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DDCs In J&K To Cease On February 24

Fresh Elections Awaited

KO Web Desk

Srinagar: The District Development Councils (DDCs) in Jammu and Kashmir will cease to exist from February 24 following the completion of their five-year term, officials said on Tuesday, leaving all Panchayati Raj institutions in the Union Territory without elected representation.

The DDC elections were held for the first time in Jammu and Kashmir in November-December 2020, completing the three-tier Panchayati Raj system after the reorganisation of the erstwhile state.

While the tenure of municipalities ended in October-November 2023, the Panchayats and Block Development Councils completed their five-year term on January 9, 2024. With the DDCs' tenure ending on February 24, there will be no elected local bodies functioning in the Union Territory.

According to officials, elections to the DDCs could not be held on time due to multiple factors, including the delimitation exercise and the reservation of | **More on P6**

'Mother of All Deals': India, EU Rewrite Trade Rules

Zero Duty On 93% Goods; Easier Access For Cars, Wines

Press Trust of India

New Delhi: India and the European Union on Tuesday announced the conclusion of negotiations for the free trade agreement, described as 'mother of all deals', under which 93 per cent of Indian shipments will enjoy duty-free access to the 27-nation bloc, while the import of luxury cars and wines from the EU will become less expensive.

The deal, concluded after negotiations spanning about two decades, will create a market of about 2 billion people across the world's fourth-largest economy, India, and the second-largest economic bloc, the EU.

Taken together, India and the EU account for 25 per cent of the global GDP and one-third (about USD 11 trillion) of international trade (about



USD 33 trillion).

After holding summit-level talks with the EU's top leaders, Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India has concluded the biggest free trade agreement in its history with the European Union.

"This is not just a trade agreement. This is a new blueprint for shared prosperity," Modi said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said it is a deal that gives unprecedented market access for over 99 per cent of India's exports



is likely to come into force in 2026 itself.

Once the agreement is implemented, except for auto and steel, almost all the Indian goods (over 93 per cent) from India will get zero-duty access in the European Union, and of the remaining over 6 per cent, Indian exporters will get tariff reduction and quota-based duty concessions (for goods like automobiles).

The pact is expected to be signed later this year and is likely to be implemented in early 2027.

The average tariffs of the EU on Indian goods are already low at around 3.8 per cent and will be reduced to 0.1 per cent under the deal.

But in some sectors, the duties are high. These are marine (0-26 per cent); chemicals (up to 12.8 per cent); plastics and rubber (up to | **More on P6**

Smart Technology Holds Key To Future Of Indian Railways: LG

Says Data-Driven Railways Will Transform Service Delivery

Observer News Service

Jammu: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Tuesday said smart technology and data-driven decision-making will shape the future of Indian Railways, as he interacted with Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS) officer trainees at Lok Bhavan in Jammu.

During the interaction, the Lieutenant Governor urged the young officers to focus on developing technology-inspired railway infrastructure to support the vision of a developed



India. Describing Indian Railways as the "circulatory system of India's aspirations," he said the vast network drives economic | **More on P6**

'Cultural, Linguistic Revival Efforts In J&K Began In 2020'

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Tuesday said that efforts to revitalize languages and elevate local culture in Jammu and Kashmir began in 2020 after decades, and stressed that preserving | **More on P6**

Fresh Snow Throws Life Out Of Gear Across Kashmir

Another WD To Hit J&K On Feb 1, 2



Observer News Service

Srinagar: The second heavy snowfall of the season across Jammu and Kashmir on

Tuesday brought normal life to a standstill, disrupting road, rail and air services and causing widespread inconvenience to residents and

travellers across the Valley. Snowfall began late Monday night under the influence of a western disturbance, with | **More on P6**

Srinagar-Jammu Highway Remains Shut

The Srinagar-Jammu national highway remains closed for traffic due to heavy snowfall and accumulation of snow on the Qazigund-Banihal-Ramban stretch, rendering the road | **More on P6**

58 Flights Cancelled, Tourists Stranded

All flights to and from Srinagar International Airport were cancelled on Tuesday due to continuous snowfall, officials said, leaving hundreds of passengers, including tourists, stranded | **More on P6**

HC Acquits Revenue Official In 4-Decade-Old Case

M Ahmad

Srinagar: Emphasizing the strict standard of proof required in corruption cases, the High Court of J&K and Ladakh on Monday acquitted a Patwari (revenue official) in a decades-old corruption case.

The Patwari, Muhammad Shaban Wani, had been convicted and sentenced on 29 September 2004 by the Court of Special Judge, Anti-Corruption Srinagar in a 1986 corruption case.

Allowing Wani's appeal filed in 2004, a bench of Justice Sanjay Dhar held that mere recovery of tainted money was not sufficient to prove bribery unless demand and voluntary acceptance are established by clear and clinching evidence.

"Allegations of bribery must be examined in the backdrop of all attendant circumstances and demand must be established by clear and clinching evidence," the court said while setting aside | **More on P6**

Kashmir's Racing Champ Atiq Mir Shines on WSK Debut In Italy

First Indian To Seal P2 In Qualifying

Press Trust Of India

Italy: Eleven-year-old racing sensation Atiq Mir made a roaring debut in the WSK Super Master Karting Series as she became the first Indian to set the second fastest time in a male dominated qualifying grid of 37 seasoned drivers.

Embracing the mighty challenge after moving from mini (age 8-11) to junior category (12-14) in 2026, Atiq showed remarkable speed driving in the OKNJ class for the first time.

One of the youngest drivers on the grid, the Formula 1 Academy supported racer



defied all odds to set the second fastest time in qualifying and missed out on pole by only a tenth of a second.

The only female on the grid was on course for the pole with a stellar time of 49.76 seconds over the weekend before being

ipped by Finland's Leo Latinen in the dying minutes of the session.

The Finish driver got an extra lap while Atiq didn't finish P2, still enough to script history as she became the first Indian ever to score P2 on debut in OKNJ Class.

Atiq had a front row start in all three of the heat races on Friday and Saturday, finishing 4th, 6th and 7th respectively. She also zoomed to the Fastest Lap in heat 1.

However, she did not have the luck she needed for the pre-qual on Sunday.

Starting fourth on the grid, Atiq's kart didn't start on the pre-grid, ending a special weekend with a heartbreak.

The team | **More on P6**

Snowfall Wipes Out Trout Farms In Budgam

Farmers Suffer Losses Worth Lakhs

Syed Mohammad Burhan

Srinagar: When the heavy snowfall began blanketing central Kashmir last week, Altaf Hussain Sheikh was fast asleep at his home in Beerwah Pethae Zanigam. It was his mother who first sensed the danger.

"My mother woke us up and said everything was covered in snow," Altaf recalled. "We rushed out with our neighbours to save the fish, but everything had vanished."

By the time the snow eased, Altaf's trout farm, located along the Lar canal, about 30 kilometres from Budgam town, had been completely destroyed. With no storage facilities and no means to | **More on P6**

THE HIDDEN COST OF SMOKING

₹36,500 a Year, ₹1 Crore Lost Over Time

Syed Mohamamad Burhan

Srinagar: Cigarette smoking is no longer just a public health concern but has emerged as a serious financial burden, particularly for lower and middle-income households, financial experts have warned.

In an interview with Kashmir Observer, Financial expert Irshad Mushtaq said smoking has taken the shape of an epidemic, with its economic consequences often ignored in public discourse. He said while the health hazards of smoking are widely known, its long-term financial implications can be equally devastating.

According to Mushtaq, an average smoker spending around 100 a day on cigarettes ends

up spending nearly 36,500 annually. "This amount may appear small on a daily basis, but over years it turns into a significant financial drain," he said.

He said the situation worsens for those consuming premium cigarettes, where daily spending can reach 150 to 170. "In such cases, annual expenditure crosses 60,000. If this money were saved or invested instead of being burnt on cigarettes, it could grow into substantial wealth over time through compounding," he said.

Mushtaq explained that consistent investment of such amounts over a period of 20 years could potentially grow into nearly 1 crore. "What people do not realise is that by smoking, | **More on P6**



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NAZIR AHMAD MIR fko_r

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Manzoor Ahmad Bafanda
R/o Viddy Srigufwar, Anantnag
Ph. No.: 954722838 inf

Government of Union Territory Jammu & Kashmir
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (R&B) DIVISION GANDERBAL
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
CIVIL WORKS
e-NIT No.92/EE/R&B/Divn/Gbl of 2025-26 under Endorsement No.:11243-48
Dated:-24-01-2026

For and behalf of the Lieutenant Governor, UT of J&K, e-tenders are invited on **Percentage Basis** from approved and eligible Contractors registered with J&K Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Governments for the following works:-

S.No	Name of the Work	Adv. Cost (Rs. In Lacs)	Cost of T/Doc. (In Rupees)	Earnest Money (In Rupees)	Time of Completion	Class Of Contactor
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
01	Construction of Library Room, Computer Room & Art & Craft Room at Govt High School Anderwan Kangan.	Rs.58.57 Lacs	Rs.1600/=	Rs.1,17,140/=	180-Days	AAV

Major Head: Samagra Shiksha
Position of AA: Accorded
Position of TS: Accorded

1. The Bidding documents consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Drawings, bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the departmental website www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given below:-

1.	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	24-01-2026
2.	Period of Downloading of Bidding Documents	24-01-2026
3.	Bid Submission Start Date	24-01-2026 from 05:30 PM
4.	Bid Submission End Date	30-01-2026 upto 5:30 PM
5.	Date & Time of Opening of Technical Bids (Online)	31-01-2026 at 11:00 AM in the Office of PW(R&B) Division Ganderbal.

2. Bids must be accompanied with cost of Tender document (as mentioned above) in shape of Treasury Receipt/e-Challan in favour of Executive Engineer (R&B) Division Ganderbal.
3. NOTE:-
The Date of Treasury Challan and CDR must be between the date of start of bid and Bid Submission End date. Any deviation shall render the bidder as Non-Responsive.
4. The Bidders shall upload earnest money equal to 2% of the Advertised Cost in the shape of CDR/FDR/BG at the time of tendering pledged in favour of Executive Engineer R&B Division Ganderbal.
5. The 1st lowest bidder has to produce an amount equal to 5% of Allotted Cost as performance security in shape of CDR/FDR/BG pledged to Executive Engineer R&B Division Ganderbal within 03 days before Fixation of contract and shall be released after completion of DLP and the 2% EMD shall be released in favour of successful bidder only after the receipt of 5% Performance Security.

Sd/- Executive Engineer
PW(R&B) Division Ganderbal

No.: 11243-48 DIPK-10374/25 Dated: 27-01-2026

Government of Jammu & Kashmir
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, MECHANICAL & HOSPITALS DIVISION BARAMULLA
e-mail, ID: xenmhd.bla@jk.gov.in
CORRIGENDUM-I

Subject: - Extension of Critical Dates of e-NIT Nos. 91 of 2025-26 Dated: - 12-01-2026, 92 of 2025-26 Dated: - 13-01-2026 & 94 of 2025-26 Dated: - 14-01-2026.

Reference: -Tender IDs: - 2026_PWDJK_300451_1
2026_PWDJK_300510_1
2026_PWDJK_300581_1

Due to inclement weather conditions / continuous snow fall and to ensure maximum participation, in reference to above cited e-NIT's, the Critical Dates are hereby extended as under:

For e-NIT No. 91		
S. No	Description	Re-Scheduled date
1	Date of Downloading	12-01-2026 (06:15 PM) to 30-01-2026 (06:00 PM)
2	Date of uploading	12-01-2026 (06:15 PM) to 30-01-2026 (06:55 PM)
3	Due date of opening of tender	31-01-2026 (01:00 PM)

For e-NIT No. 92		
S. No	Description	Re-Scheduled date
1	Date of Downloading	13-01-2026 (06:15 PM) to 30-01-2026 (06:00 PM)
2	Date of uploading	13-01-2026 (06:15 PM) to 30-01-2026 (06:55 PM)
3	Due date of opening of tender	31-01-2026 (01:00 PM)

For e-NIT No. 94		
S. No	Description	Re-Scheduled date
1	Date of Downloading	14-01-2026 (06:15 PM) to 30-01-2026 (06:00 PM)
2	Date of uploading	14-01-2026 (06:15 PM) to 30-01-2026 (06:55 PM)
3	Due date of opening of tender	31-01-2026 (01:00 PM)

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Mechanical & Hospitals Division
Baramulla

No:-M&HDB/TS/4358-60 **DIPK-10388/25** Dated: - 27-01-2026

29th year OF PUBLICATION




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Fresh snowfall blankets newly inaugurated Amira Kadal foot bridge in Srinagar. KO Photo By Abid Bhat

SKUAST-K Organises MDP to Boost E-Commerce for Local Products

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: To strengthen the digital footprint of regional entrepreneurship, Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-K) inaugurated a one-week MSME-sponsored Management Development Program (MDP) at the Shalimar campus.

The program, titled 'Management of E-Commerce for Promoting Local Products and Tapping Unexplored National Markets', organised by SKUAST-K's Institute of Business and Policy Research (IBPR), is designed to equip participants with the digital tools necessary to bridge the gap between local production and national consumer demand.

In his keynote address, Dr SH Baba, professor IBPR, provided an insightful overview of contemporary e-commerce strategies and the managerial frameworks required to stay competitive in the digital age. He emphasized that mastering digital platforms is no longer

Dr Ashiq H Lone, Co-Coordinator, further underscored the importance of collaborative networks and aligned the program's objectives with NEP guidelines for student development.

optional but a necessity for promoting local products in a crowded national market.

Earlier, Dr Omar Fayaz Khan, Assistant Professor IBPR and organiser of the MDP, highlighted how e-commerce acts as a force multiplier for market visibility.

Dr Ashiq H Lone, Co-Coordinator, further underscored the importance of collaborative networks and aligned the program's objectives with NEP guidelines for student development.

Sponsored by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Government of India, the week-long training aims to transform the local business landscape by empowering participants with practical managerial skills for effective business expansion.

Admin, SMC Conduct Joint Inspection to Review Weather Preparedness

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: In view of the prevailing weather conditions, the district and municipal administration carried out a comprehensive joint inspection of key essential establishments, with special focus on major healthcare institutions and critical road networks across the city.

The inspection covered vital healthcare facilities, including Lal Ded Maternity Hospital and SMHS Hospital, along with major and interior roads such as Boulevard Road, Gupkar Road, and areas via Dargah Hazratbal, to assess ground-level preparedness and re-

sponse mechanisms.

The visit was undertaken by the Additional Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar, Aadil Fareed, along with the Joint Commissioner, Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), Suhail ul Islam and the Chief Planning Officer, Srinagar, Fayaz Ahmad.

The team was accompanied by the Superintending Engineer, PWD (R&B), Srinagar, Tatheer Manzoor, Executive Engineers of the Civil and Mechanical Divisions, and other concerned officers.

During the inspection, the officers reviewed snow clearance operations, dewatering arrangements, and the availability of essential services

and supplies to ensure uninterrupted functioning of critical healthcare facilities. Special attention was given to mechanical installations supporting hospital operations at SMHS and Lal Ded Hospital. The team also visited the Mechanical Division Control Room at Shalteng to assess operational readiness.

The joint inspection was conducted under the overall direction and supervision of the Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar, Akshay Labroo and the Commissioner, SMC, Faz Lul Haseeb as part of a coordinated strategy to ensure continuity of essential services, safeguard public convenience, and maintain readiness during adverse weather conditions.

Srinagar Admin Urges People to Stay Indoors

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Amid prevailing inclement weather conditions and forecast of widespread light to moderate rain and snowfall across Kashmir, including Srinagar district, authorities on Tues-

day issued an advisory, urging residents to avoid unnecessary movement.

The advisory states that the public has been asked to remain vigilant and stay indoors until January 31, venturing out only in cases of absolute necessity.

Tourists, local Shikara Wallas, sand miners and others operating on Dal Lake, River Jhelum and other water bodies have been strictly advised against crossing or operating without first verifying prevailing conditions and the safety status of these water bodies.

In case of emergencies, residents can contact the District Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC), Srinagar, at 9103998355, 9103998356, 9103998357, or the Police Control Room (PCR) at 0194-2477567.

Principal GMC Sgr Reviews Healthcare Preparedness

Observer News Service

Srinagar: In view of the prevailing adverse weather conditions, Principal/Dean Government Medical College (GMC) Srinagar, Prof. (Dr.) Iffat Hassan, on Tuesday conducted an extensive inspection of all associated hospitals to assess healthcare preparedness.

She was accompanied by Administrator Associated Hospitals, Mohammad Ashraf Hakak, during the visit, which covered Children Hospital Bemina, Lal Ded (LD) Hospital, Chest Disease Hospital, Bone and Joint Hospital, and Kashmir Nursing Home. During the inspection, Prof. Iffat reviewed the availability of essential medicines, emergency and critical care services, manpower deployment, and overall patient care arrangements. She directed the Medical Superintendents to ensure uninterrupted healthcare services and stressed zero tolerance for any lapse in patient care during harsh



weather conditions.

According to CNS, administrator Mohammad Ashraf Hakak assured full administrative and logistical support, stating that all departments have been put on high alert to deal with any exigency. Medical Superintendents informed

that adequate arrangements are in place and staff has been deployed to ensure smooth functioning of healthcare services.

Personnel Officer Bashir Ahmad Bhat and other officers also accompanied the Principal/Dean during the inspection.

Police Seek Public Help to Identify Accident Victim

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Police in Srinagar have appealed to the general public for assistance in identifying an unidentified male body recovered after a road accident in the city.

According to police, information was received through reliable sources about a road accident that occurred during the intervening night of January 25 and 26, 2026, at Tangan Crossing near Sitara Marbal. Acting promptly on the tip-off, a police team from Police Station Nowgam rushed to the spot, where the body of an unidentified male was found.

Subsequently, a case vide FIR No. 14/2026 under relevant sections of law has been registered at Police Station Nowgam, and an investigation into the incident has been initiated.

Police have urged anyone having information that could help establish the identity of the deceased to contact Police Station Nowgam, Srinagar, on 9596770882, PCR Srinagar on 959622550 or 959622551, or the Police Control Room Kashmir by dialing 100

- TRAFFIC POLICE : 9419993745, 01998-266686
- PCR: 0194-2452092,2455883
- PDD: 0194-2450213
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- PATTAN: 01954-293507
- QAZIGUND: 01951-296153

HIGHWAY STATUS

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

 HIJRI CALENDAR 8-Shaban 1447	PRAYERS		
	FAJR	6: 05	ZUHR
ASR	4: 19	Magrib	6:00
		ISHA	7: 23

This Day In History

- 1077 - German King Henry IV is absolved by Holy Roman Emperor Pope Gregory VII and invited back to the Church after his penitent Walk to Canossa
- 1099 - 1st Crusaders begins siege of Hosn-el-Akrad Syria
- 1495 - Pope Alexander VI (Roderic Llançol i de Borgia) gives his son Cesare as hostage to Charles VIII of France
- 1521 - Emperor Charles V opens the Diet of Worms in Worms, Germany which lasts until May 25th. Produced the "Edict of Worms" which denounced Martin Luther
- 1573 - Articles of Warsaw Confederation are signed, sanctioning freedom of religion in Poland.
- 1671 - British pirate Henry Morgan captures Panama City from its Spanish defenders.
- 1689 - English parliament resolves that the throne is vacant
- 1724 - The Russian Academy of Sciences founded in St. Petersburg by Peter the Great, and implemented in a Senate decree. Called St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences until 1917.
- 1846 - Battle of Allwal, British beat Sikhs in Punjab
- 1855 - The first locomotive runs from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean on the Panama Railway
- 1860 - Britain formally returns Mosquito Coast to Nicaragua
- 1864 - Battle of New Bern, North Carolina
- 1887 - Work begins on the Eiffel Tower in Paris
- 1909 - US military forces leave Cuba for 2nd time
- 1915 - 1st US ship lost in WW I, William P Frye (carrying wheat to UK)
- 1915 - The United States Coast Guard is created by merging the US Life Saving Service & the US Revenue Cutter Service
- 1915 - US President Woodrow Wilson refuses to prohibit immigration of illiterates
- 1916 - Louis Brandeis is appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States after being nominated by President Woodrow Wilson
- 1916 - German colony of Cameroon surrenders to Britain & France
- 1932 - Japanese forces attack Shanghai.
- 1933 - French government of Paul Boncour falls
- 1933 - German government of Von Schleicher falls
- 1933 - The name "Pakistan" is coined by Choudhry Rahmat Ali and gradually accepted by Muslims in the Indian sub-continent who use it to push for a separate Muslim homeland in South Asia
- 1935 - Iceland becomes 1st western country to legalize abortion
- 1941 - French-Thai War: Final air battle of the conflict. Japanese-mediated armistice goes into effect later in the day.
- 1942 - Soviet troops under General Timoshenko's troops move into Ukraine
- 1942 - German troops occupy Benghazi Libya
- 1942 - WW II Navy flier Don Mason sends message "Sighted sub sank same"
- 1944 - 683 British bombers attack Berlin
- 1944 - U-271 & U-571 sunk off Ireland
- 1948 - President Manuel Roxas granted full amnesty to all so-called Philippine collaborators
- 1949 - UN Security council convicts Dutch aggression in Indonesia
- 1958 - Construction began on 1st private thorium-uranium nuclear reactor
- 1959 - Soviet Union wins 62-37 for 1st international basketball loss by US
- 1960 0 1st photograph bounced off Moon, Washington, D.C.
- 1961 - Republic of Rwanda proclaimed
- 1980 - USCGC Blackthorn (WLB-391) collides with the tanker Capricorn while leaving Tampa Florida and capsizes killing 23 Coast Guard crewmembers.
- 1986 - Space Shuttle Challenger explodes 73 seconds after liftoff from Cape Canaveral, with all 7 crew members killed, including Christa McAuliffe who was to be the first teacher in space.

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KO VIEW

Kashmir Music Rising

Kashmir's virtual space is now alive with the sound of young musicians picking up the santoor and rabab like never before.

After years when many believed the valley's music had lost its voice, a new generation is rewriting that story.

The rise of traditional instruments in homes, streets, and online streams feels like a cultural awakening, a signal that Kashmiri music has returned with energy and pride.

These young artists are blending old melodies with fresh styles. They sing classic ballads and popular songs while weaving in the sound of ancient instruments.

The music carries the soul of the valley, honouring the voices of the past while speaking to listeners today. Every note seems to declare that Kashmiri culture remains vibrant and alive.

Original compositions emerge alongside revived anthems that once filled hearts and minds in the valley.

Songs that had faded into memory find new life in voices that understand both tradition and contemporary taste. Listeners hear a santoor riff, recognize a familiar refrain, and feel a connection stretching across generations.

The music becomes a bridge between what was cherished and what is being created now.

Young musicians speak openly about pride in their culture. They see their craft as part of identity, heritage, and self-expression. Some upload recordings online and watch as audiences respond from cities across India and even abroad.

Technology allows the music to travel far beyond Srinagar's streets, creating a local sound with global resonance.

Bollywood has also turned its attention to Kashmiri music. Film scores and collaborations bring instruments like the santoor to wider audiences. Musicians combine market knowledge with tech knowhow, understanding how tradition and innovation can coexist. They preserve the authenticity of their instruments while making music that connects with modern listeners.

In classrooms and homes, Kashmiri children are picking up instruments too. Mentors encourage experimentation alongside preservation. Music festivals celebrate old forms with new arrangements.

The valley listens, smiles, and joins in.

CASH COURSE

Read This Before You Buy Anything

Winter Work Lost

Traditional skills and technology can secure Kashmir's future.

Irshad Mushtaq

During deep winters in Kashmir, snow often piled four feet high and roads were closed. Inside homes, families still had work.

Looms clicked, needles embroidered, and carpets and shawls slowly came to life. Traders brought raw materials and designs, and advance payments helped families repair houses, arrange marriages, and meet daily needs.

Thirty years ago, earning 100 rupees a day supported self-respect, and a culture of hard work.

Today, workers who once received advance payments struggle to earn 200 rupees a day, and many have no work at all. Crafts remain beautiful, but the ecosystem around them has broken down.

Cheap machine-made carpets and shawls flood the market. Young people are pushed to pursue degrees and white-collar jobs that the economy cannot absorb. Villages never received support in branding, packaging, marketing, or e-commerce.

The consequences extend beyond income. Youth disconnected from inherited skills face stress, anxiety, and frustration. Families lose stability, and social tensions rise when work disappears. The problem affects the economic and social fabric of villages.

Reviving Kashmir's cottage industries requires combining old skills with modern tools. Villages can focus on specific crafts, establish local design and finishing centres, and create Kashmir-origin brands.

Digital tools, including online marketplaces and storytelling, can connect artisans directly to global buyers. Co-operatives and producer companies can pool resources, reduce dependence on middlemen, and negotiate better prices.

Structured training can combine traditional craft with digital skills and basic finance, so youth earn while they learn.

Every society needs a mix of talent. Artisans, farmers, teachers, and coders all contribute. By reviving cottage industries, homes can once again provide work, income, and respect even when snow stands four feet high outside. Kashmir's future depends on it.

The author is a Srinagar-based reputed financial advisor.

Let Villagers Lead

Each year, snowfall strands villages and strains emergency services. Local employment under VB-GRAMG could solve both problems.

I was thousands of kilometres away in Kutch, Gujarat, when my phone began ringing with emergency calls from Kashmir recently.

Villagers from Kralgam Ledden, Doba Wataloo, Chalyan Chootinar, and Gogipather in Charar Sharief, Budgam, were frantic: "Three days have passed, and the snow is still blocking our roads."

They sent videos of streets buried under four to five feet of snow, children unable to reach tuitions, elderly trapped at home, and families struggling to fetch essentials.

I shared these clips on social media to grab officials' attention, hoping someone would act, but the silence was deafening.

Snow is a fact of life in Kashmir, but systems to deal with it remain inconsistent. I have spent over a decade arguing that rural employment programmes can be used for snow clearance.

MG-NREGA, now VB-GRAMG under the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act 2025, promises work to rural communities, but in practice, snowbound villages remain isolated and idle for days.

The law has passed Parliament and received the President's assent, but winter exposes the gap between policy and reality.

Before MG-NREGA, government departments in J&K routinely engaged local communities to clear snow from their own villages.

Locals were hired seasonally to keep lanes, paths, and link roads open. They knew every twist, turn, and slope. Machines were scarce, and heavy equipment could never reach narrow streets, rooftops, or lanes where villagers lived.

Human labour, guided by native understanding of terrain, snow patterns, and risks, was the most effective tool.

That model still works today and could be revived.

VB-GRAMG funds could be used to employ villagers to clear snow in their own areas. This would bring immediate and lasting benefits, including work during idle months, safer roads, and a community-driven approach to winter response.

Over the years, I have pursued this through RTIs, video reports, and meetings with MPs and MLAs.

In January 2022, I met Mohammad Akbar Lone, then MP from Baramulla, and urged him to raise the issue of snow clearance under employment schemes. He subsequently wrote to Union Minister Giriraj Singh seeking immediate intervention.

Local MLAs, including Dr Bashir Veeri from Bijnbehara, acknowledged my advocacy and discussed it with multiple ministers.

The Rural Development Minister, Javid Ahmad Dar, agreed to coordinate with the Union Ministry.

But a year later, snow clearance



under VB-GRAMG remains largely unaddressed.

This apathy continues even as winter cripples Kashmir's upper reaches. Roads in Shopian, Budgam, Kupwara, Baramulla, Bandipora, and Kulgam remain blocked for days.

JCBs clear main roads, but machines damage road surfaces and leave inner lanes untouched. In narrow streets, snow from rooftops quickly fills the cleared paths.

Manual clearing remains the only effective solution, and local employment under VB-GRAMG could make this systematic and swift.

Taken further, a regularised winter workforce could provide essential support beyond street clearance.

Every year, snowfall leads to medical emergencies that cannot reach hospitals in time. Pregnant women, patients with chronic illnesses, and elderly residents are trapped in remote villages. Deaths in transit occur when ambulances cannot move on blocked roads.

A trained local winter alert force could monitor high-risk areas, assist with immediate transport, and act as watch and warden for remote corners of Kashmir.

This would combine employment, public safety, and disaster preparedness in one program.

Rozgar Guarantee is alive in the law but dead in practice. Programs that work in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, or Kerala cannot be copied in Himalayan regions. Life halts for months in snowbound villages.

Engaging locals for snow clearance under VB-GRAMG would create work, protect infrastructure, and fulfill the law's promise: providing meaningful employment where it is

needed most.

The argument that snow clearance does not create physical assets misses the larger point.

Around 2011, Kinnaur district in Himachal Pradesh included snow clearance under NREGA. J&K has yet to submit a formal proposal to the Union Ministry.

Clearing snow in a timely manner is an asset. It preserves roads, prevents costly machine damage, and sustains communities through idle months.

If convergence works for Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin waste management, it can work for snow clearance too.

The cost of inaction is tragic and traumatic for people still at the mercy of the weather.

Villagers still wade through knee-deep snow for essentials, children miss classes, and medical emergencies go unanswered. Contractors clear main roads alone, leaving inner lanes blocked and locals without work.

A locally engaged winter workforce would create jobs, support emergency services, and help snowbound villages function on their own.

The solution is practical, and well within the framework of VB-GRAMG.

Until then, each winter brings the same frantic calls from the same villages, including the ones I received while I was in Gujarat.

The author is an environmental activist and policy commentator. He is the founder and chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Climate Action Group and a member of the J&K State Audit Advisory Board.



Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat

“
Reviving a locally engaged winter workforce would create a sense of ownership, connect communities, and empower them to respond to natural disasters. It would regularize employment, support emergency services, and turn snowbound villages into resilient, self-sufficient units. It is practical, urgent, and entirely within the framework of VB-GRAMG.”

Letter to Editor

A Kashmiri Family's Land Lost in Digital Records

Asad, Muma, Rashid, Zaina, and their mother Mukhti were used to walking the fields their grandfather had owned for decades in Nassu Badaragund, Tehsil Qazigund. They knew every corner, tree, and irrigation channel of the land.

One day, while checking the digitised Jamabandi, the official record of rights, they discovered something alarming. Their names appeared as owners, but the land column showed zero.

The system labeled them "Nadarad," implying landlessness.

The family had possession, cultivated the land, and fulfilled all responsibilities, but the record denied their ownership.

The error arose during the digitisation of revenue records.

Another individual, Gaffar, son of Habib Bhat, had sold five kanals and twelve marlas of land through two mu-

tations under Section 8 of the Agrarian Reforms Act, 1976.

Revenue staff mistakenly posted these mutations against Gaffar, son of Ali Bhat, the grandfather of the heirs, instead of the correct seller.

The clerical oversight turned lawful heirs into landless names, while the actual seller's transactions disappeared from official records.

Possession continued, but the digital record exposed the family to risks of denied loans, permissions, and recognition.

Revenue jurisprudence gives authority to the record, making the weaker party vulnerable when ground reality and documentation diverge.

The heirs faced uncertainty despite cultivating the land and honouring all obligations.

The law provides remedies to correct such mistakes.

Sections 31 and 32 of the J&K Land Revenue Act allow officers to correct clerical mistakes, accidental slips, and inconsistent entries.

Rectification mutations can remove erroneous sales, attach them correctly to the proper owner, and restore land to rightful heirs.

Section 15 empowers higher authorities to review records, verify legality, and set aside incorrect entries if subordinate staff fail to act.

Courts consistently hold that digitised Jamabandi cannot override verified handwritten records, inheritance mutations, or Girdawari, ensuring that ownership remains valid despite administrative errors.

Civil courts serve as a final option if administrative corrections stall.

The above mentioned cases highlight a systemic issue of mechanical posting, lack of verification, and ab-

sence of audits during digitisation.

The error is clerical, not substantive, and the heirs retain lawful rights.

Land in Jammu and Kashmir carries inheritance, livelihood, and identity, and correcting mistakes is a legal duty.

Administrative correction, proper verification of mutations, and thoughtful use of technology can prevent families from being dispossessed while restoring public trust in governance.

The heirs of Gaffar, son of Ali Bhat, continue to till their fields, but law and administration must acknowledge what they have held on the ground for generations.

Sincerely,

Mohammad Amin Mir
miramin354@gmail.com

Trust and Tragedy in the Kashmiri Home

A shocking CCTV clip from Srinagar opens old memories and new questions about trust inside Kashmiri homes.

Syed Nissar H. Gilani



KASHMIRI CULTURE RESTS ON OPENNESS, HOSPITALITY, AND FAITH IN OTHERS. These values build our homes and our sense of who we are. Holding on to them calls for care alongside warmth. Each door we open brings welcome and responsibility together. When trust stays close to attention, homes remain places of care rather than scenes of loss.

The video from Srinagar landed on my phone and refused to leave my mind.

A fixed camera showed a quintessential Kashmiri room put together by years of lived-in feeling.

Then it showed something that felt painfully close, even to those watching from far away.

An elderly woman lost her life inside her own home at the hands of a domestic helper she had let in.

The shock came from the place as much as from the act.

Homes in Kashmir still stand for safety, warmth, and shelter, and this incident broke straight through that belief.

That moment pulled old memories to the surface.

Years ago, when homes relied far less on hired help, a similar crime shook Srinagar.

A woman from a respected family was killed by a man engaged for domestic work. Fear spread quickly, and the case went to Javed Makdooi, then a young police officer known for sharp instincts and long hours.

The officer worked without cameras or digital trails, following people, routes, and conversations instead.

His search ended at New Delhi railway station, where he caught the accused and eased a city living on edge.

Many felt that painful episode would teach us something lasting. But life moved on, habits changed, and memories faded.

Recently, a young income tax advocate from Srinagar was killed in his Jammu home while his family



was away. The helper he trusted took his car and disappeared after the crime.

Even closer to me, a relative once faced a terrifying moment inside her own house. A maid locked her in and ran. A mobile phone left in a drawer saved her.

I still think about how small that margin was.

Stories like these stir fear, though the picture has more depth.

Kashmiri homes also hold countless stories of care and loyalty from migrant workers. Turning everyone into a suspect would erase that truth.

I return often to one such memory.

After my daughter gave birth, she hired a young Christian woman from Kerala. She had left college be-

hind and taken up domestic work, bringing with her a kindness that felt natural and unforced.

She fed the baby, held her, and watched over her with minute attention.

When the child began to crawl, her small hands reached toward the helper with complete ease.

Years later, that woman built a successful life in the United States.

She still calls us, asks after our health, and speaks with a warmth that has stayed intact.

But beyond hope, harm often appears without bloodshed.

A friend in Chandigarh once learned that staff at her child's crèche were taking food meant for infants and eating it themselves. The babies lay restless in their prams.

The centre shut down soon after, though the sense of betrayal stayed with her much longer.

These moments sit inside a larger change Kashmir has lived through.

The joint families of my childhood slowly gave way to smaller homes. Young people left for work abroad, sending money back while parents grew older in silent and secluded spaces. Couples began setting up separate households soon after marriage.

In this setup, domestic help shifted from convenience to compulsion.

Elderly parents leaned on helpers for meals, medicine, house keys, and company. Emotional distance grew alongside physical dependence.

This explains why helpers now hold so much influence inside pri-

vate spaces.

They learn schedules, habits, and weaknesses. Many carry that knowledge with care. A few misuse it in ways that leave deep scars.

Social change keeps moving, and longing for earlier times brings little relief. But thoughtful care still remains possible.

Police verification belongs at the centre of every household decision. Background checks through local police and labour agencies should come first.

The early weeks matter. Behaviour during the first twenty one days shows patterns, and families gain from watching closely before granting full access or leaving elders alone.

Technology adds another layer. Cameras record events and provide clarity. Neighbours checking in, regular phone calls, and local connections offer protection rooted in people rather than devices.

Law enforcement influences outcomes as well. Swift investigation and firm action send a clear message.

Officers like Makdooi once showed how seriousness builds public trust, and that example still holds value.

Kashmiri culture rests on openness, hospitality, and faith in others.

These values build our homes and our sense of who we are. Holding on to them calls for care alongside warmth.

Each door we open brings welcome and responsibility together.

When trust stays close to attention, homes remain places of care rather than scenes of loss.

— The author is a former civil servant based in Kashmir.

Lost in the Glow

Screens connect us to the world, but they drift us away from those who have always been there. Sitting together has never felt more distant.



Palveen Kour

I sit at the table and watch my family around me, but our minds are scattered across different screens.

We live under the same roof, share meals, and speak in passing, but the distance between us feels wider than any street or city could stretch.

Our attention flits from message to notification to video, searching for comfort or distraction, while the people who once filled our world without asking for anything in return sit silently beside us.

Social media tells us we are connected to everyone, but the truth is we are moving farther away from those who need us the most.

Real hearts no longer meet. Parents carry their children's happiness in their hands, even while their own hearts ache silently. We call ourselves modern and independent, scoff at old advice, and forget that our grandparents' words were shaped by love, loss, and lessons that lasted lifetimes.

The gap we call a generation gap is really a gap of understanding and empathy.

I recently met a grandmother who has lived decades with memories of the partner she lost. The hand she



CHANGE BEGINS WITH SETTING THE PHONE ASIDE DURING A MEAL, asking a parent how they feel, and staying a few minutes longer with an elder

held for years is now a memory she searches for in sleep.

She wants to speak of him, to cry in front of her children, but she fears being a burden.

Her grief goes unheard, her tears fall in silence. People dismiss her sadness as fussy or silly, when it is simply loneliness.

We pride ourselves on being strong, but strength without kindness becomes cruelty. We juggle moods, anxiety, and emptiness because we have traded real connection for fleeting distractions. We forget how it feels to sit beside someone without looking at the clock or checking our phones, simply being present together.

The saddest part is not solitude itself. It is sitting surrounded by family, but feeling unseen and unheard. Peace comes from putting the phone aside, sitting with an elder,

and truly listening. Their stories will not last forever.

One day, their voices will be memories, and we will realize too late that all they ever wanted was our time.

We often blame society, technology, or circumstance, but rarely ourselves. Change begins with setting the phone aside during a meal, asking a parent how they feel, and staying a few minutes longer with an elder.

Parents can also meet children with patience, with listening that does not judge.

These small acts may seem simple, but together they can heal hearts in ways we cannot measure.

— The author is a Srinagar-based Biotechnology postgraduate student and the author of three books. She also volunteers with NGOs, teaching children in rural Kashmir.

Words Define Identity

Kashmiri has the power to grow with the world and mold how we think, imagine, and create.

Umair Ul Umar

Last week, my niece held a tablet and asked, "What do we call this in Kashmiri?"

She looked at me with curiosity, and I realized there was no ready answer.

The words we used came in English: computer, tablet, internet. These words have become part of everyday life. We use, explore, and teach them.

Kashmiri has a place here too, waiting to give these tools a name, to make them our own.

Kashmiri has always been alive. A vehicle became gaadie, a tiler became albaen, and a needle became sechan. When airplanes arrived, our ancestors called them jahaze.

Words grew naturally, framed by work, home, and daily life. The language absorbed new things and gave them form. It could describe the world with imagination and clarity.

Today, English words enter our daily life with ease. Kashmiri can step in to create its own.

Children grow up learning technology and science while keeping their own language close. Every classroom, home, or story can carry Kashmiri alongside these new ideas.

Language grows when it is used with care, attention, and curiosity.

Scholars have written dictionaries, studied grammar, and recorded sounds. The next step is creating words for today.

Every new invention, or idea, can have a Kashmiri name. Each word brings knowledge, identity, and pride.

Schools, universities, and cultural groups can lead this change.

Standard words for modern tools grow when teachers, scholars, and experts work together. When classrooms use Kashmiri terms alongside English, children understand deeply and think in their own language.

Other languages show how this works.

French councils invent words for new ideas, while Icelandic creates terms that people use every day.

Learning in the mother tongue strengthens understanding. Children grasp ideas better when the language they speak also carries the meaning.

Kashmiri thrives when people act with intention. A group of linguists, teachers, and scientists can make new words, check them, and share them widely.

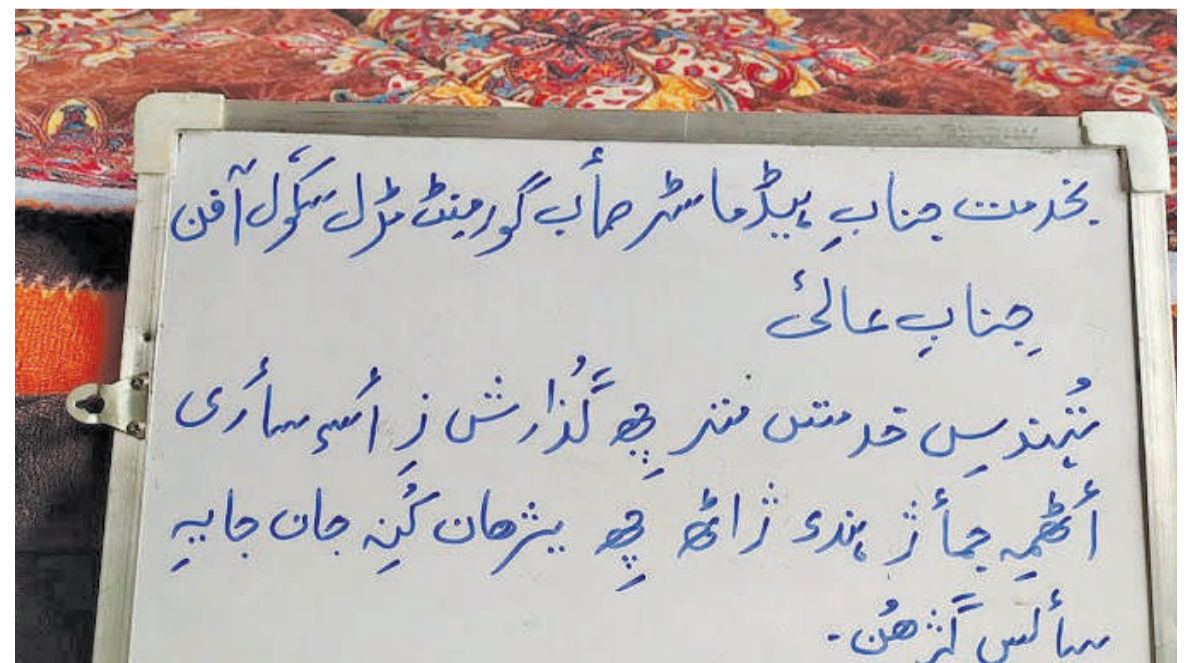
These words can exist with English and slowly enter schools, media, and public life. Teachers can show children both versions, helping them grow curiosity and confidence.

Other parts of India show what is possible. Cities like Bhubaneswar use mother-tongue learning as standard.

English opens doors to the world, while Kashmiri builds identity, knowledge, and culture.

Both grow stronger when they exist together.

— The author is an educator at GGHSS, Yariipora, Kulgam. He can be reached at umairulumar77@gmail.com.



ENGLISH OPENS DOORS TO THE WORLD, WHILE KASHMIRI BUILDS IDENTITY, knowledge, and culture. Both grow stronger when they exist together.

UGC's New Equity Regulations Spark Nationwide Debate

KO WEB DESK

New Delhi: The University Grants Commission's newly notified Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions Regulations, 2026 has triggered a nationwide debate, with students, academics and experts raising concerns over its potential impact on merit-based education, even as the UGC and the Centre maintain that the move is aimed at ensuring

equity and preventing discrimination on university campuses.

The regulations, notified on January 13, make it mandatory for all higher education institutions to put in place formal mechanisms to prevent and address discrimination. These include the establishment of equity centres and equity committees, online reporting portals and helplines, with strict penalties for non-compliance, including possible loss of

recognition and exclusion from UGC schemes.

The new framework replaces the UGC's 2012 anti-discrimination regulations, which were advisory in nature. The revised rules are binding and provide for institutional monitoring and enforcement. Officials said the regulations were framed following directions from the Supreme Court while hearing petitions related to the deaths of students Rohith

Vemula and Payal Tadv, which had questioned the effectiveness of the earlier framework.

According to the UGC, the objective of the regulations is to eradicate discrimination based on religion, race, gender, place of birth, caste or disability, particularly against Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, economically weaker sections and persons with disabilities, and to promote

equity and inclusion in higher education.

However, the notification has sparked protests and intense criticism, particularly from students belonging to the general or unreserved categories. Critics argue that the regulations contain vague definitions of discrimination, lack safeguards against malicious complaints and could create a climate of fear on campuses, affecting free academic

interaction.

A petition challenging the regulations has also been filed in the Supreme Court, alleging that the definition of caste-based discrimination under Regulation 3(c) is non-inclusionary and limits institutional protection only to members of SC, ST and OBC categories. The plea contends that students and faculty from the general category who may face caste-based harassment are excluded from

grievance redressal under the new framework.

Further criticism has centred on the composition of equity committees, which mandate representation from SCs, STs, OBCs, persons with disabilities and women, but do not provide for representation from the general category. Critics also point to the absence of clear procedural safeguards for those accused, raising concerns about potential misuse.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

'Mother of All Deals

6.5 per cent); leather and footwear (up to 12 per cent); textiles, apparel and clothing (up to 12 per cent); gems and jewellery (up to 4 per cent); railway components, aircraft parts, ships, boats (up to 7.7 per cent); furniture and light consumer goods (up to 10.5 per cent); toys (up to 4.7 per cent); and sports goods (up to 4.7 per cent).

On all these items, the EU will eliminate duties for India.

On the other hand, the EU will get duty-free access for over 90 per cent of its goods over a ten-year period in India. India will remove duties on only 30 per cent of European goods on the first day of implementation of the pact.

The main EU goods that will get duty concessions include automobiles, wines, spirits, beer, olive oil, kiwis and pears, fruit juices, processed foods like breads, pastries, biscuits, pasta, chocolate, pet food, sheep meat, sausages and other meat preparations.

These goods, at present, attract duties in the range of 33 per cent to 150 per cent.

Prices of imported cars from Europe are widely expected to come down with India agreeing to cut duty under its FTA with the EU to 10 per cent from 110 per cent gradually for 2.5 lakh vehicles a year, over six times more than offered to the UK.

According to the European Commission, following the India-EU FTA, tariffs on cars will gradually go down from the current 110 per cent to 10 per cent with a quota of 2,50,000 vehicles a year. In 2024, Europe exported motor vehicles worth 1.6 billion euros to India.

A commerce ministry official said the actual threshold is 15,000 euros (about Rs 15 lakh) under the FTA, meaning a car worth Rs 15 lakh will come to the Indian ports.

After that, there will be the import duty, taxes, insurance, freight, transportation and registration costs, so all components will add another Rs 10-12 lakh on the landed cost, pushing up the overall prices for consumers.

Under the pact, EU goods such as machinery and electrical equipment, aircraft and spacecraft, optical, medical and surgical equipment, plastics, chemicals, iron and steel, and pharma will enjoy duty-free access in the Indian markets.

"On automobiles, calibrated and carefully crafted quota-based auto liberalisation packages will not only allow EU automakers to introduce their models in India in higher price bands but also open the possibilities for Make in India and exports from India in the future," the commerce ministry said.

In the textiles sector, India will be able to better compete with countries like Bangladesh, which enjoy duty-free access in the EU nations. After the pact, Indian textile items will not attract any duty. At present, the duty is 0-12 per cent.

Goyal said, at present, the EU imports textiles worth USD 250 billion annually, and India's exports stood at only USD 7 billion.

The sector has the potential to increase the shipments to about USD 30-40 billion soon after the implementation of the agreement.

India will not give any duty concessions in the dairy (including cheese), soy meal and cereals sectors. The EU is also protecting its sugar, beef, meat and poultry sectors. On the services front, the EU has made one of its best offers to India, opening 144 sub-sectors out of 155, and India is opening 102 sub-sectors to them.

4 Killed In Udhampur

who was also travelling in the bus, sustained injuries and was admitted to Government Medical College Hospital, Udhampur. Her condition was stated to be stable.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah expressed grief over the loss of lives. In his condolence message, the Lieutenant Governor conveyed sympathies to the bereaved families and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured. The Chief Minister also extended condolences and wished strength to the families during this difficult time.

Meanwhile, police in Jammu have registered a case against the driver of an overloaded mini bus found being driven rashly in the Jhajjar Kotli area as part of a drive against traffic violations. Police said the vehicle was posing a serious threat to public safety.

HC Acquits Revenue

the conviction and sentence to Wani, who had been sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment under Section 5(2) of the Jammu and Kashmir Prevention of Corruption Act and one year under Section 161 RPC.

The case arose from FIR No. 40/1986 registered by the Vigilance Organization Kashmir, alleging that the appellant demanded a bribe of Rs 1,000—later reduced to Rs 800—for issuing a revenue extract required for the sale of land. During a trap laid on September 15, 1986, Rs 700 was claimed to be recovered from Wani and Rs 100 from another Patwari, who was later discharged.

Re-examining the evidence, the High Court noted that the complainant had turned hostile and categorically denied making any payment or witnessing any demand for bribe. Crucially, the shadow witness also failed to depose that he had seen the complainant hand over the money to the accused, raising serious doubts about the prosecution version.

The Court observed that the trial court had relied heavily on recovery and phenolphthalein test results, overlooking the settled legal position that proof of demand is the sine qua non for conviction in bribery cases.

"The learned Trial Court proceeded on the premise that once the money was recovered from the pocket of the appellant and there was no contradiction in the recovery evidence, it must be presumed that the same was in pursuance of demand. Such conclusion is contrary to the settled legal position," the Court said, adding, "For proving a trap case, four essential ingredients are required: (i) demand of illegal gratification, both initial and at the time of trap; (ii) acceptance of money pursuant to such demand; (iii) recovery of tainted money; and (iv) motive or consideration for demanding such money."

Citing Supreme Court judgments in *B. Jayaraj v. State of Andhra Pradesh* and *Selvaraj v. State of Karnataka*, the Court reiterated that recovery alone, without proof of demand and acceptance, cannot sustain a conviction.

It was further noted that the alleged trap was conducted in a private house, the owner of which did not support the prosecution case, and that the accused had plausibly explained that he was ill and had deputed another Patwari to prepare the revenue extract.

Holding that the prosecution failed to prove demand and voluntary acceptance of illegal gratification beyond reasonable doubt, the High Court concluded that the conviction was based on conjectures and suspicion rather than legally admissible evidence.

"The finding recorded by the learned Trial Court that the complainant may have been won over is purely conjectural and is not supported by any cogent evidence," the Bench said, adding, "The Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Selvaraj* has categorically held that courts cannot draw adverse inferences against the accused on mere assumptions, particularly when the prosecution itself has failed to establish the foundational facts of demand and acceptance."

Accordingly, the appeal was allowed, the conviction and sentence were set aside, and Wani was acquitted of all charges.

Fresh Snow Throws

most parts of Kashmir receiving fresh accumulation. While plains, including Srinagar, recorded light to moderate snowfall, higher reaches witnessed moderate to heavy snow.

South Kashmir areas, including the Shopian plains, received heavy snowfall with fresh accumulation of 14 to 15 inches, according to details available with Kashmir News Observer. In North Kashmir, areas such as Handwara, Gurez, Karnah and Uri also reported heavy snowfall, disrupting interior roads.

Official data showed that Zojila received nearly three feet of snowfall, while Sonamarg recorded around two feet. Gagangar and Kulan Gund received about one and a half feet, while parts of Kangan in Ganderbal district saw nearly four inches of snow.

The snowfall led to the closure of several roads due to slippery conditions. The Srinagar Jammu National Highway was shut after heavy snow accumulation between the Qazigund and Banihal stretch, cutting off surface connectivity between the Valley and the rest of the country. Officials said snow clearance operations were underway, but no traffic was allowed on the highway.

Rail services were also affected, with several trains cancelled due to snow on the tracks. Officials said services were restored after a few hours once tracks were cleared, while train services between Srinagar and Katra continued as per schedule.

Air traffic was severely hit, with flight operations at Srinagar Airport suspended throughout the day. Nearly 50 flights were cancelled as snow accumulation on the runway and poor visibility made operations unsafe, leaving hundreds of passengers, including tourists, stranded.

Popular tourist destinations such as Gulmarg, Sonamarg and Pahalgam witnessed heavy snowfall, transforming them into scenic winter landscapes. While the snowfall added to the Valley's visual appeal, it also created travel difficulties for visitors.

In view of the situation, police and district administrations set up control rooms and issued helpline numbers to assist stranded passengers. Police personnel also helped people reach safer locations and provided assistance during medical emergencies in areas including Sopore, Handwara, Bandipora, Ganderbal and Kulgam.

The Jammu and Kashmir Disaster Management Authority issued avalanche warnings for several districts, cautioning people against venturing into higher and vulnerable areas. The India Meteorological Department warned of fresh snowfall and possible avalanches in higher reaches over the next 48 hours, particularly along the Pir Panjal range.

Meteorological officials said snowfall was expected to reduce by Tuesday evening, with weather conditions likely to improve from Wednesday morning. Dry weather has been forecast for the next 48 hours, though light to moderate rain or snow may occur at isolated places due to another western disturbance.

Another spell of precipitation is likely on February 1 and 2, the Meteorological Department said.

Authorities advised travellers and transporters to check road and highway conditions before starting their journey and urged residents to strictly follow official advisories. Farmers have been advised to suspend agricultural activities till January 28 as continued rain and snowfall could damage crops.

District administrations remain on high alert to deal with any emergency, while people have been

advised to stay indoors unless necessary until weather conditions improve.

Srinagar-Jammu

non-motorable, officials said on Tuesday.

Officials said that no traffic was allowed to ply on the Jammu-Srinagar highway as snow clearance operations were underway. They said passenger safety remains paramount. "Traffic has been stopped at all holding points as the road surface has turned into a virtual ice sheet," an official said.

He said that due to heavy snowfall, the highway was closed from both the Jammu and Kashmir divisions. "Though clearance work was taken up, the highway is still inaccessible for full traffic movement," he added.

According to officials, some heavy motor vehicles (HMVs) are stranded along the snow-bound Qazigund axis and in the Banihal-Ramban sector.

"Restoration efforts are ongoing and are subject to weather conditions. Stranded vehicles are being provided with the necessary assistance, and traffic will be allowed only after a green signal from concerned agencies," the official said.

The Srinagar-Sonamarg-Gumri (SSG) Road, Bhaderwah-Chamba Road, Mughal Road and Srinagar Road are also closed due to snow accumulation.

Inspector General of Police (Traffic), M. Suleman Choudhary said the Jammu-Srinagar highway was closed due to snowfall on the Qazigund axis and the Banihal-Ramban stretch.

"The highway will remain closed tomorrow as well, and traffic will be restored only if weather conditions improve and a green signal is received from road agencies," the IGP said.

Railway services were also affected due to snowfall, with three up and five down trains suspended, officials said. However, Vande Bharat trains and two additional special trains were operated amid the inclement weather.

Around 1,400 passengers travelled in the two special reserved trains operated by the Jammu Division to manage the rush caused by road closures and adverse weather. More than 650 passengers travelled in the first special train, while over 700 passengers travelled in the second one.

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Uchit Singh, said that the special reserved train ensured connectivity between Katra and the Kashmir Valley during the adverse weather.

"The train maintained an occupancy rate of over 100 per cent. Passengers appreciated the service, terming it extremely beneficial, especially when road and air connectivity were disrupted," Singh said. "Such initiatives ensure safe travel during bad weather and improve passenger convenience, particularly during the tourist season." (KNO)

58 Flights Cancelled,

across the Valley. An official of the Airports Authority of India said adverse weather conditions and persistent snowfall made the runway unsafe for aircraft operations.

"Due to continuous snowfall in Srinagar, the runway is currently not available for safe aircraft operations. In the interest of passenger safety, all flight operations to and from Srinagar have been cancelled for the day," the official said.

He said airport authorities and airlines were closely monitoring the weather situation and that flight operations would resume once conditions improve and the runway is declared safe.

A total of 58 flights, including 29 inbound and 29 outbound, were cancelled due to the snowfall, the official said.

Passengers have been advised to remain in touch with their respective airlines for the latest updates and alternate travel arrangements.

The flight cancellations have caused inconvenience to many travellers, particularly tourists who were scheduled to return home after spending the weekend and the Republic Day holiday in the Valley.

Meanwhile, officials said snow clearance operations were underway at the airport, while the Meteorological Department has forecast gradual improvement in weather conditions later in the day.

Smart Technology Holds

growth, strengthens social cohesion, and connects the nation from remote rural habitations to major industrial centres.

"From formidable mountain heights to distant habitations, Indian Railways threads together industry and markets while energising the everyday lives of millions," he said.

Emphasising the importance of data and technology, the Lieutenant Governor said the wealth of operational, passenger, and freight data must be harnessed through scientific analysis to transform service delivery. He said a technology and intelligence-driven approach would sharpen demand forecasting, optimise resource allocation, reduce accident risks, and strengthen railway infrastructure.

"Smart technology holds the key to reimagining Indian Railways as a passenger-first mobility powerhouse for the 21st century," he said, adding that as India's economy grows and cities expand, the demand for efficient logistics will continue to rise. He noted that Indian Railways is evolving to become swifter, safer, and more dependable, with emphasis on enhanced operations and optimal resource deployment.

The Lieutenant Governor also highlighted the critical role of reforms and technology in the freight sector. He said dedicated freight corridors,

modern logistics terminals, and integrated digital platforms could make freight transport faster, cheaper, and more competitive, thereby reducing costs for industries and giving a boost to the Indian economy.

Stressing the need for future-ready infrastructure, he said developing a multimodal logistics network by integrating rail with road and other modes of transport is essential to meet emerging mobility and logistics demands.

Extending his best wishes to the officer trainees, the Lieutenant Governor encouraged them to embrace new challenges and opportunities, and to keep national interest paramount in their professional conduct.

"Every file, every decision, and every order you make must have the ultimate objective of serving the nation and building a developed India," he said.

The IRMS officer trainees are visiting the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir as part of the Bharat Darshan programme. Principal Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor Dr Mandeep K. Bhandari, course directors, and senior officials were also present during the interaction.

'Cultural, Linguistic

this heritage remains a collective responsibility.

"It is our duty to advance this heritage not merely as memory, but as a living, breathing tradition," the Lieutenant Governor said while addressing the Akhil Bhartiya Hindi Kavi Sammelan at Abhinav Theatre, Jammu. The event was organized by the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages as part of the Republic Day celebrations.

Extending his felicitations to the poets participating in the Sammelan, the Lieutenant Governor highlighted the transformative role of the literary community, saying poets possess a unique power to reform society's inner character, propel social momentum, and infuse renewed vitality into the nation's consciousness.

"A truly prosperous society, rich in material progress yet balanced in culture and spirit, needs the essential contributions of both scientists and poets," he said.

Reflecting on the essence of poetry, the Lieutenant Governor said it serves as a bridge between the tangible and the ethereal. He observed that poetry emerges when inner emotions transcend ordinary expression and crystallise into articulate form, resonating with the rhythm of existence.

He further said culture provides direction to the soul, while economic empowerment lends stability, adding that a harmonious, progressive, and self-reliant society can emerge only when both dimensions grow together.

"We possess natural resources, human capability, and a rich cultural heritage. What is required is wise and deliberate deployment of these resources. This will enable Jammu and Kashmir to fulfil the aspirations of its people while contributing to national advancement," the Lieutenant Governor said.

Padma Shri awardee Dr S P Varma, Principal Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor Dr Mandeep K Bhandari, Principal Secretary Culture Brij Mohan Sharma, Divisional Commissioner Jammu Ramesh Kumar, Director Anti-Corruption Bureau Shakti Kumar Pathak, DIG Jammu-Samba-Kathua Range Shiv Kumar Sharma, Regional Director IGNCAs Shruti Awasthi, Secretary JKAAL Harvinder Kour, senior officers of the police and civil administration, prominent literary figures, and people from various walks of life attended the Kavi Sammelan.

36,500 a Year

they are not just damaging their health but also losing the opportunity to build financial security," he said.

He said smoking has been socially normalised in many parts of Kashmir, making the problem more entrenched. Rising cigarette prices due to inflation further add to the financial pressure on smokers, particularly those from economically weaker sections.

The expert said money spent on cigarettes could instead be channelled into savings, income-generating activities or long-term investments. "Reducing or quitting smoking can significantly improve a person's financial condition, reduce dependence on loans and enhance overall economic stability," he said.

Mushtaq stressed the need to look at smoking not only as a health issue but also as a financial and social problem. He said awareness about the economic cost of smoking could help people make informed choices and adopt preventive measures.

"Smoking silently erodes both health and wealth. Addressing its financial impact is essential for improving quality of life and long-term security," he added.

Snowfall Wipes

save the dying fish, the family distributed what they could among villagers.

"I have suffered a total loss of more than one lakh rupees," Altaf said.

For Altaf, the loss is particularly painful given his long and troubled journey in trout farming. He first started his farm in 2012, but was forced to shut it down in 2014 after people used bleaching powder in nearby waters to illegally catch fish, killing his stock.

"Even back then, no support was given by the fisheries department," he said.

After nearly a decade, Altaf restarted the farm in 2024, confident that his experience and familiarity with Kashmir's winters would help him

manage the risks. But this winter proved different. "We are used to snow, but not this kind of snow," he said. "There was more than three feet of snowfall."

The fish he lost were more than a year old, weighing between 400 and 500 grams. "The total stock was around two quintals," he said. Disillusioned by past experiences, Altaf added, "I haven't even consulted the department this time. I don't trust them."

Altaf's story reflects the plight of several trout farmers across Budgam district who have suffered severe losses due to the unprecedented snowfall.

In Gutipora Arigam, Fayaz Ahmed, who has been in the trout farming business for around one and a half years, lost approximately 18,000 trout fish.

"This was the stage where I was hoping to recover my investment," Fayaz said. "Instead, everything has been wiped out."

Another farmer, Ghulam Muhammad from Gutlipora along the Azgi Canal Road, has been running a trout farm for the past five to six years. He estimates his losses at 20 to 25 quintals of fish, worth between 10 to 15 lakh.

"The fish were around 250 grams and we were waiting till March for them to reach 300 grams," Ghulam Muhammad said. "But then it snowed heavily and the entire stock died."

Although officials from the fisheries department visited his farm after the incident, Ghulam Muhammad remains pessimistic about any relief. "They came and saw the damage," he said, "but I have no hope of receiving any compensation." Trout farming has emerged as a promising livelihood option in Budgam, particularly in canal-fed areas with cold-water conditions. However, the recent losses have exposed how vulnerable small-scale farmers remain to extreme weather events and a lack of institutional support.

Responding to the situation, the Fisheries Department has acknowledged the damage caused by the snowfall. Speaking to Kashmir Observer, an official from the department said that teams have been dispatched to assess the losses.

"Teams have been sent to assess the damage on the ground, and a report has been forwarded to the Directorate of Fisheries as well as the district administration," the official said.

He added that the department is exploring ways to assist the affected farmers. "Around 11 trout farms in Budgam district have witnessed losses. We are looking forward to helping the distressed farmers, and possible assistance will be provided to them," the official said.

For farmers like Altaf Hussain Sheikh, however, hope remains fragile. Standing beside his snow-covered ponds, he summed up the despair shared by many trout growers in the district: "We put everything we have into these farms. When disaster strikes, we are left alone to bear it."

Kashmir's Racing

tried very hard to fire up the kart but to no avail. Because of the mechanical failure, she was relegated down to 18th place on the grid for the final.

Starting on the outside lane, Atiqa was pushed off the track in Turn 1 and dropped to 22nd. From thereon, she made a remarkable recovery to finish 14th out of 37 drivers.

"That was a good debut weekend for me. I love the OKN category as the karts are very fast and power is instant. I worked hard during this weekend with the team and my coaches as I had limited track time in this kart compared to the other drivers who are far more experienced in this class.

"But we all worked hard as a team and got me up to speed. I wasn't expecting a P2 in qualifying and almost a Pole in a debut race, what else can I ask for. Pity about the Pre Final when my kart wouldn't start but that is motor racing. The team Modena other than this has been flawless and have integrated me really well."

Atiqa's father Asif Mir, a former Formula Asia Vice-Champion, said her daughter's performance on debut surpassed his expectations.

"She showed top quality speed and beat some of the best karters in the world with far more experience than her. Atiqa has proven that she has the natural talent as a racer. Atiqa initially held Pole Position at the end of qualifying and it was great to see the Indian flag on top. We will continue to work and hone her skills," said Asif.

DDCs In J&K

wards for Other Backward Classes.

In a communication, the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj said that as per the opinion of the Department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and in accordance with provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Rules, 1996, the term of the District Development Councils commenced from the date of issuance of the notification constituting the councils on February 25, 2021.

"Accordingly, the Councils shall cease to exist with effect from February 24, 2026," the department said.

Last year, the Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Dedicated Backward Classes Commission, constituted on June 11, 2023 to carry out empirical studies on Other Backward Classes representation, submitted its final recommendations to the government on February 27.

In his address to the budget session of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly on March 3 last year, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha had said the government was committed to strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies by ensuring timely elections at all levels.

36th UTLCC

CS Favours Tech-Driven Measures to Curb Cyber Frauds

Observer News Service

JAMMU: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo emphasised the need for robust technology-driven solutions, strengthened enforcement mechanisms and real-time coordination among regulators and law enforcement agencies to effectively curb cyber frauds and online financial scams.

Chairing the 36th Union Territory Level Coordination Committee (UTLCC) meeting, convened by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Jammu, the Chief Secretary asserted that comprehensive technological interventions, coupled with stringent legal action, are imperative to safeguard the public from the menace of cyber-enabled financial frauds.

The UTLCC is a statutory co-ordination forum constituted by the Ministry of Finance to ensure close cooperation among regulators and enforcement agencies, curb unauthorised deposit-taking and other unregulated financial activities, and facilitate sharing of market intelligence.

The meeting was attended by the Regional Director, RBI, Jammu; Principal Secretary, Home



Department; IGP Crime; Commissioner Secretary, Law; Director, Information; Director, Industries, Jammu, and other senior officers.

Senior officials including GM, RBI; Registrar of Cooperatives; Market Intelligence Unit, RBI, along with representatives of SEBI and ICAI, also participated.

Taking serious note of instances of cyber fraud and online cheating reported in the UT, the Chief Secretary directed that the strictest possible action be taken against offenders under the relevant provisions of the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes (BUDS) Act, which has now been operationalised in Jammu and

Kashmir.

He called upon the RBI and law enforcement agencies to clearly define and streamline cyber regulatory protocols for swift and effective enforcement. Stressing on public awareness, the Chief Secretary directed the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), J&K, to publish awareness campaigns in local newspapers and across official social media platforms, in coordination with RBI Jammu, particularly highlighting the importance of investing only in RBI-authorized and white listed entities.

The Chief Secretary further urged regulatory authorities, including the Registrar of Compa-

nies (RoC), to proactively share details of unregistered and suspicious entities with law enforcement agencies to enable timely action against repeat offenders. He also underscored the need for capacity building and sensitisation of police and defence personnel to effectively deal with financial frauds and cyber crimes.

Highlighting financial safety initiatives, Atal Dulloo stressed the importance of the Unified Lending Interface (ULI) introduced by RBI to make lending and investment processes safer and more transparent. He also called for onboarding J&K Bank on enhanced RBI safety and cyber security parameters to fur-

ther strengthen the digital payments ecosystem in the UT.

The Chief Secretary reiterated the need for firm action against fraudulent mobile applications, websites, Nidhi companies and other unregistered or unregulated entities involved in duping the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Earlier, Chandrashekhar Azad, Regional Director, RBI, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, apprised the meeting of various initiatives undertaken by the Reserve Bank of India to curb cyber frauds and financial crimes. He stressed the importance of a collaborative and coordinated approach among regulators, enforcement agencies and other stakeholders.

He highlighted the launch of exclusive internet domains 'bank.in' for banks and 'fin.in' for NBFCs to prevent the creation of deceptive websites impersonating financial institutions. He also informed that, as per RBI guidelines, regulated entities are using verified customer care numbers published on the Sanchar Saathi portal, with '1600xx' series for service calls and '140xx' series for promotional calls, to curb fraudulent communication.

Snowfall Rejuvenates Water Bodies in Kashmir



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Fresh spells of rain and snowfall have brought much-needed relief to Kashmir, rejuvenating water bodies across the Valley, which had witnessed alarming depletion following a prolonged dry spell.

According to official data obtained by KNO, Jammu and Kashmir recorded an overall rainfall deficit of 85 per cent between November 1 and January 21, receiving only 20.6 mm of rainfall against the normal 139 mm. The deficit had severely impacted springs, streams and rivers, raising concerns over a looming water crisis and drought-like conditions in several areas.

The Veshaw River, a major tributary of the Jhelum in Gulgam district, was among the worst-hit water bodies and had dried up completely.

Officials said fresh precipitation has now led to its revival, raising hopes for

the rejuvenation of other major springs across the Valley.

An official from the Jal Shakti department said that water discharge has improved considerably. The drinking water supply pipelines are now functioning smoothly in areas that were earlier affected by low flow, he added.

Farmers termed the snowfall a lifeline after months of dry conditions. "We were deeply worried as our springs had dried up and the soil had lost moisture. This snowfall has revived our hopes and will help recharge groundwater," said Abdul Rashid, a farmer from Yaripora.

He said the snowfall would prove beneficial for crops and orchards. "Snow acts as a natural fertiliser and also protects crops from frost damage. If such weather continues, it will ensure a good agricultural season ahead," he added.

Environmental expert

Rouf Hamza told KNO that the depletion of water bodies in Kashmir was primarily due to insufficient snowfall this winter. "Snowfall plays a vital role in sustaining and recharging water bodies. The recent snowfall has led to the rejuvenation of these critical water sources," he said.

He said the snowfall has also recharged Kashmir's glaciers, often referred to as the Valley's 'water banks'. "Glaciers are the lifeline of Kashmir's economy. Fresh snowfall strengthens glacier mass, ensures sustained river flows during summer and supports agriculture, hydro-power and drinking water needs," Hamza said.

He expressed optimism about the coming months, saying the fresh snowfall would benefit farmers and orchardists alike. "Snow is crucial for Kashmir, as it supports agriculture, horticulture and tourism, which form the backbone of the Valley's economy," he said.

The expert added, "Snowfall helps protect forests from forest fires, as fires tend to spread throughout the year due to a lack of moisture in the forests. Snow also reflects a good amount of sunlight, which helps reduce global warming."

CM Omar Chairs Pre-Budget Meet with Jammu, Samba Reps



Observer News Service

JAMMU: As part of the ongoing exercise for formulation of a people friendly and development-oriented budget, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah chaired a pre-budget consultation meeting with Members of the Legislative Assembly from Jammu and Samba districts, here.

Discussions were held on sector-wise priorities, district-specific developmental needs and policy interventions aimed at balanced and inclusive growth.

The consultation was attended by Ministers Sakina Ito, Javid Ahmed Dar and Satish Sharma, who also represents the Chamb Assembly constituency. Members of the Legislative Assembly present in the meeting included Dr Devinder Kumar Manyal (Ramgarh), Surjeet Singh Slathia (Samba), Rajeev Kumar (Bishnah), Garu

Ram Bhagat (Suchetgarh), Vikram Randhawa (Bahu), Yudhvir Sethi (Jammu East), Devyani Rana (Nagrota), Arvind Gupta (Jammu West), Sham Lal Sharma (Jammu North) and Mohan Lal (Akhnoor).

The meeting was also attended by Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister Dheeraj Gupta, Additional Chief Secretaries of Power Development Department and Public Works Department, Principal Secretary Finance, Commissioner Secretary Industries & Commerce, Secretary Tribal Affairs, Secretary Rural Development, Deputy Commissioners of Jammu and Samba districts, Director General Budget, senior officers of the Finance Department and heads of key departments.

The out station officers attended the meeting through video conferencing.

Addressing the legislators,

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said that the pre-budget consultations are part of a continuous and evolving process aimed at ensuring meaningful participation of elected representatives in shaping government priorities.

"I have reviewed the discussions held over the last few days. If we look at it from one side, this has been a continuous process. The good thing is that most of the issues raised were not repeated," the Chief Minister said.

He emphasised that the purpose of these meetings is consultation rather than formal responses. "You and I both know that the government's response to district development board meetings does not figure in these consultations. The objective here is to listen to you, understand your views and thoughts, and then translate them into policy and action," he said.

The Chief Minister explained that constituency-specific issues would be addressed during the budget discussions in the Assembly when departments present their grants. "Whether it is the establishment of a degree college, irrigation-related works or other sectoral issues, answers will come when the concerned ministers present their grants in the House," he added.

Tourists Say Taxi Driver Robbed Them During J&K Trip

SRINAGAR: A tourist couple from Kolkata was allegedly robbed by their cab driver in the Banihal area while visiting Kashmir, prompting police to initiate an investigation into the matter, officials said.

According to the complaint lodged by the victims, the cab driver fled with their belongings after dropping them off at Banihal. The couple said they realised the theft soon after the driver left the spot with their luggage and personal items.

Officials said the accused driver has been identified as Amit, a resident of Uttar Pradesh. The vehicle involved in the incident bears registration number UP16 NT 6191.

According to KNT, the victims, particularly the lady namely Uma from Kolkata have appealed to the authorities to trace the cab and apprehend the driver at the earliest so that their belongings can be recovered. They also urged swift action, citing the distress caused to them during their visit.

Police said they have taken cognizance of the complaint and initiated necessary legal proceedings. Efforts are underway to track the vehicle and locate the accused driver, officials added. (Observer News Service)

Power Supply Stable Despite Snowfall, KPDC Officials Say

SRINAGAR: Power supply across the Kashmir Valley remained largely stable on Tuesday despite continued snowfall in several areas, officials said.

Officials from the Power Development Department said that the electricity infrastructure is functioning normally and no major disruption has been reported so far due to the prevailing weather conditions. They said field teams have been deployed across districts to monitor the situation and respond promptly to any localized faults.

Officials said snowfall, though continuing in parts of the Valley including Srinagar, south Kashmir and higher reaches, has not significantly affected transmission or distribution systems. He added that precautionary measures had been put in place in advance, including readiness of maintenance crews and availability of essential equipment.

They said power supply to hospitals, water supply schemes and other essential services is being given priority to ensure uninterrupted functioning during the weather spell.

According to KNT, authorities said control rooms are operational at district and divisional levels to receive complaints and coordinate rapid response in case of outages. Consumers have been advised to report faults through designated helpline numbers.

Meanwhile, light to moderate snowfall continued in several areas of the Valley, with officials saying the situation remains under close watch. (Observer News Service)

BRO Restores Strategic Rajouri-Kandi-Kotranka Road



RAJOURI: The Border Roads Organization on Tuesday restored traffic movement on the strategic Rajouri-Kandi-Kotranka road after clearing heavy snowfall along the route, officials said.

According to officials, BRO teams cleared nearly three feet of accumulated snow from a 35-kilometre stretch of the road within 24 hours, enabling the restoration of connectivity to remote and snowbound areas of Rajouri district.

Officials said the road is of strategic importance as it connects several far-flung habitations and serves as a key route during winter months. The swift clearance operation was carried out using heavy machinery despite challenging weather and terrain conditions.

A BRO official said round-the-clock efforts were made to ensure early restoration of the road, keeping in view the movement of essential supplies and emergency services. He said teams remain deployed in the area to prevent fresh blockages in case of continued snowfall.

According to KNT, locals welcomed the restoration of the road, saying prolonged closure would have severely affected daily life, access to medical facilities and supply of essential commodities.

Officials said BRO continues to monitor other vulnerable road stretches in the region and will undertake further clearance operations as required. (Observer News Service)

Tawi Artificial Lake to Host 'Boating Festival' on Jan 28-29

Observer News Service

JAMMU: After nearly 15 years, the dream of an artificial lake on the Tawi River in Jammu city has finally taken shape, with Jammu Smart City Limited announcing a two-day Tawi Boating Festival on January 28 and 29.

An official while talking to KNO said, "The festival will be held from 3:30 pm to 6:30 pm and will be open to the public free of charge. Boats will operate on the artificial lake while the riverbanks will be illuminated with decorative lights."

Pertinently, the artificial lake has been created by closing the barrage and retaining water in the Tawi River in collaboration with the Irrigation and Flood Control Department. Around three to four metres of water has been accumulated to facilitate boating activities.

Talking to reporters here, Smart City CEO and Municipal Commissioner Dr Devansh Yadav said the



festival aims to connect people with the newly developed lake and test its operational feasibility. "Boats will be operated for two days on a trial basis, while local bands and stalls offering traditional Dogra cuisine have been arranged to enhance the festive atmosphere," the officer added.

He said, "If the trial proves successful, boating and allied activities will be made part of routine operations in future. SDRF teams will be deployed during the event to ensure safety, and the programme will be conducted in coordination with various departments."

Dr Yadav said systems have been put in place to

handle flood-like situations during the rainy season, adding that only limited water will be retained while the rest will be released as required.

It may be recalled that the project, executed at a cost of about Rs 180 crore, was revived after 2019. It was originally launched in 2010 by the then NC-Congress coalition government and later expanded from the initial plan of 1.5 km to nearly seven km, stretching from Gujjar Nagar to Bhagwati Nagar. Work on the project was stalled for several years before being resumed following the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019.

J&K Tourism Dept Participates in FITUR Madrid

Observer News Service

JAMMU: The J&K Tourism Department participated in the leading annual global trade fair for tourism FITUR in IFEMA Madrid held from 21st to 25th January 2026.

The delegation of J&K Tourism was headed by Nasir Aslam Wani, Advisor to the Chief Minister. Besides, the delegation was composed of Joint Director Tourism Kashmir Waseem Raja and Joint Director Tourism Jammu Ajaz Kaiser Malik. The event was also attended by tour operators of J&K.

The highlight of the event was the facility of Virtual Reality (VR) which was introduced for the first time by the J&K Tourism Department. Visitors were mesmerised by watching the captivating videos of landscapes through the VR mode.

Besides, the display of arts and crafts of J&K like Paper Machine, Basholi Paintings, Wicker Willow enthralled the foreign visitors. The Kashmiri Kehwa



became a huge attraction among the foreign visitors. The beautifully designed J&K stall with an aesthetic display of arts and crafts received huge appreciation from the visitors and officials of the Ministry as well as the Embassy.

The event started with inauguration of J&K Tourism Stall on 21st January by Advisor to CM, with senior officers from Indian Embassy in Spain, officers of Ministry for Tourism Govt of India and leading tour operators participating in the inaugural.

In order to promote J&K Tourism at the global level, the J&K Tourism Department hosted a high tea for the tour operators on 22nd

Jan 2026. The event was attended by a large number of leading tour operators and media persons. The event was graced by the Ambassador of India in Spain and Advisor to CM J&K.

Besides, the Advisor to Chief Minister also attended a high profile meeting on promotion of Tourism hosted by the Indian Embassy in Spain on 23rd January.

During the five day event, the Advisor to the Chief Minister held meetings with various prominent tour operators and media persons for promotion of J&K Tourism at the global level.

The event concluded on 25th January 2026.

Govt Suspends Five Engineers Over Snow Clearance Delays, Absenteeism

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir government has initiated departmental proceedings and placed five engineers of the Public Works (R&B) Department under suspension after reports of unauthorised absence from duty and delays in snow clearance operations.

The action follows a stern directive from the Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary during a review meeting at the Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), Srinagar.

According to an official communication issued by the Public Works (R&B) Department, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, and accessed by Kashmir Observer, Assistant Engineer Er Sandeep Vaishnavi of the Machinery Division, Srinagar, was found absent from duty during the Deputy CM's visit. This led to the administrative action.

The communication states that complaints were received from elected representatives and public delegations from areas including Shopian, Anantnag, Imam Sahib, Tangmarg and Zainapora, alleging poor response and delays in snow clearance that hampered road connectivity and essential services.

In response, the Deputy CM directed that the officials be placed under suspension and their duties reassigned. These officials include Er Noor Din, AEE, PW(R&B) Sub-Division Imam Sahib, Zainapora Division; Er Shabir Ahmad Ganie, AEE, Mechanical & Hospital Division, Tangmarg; Er Nasir, AE, Mechanical & Hospital Division, Anantnag (Sub Division-II); Er Sandeep Vaishnavi, AE (PM Package), Machinery Division Srinagar; and Er Ramiz, JE, Mechanical & Hospital Division, Zainapora, Sub-Division Imam Sahib.

The communication also sought inputs from the Chief Engineer, M&HD Kashmir, by January 27 to proceed further in the matter.

Kashmir witnessed heavy snowfall and strong winds this week, disrupting road, air and power connectivity across the Valley. (Observer News Service)

U-19 WORLD CUP

India Thrash Zimbabwe by 204 Runs

Press Trust of India

BULAWAYO: Young middle-order batter Vihaan Malhotra showed admirable composure to rediscover his touch and compile a fine century, while Abhigyan Kundu extended his sublime run of form as India stormed to a commanding 204-run victory over Zimbabwe in their opening Super Six match of the U-19 World Cup here on Tuesday.

India, after an all-win group-stage campaign in which they emphatically defeated the USA, Bangladesh, and New Zealand, continued their aggressive brand of cricket to pile up a mammoth 352 for 8.

The innings was anchored by Malhotra's cautious yet confident unbeaten 109 (107 balls, 7x4) while Kundu chipped in with a fluent 61 (62 balls, 5x4, 1x6), as the hapless Zimbabwe bowlers were taken apart with alarming ease.

India's pace-bowling duo



didn't let up, as RS Ambrish (2/19) and Henil Patel (1/25) bowled the first nine overs in tandem to completely overwhelm the Zimbabwean batters, reducing them to 24 for 3 by the ninth over.

Zimbabwe were eventually bundled out for 148 in 37.4 overs, giving India a superb start to

their Super Six campaign.

India now have six points and are on top of Group 2 of the Super Six. India carried four points into the Super Six, having beaten New Zealand and Bangladesh, the other teams to have qualified. Since USA didn't qualify, India's points weren't carried over.

Skipper Ayush Mhatre (3/14) bowled his part-time off-breaks to run through the late-order, completing the annihilation, while left-arm seamer Udhav Mohan also chipped in with three wickets.

India's dominance was evident as they brought up their first 100 in just 62 balls, with batting prodigy Vaibhav Suryavanshi leading the charge. He piled on the runs with remarkable ease at the top, smashing a 52 off 30 balls, an innings studded with four boundaries and an equal number of sixes.

India did hit a minor roadblock in the 11th over, losing Mhatre (21) and Suryavanshi in quick succession to slide to 101 for 3. The setback, though, barely dented the momentum, with Malhotra and wicketkeeper-batter Kundu batting with composure and resolve to steady the innings.

Malhotra brought up his century off 104 deliveries as In-

dia continued to plunder runs. Zimbabwe's persistence with the profligate pacer Nigel Mazai proved costly, with the bowler conceding 86 runs from his eight overs, effectively giving the opposition a licence to score freely. Zimbabwe threw as many as eight bowlers at the Indian batters, but to little effect, as left-handers Malhotra and Kundu rotated the strike efficiently to add a 113-run partnership for the fifth wicket. The stand lifted India from a modest 130 for 4 to a commanding 243 for 5 by the 36th over.

Kundu's consistency was once again on display as he brought up his second half-century in three innings. The left-hander had earlier smashed 80 against Bangladesh, while he was not required to bat in the last group match against New Zealand after the target was chased down before his turn. He had also remained unbeaten on 42 against the USA in the tournament opener.

Flick: Barcelona Must Hit 'Top Level' to Reach UCL Top 8

MADRID: Needing a win and several goals to earn an automatic spot in the top eight of the Champions League, coach Hansi Flick knows Barcelona will have to be at its best against Copenhagen on Wednesday.

Barcelona sits ninth ahead of the final round of matches in the league phase, with the same 13 points as seven other teams, including eighth-place Chelsea, seventh-place Newcastle and sixth-place Paris Saint-Germain.

"We are only focusing on ourselves and on what is in our hands," Flick said Tuesday. "That's a good way to approach it. It will be a tough match against Copenhagen, who also have a lot at stake. We should never make excuses. That's our philosophy... we have confidence in our style, in how we play, and this is the Champions League. We'll have to show our best level."

Goal difference is likely to be decisive for the teams that end up tied on points. The top eight automatically qualify for the round of 16, while those from ninth to 24th have to play an extra playoff round.

"We have to take it step by step," Flick said. "We have to play this match respecting Copenhagen because they have a fantastic team. We'll need to defend very well, try to keep a clean sheet and score goals to win."

"We're very confident and I hope we can win to qualify for the next round. The most important thing is to do a good job and play at our highest level."

Flick said he felt confident because Barcelona was going through "a good moment" and was "in a good situation." The Catalan club has won 13 of its last 14 matches in all competitions and has scored 18 goals in its last six games. (AP)

UCL Jeopardy

PSG, Real, Barça, Man City Eye Playoffs Fight

MANCHESTER: Paris Saint-Germain, Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester City are among the giants of European soccer preparing for a nervy final round of matches in the opening phase of the Champions League on Wednesday.

All face the prospect of being consigned to the playoffs on a bumper night of 18 matches in Europe's elite club competition.

Only eight teams will advance directly to the round of 16. The next 16 teams face a two-legged playoff to complete the lineup in the knockout phase.

After seven rounds, first-place Arsenal and Bayern Munich in second are the only teams certain of progress.

That sets up a potentially thrilling night of action with just three points separating third-place Madrid and Juventus in 15th.

Too close to call

Eight teams, from PSG in sixth to Atalanta in 13th, are bunched up on 13 points. That raises the prospect of some volatile movement depending on results.

PSG is at home to Newcastle. The French giant is ahead of the English club on goals scored and a loss or a draw could see the defending champion drop out of the top eight.

Hoping to climb into the automatic qualification places are Barcelona and City, both on 13 points. (AP)

Late Entry Scotland Name T20 WC Squad

Press Trust of India

EDINBURGH: Last minute T20 World Cup entrants Scotland have included Afghan-born uncapped pacer Zainullah Ihsan in their 15-member squad for the ICC event beginning in India and Sri Lanka on February 7.

Scotland have replaced Bangladesh in the tournament with the latter refusing to play in India citing security concerns.

Richie Berrington will captain a strong squad that includes eleven players who were part of the 2024 T20 World Cup squad in West Indies and USA. The team selection on Monday was the first made by new head coach Owen Dawkins, following his appointment last month.

Ihsan is the sole first-



time call-up, with the fast bowler having recently qualified to play for Scotland. Tom Bruce, Finlay McCreech and Oliver Davidson will all travel to their first World Cup, following their involvement in T20 and ODI squads during the last twelve months.

"The squad selection is subject to all player and staff visa applications being approved. Given the limited notice for Scotland's participation at the

tournament and timescale for selecting players, two travelling reserves have been selected while three others will be non-travelling reserves," said Cricket Scotland in a statement.

Safyaan Sharif is a squad member of Pakistan lineage and his application will attract more scrutiny.

Head coach Dawkins said the unexpected entry into the World Cup provides a great opportunity for the players.

Australia Swelters as Record Heat Nears 50°C

AP

WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND): Parts of Australia sweltered in record temperatures of close to 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) on Tuesday as the country sweated through a prolonged heat wave.

The rural towns of Hopetoun and Walpeup in Victoria state registered preliminary highs of 48.9 C (120 F), which if confirmed overnight would top records set on the day in 2009 when 173 people were killed in the state's devastating Black Saturday bushfires.

No casualties were reported from Tuesday's heat wave, but Victoria authorities urged caution as three forest fires burned out of control.

Melbourne, the state's largest city, also came close

to its hottest day. Nowhere perhaps was the searing heat more evident than at Melbourne Park, where the usual crowds thronging outside the Australian Open tennis tournament dwindled to a ghost town as temperatures soared.

Inside, organizers enacted extreme heat protocols, forcing closure of the retractable roofs over the main arenas and postponement of matches on the uncovered outer courts.

During Tuesday's quarterfinal between Aryna Sabalenka and Iva Jovic — the last match played under scorching sun — the players held ice packs to their heads and portable fans to their faces during breaks in play.

Photographers shooting the match were supplied with cushions by organiz-

ers to avoid heat-related injuries when they sat down and covered their cameras with towels to prevent the devices malfunctioning in the heat or burning their hands. Fans lined up to stand in front of giant misting fans or sought shelter in air-conditioned areas of the venue.

Crowds at the event, which has registered record-breaking turnout days so far, dropped from 50,000 from Monday's daytime session to 21,000 on Tuesday as people heeded health warnings from officials and stayed home.

Temperatures were expected to drop Wednesday, although the heat wave was due to linger until the weekend. The heat wave followed another earlier this month amid one of Australia's hottest ever summers.

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