & Order Scenarios etc.

Following the exercise, detailed debriefing sessions were held with all stakeholders to identify operational gaps and refine the existing Emergency Response Plan. The drill not only demonstrated the strengths of emergency response framework of the District but also provided actionable insights into areas requiring improvement.

Exercises of this nature are crucial to safeguarding lives, strengthening institutional resilience, and ensuring a safe and secure pilgrimage for all.

Meanwhile, Srinagar Police, along with its partner agencies, reaffirm their unwavering commitment to public safety and effective disaster management response mechanisms for one and all.

Kashmir’s Startup Scene Just Got A Major Boost

Greenovator Incubation Foundation and Startup Kashmir sign MoU to bring structured innovation and entrepreneurship programs to Jammu and Kashmir’s underserved youth.

KO Web Desk

SRINAGAR: In an effort to bring more structure to Jammu and Kashmir’s patchy startup ecosystem, a Srinagar-based academic incubator has signed a formal partnership with a private consultancy to deliver innovation programs across the region.

The Greenovator Incubation Foundation, or GIF, based at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Srinagar, has entered into a one-year agreement with Startup Kashmir Consultancy Pvt. Ltd., a local firm supporting early-stage businesses.

The memorandum of understanding, signed this week, will allow the two organizations to jointly run entrepreneurship workshops, campus-based startup bootcamps, and industry-facing innovation events aimed at college students and first-time entrepreneurs.

Executives involved in the partnership say the goal is to shift the region’s startup conversation from inspiration to implementation.

“Young people here are ready,” said Prof. M.F. Wani, Director of GIF and Head of Mechanical Engineering at NIT Srinagar. “They just need a working system that connects their ideas to real-world markets.”

Under the agreement, Startup Kashmir will support GIF in implementing key programs across educational institutions and public platforms. These include identifying high-potential startups, organizing regional ideathons and industrial challenges, and producing a startup-focused publication to document the emerging ecosystem.

The firm will also help promote GIF’s initiatives both online and offline, according to officials.

The agreement comes at a time when the valley is showing early signs of startup interest but lacks the institutional backbone found in India’s larger innovation hubs like Bengaluru, Pune, or Hyderabad.

“Most startups here fail in the execution phase,” said Shahid Haider Ansari, Founder and CEO of Startup Kashmir. “We’re addressing that by bringing operational support, mentorship access, and local partnerships into one place.”

Mr. Ansari signed the MoU alongside Shahid Abbas Mir, CEO of GIF, and a team of coordinators and administrators from both sides.

Prof. Rakesh Sehgal, former Director of NIT Srinagar and currently at NIT Hamirpur, joined the proceedings online and voiced support for the initiative.

Despite efforts by government agencies to promote entrepreneurship in Jammu and Kashmir, data from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) shows the region has only around 570 reg-

istered startups.

Outside the urban centers of Srinagar and Jammu, access to venture support, incubation, and even basic awareness remains limited.

GIF and Startup Kashmir say the new collaboration will expand outreach to underserved areas through a mix of campus programs, rural campaigns, and digital mentorship.

“This partnership is not about events for the sake of publicity,” said Shahid Abbas Mir, CEO of GIF. “We want to create durable systems that can support both tech-driven startups and local innovations in agriculture, climate, manufacturing, and community health.”

The initiative is one of the few private-academic collaborations in the Union Territory’s nascent startup space. Previous efforts have largely remained siloed within government departments or failed to sustain momentum after their launch.

Prof. Wani believes the difference this time lies in the operational clarity and shared accountability between the two institutions. “We’ve tried pilots before,” he said. “Now we have a model with clearly defined roles, checkpoints, and follow-through.”

Prof. Sehgal, who helped launch GIF during his tenure at NIT Srinagar, said during the on-line session that Kashmir’s economic recovery depends on such forward-facing partnerships. “We’ve seen years of brain drain. This is a way to reverse that by creating opportunities at home.”

While the program will initially be centered around institutional campuses, there are plans to expand to polytechnic colleges, ITIs, and high schools. Officials say rural entrepreneurship, often overlooked in mainstream startup conversations, will also be part of the focus.

The pact comes amid broader efforts by the government of India to invest in infrastructure and employment in Jammu and Kashmir.

Yet despite these efforts, many young Kashmiris continue to face limited job prospects. A report released earlier this year by CMIE showed the region’s youth unemployment rate hovering above 20%, well above the national average. That’s where the organizers see a window for entrepreneurship.

“There’s no shortage of ambition here,” said Shahid Ansari. “What’s missing is the bridge between intention and execution. With this MoU, we’re building that bridge.”

The partnership may not solve every structural gap in Kashmir’s economy, but organizers say it could set a working precedent for how local institutions can co-create value.

“This is a long game,” said Shahid Abbas Mir. “And we’re finally taking the first move seriously.”

Mallabuchan Villagers File Formal Complaint With ACB Over JJM Scam

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The residents of Mallabuchan village, Tehsil Patan, Block Sherabad Khore, District Baramulla, have submitted a detailed formal complaint to the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on 14 July 2025, alleging corruption, misuse of public funds, and procedural fraud in the implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in their area.

The complaint—filed through Er. Irfan Banka, Chairman of the J&K RTI Foundation—presents documentary evidence and RTI replies showing that:

The Village Action Plan (VAP) and Pani Samitis were falsely claimed to have been approved by the Gram Sabha.

The village was illegally bifurcated between two districts for water supply: Hurrah Mohalla was connected to WSS Narabal Magam (Budgam) while Sofi Mohalla was forcefully linked to WSS Ahmadpora (Baramulla) without consent or planning by the Gram Sabha.

Water quality standards as per IS 10500:2012 were ignored in Sofi Mohalla, where water is highly turbid and undrinkable, violating public health and JJM norms.

No Implementation Support

Agencies (ISAs), community mobilization, or field water testing have taken place—despite huge sums shown to be spent under JJM support activities.

Dozens of households have illegally received dual connections from multiple schemes, while half the village remains excluded.

In response, the Gram Sabha has declared the Ahmadpora pipeline “dead” and symbolically disconnected it during a public event, citing years of deception and neglect.

A copy of the complaint has been submitted to the Mission Director of Jal Jeevan Mission J&K, and the Additional Chief Secretary, Jal Shakti Department, requesting immediate action. The villagers have announced that they will not be held liable for any damage to non-functional infrastructure declared unusable by the community.

The J&K RTI Foundation demands a time-bound, transparent investigation into the role of departmental officials, implementing agencies, and elected panchayat representatives in the diversion of funds, fabrication of documents, and denial of basic drinking water rights to citizens.

CS To Make Cybersecurity Audits Of Websites Time-Bound



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo on Tuesday chaired a crucial meeting to thoroughly review cyber security measures safeguarding government websites and critical infrastructure across Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting besides the Secretary IT was attended by all Administrative Secretaries of various departments, and key officers from NIC, JaKeGA, and the IT Department.

In this meeting the Chief Secretary underscored the urgent need for fixing clear timelines for completing website security audits, stressing that prolonged website downtime causes significant inconvenience to the public. He emphasized that all exercises must be time-bound, with a focus on reviving all important websites at the earliest.

Furthermore, he directed the immediate decommissioning of all redundant and unused websites, stating they serve no purpose and pose unnecessary security risks.

To bolster internal capabilities, the Chief Secretary advo-

cated for capacity building of all departmental Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) and Information Security Officers (ISOs). This initiative aims to empower them to conduct future website audits independently, thereby mitigating potential security compromises.

He also mandated the installation of necessary security software on all devices used for official work and strictly directed the discontinuation of private email IDs for official communications, citing the inherent security risks to official data and devices.

Addressing infrastructure needs, the Chief Secretary took note of the requirement for augmenting the State Data Centre (SDC) in Jammu. He directed the IT Department to promptly initiate the process using available funds, assuring that additional requisite funding would be provided as the work progresses.

During the meeting, Administrative Secretaries also contributed valuable suggestions to enhance the overall security of IT assets and prevent data breaches.

King Charles Asks Gill About Siraj's 'Unfortunate' Dismissal In 3rd Test

Press Trust of India

LONDON: King Charles III felt Mohammed Siraj's dismissal was an "unfortunate one" and couldn't help but ask Shubman Gill about it as he welcomed India's men's and women's cricket teams in the gardens of Clarence House here on Tuesday.

The 76-year-old British monarch spent a considerable time discussing cricket with Indian cricketers, a meeting that men's team skipper Gill termed as "amazing" during his chat with the media.

Indian High Commissioner to the UK Vikram Doraiswami and Deputy High Commissioner Sujit Ghosh along with Congress Rajya Sabha MP and BCCI vice-president Rajiv Shukla and secretary Devajit Saikia were also present.

"It was amazing. I think he (King Charles) is very kind and generous... we had some really good conversations," said Gill after the



audience.

On Monday, India lost a tantalisingly close Test by 22 runs with last batter Mohammed Siraj getting bowled off England off-spinner Shoaib Bashir's delivery. The ball trickled back to clip the bats after Siraj played a defensive stroke.

"He (The King) did tell us that the way our last batsman got out was quite unfortunate, the ball rolling on to the stumps. And he was just asking us, 'how did you feel after that?' And we told him it was an unfortunate match for us... but hopefully, we'll have better luck in both the next games," the young Indian skipper said.

Gill spoke about the tremendous support that his team always gets from the Indian diaspora whenever it plays in the United Kingdom.

He added: "I think everywhere

we go, we are very lucky and fortunate that we always get good support; and it's been no different here. Although I think the first couple of days, there were more England supporters at the Lord's but I think in the last three days we got some really good support for us."

The quality of cricket in the first three Tests have raised the interest level, feels Gill.

"I think the way both the teams played, they showed a lot of passion, and we played with a lot of pride. We gave out everything mentally and physically. And at the end of the day, when you play a Test match that goes on for five days into the last session, and you lose by 20 (22) runs, the winner would definitely be cricket."

The special cricket event was hosted by the British Asian Trust, a charity founded by King Charles III to tackle poverty, inequality and injustice in South Asia.

Provincial Handball Competition Begins In Bandipora

A week-long Inter-District Provincial Level Handball competition for boys of all age groups formally commenced on Tuesday at S.K. Stadium Bandipora.

The event was inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner Manzoor Ahmad Qadri, who was the chief guest on the occasion.

Organised by Department of Youth Services and Sports Bandipora, the competition will end on July 20 and features teams from across various districts of Kashmir. Participants will compete in three age categories: U-14, U-17 and U-19.

Speaking at the inaugural function, DC lauded the efforts of the department for providing such platforms for young athletes to display their potential. He emphasized the importance of sports in shaping the overall personality and career of the youth.

On the occasion, District Youth Services and Sports Officer (DYSSO) said that the event is expected to witness a large turnout of players, officials and sports enthusiasts throughout the week. (Observer News Service)

WI Invites Lloyd, Richards, Lara To Help Caribbean Cricket

The Cricket West Indies on Tuesday invited former greats of the game Clive Lloyd, Vivian Richards and Brian Lara to strengthen discussions on how to revive cricket in the Caribbean, following the team's abject surrender in a 0-3 Test series whitewash at home against Australia.

Australia won the inconsequential third Test by 176 runs, riding on Mitchell Starc's sensational 6/9 and Scott Boland's hat-trick to dismiss the West Indies for 27 -- the second-lowest total ever in Test cricket. They fell just one run short of the all-time lowest score due to a misfield.

Australia needed only 14.3 overs to bowl out the hosts in the first day-night Test at Sabina Park. "To strengthen the discussions, I have extended invitations to three of our greatest batsmen ever: Sir Clive Lloyd, Sir Vivian Richards, and Brian Lara," president of CWI, Kishore Shallow said in a statement.

"They will join past greats Dr Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Dr The Most Honourable Desmond Haynes, Ian Bradshaw, who already serve on the committee." (PTI)

KASHMIR SUPER LEAGUE

Aqua Kashmir Avengers Defeat New JK United 2-1 At TRC

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The sixth match of the ongoing Kashmir Super League 2025, powered by Athwas Hyundai and supported by J&K Sports Council, featured an exciting showdown between Aqua Kashmir Avengers FC and New JK United FC. The closely contested match ended with a 2-1 victory in favour of Aqua Kashmir Avengers FC.

Both teams displayed exceptional skill and sportsmanship on the field. However, it was Aqua Kashmir Avengers FC who maintained their composure and capitalized on key moments to secure the win.

Man of the Match: Adnan Ayub (Aqua Kashmir Avengers FC)

Game Changer of the Match: Owais Bashir (Aqua Kashmir Avengers FC)

Golden Moments Award:



Musa Qureshi (Aqua Kashmir Avengers FC)

The match began with a formal introduction ceremony, graced by Ahsan Pardesi, MLA Amira Kadal, who appreciated the platform the league provides to young local talent and emphasized the importance of sports in building a vibrant and positive youth culture.

The felicitation ceremony was attended by

Happy To Silence The Keyboard Warriors: Jofra Archer

Press Trust of India

LONDON: England pacer Jofra Archer is glad to have silenced the "keyboard warriors" who went after him during his long rehabilitation from multiple injury setbacks.

Archer, featuring in his first Test since 2021, sparked India's collapse in the second innings of the third Test at Lord's. He dismissed opener Yashasvi Jaiswal for a duck before claiming the scalps of Rishabh Pant and Washington Sundar to fashion England's 22-run win here on Monday.

The 30-year-old has long been troubled by elbow and back injuries, and has played only white-ball cricket for England since 2021.

"I guess I was a little bit emotional (after England's win). It was a long journey. I can't tell you the amount of keyboard warriors there have been for the last three or four years," Archer told 'Sky



Sports' after playing a pivotal role in helping England take a 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

"It (comeback) was a long time coming, a lot of rehab, a lot of training but it's moments like this that make it all worth it. The whole crowd gave me a huge lift," he added.

Archer, incidentally, shone on a day when exactly six years ago he bowled a Super Over in the World Cup final against New Zealand at the same venue as England lifted the trophy on boundary count.

"The hardest part has been playing cricket for the last year and a half and still having the training wheels on talking about workloads -- bowl today, don't bowl tomorrow.

"Sometimes you think you are ready but you never know until you do it. The safer way is the best way so I am not too fussed and this is surely worth the wait," said Archer, who sent Pant's off-stump cart-wheeling early on the final day, a setback India struggled to recover from.

Cricket At LA Olympics To Begin On July 12, 2028

Cricket's much-hyped return to the Olympics at LA Games will take shape at the Fairgrounds Stadium in the city of Pomona -- about 50km from Los Angeles -- from July 12 with the medal matches scheduled on July 20 and 29, 2028. A total of six teams each in men's and women's sections and 180 players will compete in the T20 format in the quadrennial showpiece, which hosted cricket for the first and only time in 1900.

There are no matches scheduled on July 14 and 21 and most of the matchdays will be double headers, according to the competition schedule released by the organisers. (PTI)

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