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DRY SKIES, EMPTY GAUGES

J&K Winter Rainfall Slumps Sharply



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing an exceptionally dry winter, with data showing one of the sharpest seasonal rainfall deficits in recent years. According to independent weatherman Faizan Aif, between November 1, 2025 and January 17, 2026, the region recorded an overall rainfall deficit of 85 percent, receiving

only 20.6 mm of precipitation against a normal of 139.0 mm. In the Kashmir Valley, all districts reported severe to extremely severe rainfall deficits during the period. Srinagar recorded 22.4 mm of rainfall against a normal of 115.4 mm, reflecting an 81 percent shortfall. Budgam received 16.4 mm, nearly 80 percent below normal, while Ganderbal recorded 29.3 mm against a normal of 127.9 mm. | [More On P6](#)

History Remembers Those Who Dared To Challenge Limits: LG

Urges Youth to Lead J&K's Journey Towards Viksit Bharat

Observer News Service

JAMMU: "History remembers those who dared to challenge limits, conquered fear, and turned the impossible into reality," Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said on Sunday while addressing the youth at the 7th Annual Day Celebration of the Guidance and Career Counselling Cell for Youth Development (GCC) at Gurha Slathia in Samba. Urging young people to dream big and aim high, the Lieutenant Governor said the youth must pursue their goals with courage, dedication, and unshakable resolve to build a brighter future for Jammu



and Kashmir. "Your future is waiting for you. Take a pledge to build a brighter J&K and work with dedication. Youth are not just the hope of tomorrow; they are the greatest power of today," he said, calling upon young people to serve

as architects of social change and contribute actively to the vision of Viksit Bharat. The Lieutenant Governor said history has shown that transformative change is driven not by extraordinary circumstances but by extraordinary thinking. | [More On P6](#)

Daughters Are True Carriers Of Change & Progress: LG

Daughters are true carriers of change and progress in an evolving world," Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said on Sunday while reviewing the ongoing development works of the Pachokhar Digital Library dedicated to Nari Shakti at Zamania in Ghazipur district of Uttar Pradesh through virtual mode. Commending the Pachokhar Digital Library initiative, | [More On P6](#)

8 Army Men Injured In Kishtwar Encounter

KO Web Desk

SRINAGAR: Eight soldiers of the Army were injured in a gunfight with terrorists in a remote forested area in the upper reaches of Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district on Sunday, officials said. The intense exchange of fire between the two sides lasted several hours before the guns fell silent. Reinforcements have been deployed to strengthen the cordon and neutralise the terrorists, the officials said. The operation, which the Army's Jammu-based White Knight Corps has named 'Operation Trashi-I', began around noon. In a post on X, the White Knight Corps said the security forces came in contact with the terrorists | [More On P6](#)

Kashmir Under Tight Security As R-Day Nears

Sniffer Dogs, Metal Detectors Deployed; Random Vehicle Checks Underway

KO Web Desk

SRINAGAR: Security forces have intensified sanitisation and area domination exercises across Kashmir ahead of Republic Day to ensure smooth and peaceful celebrations in the valley, officials said here on Sunday. Random frisking of vehicles is being carried out at all major intersections in Srinagar city and elsewhere in the valley to keep a check on any suspicious movement, the officials said. Search operations and area domination exercises have



also been started around the venues where Republic Day will be celebrated, they said. The main Republic Day function in Kashmir will be held at Bakshi stadium where stringent security | [More On P6](#)

Rs 39 Lakh Job Scam: Case Registered Against 7

Fake Appointment Orders Used to Dupe Unemployed Youth

KO Web Desk

SRINAGAR: The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Crime Branch Kashmir has registered a criminal case against seven individuals for allegedly cheating and duping unemployed youth by promising government jobs in exchange for money, officials said on Sunday. According to officials, the case was initiated following a written complaint received by the Economic Offences Wing alleging that the accused were fraudulently

inducing job aspirants by assuring them employment in various government departments, including banks, the Agriculture Department, and defence services. During preliminary verification, the allegations were found to be prima facie substantiated. Officials said the accused allegedly collected around Rs 39 lakh from multiple victims on the pretext of facilitating their appointments in government services. However, instead of securing legitimate jobs, the victims were | [More On P6](#)

Advocates Cannot Use RTI To Seek Case Details For Clients: CIC

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI: The Central Information Commission (CIC) has ruled that advocates cannot use the Right to Information (RTI) Act to seek details regarding cases they are handling for clients, observing that using the transparency law in this manner fails to advance its core objectives. Dismissing a second appeal filed by an advocate in a dispute related to the termination of a fruits-and-vegetables | [More On P6](#)

Crypto Hawala Network Linked To Terror Flagged In J&K

Press Trust Of India

SRINAGAR: Security agencies have flagged a sophisticated "crypto hawala" network by-passing the country's financial safeguards to funnel untraceable foreign funds into Jammu and Kashmir, sparking grave concerns that the money is being used to support terror activities, officials said on Sunday. This has put the security establishment on high alert, with officials warning that these shadow funds are intended to give a fresh lease of life to separatist elements and reignite the anti-national rhetoric within the Union Territory that had otherwise



been virtually neutralised by a crackdown by police and central agencies, they said. Mirroring the traditional hawala system, where money is sent through non-banking channels, this digital version uses the anonymity of unregulated cryptocurrency to erase the financial | [More On P6](#)

Stress Speeds Ageing, Raises Cancer Risk By Shortening Telomeres

Press Trust Of India

NEW DELHI: Stress, ageing, cancer. There are still no magic solutions but one factor linking all three holds out hope. And that, says Nobel Laureate Jack Szostak, is the telomere, which lies at the end of chromosomes that contain genes. There is still a lot that is not known. But some things are. Like long-term stress can shorten telomeres, thereby increasing cell death and contributing towards ageing, the world renowned scientist said. "While there haven't been any magic solutions to the



problems of ageing or cancer, we now recognise that the control of telomeres is an important part of both processes," Szostak told PTI in an interview. The telomere lessons of today were made possible by

the Nobel Prize-winning discovery that telomeres protect chromosomes, he said. "Telomeres are special (genetic) sequences found at the ends of chromosomes, which are very long DNA molecules. Telomeres are wrapped up with a whole bunch of proteins, and they play an important role in keeping chromosomes intact. It turns out they also are important for things like cancer and ageing." Szostak was part of a team, including Elizabeth Blackburn from the University of California and Carol Greider from Johns Hopkins | [More On P6](#)

Why More Families Are Rethinking Gold At Weddings

Rising prices are pushing families to cut back on jewellery, rethink traditions, and make difficult compromises.

Saqia muzafar

SRINAGAR: One evening last week, a post in Yakjut, an all-Kashmiri women's Facebook group, drew an unusually large number of responses. A bride-to-be asked a simple question: What are the options for those who cannot afford heavy gold sets anymore? Within hours, the comments filled up. Women suggested lighter jewellery, heirloom pieces, imitation sets for pre-wedding functions, even renting gold. Some shared their own compromises, others spoke of pressure, guilt, and



quiet negotiations at home. The discussion revealed something that rarely finds

public expression: families are actively searching for alternatives as rising gold prices reshape weddings across Kashmir. For decades, gold has held a special place in Kashmiri weddings, not merely as jewellery, but as assurance. Families saved for it silently, piece by piece, believing it would one day secure their children's future and uphold family dignity. Today, however, steep price rises are unsettling these long-held beliefs, forcing households to revisit wedding plans shaped over years. Despite changing lifestyles

and conversations around simpler ceremonies, social expectations remain rigid. Fouzia Jan, a bride-to-be, says gold continues to be a measure by which weddings are judged. "People may not say it openly, but everyone notices how much gold the bride wears," she says. "That pressure never really goes away." In her case, rising prices have reshaped decisions made long ago. Heavy traditional jewellery has been replaced with lighter designs, fewer pieces, and careful budgeting. Some items have been postponed altogether. | [More On P6](#)



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Extreme Cold Can Damage Kidneys, Lungs, Heart: AIIMS

Press Trust Of India

As the national capital reels under a cold wave, doctors at AIIMS Delhi warned that such extreme cold conditions can complicate chronic medical conditions and impact the kidney, lungs and heart. The maximum temperature in Delhi on Monday was recorded at 20.6 degrees Celsius, which was 0.7 notches above normal, while the minimum temperature settled at 3.2 degrees Celsius, plunging 4.2 notches below the season's average.

Dr Rajiv Narang, head of the Department of Cardiology at AIIMS, said that extremely cold weather directly influences a person's blood pressure.

"During winter, blood vessels get constricted and also there is less water intake, which negatively affects blood flow and leads to an increase in blood pressure. Also, the consumption of salty and processed food rises during this time. All this combined can cause the blood pressure to climb, increasing the risk of heart attacks," he said.

Dr Narang advised regular monitoring of BP during winters, which he said people can do even at home with BP machines. Also, people should keep themselves hydrated during the cold season.

Talking about how extreme cold conditions impact kidneys, Dr Sandeep Mahajan, professor at the Department of Nephrology, AIIMS, said that during periods of extreme cold, blood pressure tends to elevate. Given that a significant number of patients with chronic kidney disease (CKD) already experience hypertension, blood pressure levels are often higher during the winter months.

"Maintaining strict blood pressure control is crucial for decelerating the progression of kidney disease. Consequently, individuals with CKD should diligently monitor their blood pressure throughout the winter and seek medical consultation as needed to optimise their blood pressure management," he said.

44% Indian Cities Face Chronic Air Pollution, Only 4% Under NCAP

Press Trust Of India

Nearly 44 per cent Indian cities face chronic air pollution, indicating a structural problem driven by persistent emission sources rather than short-term episodes, an analysis by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) has found. However, only 4 per cent of these cities are covered under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), the report said.

Using satellite data, CREA assessed PM2.5 levels in 4,041 Indian cities.

"Out of 4,041, at least 1,787 cities exceeded the national annual PM2.5 standard every year across five recent years (2019-2024), excluding the COVID-affected year of 2020. This means nearly 44 per cent of Indian cities face chronic air pollution, indicating a structural problem driven by persistent emission sources rather than short-term episodes," the report said.

The PM2.5 assessment for 2025 ranks Bymohat (Assam), Delhi, and Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh) as India's top three most polluted cities with annual concentrations of 100 µg/m³, 96 µg/m³, and 93 µg/m³, respectively.

Noida is the fourth on the list, followed by Gurugram, Greater Noida, Bhiwadi, Hajipur, Muzaffarnagar, and Hapur.

"Yet, India's flagship NCAP covers only a fraction of this burden. Just 130 cities were included under NCAP, and only 67 overlap with the 1,787 persistently non-attainment cities. As a result, NCAP currently addresses only 4 per cent of India's chronically polluted cities, leaving the vast majority outside targeted clean air action," it added.

Non-attainment cities are urban areas identified by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) that consistently fail to meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards



(NAAQS) over several years.

The report noted that Uttar Pradesh tops the list with 416 non-attainment cities, followed by Rajasthan (158), Gujarat (152), Madhya Pradesh (143), Punjab and Bihar (136 each) and West Bengal (124).

Out of 130 NCAP cities, 28 still lack continuous ambient air quality monitoring stations (CAAQMS), and among the 102 cities with stations, 100 cities reported 80 per cent or higher PM10 levels.

"Progress on PM10 control remains mixed. Twenty-three cities have achieved the revised 40 per cent PM10 reduction target, 28 cities have recorded 21-40 per cent reduction, 26 cities show modest improvements of 1-20 per cent, while 23 cities have in fact experienced an increase in PM10 levels since the programme's inception," the report said.

"For PM10, Delhi tops the list with an annual average of 197 µg/m³, three times the national standard. Ghaziabad and Greater Noida follow with averages of 190 µg/m³ and 188 µg/m³, respectively.

Rajasthan has the highest number of cities in the Top 50 in terms of PM10 concentration, 18 in total, followed

by Uttar Pradesh (10), Madhya Pradesh (5), and Bihar and Odisha (four each)," the report said.

According to Manoj Kumar, India Analyst, CREA, strengthening the country's air quality governance through targeted, science-based reforms may be the only way forward.

"This means prioritising PM2.5 and its precursor gases (sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide) over PM10, revising the list of non-attainment cities under NCAP, setting stricter emission standards for industries and power plants, allocating funding based on source apportionment studies, and adopting an airshed-based approach to address air pollution at a regional scale," he said.

Since the programme's inception, Rs 13,415 crore has been released under the NCAP and 15th Finance Commission grants, of which Rs 9,929 crore (74 per cent) has been utilised.

Road dust management accounts for 68 per cent of spending, followed by transport (14 per cent) and waste and biomass burning (12 per cent), while industries, domestic fuel use, public outreach (each less than 1 per cent), and capacity building and monitoring (3 per cent) received limited allocations.

Public Notice

I Zahoor Ahmad Beigh want to change my Son's name in his Aadhar card bearing no 2728 3978 8260 from Emaan Zaahoor Beigh to Talib Zahoor Beigh .If anybody has any objection in this regard he/she may file them in the concerned centre within seven days. After that no objection shall be entertained.

jvd

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Sub Office Budgam

I have passed/appeared in Secondary School Examination (Class- 10th) under Roll No.: 224218 Session: November 1995 Year 1995 through the Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education. Due to the error committed by the concerned School against my name as Fatima Akhtar instead of Patima Akhter



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Name: Fatima Akhtar
Father's name: Mohd Akram Bhat
Mother's Name: Muglee Bibi
DOB: 09-10-1979
Residence: Gariend Khured Budgam
Mobile no: 9906753406

rko

The Jammu And Kashmir Board Of School Education

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I have passed/appeared in Secondary School Examination (Class- 10th) under Roll No.: 204216 Session: April 1991 Year 1991 through the Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education. Due to the error committed by the concerned School against my name as Ab Majid Dar Instead of Abdul Majid Dar



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Name: Abdul Majid Dar
Father's name: Ab Ahad Dar
Mother's Name: Khurshree Begum
DOB: 07-11-1974
Residence: Sholi Pora Budgam
Mobile no: 9419007186

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Better for Kashmir if Jammu Is Separated, Says Former Mayor

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Former Srinagar Mayor Junaid Azim Mattu has launched a sharp political critique of the idea of a "united" Jammu and Kashmir, stating that the concept lacks historical, cultural and linguistic basis and has evolved into what he described as an abusive and exploitative political arrangement for Kashmiris.

Mattu wrote on X, stating that the foundation of Jammu and Kashmir, rooted in the Treaty of Amritsar, represented an unjust beginning that Kashmiris have never been able to identify with or celebrate. He said Kashmir bore the brunt of prolonged turmoil, losing thousands of young lives, while Jammu, according to him, received sympathy and concessions during the same period.

The former mayor alleged that policies over the years have disproportionately favoured the Jammu region, particularly in matters of reservation and access to opportunities. He said the reservation framework is Jammu-driven and benefits both Hindu and Muslim communities of the region, while Kashmiri Muslims are increasingly being pushed out of the professional and economic mainstream.

Mattu warned that Kash-

miris today face an uncertain future, with shrinking opportunities for youth and entrepreneurs. He described this situation as a form of political punishment imposed collectively on the region, leaving little hope for the next generation.

Referring to renewed demands for separate statehood for Jammu, Mattu said the move once again reflects what he termed indifference towards Kashmiris. He said that if the authorities proceed with carving out a separate Jammu state, it would, in his view, amount to a favour for Kashmir rather than a loss.

Calling the idea of a united Jammu and Kashmir a romantic but unrealistic construct, Mattu said regional differences with Jammu and Ladakh are far deeper than any shared commonalities. He asserted that Kashmiris cannot afford to spend another generation attempting to prove their nationalism to those who, he claimed, have shown intolerance even in educational spaces.

Urging political leadership to confront reality, Mattu said rhetoric and poetic language can no longer conceal the depth of the divide. He described the situation as requiring an unavoidable political correction, adding that delaying it would only worsen the crisis. [KNT]

KU Students Shine at AIU North Zone Inter-University Festival

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Department of Students Welfare (DSW), University of Kashmir (KU), has achieved a significant milestone at the 39th Inter-

with pride," she said. Appreciating the achievement, Registrar, KU, Prof. Naseer Iqbal, said that the success reflects the strong academic and cultural environment of the University and congratulated the team for bringing nation-



University North Zone Youth Festival, organised by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) and hosted by Chitkara University, Chandigarh. Competing against leading universities from across North India, the KU cultural contingent secured top ranks and key positions, earning medals and national recognition for the University.

Congratulating the team on its remarkable performance, Vice-Chancellor, KU, Prof. Nilofer Khan, said that the achievement is a matter of great pride for the university.

"Our students have showcased exceptional talent and confidence on a national platform. Their success reflects the creative strength of our youth and motivates other students to explore their abilities and represent the university

al recognition to the varsity. Dean Students' Welfare KU, Prof. Pervez Ahmad, also praised the students, noting that their performance once again showed that talent from Kashmir can compete successfully at the national level.

The KU contingent, led by Dr. Shahid Ali Khan, Cultural Officer, DSW KU, participated in a range of events across the Literary, Fine Arts, and Music categories.

In terms of individual achievements, Suhail Ahmed Khan secured first position in the Clay Modelling competition. In the English Debate, Syed Noha Balki and Aaliya Ali bagged second position and have qualified to represent the University at the 39th AIU National Inter-University UniFest, scheduled to be held in Chennai in March this year.

One Kg of Narcotics Seized in City

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Police have arrested a person and recovered one kilogram of heroin during a naka checking operation near the STP Plant at Munawarabad in Srinagar, officials said on Sunday.

A senior police officer confirmed to KNT that a police party from Police Station Khanyar apprehended the accused during routine naka checking. "During naka checking, police personnel from Police Station Khanyar apprehended one person at Munawarabad near STP Plant. He has been identified as Fayaz Ahmad Dar, son of

Ghulam Hussain, resident of Ichgam, Budgam. Upon search, one kilogram of heroin was recovered from his possession," the officer said.

Following the recovery, police registered a case under FIR No. 04 of 2026 under Sections 8 and 21 of the NDPS Act at Police Station Khanyar. The accused has been taken into custody and further investigation has been initiated to trace the source of the contraband and possible forward and backward linkages.

The officer said the seizure is part of the ongoing drive against drug trafficking and narcotics abuse. He said further arrests and recoveries cannot be ruled out as the investigation progresses.



Fire Breaks Out at Girls' Hostel in Rajbagh

Observer News Service

Srinagar: A minor fire incident was reported on Sunday at Rajbagh in Srinagar after an electrical appliance overheated inside a girls' hostel, officials said.

According to Fire and Emergency Services, the State Fire Control Room at Batamaloo received an emergency call following which a fire tender from Fire Station Gawkadal was immediately rushed to the spot.

On arrival, firefighters found that the blaze had erupted in a room on the second floor of a four-storeyed building housing a girls' hostel operating under the name Royal Girls Hostel.

Preliminary assessment revealed that an electric blanket had been left switched on, resulting in overheating that ignited the bedding and mattress

inside the room.

Officials said the hostel management responded promptly by using fire extinguishers, which helped contain the flames and prevented the fire from spreading to other parts

Officials said the hostel management responded promptly by using fire extinguishers, which helped contain the flames and prevented the fire from spreading to other parts of the building. Fire personnel later doused the remaining flames and carried out cooling operations to ensure complete safety,"

of the building. Fire personnel later doused the remaining flames and carried out cooling operations to ensure complete safety.

In the incident, bedding and a mattress in one room were damaged, while the rest of the property was successfully saved. One minor in-

jury was reported, though no serious harm occurred.

According to KNT, the fire operation was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mir Aqib Hussain, with effective mobility and coordination

ensured by Aijaz Ahmad Shah.

Meanwhile, Alok Kumar has advised the general public to avoid using substandard or low-quality electrical appliances and to strictly refrain from leaving electrical devices unattended to prevent such incidents in the future.

Man Injured in Gas Leakage Fire, Admitted to SMHS

Observer News Service

Srinagar: A middle-aged man sustained burn injuries following an alleged gas leakage incident at his residence in Noorbagh area of Srinagar and was admitted to SMHS Hospital for treatment, officials said on Sunday. Hospital sources said

the injured person was brought to the emergency department of SMHS Hospital with a history of burn injuries reportedly caused by leakage of cooking gas at his home. The incident resulted in multiple burn injuries to the victim.

According to KNT, the injured has been identified as Mohammad Amin,

son of Ali Mohammad Magray, an inhabitant of Noorbagh, Srinagar, aged about 47 years. Doctors attending the patient said his condition is stable as of now and he is undergoing necessary medical care. The extent of burns is being assessed, while treatment is continuing under medical supervision.

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- Mughal Road - (Open)
- Srinagar- Leh- (Open)

PRAYERS	
FAJR	6: 08
ZUHR	12:38
ASR	4: 09
Magrib	5:52
ISHA	7: 16

This Day In History

- 379 - Theodosius installed as co-emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire
- 1419 - French city of Rouen surrenders to Henry V in Hundred Years War
- 1493 - France cedes Roussillon & Cerdagne to Spain by treaty of Barcelona
- 1511 - Italian city Mirandola surrenders to the French
- 1795 - Democratic revolution in Amsterdam ends oligarchy
- 1806 - United Kingdom re-occupies the Cape of Good Hope following victory in the Battle of Blaauwberg over French vassal, the Batavian Republic. Establishes British rule in South Africa.
- 1808 Louis Napoleon signs 1st Dutch aviation law
- 1812 - Peninsular War: After a ten day siege, Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, orders British soldiers of the Light and third divisions to storm Ciudad Rodrigo
- 1883 - The first electric lighting system employing overhead wires, built by Thomas Edison, begins service at Roselle, New Jersey.
- 1885 - Battle of Abu Klea, Sudan, between the British Desert Column and Mahdist forces: 76 British and 1,100 Mahdists killed
- 1899 - Anglo-Egyptian Sudan forms
- 1903 - 1st regular transatlantic radio broadcast between US & England
- 1922 - Geological survey says US oil supply would be depleted in 20 years
- 1927 - British government decides to send troops to China
- 1938 - General Motors begins mass production of diesel engines
- 1941 - British offensive in Eritrea
- 1941 - British troops occupies Kassalaf, Sudan
- 1942 - Japanese forces invade Burma
- 1943 - 1st Warsaw Ghetto Uprising begins
- 1957 - USSR performs atmospheric nuclear test
- 1960 - Eisenhower & Premier Kishi sign US-Japanese Security pact
- 1966 - Indira Gandhi elected India's 4th Prime Minister.
- 1977 - World's largest crowd gathering - the Hindu Kumbh Mela in India attracts a then record 15 million people.

From KO Archives

Police Detect 150 Fake Finance Companies In J&K

Rajinder Singh

Jammu: The crime branch of Jammu and Kashmir police has detected 150 finance companies operating in the state allegedly without any registration from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). These have defrauded gullible depositors to the tune of Rs 80 crore. Cases have been registered against 40 such allegedly fake companies, mostly in Jammu involving over 200 accused.

Disclosing this to Kashmir Observer, the inspector general of police, crime and railways, Masood Chaudhary, said over 99 per cent of the companies were fake and had defrauded people mostly from rural areas in the name of higher interest on their deposits. Most of these operators are believed to have gone abroad along with their families while some of them have declared themselves bankrupt and closed down their companies.

Chaudhary said the cases were registered on receipt of complaints from the affected people. A special team of senior police officials, headed by the deputy inspector general (DIG) of police, crime and railways, Prem Kumar, has been constituted to investigate the cases. He said some of the accused have been apprehended while some more were likely to be arrested shortly.

In the absence of more stringent laws, Chaudhary said, police were finding it difficult to intervene in the matter. It can take action only after a formal complaint is received. Some of the accused had defrauded the depositors to the tune of Rs 10 crore to Rs 15 crore. He said some special teams had been rushed to places like Mumbai and other major cities across the country to apprehend the culprits.

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KO VIEW

Myth of Meritocracy

Unequal schools, closed networks, and inherited power are redefining success in Kashmir.

Er. Umair Ul Umar

A few weeks ago, a countryside boy from a government school told me he wanted to "learn how to speak English like the rich boys in Srinagar."

His teacher had praised his science marks, but he wasn't sure if that meant anything.

"They still get better jobs," he said, pointing toward the hilltop private school with gleaming buses and a tall iron gate.

He wasn't wrong. In today's Kashmir, the game is increasingly fixed. We often talk about success as something earned. "Work hard," they say, "and you'll rise."

Yet rising is no longer about hard work. It's about where you were born, who your parents know, which school you went to, and whether your surname opens doors.

The myth of meritocracy survives only because it hides in plain sight, dressed in the language of aspiration.

Elite families, those who control land, businesses, politics, and culture, are consolidating their power.

The sons of Kashmiri landlords are now legislators. Their daughters head private schools. And their cousins run the bureaucracy.

These families have moved from orchards to offices without ever losing power. Generation after generation, they inherit institutions, not just assets. They shape syllabi, policies, hiring, even aesthetics.

Beyond ambition, this is aristocracy.

In the 1990s, Kashmiri families lived side by side. A new child, a new cow, or a wedding was a shared joy. People borrowed sugar from each other's kitchens. A meal of mutton was sent across fences without ceremony. There was pride, but not pretence.

Today, that landscape has shifted. Concrete walls have gone up, separating houses and hearts. You don't knock anymore, you call first. If you're not on the guest list, you're not welcome.

The symbols of social life have changed. False ceilings, ornamental gates, and imported tiles are essentially about ranking than taste.

You drive a Gypsy, I drive an Audi. You send your child to elite private school, mine goes to the nearest government school with broken windows.

Even celebrations are curated for display. Wedding photographers, designer lehengas, and staged rituals for Instagram have festive facades.

It doesn't stop there. When a boy from a humble family clears a government exam or starts a business, he often doesn't invest in the community he came from. He begins to chase the same symbols of prestige that once excluded him.

His child won't attend the village school. His parents won't stay in the old house. He'll build new friendships, pose with new acquaintances, and slowly forget where he came from.

This desire to "rise" has become corrosive.

We mistake imitation for success, and replicate the habits of the powerful without asking what we're losing.

And what we're losing is social cohesion, the idea that we owe something to each other beyond envy or competition.

What used to be shared space has now become spectacle. A wedding is no longer a community affair, it's a budgeted exhibition. A housewarming isn't about warmth, it's about showing what you could afford.

The deeper damage, however, is to the minds of the young.

In Kashmir's villages and towns, children grow up internalizing this gap. A girl in a government school with top marks believes she's still behind, because her uniform doesn't match the elite. A boy with curiosity and courage doubts himself because he hasn't seen the inside of a coaching center.

These kids aren't lacking in ability, they're cut off from advantage. And the worst part is: they know it.

So they scale back their dreams.

A child of a labourer won't say he wants to become a lawyer, he'll say he wants a Grade IV job with contract pay. A brilliant girl who reads late into the night won't apply for civil services, she'll apply for nursing school, because that feels "realistic."

We are watching a generation edit their ambitions to fit a system that never welcomed them.

Meanwhile, the elite tell a different story. They say success is open to all. That anyone can make it. But behind their soft words are hard structures: exclusive schools, coaching centers charging lakhs, social networks built over decades, interview tips passed down like heirlooms.

Even when the entrance is open, the staircase is steeper for some.

This is how hope is killed: in small humiliations, repeated rejections, and the realization that the game was over before you started.

Public service has also become a tool of preservation rather than transformation. It used to be a way to uplift. Today, it's a way to secure status.

Political tickets go from father to son. Bureaucrats raise future bureaucrats. Even when rules are open, unwritten advantages decide who crosses the line. One child has Wi-Fi, mentors, and fluency in English, another sits under a tin roof and translates notes on a borrowed phone.

The rot runs deep. The elite have shaped not only outcomes but values. They fund schools, control curriculum boards, own coaching institutes. They decide what "smart" looks like, what "success" sounds like.

And through media, they spread this culture far beyond their circle.

Suddenly, children in Budgam want what children in Bangalore want: branded clothes, a Western accent, an Ivy League degree. Local dignity has been replaced by distant aspiration.

This narrowing of imagination is dangerous. It does more than create inequality. It makes inequality feel permanent.

The danger is national, not just moral. A country where only the privileged can succeed becomes a place of simmering unrest. Crime grows when trust disappears.

When a child sees that effort doesn't matter, he may no longer believe in books, but he may believe in anger. A society built on exclusion cannot build peace.

The solution is not to ask elite families to donate. It is to demand they stop hoarding the future.

We need policies that redistribute opportunity, not charity. Make public education competitive, mandate economic representation in decision-making bodies, break the monopoly of coaching empires, and perhaps most urgently, stop making opulence aspirational.

Let integrity, humility, and public service matter again.

A civilization isn't measured by the height of its richest tower. It is measured by whether the child at the bottom can see the sky, and believe she can reach it.

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Community Climate Model

By blending tradition with innovation, Kashmiri communities are turning environmental risk into collective campaign and opportunity for future generations today.

Last year, a group of farmers gathered along the Lidder River in Pahalgam to plant willow and poplar saplings. These are local residents, acting to protect the lands they have farmed for generations.

The trees are meant to prevent soil erosion and slow the river's rising waters during sudden floods, a reality that has grown more frequent as glaciers shrink and rainfall patterns shift.

Similar community-led projects are emerging across the valley.

In Srinagar, school clubs and youth groups organize monthly clean-ups and afforestation drives, turning public spaces into living classrooms.

Students measure saplings, track growth, and learn how local wetlands absorb carbon while controlling floods. Religious institutions support these initiatives, using spaces and networks to mobilize volunteers.

Each effort is small on its own, but together they form a network that strengthens the valley's resilience.

Households are changing too. Families are adopting energy-efficient cookstoves, installing solar water heaters, and switching to LED lighting.

These adjustments reduce dependence on firewood and kerosene, cutting emissions while improving air quality. Neighbourhoods that collectively embrace these practices notice a measurable drop in fuel use and cost, creating an incentive to continue.

Seasonal and locally produced foods are gaining popularity, further reducing carbon footprints while sustaining local markets.

Community support extends to renewable energy. The valley's topography allows for micro-hydropower projects and solar installations. Villagers in remote areas are pooling resources to fund small solar grids, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and increasing electricity access.

These projects create ownership, responsibility, and pride among participants, showing how climate action can coexist with livelihoods.

Education underpins every initiative. Workshops in schools, colleges, and vocational centers equip young people with knowledge about sustain-



able farming, energy use, and ecosystem management.

Youth trained in these programs act as local ambassadors, sharing practices with neighbours and families.

When a single village embraces energy conservation, tree planting, and sustainable agriculture, its impact extends beyond borders, influencing nearby communities.

Civic engagement reinforces these actions. Residents monitor local development projects, advocate for the implementation of the Jammu & Kashmir State Action Plan on Climate Change, and participate in public consultations.

This combination of household choices, community initiatives, and local advocacy creates a model that complements state-led climate policies. It demonstrates that mitigation does not depend solely on top-down programs.

The valley faces mounting environmental pressures. Glaciers are retreating, rivers swell unpredictably, and

floods threaten homes and farms. Yet, the collective energy of communities is turning vulnerability into resilience.

When residents plant trees along rivers, restore wetlands, and invest in renewable energy, they are not waiting for external solutions. They are shaping them.

Community-led initiatives in Kashmir are proof that climate action begins at home. Every sapling planted, solar panel installed, and household that shifts to sustainable practices contributes to a larger story of adaptation and hope.

The future of the valley depends on these actions, showing that when people lead, they can transform both landscapes and lives.

The author is a research scholar at Integral University, Lucknow, focusing on the socio-economic impacts of climate change in the Kashmir Valley.

Iqbal Hussain

Community-led initiatives in Kashmir are proof that climate action begins at home. Every sapling planted, solar panel installed, and household that shifts to sustainable practices contributes to a larger story of adaptation and hope.

Fruit, Fertility, & Forgotten Costs

Farmers, families, and frontline workers are showing signs of exposure to toxic chemicals.

Dr. Waseem Ahmad

In the villages of Pulwama and Shopian, apples are a badge of pride and progress. Families have tended these orchards for generations. They know how to prune branches, read the sky for hail, and time the harvest to perfection.

But lately, a darker knowledge has taken root.

Mothers speak in hushed tones about daughters who can't conceive. Young men queue at clinics for unexplained spinal pain.

In one village of 1,400 homes, 15 cancer cases have emerged in just a few years.

I began noticing these patterns during training sessions and outreach camps held in South Kashmir. Women from orchardist households would stay behind after the formal sessions ended.

"Why are we seeing so many girls who can't get pregnant?" one woman in Shopian asked. "Our mothers never talked about this. It's something new."

They are right. It is new, and it's spreading.

In Srinagar's diagnostic labs, young radiologists are alarmed. They perform 20 to 25 scans a day, often over grueling 12-hour shifts.

Over half of their patients now come from South Kashmir, and a worrying share show early signs of spinal degeneration, liver stress, and even brain tumors.

Lab technologists, too, are seeing a surge in hormonal disorders: thyroid dysfunction, PCOD, early menopause.

These complaints form a pattern, and all arrows point back to the orchards.

What changed?

Ten years ago, an average orchardist used just three or four sprays a year, mostly harmless horticultural oil and occasional antifungals.

Today, farmers apply up to 20 chemical treatments per season, and the sprays are no longer benign.

Systemic pesticides, synthetic fungicides, and a newer, more dangerous entrant, Plant Growth Regulators (PGRs), have transformed apple farming.

These are not your grandfather's sprays. PGRs are powerful synthetic chemicals designed to force larger fruit, earlier blooming, and higher yields.

They also come with a well-documented risk: they disrupt human endocrine systems.

According to Dr. Ghulam Hassan Mir, one of Kashmir's most respected plant pathologists, many of these PGRs are not meant for widespread use in residential areas.

"The chemicals being sprayed now are strong, systemic, and often unregulated," he told me. "Some of them interfere directly with hormones. And we're using them in orchards that are just steps from homes."

The science is clear.

Exposure to certain PGRs and systemic pesticides is associated with reduced fertility, hormonal imbalances, and an elevated risk of cancers.

In farming communities where these chemicals are used heavily, the consequences are showing up in medical records, if anyone bothers to look. The problem is, almost no one is looking.

There is no health registry that tracks environmental exposure in South Kashmir. There is no centralized data on the rising incidence of endocrine disorders, cancers, or fertility problems in orchard districts. Public health departments are slow to respond, and agriculture departments often avoid confronting the pesticide lobby.

And so, the burden falls on women undergoing invasive fertility treatments, on men too young to need spinal scans, and on children growing up surrounded by toxins they cannot see.

This is a systemic failure.

We cannot separate agriculture from health. What we grow, how we grow it, and what chemicals we allow into our soil and water will always show up, first in test tubes, then in hospital beds.

Right now, South Kashmir's apple



What's happening in South Kashmir is a warning, for any region that believes economic success can be separated from ecological balance.

economy is thriving on paper. But in its villages, the cost is becoming unbearable.

So what can we do?

First, we need regulation, with teeth. The government must urgently audit and limit the sale and use of PGRs and systemic pesticides, especially in high-density farming zones near homes and schools.

Second, we need information. A region-wide health surveillance program should be launched immediately to track disease clusters and correlate them with occupational exposure, soil residue, and groundwater toxicity.

Third, we need education. Farmers are not villains. They're victims of a system that rewards short-term yield over long-term sustainability.

Most orchardists I meet are unaware of what exactly they're spraying, or the cumulative health risks it brings.

Outreach campaigns must be launched for local health workers, Panchayat leaders, and district officials.

Fourth, we must invest in safer alternatives. Integrated pest management, organic farming incentives, and crop diversification may not offer quick profits, but they are the only path forward if we want our people to thrive alongside our apples.

Finally, we must talk. Health workers, environmental scientists, farmers, and policymakers must begin meeting regularly to share data, concerns, and solutions. No one sector can fix this alone.

What's happening in South Kashmir is a warning, for any region that believes economic success can be separated from ecological balance.

If we continue to prioritize fruit size over family health, market yield over medical ethics, we risk destroying the very communities that sustain this valley's economy.

The orchard is Kashmir's pride. But if the price of that pride is rising illness, shrinking fertility, and early death, we must stop and ask: What are we really cultivating?

The author is an agricultural scientist from South Kashmir. He can be reached at waseembhatspn@yahoo.com. Views expressed in this article are author's own and don't necessarily reflect KO's editorial policy.

A Kashmiri Technocrat in Global Aerospace

As aviation enters a period of change, a Kashmiri doctoral researcher shares insights from aerospace engineering, industry work, and student mentorship rooted in her early years at home.

Aashiq Hussain Andrabi

On a California university campus, where research labs run on complex computation and aircraft models dominate screens, a Kashmiri woman focuses on problems that govern flight itself.

Faiqa Anbreen's work belongs to a world defined by precision and imagination, where mathematics turns into motion and theory becomes flight.

Her presence in this space carries meaning beyond professional success, because her journey begins far from these laboratories, in classrooms and homes in Kashmir where science often feels distant and ambition must fight for room to grow.

Her story arrives at a moment when young people in the valley continue to look outward for examples that connect education with purpose. Conversations around careers often circle familiar paths, shaped by caution and expectation. Aerospace engineering rarely enters those discussions, especially when the student imagining it happens to be a girl.

Faiqa's path brings a different picture into view, one built slowly through curiosity, discipline, and sustained effort rather than sudden opportunity.

As a child, physics and mathematics drew her attention early, offering patterns that explained how the world holds together. A televised space tragedy watched in her school years left a deep impression, linking human courage with scientific pursuit and turning distant spacecraft into symbols of possibility.

That moment stayed with her as she moved through school in Charar-i-Sharief and Srinagar, then into engineering studies that demanded long hours and steady focus.

Each step carried her further into a field where abstract equations meet real machines, and where progress depends on patience as much as inspiration.

Today, Faiqa Anbreen's doctorate research combines aerospace engineering with computational mathematics in the United States. Her academic work runs parallel to professional engagement with an international aerospace company serving aviation, space, and defense sectors.

This dual role places her research inside the living system of global aviation, where design decisions travel from computer models to aircraft in the sky. Her experience includes work connected to advanced commercial aircraft, turning years of study into components that fly with passengers every day.

Her presence in this field also highlights a broader reality.

Aerospace engineering remains heavily shaped by men, and women entering these spaces often find themselves standing alone in classrooms and project teams. Faiqa speaks about focusing on learning and contribution, allowing work to speak before identity.

Over time, that approach has placed her in a position where younger students, especially girls from Kashmir, look toward her as evidence that technical ambition can survive distance and doubt.

Despite years spent outside the valley, her connection to home remains active. She engages with networks of Kashmiri scientists and professionals and takes part in student outreach whenever possible. These interactions often turn into conversations about curiosity, parental support, and the importance of allowing children to grow into their interests.

Her reflections resonate in a society where family influence shapes choices early and where encouragement can determine how far a student dares to think.

Her voice also carries relevance in



IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO HAVE GOOD SELF-ESTEEM AND TO KEEP REMINDING YOURSELF THAT YOU'RE NOT ALONE, and there're other women out there in diverse fields. You've to keep feeling it and be confident that you can compete with men at the same level.

the present moment for global aviation. The industry continues to rebuild and rethink after widespread disruption, and engineers like Faiqa work inside questions that touch speed, efficiency, and future design. Her academic focus and professional experience place her close to these shifts, giving her perspective weight and immediacy.

Please tell us something about your current professional engagements and your academic journey?

Well, I'm a Ph.D. student in aerospace engineering and computational mathematics at California State University and Claremont Graduate University. I also work for Safran as a proposal engineer.

Safran is an international high-technology company catering to aviation, space and defense markets.

I did my initial schooling from Shiekhul Alam Islamic Model (SIM) School, Charari Sharief and later on joined Delhi Public School (DPS), Srinagar where I passed my Senior Secondary School Examination.

Both these schools had a constructive role in shaping up who I am today. SIM offered a decent environment to be able to ask questions but DPS offered more resources and a platform to develop a multi-dimensional personality.

Later on, I started my career at Amity University where I finished Bachelors in Aerospace Engineering, and then I came to US for Mas-

ters at California State University.

Aerospace is one of the toughest engineering streams, how did you get into it?

As a curious child, when someone used to ask me about my career goals, my response would be "a scientist".

When you start learning about great scientists like Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, it gets quite fascinating to know how they came up with such complicated laws and equations. Only with time, one realizes that it takes an enormous effort and dedication to be a scientist.

I've always been interested in reading about planets, stars, and creation of the universe and would ask teachers questions to which sometimes they wouldn't even have answers.

In 2003, I watched space shuttle Columbia disintegrating on re-entry into the earth's atmosphere. Returning from a space mission, it took precious lives of six astronauts. It may sound counterintuitive that a disaster helped me shape up an idea in my head that I want to become an aerospace engineer.

Kalpna Chawla, the first Indian astronaut, got killed in that accident. Reading her biography has always been exciting. What she studied and how she reached NASA always intrigued me. It was this event that in some way helped me to decide and pursue Aerospace Engineering as a career choice.

But now, all the research I am doing is more motivated by working on something that furthers the aerospace technology and solve some of the unexplored problems of computational fluid dynamics.

Throughout your academic journey, what kept you motivated, focused and energized to keep

going?

I feel as humans, we continue to keep finding the meaning of life. There's a curiosity and inquisition that keeps pushing you to know more about this universe and existence. And I consider science feeds to that curiosity within me.

Aerospace is all about physics and mathematics. Those things keep me interested and motivated.

I still sometimes go back to read Class 9 Physics textbook, where we start understanding physics at a detailed level. Physics is at the heart of the whole universe. The manifestations of the subject amaze me, from the order of the universe to the music; it keeps me glued to what I'm studying and what I want to do in the future.

Besides, I have always tried to be well-balanced in everything I do.

Data shows that there aren't many women in this area. So how does it feel to create a niche in a male-dominant field?

Taking up aerospace engineering after Class 12 was like jumping into a dark well. I didn't know anyone in this field I could consult, I hadn't checked any statistics. All I was doing was following my instincts and believing in myself. I always focused on the work rather than the difficulties and limitations.

Now when I look at the number of women in aerospace, I have had situations where I have been the only woman in a group of male engineers doing projects or working with them. This not only inspires me in many ways but also makes me realize that we should have more women in this field.

When I look back, I don't see many precedents among women to follow from Kashmir but I think there are a lot in the coming generation who have demonstrated enormous interest in the field who look up to me as a precedent. And I try my best to pass on my experiences to whoever approaches me.

Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom. What've you learned about yourself in this journey?

It's certain that we live life forwards but it's amusing that we learn and understand about life backwards.

When we look back at the phases of life we have lived, the reflections of those become the steps of the

staircase of experiences we climb on, towards more meaningfulness. It has been a natural progression towards learning about sensitivities and human biases, only after being exposed by living on my own in foreign lands from the last 11 years.

The most important learning that I would like to share is being open

TAKING UP AEROSPACE ENGINEERING AFTER CLASS 12 WAS LIKE JUMPING INTO A DARK WELL. I didn't know anyone in this field I could consult, I hadn't checked any statistics. All I was doing was following my instincts and believing in myself. I always focused on the work rather than the difficulties and limitations.

to criticism and thank your critics for they are the people who help you in becoming better and bigger.

Taking criticism is very hard and people usually get offended by it, but for me, I've only realized how important feedback is for personal as well as professional growth. Also, we are unknowingly

wrapped up in a number of biases and the whole struggle is to take yourself out of them one by one.

I see life in pieces. For a moment I live in those small pieces. And it's only when you look back, you're able to see what the journey was about.

You said since your childhood days you were keen about giving back to the society. How do you intend to do that now?

Well, my idea to giving back to humanity is to develop faster planes one day. It's one of my core interests.

I'm part of JK Scientists, an NGO run by Kashmiri scientists and professionals all over the world. Also, whenever I'm home, I try to be part of student outreach programs to interact with students and mentor them.

With all the work you've done, are you interested in going up in space one day?

I've always had this dream of traveling to space and wanting to be an astronaut.

But being an astronaut is like one in a million jobs which literally takes a lot of learning and experience to get selected. The work I have done so far is just the stepping stone, but to go to space one day I have a thousand miles to go. For now, it looks like a distant dream, but I will keep dreaming.

What's the biggest challenge you've faced as a woman in aerospace industry?

It's very important to have good self-esteem and to keep reminding yourself that you're not alone, and there're other women out there in diverse fields. You've to keep feeling it and be confident that you can compete with men at the same level.

That's a bit challenging when you talk in general terms but personally speaking, I haven't faced any challenges that I can count on. I've found great mentors and colleagues who I learn from every day and who've always been there to guide me through.

What's the most memorable opportunity you have had as an aerospace engineer?

Well, it was to work as a design engineer for A350 which is the latest Airbus aircraft. I have designed some parts which are flying on-board A350. I cherish that most memorable opportunity.

Any word for people back home?

My interactions with Kashmiri students make me believe that children aren't allowed to pursue their dreams easily, especially girls.

Parents impose their opinions and career choices on their children without considering what talent and interest the child has.

Students should stay persistent with what they want to do in life. They must believe in themselves, and make the people around them believe in their talent. Don't give up easily on your dreams.

For parents out there, I would say believe in your children, empower and guide them by letting them learn on their own by experiencing and exploring.

Family is the one of the most important influences in a child's life and family support plays a significant role in our success as individuals and as members of the society.

Personally speaking, my parents especially my mother always supported me to do what I was passionate about.

For those who want to pursue a career in aerospace, I would say read and familiarize yourself with the field and understand what you are getting into. It is a very vast field and has a lot of opportunities to explore.

— The author is a senior scribe from Pulwama.

Trump Takes Over Davos as WEF Circus Rolls In

Press Trust Of India

DAVOS: Around 1880, English people suffering from the then-fatal and raging tuberculosis sought refuge in the mountain air of Davos in the hope of getting well and also built a church here. That church is now the USA House for the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting week.

The historic church will host US

President Donald Trump, his cabinet colleagues, businessmen, and others attending the five-day annual meeting of over 3,000 global leaders starting Monday.

By far, Trump is already being seen as the biggest star of this year's congregation of rich and powerful from across the world in this Swiss ski resort town, which first rose on the global map as a health tourism destination due

to the tuberculosis raging across Europe in the late 19th century.

The Englische Kirche church on the main promenade of this small town was apparently to be demolished in the late 1970s to make way for an apartment complex, but locals came together to stop that.

Now, it is listed as a historical monument and has been taken over by the Gemeindebund of



the Free Evangelical Church of Switzerland.

Despite the WEF now being the biggest claim to fame of Davos on the global stage, it offers much more than that, especially for skiing enthusiasts.

It is also a home to the creator of Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle, who moved here to help his ailing wife live longer.

Once famous for being a summer health resort, Davos has gradually emerged as a major

winter sports hub in the Alps, but its biggest claim to fame for the past five decades has been the World Economic Forum's annual meeting every January, beginning in 1971.

The Geneva-based WEF is hosting its 56th annual meeting here beginning Monday, where more than 3,000 leaders from across the world will participate in a high-profile talkfest for five days.

To cover this global elite jamboree, there are more than 500 journalists and thousands of support staff as well.

While such a high-profile event leads to all hotels and rental apartments being occupied, the die-hard winter sports fans still through this place as the WEF week also means relatively smaller crowds in ski areas and on mountain cableways.

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

J&K Winter Rainfall

marking a deficit of 77 percent.

"North Kashmir districts also remained well below normal levels," Faizan said. Bandipora recorded 56.9 mm of rainfall, a deficit of 45 percent, while Baramulla received 35.8 mm, reflecting a 72 percent shortfall. Kupwara registered 72.2 mm against a normal of 141.6 mm, a deficit of 49 percent.

The rainfall situation was most severe in south Kashmir. Kulgam recorded just 13.4 mm against a normal of 196.8 mm, a deficit of 93 percent. Shopian received 9.0 mm, while Pulwama and Anantnag recorded 17.5 mm and 22.6 mm respectively, all showing deficits exceeding 75 percent.

In the Jammu region, several districts reported negligible rainfall. Kathua recorded 1.1 mm against a normal of 131.3 mm, amounting to a 99 percent deficit. Doda and Udhampur recorded deficits of 94 percent each, while Ramban reported an 87 percent shortfall. Samba recorded a 98 percent deficit. Jammu district received 8.6 mm against a normal of 94.7 mm, a deficit of 91 percent. Poonch recorded a comparatively lower deficit of 42 percent.

Overall, Jammu and Kashmir recorded an 85 percent rainfall deficit during the period, while Ladakh registered a 77 percent shortfall.

The dry conditions intensified further in January. From January 1 to January 17, 2026, Jammu and Kashmir received only 1.5 mm of rainfall against a normal of 44.4 mm, resulting in a deficit of 97 percent. Several districts, including Srinagar, Budgam, Shopian, Doda, Ramban, Samba, and Udhampur, recorded zero rainfall during this period.

Other districts received only trace amounts. Anantnag recorded a 95 percent deficit, while Baramulla and Kupwara reported deficits of 93 percent each. Jammu district recorded a 94 percent shortfall during the same period.

In Ladakh, rainfall between January 1 and 17 stood at 1.1 mm against a normal of 2.6 mm, a deficit of 56 percent, while Leh recorded a shortfall of 79 percent.

History Remembers

He added that consistent efforts and belief in one's own potential are essential for long-term transformation.

"Young people who take small steps towards their dreams every day will one day lead transformation. Only those who truly believe in themselves go on to create history," he said.

Highlighting the role of innovation and entrepreneurship in societal progress, the Lieutenant Governor encouraged the youth of the Union Territory to embrace new ideas to address challenges and create opportunities for self-employment, describing entrepreneurship as a powerful driver of economic empowerment.

The Lieutenant Governor reiterated the commitment of the Government of India and the UT administration towards the complete rehabilitation of families affected by recent natural calamities. He said that, on the request of the UT administration, the Government of India has approved a comprehensive allocation of Rs 1,437 crore for the reconstruction of damaged public infrastructure and the implementation of disaster mitigation measures across Jammu and Kashmir.

"The damaged railway bridges will be restored within three months, while restoration of national highway stretches affected by floods will be completed in the coming four months," he said.

Responding to a demand raised by the Member of Legislative Assembly, Samba, regarding the construction of a railway overbridge, the Lieutenant Governor assured that the matter would be taken up with railway authorities for early resolution. He also suggested the development of a pond in the area with voluntary support from youth and social organisations.

The Lieutenant Governor expressed gratitude to Radha Soami Satsang Beas and High-Range Rural Development Society (HRDS) India for their selfless service to society and commended the Guidance and Career Counselling Cell for Youth

Development for its sustained efforts towards youth empowerment.

During the visit, he also reviewed the progress of the auditorium and upgradation works at Government Higher Secondary School, Gurha Slathia, and directed officials to ensure proper sanitation and sports facilities.

Several senior officials, public representatives, members of GCC, and a large number of youth attended the event.

Daughters Are True

The Lieutenant Governor said the project reflects the spirit of the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao programme by promoting girls' education and strengthening access to learning in rural areas.

"Education expands the horizon of opportunities and opens doors to a brighter future. It should be our collective responsibility to ensure that no girl is denied the gift of education and that every possible support is extended for their higher learning," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor said educated daughters play a decisive role in breaking social barriers and combating discrimination, thereby contributing to the creation of a fair, inclusive, and equal society.

Stressing the importance of women's economic empowerment, he said financial independence is essential for women to live with dignity and confidence in today's changing world.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasised that initiatives like the Pachokhar Digital Library should be replicated in other areas as well, empowering young girls with knowledge, digital resources, and skills to contribute meaningfully to the nation's development.

Officials briefed the Lieutenant Governor on the progress of the project and its role in promoting digital learning and community participation, particularly among girls and young women in rural regions.

8 Army Men

in the general area Sonnar, north-east of Chatroo, during a search operation conducted as part of ongoing joint counter-terror exercises along with Jammu and Kashmir Police.

"Operations remain underway with additional forces inducted to reinforce the cordon, supported by close coordination with civil administration and security agencies," the Army said, commending the troops for their exceptional professionalism and resolve while responding to hostile fire under challenging terrain and conditions.

According to the officials, one of the search teams came across a group of two to three foreign terrorists allegedly belonging to Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), who fired indiscriminately and also lobbed a few grenades in an attempt to break the cordon.

The troops retaliated and reinforcements from Army, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and police were rushed to further tighten the cordon. There was intermittent firing between the two sides till 5.40 pm, the officials said.

Eight soldiers were injured and evacuated to the hospital. Most of them suffered splinter injuries in the grenade blast, the officials said, adding that a massive search operation is on to track and neutralise the terrorists.

Advanced surveillance equipment, including drones, and sniffer dogs have been deployed to speed up the operation.

This is the third encounter between the security forces and terrorists in the Jammu region this year. Encounters broke out in Kahog and Najote forests in the Billawar area of Kathua district on January 7 and 13, respectively.

On December 15 last year, a police officer was killed in an encounter with terrorists at Soan village in the Majalta area of Udhampur district. The terrorists managed to escape, taking advantage of thick foliage and darkness.

The encounters followed a major counter-terrorist operation launched in the forest belts of the Jammu region in December last year to flush out nearly three dozen held-up terrorists.

Operations have been further

intensified in the run-up to Republic Day to ensure peaceful celebrations, amid intelligence inputs about desperate attempts by Pakistan-based handlers to push more terrorists, the officials said. (PTI)

Kashmir Under Tight

arrangements have been made, the officials said. Police and paramilitary personnel have been deployed in the city and other district headquarters while checkpoints have been established at various places in Srinagar, especially at the entry points of the city and other districts, the officials said. The security around the venues of Republic Day functions in the valley, including the stadium here, has been beefed up, and a multi-layer security apparatus has been put in place around the venues, they said.

Security agencies have been asked to remain alert and not allow anyone to disturb law and order, or vitiate peace, the officials added. Sniffer dogs and metal detectors have been pressed into action to ensure that the terrorists are not able to carry out any IED explosions ahead of the Republic Day. The security agencies are not leaving anything to chance as mock security drills have been conducted at various places in the valley to meet any eventuality, they said.

Random frisking of vehicles is being carried out at all major intersections in Srinagar city and elsewhere in the valley to keep a check on any suspicious movement, the officials said.

Rs 39 Lakh Job

allegedly handed fake and forged appointment orders.

The investigation further revealed that the accused used SIM cards registered in the names of other individuals to carry out acts of cheating and fraud. Verification of the appointment orders provided to the victims confirmed that the documents were forged and not issued by any authorised government department.

Based on the findings, a case has been registered at Police Station Economic Offences Wing under Sections 420, 468, 472, and 120-B of the Ranbir Penal Code (RPC). Further investigation is underway to ascertain the full extent of the fraud and identify other possible accomplices.

The Economic Offences Wing has advised the general public, particularly unemployed youth, to remain vigilant against individuals or groups offering government jobs in return for money. Officials urged people to immediately report such fraudulent activities to the nearest police station or the Economic Offences Wing to prevent further victimisation.

Advocates Cannot Use

supply contract at a Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in Haryana. Information Commissioner Sudha Rani Relangi noted that the appellant had sought information "on behalf of his brother, who used to be supplier of vegetables/fruits to the respondent public authority".

The commission said in the absence of any explanation as to why the supplier himself could not seek the information, "it appears that the appellant has sought information on behalf of his client per se, which is not permissible".

Quoting a Madras High Court order, the CIC underlined that "a practising advocate cannot seek information relating to the cases instituted by him on behalf of his client".

The high court had cautioned that otherwise, "every practising advocate would invoke the provisions of the RTI Act for getting information on behalf of his client", which "does not advance the objects of the scheme of the RTI Act".

The commission further quoted the ruling to stress that the "laudable objectives of the RTI Act cannot be used for personal ends and should not become a tool in the hands of the advocate for seeking all kinds of information in order to promote his practice".

Taking note of the claims made by the public authority that several records were destroyed in a fire and that personal information was rightly denied under exemptions, the CIC said it found "no infirmity in the reply furnished by the CPIO".

The appeal was accordingly disposed of, with a direction to share copies of written submissions with the appellant.

Crypto Hawala Network

trail and inject cash into the domestic economy.

While India requires all Virtual Digital Asset Service Providers (VDA SPs) to register with the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), this shadow network operates entirely off the grid.

For the 2024-25 fiscal year, only 49 exchanges have registered as legal reporting entities, prompting the government to come out with fresh guidelines that include a mandatory liveness detection and geographical tracking, besides asking users to take a "live selfie" using software that verifies their presence, typically through eye-blinking or head movement.

The "penny-drop" method, which involves processing a nominal Re 1 transaction to confirm that the bank account is active and belongs to the registrant, is required. In addition to a Permanent Account Number (PAN), users must provide a secondary ID, such as a Passport, Aadhaar or Voter ID, verified via OTP.

A detailed study done by the Jammu and Kashmir Police, along with central security agencies, identified people in countries like China, Malaysia, Myanmar and Cambodia directing people in the union territory to create private crypto wallets, which are often set up using a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to avoid detection and require no Know Your Customer (KYC) or identity verification.

The Jammu and Kashmir Police has already suspended the use of VPNs in the valley as registering in crypto wallets was increasingly seen in the region of late. The VPN is a handy tool for terrorists as well as separatists to avoid detection.

The officials said the foreign handler sends cryptocurrency directly into these private wallets, placing the funds under local control without involving a regulated financial institution, and the wallet holder travels to major cities like Delhi or Mumbai to meet unregulated peer-to-peer (P2P) traders and sell crypto for cash at negotiated rates.

This effectively "breaks the financial trail," allowing foreign money to enter the local economy as untraceable cash, the officials said.

The key to this network is the use of "mule accounts," which are parking accounts that layer transactions. To keep the system running, syndicates have set up a structured commission system where such an account holder earns anywhere between 0.8 to 1.8 per cent per transaction.

The officials said that mule accounts belong to ordinary people who are motivated by the promise of commission and are assured that their role is safe and they are merely allowing their accounts to be used temporarily as parking accounts. All control of their bank accounts, including net banking usernames and passwords, is handed over to the scammer.

A single scammer is typically provided with multiple mule accounts, often ranging from ten to thirty accounts at a time, the officials said.

The officials said the rise of crypto hawala throws a new challenge of off-exchange trading and, by operating in the "grey market," these traders evade the anti-money laundering laws that apply to registered entities.

Officials warn that the "crypto-hawala" method is designed to bypass formal banking systems and avoid leaving any financial traces. By moving money from a digital private wallet to a physical cash transaction in a different city, the "financial trail" is effectively cut off.

Despite the FIU's efforts to regulate 49 major exchanges, the rise of "crypto hawala" presents a significant challenge for enforcement agencies since it allows foreign-sourced funds to enter the local economy without going through a regulated financial institution.

Stress Speeds Ageing

University, that was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or

Medicine in 2009 for the discovery.

He is professor of chemistry at the University of Chicago and advisor to the Trivedi School of Biosciences at Ashoka University in Sonapat, Haryana.

"How telomeres are regulated is very complicated and not that well understood, but factors such as a lot of stress apparently have effects on telomeres, which leads to them getting shorter with time. As a result, stem cells are unable to divide and tissues are unable to repair and regenerate. And so, shortening of telomeres might be a contributing factor to some of the problems of ageing," the 73-year-old said during a recent visit to India.

Szostak has been active in studying origins of life for about 25 years, looking at how life got started on the early earth. Research focussed on understanding the nature of first cells, called 'protocells', to arise on the early Earth, among other topics.

"There are so many different things happening as a cell divides and differentiates into different kinds of cells, tissues and organs. A lot of the understanding of these processes will come from knowledge of the sequence of the genome," Szostak explained.

Country-wide genomics projects which analyse human genomes of a population on a large scale are underway around the world. The Genome India Project is one such initiative aimed at putting forth a genetic database representative of Indians among other objectives.

"(Sequencing) the whole human genome at a population level gives us a huge amount of information about the genetic causes, resistance and susceptibility to different diseases. It also gives us a huge amount of information about the migration of populations of people over time. So, it tells us about the history of humanity in that way," Szostak said.

The Genome India Project is a genetic tool that can help understand the history of how the population emerged or evolved over time, he added.

This will have a direct bearing on the health profile of Indians, among the ethnicities in the world said to be genetically predisposed to diseases, including chronic non-communicable ones such as diabetes and hypertension.

Asked if there's anything that can be done about the genetic tendencies for disease, Szostak said, "There's no easy or a desirable way to manipulate genetics of a population. The hope is that an understanding of how all these diseases emerge from the interaction of genetics with the environment will teach us about how to minimise and avoid them, and even treat them."

While there may be genetic aspects that increase susceptibility to disease, "there's also susceptibility based on the environment -- which includes the way people eat, the way they exercise or don't. It's things like that", the geneticist said.

"And if we understand that, we can advise people on how to live a healthier life, and we can also develop therapies for when problems arise."

The scientist also spoke at length on how his pioneering work started.

It was the summer of 1980. He met Blackburn at a meeting and the two got talking about issues such as DNA and RNA.

Blackburn was researching telomeres in tetrahymena -- a single-celled organism common to freshwater environment such as ponds and lakes -- while Szostak was working on yeast genetics at the time.

In a 1984 letter, published in the journal Nature, Szostak and Blackburn hypothesised that there might be an enzyme -- now called telomerase -- that adds DNA sequences to telomeres, thereby making them longer and counteracting the shortening that happens during cell division.

Cell division -- a parent cell splitting into two or more daughter cells -- was known to be crucial for growth, repair and reproduction, and involve a duplication of the genetic material, including chromosomes and telomeres.

Telomeres were theoretically predicted in the early 1970s to shorten with each cell division, experimental evidence for which was provided in the late 1980s and directly linked to cell

ageing.

Blackburn and her graduate student Greider found the first evidence of activity of the hypothetical enzyme on Christmas Day in 1984.

"There's been so much work on telomeres ever since our discovery. A lot has focused on the enzyme telomerase that adds extra DNA to telomeres, but also on the reasons for why telomeres get shorter over time, and it's become a really active area of work," Szostak said.

Why More Families

"These were not last-minute choices," Fouzia says. "We sat down many times, calculating and recalculating. In the end, practicality won."

For pre-wedding functions, she plans to wear imitation jewellery, a decision that would have seemed unthinkable a few years ago.

"It looks fine," she says, pausing, "but emotionally it still feels like a compromise."

What often remains invisible, families say, is that the pressure does not rest only on the bride's side.

A groom-to-be, speaking on condition of anonymity, says expectations follow them too. "There is an unspoken rule that the groom's family must give a gold to the daughter-in-law," he says. "If that doesn't happen, people talk about respect, status, upbringing."

With prices rising sharply, meeting these expectations has become difficult. "No one asks whether you can afford it," he adds. "They only see what is given."

Parents describe weddings as emotionally exhausting in ways they had not anticipated. Ghulam Rasool, who is preparing for his daughter's wedding, says the joy of the occasion is overshadowed by constant worry.

"We started saving early, thinking we were doing the right thing," he says. "But now, every visit to the market reminds us how insufficient those savings have become."

For families with modest incomes, gold was never meant to be an immediate expense. It was a long-term safeguard, something to fall back on during emergencies. Today, many parents feel that safeguard slipping away.

"As parents, you want to give your child dignity," Rasool says. "But dignity has become expensive."

In local markets, the strain is visible. Irfan, a gold trader, says prices have climbed unusually fast. In 2024, gold was selling at around ₹65,000 per pound. By 2026, the same pound has crossed nearly ₹1.08 lakh. Smaller items show an even sharper rise. A gold biscuit that cost about ₹4,000 in 2024 is now priced close to ₹15,000. Currently, gold is selling at around ₹11,900 per gram, nearly ₹600 higher than the same period last year, even though winter months typically see lower wedding demand.

"This kind of increase usually happens during peak wedding seasons," Irfan says. "This time, it has come early and sharply."

Buying behaviour has changed. Customers spend longer asking questions and calculating weights, often leaving without purchasing. Many now exchange old jewellery instead of buying new pieces.

"People are hesitant," Irfan says. "Every gram is thought through."

Jewellers say lighter sets, minimal designs, and postponed purchases have become common. What was once chosen for beauty and tradition is now weighed against affordability and necessity.

Beyond prices, families speak of sleepless nights, quiet comparisons, and an anxiety about how their wedding will be perceived. These pressures are rarely discussed openly, yet they shape every decision.

As gold prices continue to rise, weddings are changing quietly, not through public declarations, but through smaller purchases, delayed plans, and careful compromises. The ceremonies may look familiar, but beneath them lies a growing unease.

The question raised in an online women's group lingers far beyond social media: in a time of tightening economic pressures, should weddings still be judged by the weight of gold exchanged, or by the peace and dignity of the families involved?

How Apple Harvest Stopped Youth from Joining Delhi Terror Plot

Observer News Service

New Delhi/Srinagar: Investigations into the "white collar" terror module busted after the recent car bombing near Red Fort showed that the mastermind Dr Umar-un Nabi had attempted to recruit a second suicide bomber but could not succeed as he backed out of the terror plot citing the need to help his family during the apple harvest, officials said on Sunday.

The Srinagar Police and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) have uncovered a parallel terror module orchestrated by Nabi, the man who was driving the explosive-laden vehicle that detonated outside the historic Red Fort on November 10, killing over 12 people.

According to PTI, interrogations of the arrested suspects have highlighted recruitment tactics used by the doctor-turned-terrorist, leading to the nabbing of a Shopian resident, Yasir Ahmed Dar, by the NIA.

The officials said Nabi had successfully radicalised Dar as a potential suicide bomber, but during a meeting in August last year, he backed out at the last minute, citing the "apple harvest season" and repairs at home as reasons.

According to the officials, Dar had been in contact with Nabi since 2023 and he admitted that Nabi's professional status as a medical doctor played a significant role in his influence, making his extremist rhetoric more persuasive and "trustworthy" to recruits.

The probe indicated that Nabi was not merely a terrorist but a strategic recruiter who was actively building secondary, independent cells to ensure the continuity of operations even if primary cells were compromised, the officials said.

During the investigation, the police also recovered a voice note from the phone of one of the accused in which he is pronouncing 'Bayat' (oath of allegiance) for Jihad.

The name of Dar, a school dropout, had



File Photo PTI

surfaced earlier in investigations when one of his friends had joined the ranks of terror groups.

During interrogation, it came to light that he had been in touch with Nabi through Telegram and he was always asked to ensure the best physical training, the officials said.

Dar is the second potential suicide bomber that Nabi was trying to rope into the terror module, as he was a "hardcore radical" and insisted that a human bomber was essential for their terror operations, they said.

As the terror module was being exposed by the Srinagar Police last year, one person identified as Jasir alias Danish was arrested from Qazigund in South Kashmir.

A bachelor in political sciences, he admitted to having met the 'Doctor module' in

October 2024 at a mosque in Kulgam, from where he was taken to rented accommodation at Al-Falah University in Faridabad.

Jasir had told his interrogators that while others in the white-collar terror module wanted him to be an over-ground worker (OGW) for the banned Jaish-e-Mohammed, he was intensely brainwashed by Nabi over several months to become a suicide bomber.

The plan, however, collapsed in April last year after he backed out, citing his poor economic condition and the belief that suicide was forbidden in Islam.

The suicide bomber scouting plot of the module, cracked by Srinagar police led by its Senior Superintendent of Police Dr G V Sundeep Chakravarthy, adds a dangerous new dimension to the investigation into the

interstate terror network linked to the JeM.

As reported by the PTI earlier, Nabi, a 28-year-old doctor from Pulwama, emerged as the most radicalised and key operative in the network spanning Kashmir, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. Officials believe he was planning a powerful Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) blast timed around the Babri Masjid demolition anniversary on December 6.

He planned to place the VBIED around a crowded place, either in the national capital or at some place of religious importance, and then disappear, the officials said.

According to the interrogation of the co-accused, Nabi's transformation began after a trip to Turkey in 2021 with co-accused Dr. Muzammil Ahmad Ganaie, where they allegedly met JeM overground workers.

Following the trip, Nabi and Ganaie, who taught at Faridabad's Al Falah University, began accumulating vast quantities of chemicals from the open market, including 360 kg of ammonium nitrate, potassium nitrate and sulphur, much of which was stored near the university campus.

The December plot fell apart when Srinagar police's meticulous investigation led to Ganaie's arrest and the seizure of the explosives, which caused Nabi to panic and finally resulted in a premature blast outside the Red Fort.

The intricate inter-state terror network was exposed after a small but significant incident of the appearance of JeM posters on walls in Bunpora, Nowgam, on the outskirts of Srinagar on October 19, 2025.

Srinagar police registered a case and reviewed CCTV footage, leading to the arrest of three locals - Arif Nisar Dar alias Sahil, Yasir-ul-Ashraf, and Maqsood Ahmad Dar alias Shahid, all with prior stone-pelting cases.

Their interrogation led to the arrest of Maulvi Irfan Ahmad, a former paramedic turned Imam from Shopian, who allegedly supplied the posters and used his access to radicalise the doctors.

Omar Abdullah Joins Marathon in Mumbai



Observer News Service

Mumbai: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday said Mumbai's progress has now become the BJP's progress, after its victory in the recent Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation elections.

"The election took place after a long gap. In every election, somebody wins and somebody lags behind. The BJP secured the maximum number of seats. It becomes their responsibility to ensure the progress of Mumbai," Abdullah said.

Chief minister was speaking to the media after taking part in the Tata Mumbai Marathon, joining thousands of runners in promoting fitness, endurance, and a healthy lifestyle through the high-profile sporting event.

"The BJP now carries a major responsibility to fulfil the expectations of Mumbai's residents after emerging as the largest party in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation elections," he said.

The people of Mumbai have given the BJP a chance to ensure the progress of Mumbai, he said.

According to PTI, Abdullah also recalled the three years he spent in Mumbai during his college education.

"When I was in Mumbai for three years in my college days, one would have never imagined even in dreams that the city will on day have) infrastructure projects such as the Coastal Road," Abdullah said.

The alliance of BJP and Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena won a clear majority in the 227-member Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation on Friday, securing 89 and 29 seats, respectively.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) won 65 seats, while Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, which contested the polls in alliance with the Sena (UBT), won six seats in the elections.

The Congress, which had tied up with Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), bagged 24 seats, AIMIM won 8, NCP 3, Samajwadi Party 2, and NCP (SP) got just one seat.

Army Organize Skiing Camp to Boost Winter Tourism in Gurez

Aadil Abdullah

Bandipora: In an effort to promote winter tourism and generate livelihood opportunities in snow-bound border areas, the Indian Army organised a skiing training camp in the high-altitude Bagtore area near the Line of Control in the Gurez sector of north Kashmir's Bandipora district.

The initiative was carried out by the Army's Rana Battalion with the objective of equipping local youth with practical winter sports skills that can help sustain economic activity during the harsh winter months. Gurez Valley, widely known for its scenic beauty, has already established itself as a popular summer destination, but heavy snowfall during winter often brings tourism and related livelihoods to a standstill.

Officials said the skiing camp was designed to train local participants in skiing techniques and basic support roles so that they can work as ski guides, instructors, or support staff for tourists visiting the area in winter. The programme also aims to project Gurez as a safe and attractive winter destination despite its challenging terrain and climatic conditions.

Locals appreciated the initiative and said the valley has immense potential for winter sports due to prolonged snowfall and natural slopes. They said such training programmes help build confidence among local youth and encourage self-reliance, reducing the need to migrate elsewhere in search of work during winter.

According to KNT, the local population expressed hope that similar programmes will continue in the future, helping Gurez Valley develop as a year-round tourist destination while strengthening cooperation between civilians and security forces in this strategically important region.

Winter Carnival 2026:

Day Two Enthralls Thousands at Baderwah

Observer News Service

DODA: The second day of the Winter Carnival 2026 was celebrated with great enthusiasm and splendor at New Bus Stand, Baderwah on Sunday, a massive gathering of locals and tourists alike.

The mega event was organized by the Department of Tourism, Government of Jammu & Kashmir, in collaboration with the District Administration Doda and Baderwah Development Authority (BDA).

The carnival featured a colourful blend of celebrity performances, local cultural programmes, ethnic food stalls and a street bazaar, offering visitors a complete cultural and tourism experience.

New Era of Agricultural Transformation

92,000 Units Established Under HADP in J&K

Observer News Service

Jammu: The Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP) has emerged as a key driver of agricultural transformation in Jammu and Kashmir, with more than 92,000 units established across the Union Territory, officials said on Sunday.

With a total outlay of Rs 5,013 crore and 29 interlinked projects spanning agriculture, horticulture and livestock sectors, the flagship programme was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March 2024.

It is designed with a clear objective -- to transition agriculture from subsistence-driven practices to sustainable, resilient and income-generating livelihoods, the officials said.

Agriculture and allied sectors are the backbone of Jammu & Kashmir's rural economy, supporting over 13 lakh families and contributing nearly one-fifth of the region's gross state value added.

As HADP advances into deeper stages of implementation, the officials said the transition from policy intent to on-ground delivery is clearly visible.

More than 3.7 lakh farmers have been registered under the programme, with around 171 activities opened for applications, while over 5.9 lakh applications have been received so far, of which nearly four lakh have been approved across districts, the officials said.

On the ground, more than 92,000 productive units covering farms, nurseries, livestock units, mushroom cultivation, poultry and value-addition enterprises have already been established, with over 86,000 units actively tracked through digital dashboards, they said.

The officials said capacity building has remained central to the programme.

Through DakshKisan, over 3.5 lakh farmers have been onboarded for structured skilling and orientation, with nearly three lakh course completions recorded, the officials said, adding this focus aims to strengthen on-

farm decision-making related to crop selection, input optimisation, enterprise choice and risk management.

Monitoring under HADP extends beyond sanctions to measurable outcomes. Digitally tracked units have generated nearly Rs 350 crore in revenue and over Rs 125 crore in profit, along with more than 1.9 crore person-days of employment, the officials said.

In efficiency terms, they said this translates into over Rs 2 of revenue and nearly Re 1 of profit for every rupee of subsidy deployed so far indicating that public investment is translating into tangible household-level economic activity.

The officials said thousands of cases have already been routed to financial institutions, marking a gradual shift from subsidy-centric support to enterprise-oriented financing.

Going forward, they said, emphasis will be placed on expanding coverage, strengthening market linkages and ensuring commercial viability of enterprises already established.

In Solitary Jail Cell, Books Keep Wangchuk Company: Angmo

Anjali Ojha

New Delhi: Cut off from the world in his solitary confinement in the Jodhpur jail, climate activist Sonam Wangchuk has turned his attention to a group of usually unremarkable visitors -- ants. Perhaps, he is drawn to the sense of solidarity and team spirit they display, his wife and HIAL co-founder Gitanjali Angmo says.

The activist and educator has been lodged in the jail for over 110 days. He was arrested on September 26 and taken to jail soon after he ended his 15-day fast over the demands pertaining to the Sixth Schedule and statehood for Ladakh, as violence erupted in Leh, leading to the death of four people.

Angmo says Wangchuk remains optimistic and hopeful; his confinement has not dampened his spirit. He is also writing a book about his experience there.

"So, the one good thing about positive and hopeful people is that they take everything in their stride. But the conditions he lives in are very dire, very difficult," Angmo told PTI during an interview.

Wangchuk has been sleeping on a blanket on the floor in a barrack devoid of furniture. He has been reading books, as he remains deprived of any communication with the out-

side world except interactions with his family and lawyers. Even the newspaper that Angmo brings for him has reports related to him cut out of it, the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh (HIAL) co-founder says.

The imprisoned climate activist and innovator has been doing Vipassana, yoga and meditation, and is content with the basic food that he gets. The family has been allowed to bring him some snacks and fruits, but the jail authorities do not allow dried apricots, a fruit Ladakh is known for.

When asked about Wangchuk's health, she says, "He is generally a very optimistic and hopeful person who sees the positive side of things. He makes the best of everything, and so he has made his life in jail a means for his progress. Just as I have made mine outside, running from pillar to post, a means of my progress," Angmo told PTI.

"For the first two months, we did not share the problems we were going through with each other. We presented a strong front. Only recently, he told us he does not have a bed or any furniture," she says.

Wangchuk is sleeping on the floor on some blankets, and he has very little space to do his walks.

"But he is using his time to do Vipassana, Surya Namaskar, Yoga; he reads a lot. He keeps asking for different books. I also keep taking different books depending on what I

feel inspired to give to him," she says.

"I gave him Sri Aurobindo's recount of his detention in Alipore jail, to make him feel that even somebody like him has gone to jail, in addition to people like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and others. But while giving him the book, I joked that just like Sri Aurobindo's enlightenment inside the jail, you should be a self-realised person when you come out. He said he would try his best," Angmo says.

The book he's writing on his jail experience is likely to be titled 'Forever Positive'.

"If he observes some ants and their behaviour, he asks me to get books on ant behaviour because the ant community has a lot of solidarity, a lot of team spirit. So, maybe he wants to study that," she says.

According to Angmo, he wanted books on sundials, as he didn't have a watch for a long time.

"I have also given him all the feel-good books like Jonathan Livingston's 'Seagull', 'Mister God, This Is Anna', et cetera," she says.

Wangchuk is not allowed to have any devices, including mechanical watches.

"No phone, no television, even the newspapers that I gave to him have things that pertain to him or to Ladakh cut out. So, when he sees the newspaper with those cuttings, he knows he must have featured there that day, or it must have been about Ladakh," Angmo says.

3 Arrested in Budgam Joint Operation

Observer News Service

Budgam: Security forces have arrested three persons and recovered ammunition during a late-night joint operation carried out by Budgam Police and the 53 Rashtriya Rifles in Mouchwa area of Budgam district, officials said on Sunday.

Officials said that during the operation, security forces recovered a total of 45 rounds of ammunition from the possession of the accused persons. A total of 45 rounds were recovered from the arrested individuals.

Police said the recoveries were effected during a coordinated late-night operation conducted jointly

by Police Station Budgam and 53 Rashtriya Rifles following specific inputs.

In connection with the recoveries, FIR No. 08 of 2026 under Sections 18 and 23 of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and Sections 7 and 25 of the Arms Act has been registered at Police Station Chadoora. Further investigation into the matter is underway to ascertain the source of the ammunition and any possible linkages.

Officials said the operation is part of the ongoing efforts to maintain peace and security in the area and that strict action will continue against elements involved in unlawful activities.

Kohli's 124 In Vain As New Zealand Beat India By 41 Runs

Amanpreet Singh

INDORE: Virat Kohli's magnificent, combative century, forged with trademark resolve under mounting pressure, proved heartbreakingly insufficient as India slumped to their first-ever bilateral ODI series defeat at home against New Zealand, losing the decider by 41 runs at the Holkar Stadium here on Sunday.

Kohli's 124 off 108 balls was a study in controlled aggression and steely temperament. The chase master shouldered the responsibility almost single-handedly, counter-punching a disciplined New Zealand attack with crisp drives, well-judged pulls and calculated risks over the ropes.

As wickets tumbled regularly at the other end, Kohli dug in, refusing to let the chase drift away, but once he fell late in the innings, India's resistance finally collapsed at 296 in 46 overs while chasing a stiff 338.

The defeat not only handed New Zealand a 2-1 series win but also marked a historic first

-- India had never before lost a home ODI series to the Kiwis.

It was a sobering evening for the hosts, made more poignant by the fact that one of their finest modern-day batters had delivered a near-perfect response to adversity.

Earlier, Daryl Mitchell's second consecutive hundred and Glenn Phillips' blistering century powered New Zealand to a competitive 337 for eight despite early jolts from India's pace attack.

Mitchell (137) and Phillips (106) stitched together a 219-run partnership for the fourth wicket that turned the innings on its head.

Calm and authoritative, Mitchell anchored the stand while Phillips provided the momentum, allowing New Zealand to shift gears after a cautious start.

India were controlling the innings at one stage, having reduced the visitors to 58 for three but Mitchell and Phillips made it a contest.

Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh, brought in for Prasidh



Krishna, made an immediate impact by removing Henry Nicholls (0) with a beauty in the opening over.

Coming closer to the off-stump, Arshdeep (3/63) shaped the ball away to perfection as Nicholls, caught in two minds,

withdrew his bat late and saw the delivery take the inside edge and crash into the leg-stump. Arshdeep and fellow seamer

Harshit Rana (3/84) hit the deck hard and extracted just enough movement to keep the New Zealand batters under check early on.

The visitors managed only 47 runs in the first 10 overs, losing both openers cheaply. Harshit dismissed Devon Conway (5) for the third straight time, inducing an edge with a back-of-a-length delivery that was safely taken in the slips.

Will Young (30) attempted to break the shackles with a six over deep backward point off Harshit but the bowler had the last laugh.

Harshit broke the 53-run stand between Young and Mitchell when the former cut firmly to the right of Ravindra Jadeja at backward point, where the Indian all-rounder took a comfortable catch.

Mitchell once again set the tone for New Zealand's recovery by taking on Kuldeep Yadav early, launching the left-arm wrist-spinner for a towering six.

In reply, India's chase began shakily. Rohit Sharma fell early for 11, caught by Kristian Clarke

off Zak Foulkes, and Shubman Gill was dismissed for 23 by Kyle Jamieson, leaving India two down inside seven overs.

Kohli immediately set about rebuilding the innings with purpose.

Shreyas Iyer and KL Rahul failed to provide support, departing cheaply as India slipped to 71 for four.

Kohli, however, remained unflustered, rotating strike efficiently and punishing loose deliveries. His partnership with Nitish Kumar Reddy (53 off 57 balls) revived India's hopes, with the duo adding valuable runs through intelligent placement rather than reckless hitting.

Even as required rate climbed, Kohli continued to attack selectively, reaching his century that drew loud applause from the Indore crowd.

Harshit Rana's late cameo of 52 off 43 balls briefly reignited hopes, but the asking rate proved too steep. Kohli's dismissal at 292 for nine -- caught by Daryl off Kristian Clarke -- sealed India's fate. (pm)

LA Olympic Qualifier

World's Elite Cyclists To Compete In Pune From Today

Press Trust of India

PUNE: The Bajaj Pune Grand Tour 2026, which offers 2028 Los Angeles Olympics qualification points and features 164 riders from 28 teams across 35 countries, will be flagged off here on Monday.

The event marks country's first-ever Continental multi-stage Road Race for Men and is classified as a Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) 2.2 international competition.

With its inclusion under the UCI framework, the Grand Tour marks India's official entry into the global professional cycling calendar.

Owing to its UCI classification, the Grand Tour will offer riders the opportunity



to earn valuable ranking points that count toward qualification for the 2028 LA Olympics.

The competition is scheduled to begin on Monday, with Prologue -- to record reach riders' individual time travel -- will decide the pole positions ahead of the opening

(Stage 1) race day.

Morocco's team Sidi Ali Unlocks Sports Team (UCI world ranked 157) has pulled out of the event due to unforeseen reasons, leaving the field of riders to 164 from 28 teams, representing 35 countries across five continents who will take the start line.

Despite the absence of Morocco, India still holds a rare milestone of having largest field of riders, unprecedented for a UCI 2.2 category race. Typically, this classification race features around 125 riders.

For the inaugural year of Grand Tour, Asia will have the largest representation of 78 riders, followed by 69 from Europe, along with strong representation from Oceania, the Americas, and Africa, underscoring the global stature of the event.

Spain's Burgos Burpelle BH enters the Grand Tour as the crowd favourites. Ranked 29th in the world, they are the only ProTeam-level squad in the field and regularly compete at cycling's high-tier races, including the Vuelta a España.

World T20: England's Pak Origin Players Receive Visas

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: The International Cricket Council has stepped in to facilitate visa formalities for all 42 players and officials of Pakistan origin bound for the T20 World Cup in India.

In the England squad, cricketers of Pakistan lineage include spinners Adil Rashid, Rehan Ahmed and pacer Saqib Mahmood.

USA will be represented by Ali Khan and Shayan Jahangir while the Netherlands have Zulfiqar Saqib to name a few.

PTI has learned that visas have already been cleared for England players Rashid, Rehan and Saqib.

Members of the Netherlands squad have also received their visas. Canada staff member Shah Saleem Zafar has been granted



clearance as well.

Visa arrangements are currently underway for players and officials of Pakistan nationality or origin who are part of teams from United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, Italy, Bangladesh and Canada.

For these teams, visa appointments have already been scheduled for early next week, indicating that the process is moving into its final phase. The deadline

for visa issuance for participants is January 31.

These clearances are seen as an important early step, given the diverse representation of players of Pakistani descent across associate and full-member nations.

The ICC exercise covers cricketers, officials and standby personnel across multiple teams, underlining the governing body's attempt to pre-empt any

last-minute complications ahead of the global event.

The ICC, which is overseeing the coordination process, has remained in constant communication with Indian High Commissions in multiple cities across continents.

The aim has been to ensure that visa applications for the remaining players and officials are handled efficiently and without procedural delays.

The council has received assurances that the pending cases will be processed smoothly within the stipulated timelines.

With visa facilitation progressing as planned, the ICC believes that all participating teams will be fully prepared from a logistical standpoint before the tournament gets underway on February 7.

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