

Connect New Generation To Roots: LG To Writers

Observer News Service

Jammu: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday urged practitioners of literature and arts to preserve Jammu division's rich heritage, promote its legacy, and connect the new generation to their cultural roots.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the two day literary and cultural conclave "Sahitya Sanskriti Samagam" organised by the University of Jammu, Sinha said the region's literary and cultural traditions have long served as a unifying force in society.

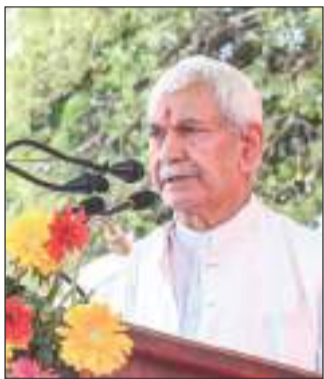
"Jammu's traditions in literature, culture and spirituality have taught us to rise above divisions of caste, creed and artificial boundaries. The values embedded in our culture embody an ideology that places humanity above all," the Lieutenant Governor said.

He said that a society shaped by its abundant literary and cultural wealth ultimately determines who it is and what it can become. According to him, literature and culture play a vital role in shaping collective identity and strengthening a sense of belonging among people.

Sinha also called upon participants to reflect on the deeper identity that binds society together.

"I urge everyone to reflect in this festival of literature and culture on the true identity that binds us and instils a profound sense of belonging," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor said



the true confluence of culture and literature lies in engaging with the soil through diverse art forms and infusing new resonance into the soul of society.

Paying homage to great literary personalities and cultural luminaries, he said a region's identity is not defined merely by economic achievements but shines through its stories, songs and the vibrant hues of its artisans.

He stressed that enlightened minds in society must recognise folk arts and folk literature as the living vitality of Jammu.

"Our folk traditions do not dwell in libraries. They thrive in writers' quills, singers' songs, folk dance footprints, and artists' brushes and pigments," Sinha said.

Calling upon the youth to take responsibility for preserving cultural traditions, the Lieutenant Governor said serving literature and culture means carrying forward the legacy of values passed down through generations.

"It entrusts | **More on P6**



KO PHOTO | ABID BHAT

Jumat-ul-Vida: Congregations Across Kashmir; 80,000 Offer Prayers At Hazratbal

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Thousands of devotees gathered at mosques and shrines across Kashmir on Friday to offer special congregational prayers on the occasion of Jumat-ul-Vida, the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan.

The largest gathering was witnessed at the revered Hazratbal Shrine on the banks of Dal Lake in Srinagar, where

officials said around 80,000 worshippers offered prayers. Devotees began arriving early in the morning, filling the shrine complex and surrounding areas to participate in the prayers, considered spiritually significant during the fasting month.

Former chief minister Farooq Abdullah was among those who offered prayers at the shrine.

Authorities had made

arrangements in and around Hazratbal to manage the large influx of devotees, while security personnel were deployed to regulate the movement of worshippers and ensure the smooth conduct of prayers.

Large congregations were also reported from several other shrines and mosques across the Valley. Devotees gathered in significant numbers at Jinab Sahib in Soura, Ziyarat Sharief of Hazrat Mir Syed Hussain

Simnani (RA) in Kulgam, and the historic Ziyarat Kailashpora shrine in Srinagar.

Similar scenes were witnessed in Kabamarg in Anantnag district and at Jamia Masjid Shopian, where residents and devotees assembled to participate in the congregational prayers.

Officials said adequate arrangements were made at several places to facilitate the smooth conduct | **More on P6**

J&K Cabinet Okays 18% Fare Hike

E-Rickshaw Rs 15/Km; E-Auto Rs 25 For First Km, Rs 20 Thereafter

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir Cabinet on Friday approved an 18 percent hike in fares for all passenger vehicles, sources said.

Sources said that the Cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in Srinagar, cleared several important proposals. The decisions taken by the Cabinet will now be sent to the Lieutenant Governor for approval.

According to sources, the Cabinet approved a proposal to increase fares of passenger vehicles by 18 percent across Jammu and Kashmir. It also fixed fares for electric vehicles, setting e-rickshaw fare at Rs 15 per kilometre, while e-auto fare has been fixed at Rs 25 for the first kilometre and Rs 20 for every subsequent kilometre.

The Cabinet also approved a proposal to enhance allowances for Ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the Leader of Opposition.

Sources said the Cabinet gave its nod to amend rules to increase allowances related to travel, medical care, housing and car loan facilities for them.

In another decision, the Cabinet approved the creation of 136 faculty posts in Government Medical College Jammu and | **More on P6**

Defiance In Tehran: Crowds Rally Despite Airstrikes



KO Web Desk

Tehran: Thousands of Iranians braved explosions and ongoing US-Israeli airstrikes to take part in nationwide Quds Day rallies on Friday, with several of the country's top leaders joining demonstrators in Tehran in a show of defiance. At least one person was killed when a blast struck near the march in

the capital amid the 14th day of the war. Iranian state television reported that a powerful midday explosion rocked Ferdowsi Square near Tehran University, close to the epicentre of the annual demonstrations held in solidarity with Palestinians. The English-language state broadcaster Press TV said a woman was killed by shrapnel following what it described as a US-Israeli | **More on P6**

Jaishankar Holds 4th Call With Iran FM In 2 Weeks

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi - their fourth such conversation since the West Asia crisis erupted - as New Delhi intensifies efforts to secure safe passage for over two dozen Indian-flagged merchant vessels currently stationed on either side of the Strait of Hormuz. The two foreign ministers held the phone conversation on Thursday night. Jaishankar and Araghchi spoke on February 28, soon after the | **More on P6**

Kashmiri Students Reach Armenia

The first batch of Kashmiri medical students stranded in Iran has crossed into Armenia and is heading to temporary

accommodation, with around 150 students from Kashmir expected to land in Delhi and Mumbai on March 15 as the repatriation | **More on P6**

Dr Farooq Attack

MHA To Review VIP Security Measures

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: The Union home ministry will undertake a comprehensive security audit of all VIPs under the central security cover in the wake of the assassination bid on former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah, officials said on Friday.

The decision to hold the review next week was taken in a meeting chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, Home Secretary Govind Mohan, Intelligence Bureau (IB) Director Tapan Deka and senior officials from the VIP security wing of the MHA, they said.

A security cover to such VIPs is provided by central paramilitary forces like the CRPF, CISF, NSG, and ITBP.

Officials said the review will also be relevant because assembly polls in five states - Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry - are taking place soon, requiring a host of political VIPs to travel across these | **More on P6**

LPG Panic Across States; Centre Denies Shortage

KO Web Desk

Srinagar: Panic over domestic cooking gas supply triggered long queues outside LPG distribution centres across several states on Friday, forcing eateries to shut down and prompting reports of hoarding, even as the Centre maintained there was no shortage of cylinders in the country.

The Union government said uninterrupted supply of LPG to households was being maintained and urged people not to indulge in panic booking.

Addressing a media briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said domestic LPG production has increased by 30 percent since March 5.

"There is no need for panic booking and there has been no dry-out at any LPG dealer,"



Sharma said, adding that the recent spike in bookings was driven by panic buying.

According to the ministry, LPG bookings have surged to 75.7 lakh, compared to the pre-conflict average of 55.7 lakh, indicating a sharp increase in demand.

Despite these assurances, large crowds were seen outside LPG distribution centres in several states. In Bihar, people queued up in | **More on P6**

Department of Floriculture, Gardens and Parks, J&K

Spring begins at Badamvaer

Inauguration of

Badam Vaer Blooms

by

Jenab Omar Abdullah

Hon'ble Chief Minister, J&K

March 14, 2026

DIPK-11850/25 Dated: 13.03.2026

Daily Vitamins, Minerals May Reduce Irritability in Teens: Study

The Conversation

Irritability is one of the most common and distressing problems teenagers and their families face. Its main symptom is an excessive reaction to negative emotional stimuli, resulting in temper outbursts and severe irritable mood. While current treatment options such as psychotherapy and medications are helpful for some, they can be inaccessible or poorly tolerated. Our new research, based on a double-blinded, placebo-controlled clinical trial, shows broad-spectrum micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) can significantly reduce severe irritability in teenagers. Teens with severely disruptive behaviour experienced especially large improvements. This offers a safe, scalable and biologically grounded alternative to conventional psychiatric treatments. Urgent need for more effective treatments Irritability cuts across many psychiatric presentations, including anxiety, depression, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other disruptive behaviour disorders. The need for interventions that directly target irritability, have fewer side effects and are available to all communities is urgent. Statistics on mental health in young people are especially concerning. Youth mental health has been declining globally over the past two decades and has now reached a "dangerous phase", according to a Lancet commission. Despite this, research consistently highlights a lack of effective and accessible treatments for severely irritable youth. This suggests a significant unmet public health need. Our research findings are based on the Balancing Emotions of Adolescents with Micronutrients (BEAM) trial, in which 132 unmedicated



teenagers (aged 12 to 17) with moderate to severe irritability were randomly assigned to micronutrients (taken as four pills three times a day) or an active placebo for eight weeks. They were monitored monthly online by a clinical psychologist. The placebo response was high, suggesting that simply participating in the study helped many teens feel able to improve their behaviour. But micronutrients still outperformed the placebo across key clinical measures such as irritability, emotional reactivity and overall improvement. We saw the strongest effects in teenagers with disruptive mood dysregulation disorder (DMDD), with 64% responding to micronutrients compared to 12.5% on placebo. This demonstrates an unusually large effect for a psychiatric intervention. Parents of participants receiving micronutrients rated the teens' conduct and prosocial behaviour much higher compared with those of teens on placebo.

Micronutrient treatment was also associated with more rapid improvements in clinician-rated irritability, parent-reported dysphoria and teen-reported quality of life, stress and prosocial behaviours. One of the most notable and reassuring findings was that suicidal ideation, which about a quarter of study participants reported at the start of the trial, improved over time for both groups, but with a greater change for teens on micronutrients. Self-harm behaviour also decreased for both groups. Only one side effect differed significantly between groups: diarrhoea was more common on micronutrients (20.9%) than placebo (6.2%). But this side effect was typically temporary and resolved by taking the nutrients with food and water. A minority (fewer than 10%) found swallowing pills a challenge. Other side effects reported equally in both groups included occasional headaches, stomach aches or a dry mouth.

These tended to dissipate within the first few weeks. Socioeconomic background matters The response to treatment was moderated by the teens' socioeconomic status. Participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to benefit from micronutrients. This is particularly meaningful for both clinical practice and public health. Lower socioeconomic status is typically associated with greater exposure to nutritional insufficiencies, chronic stress, reduced access to health services and higher rates of mental health difficulties. Our findings suggest micronutrients may help address underlying nutritional vulnerabilities that may be more prevalent or more severe in disadvantaged groups. This pattern also indicates that micronutrient supplementation, if publicly funded, could function as a low-cost, scalable intervention, with the potential to reduce health inequities.

Many evidence-based psychosocial or pharmacological treatments require resources – time, transportation, specialist access – that disproportionately disadvantage lower-income families. In our trial, all meetings between the psychologist and the teen with their family were conducted online and the micronutrients were couriered across the country, making this intervention accessible, particularly to rural communities. Micronutrients may represent an intervention that is both accessible and responsive to the specific needs of youth who are most at risk yet often least well served by traditional care pathways. This study was developed alongside Mori health providers and fits within a tikanga (traditional) Mori framework. It had a high percentage of Mori participants (27%) and worked closely with them, their families and health providers to assist in improving mental health outcomes. The BEAM trial provides robust evidence that a simple nutritional approach can meaningfully improve symptoms, including emotional reactivity, conduct difficulties and even suicidal ideation. These results are relevant for parents, clinicians, teachers and policymakers seeking safe and practical interventions, especially for young people who cannot access or do not respond well to existing treatments. The results also highlight important equity implications, as teens from lower income families showed stronger responses. Our results cast a new lens on the cause of some psychiatric problems, often conceptualised as chemical imbalances or family dysfunction. They reframe some cases of irritability as a possible nutritional and metabolic vulnerability, one that might be addressed with greater attention to the quality of our food alongside some supplementation with broad-spectrum micronutrients.

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MALIK NEWS AGENCY	AERWANI
IRSHAD NEWS AGENCY	KOKERNAG
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SANGAM NEWS AGENCY	SANGAM
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PUBLIC NOTICE
 I, Rayees Ahmad Khan, S/o Bashir Ahmad Khan, R/o Manzgam, Kupwara, intend to start a travel agency under the name Valley Yatra.
 If anybody having any objections he/she may submit the same in writing to the JK Tourism Office within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.
 Mob: +91 70065 83301

Public Notice
 I have lost my marks card of class 10th bearing session 2007-2008. Now I have applied for the duplicate of the same if anybody has any objection in this regard he/she may file them in the office of the JK Board Of School Education within seven days. After that no objection shall be entertained.
 Nissar Ahmad Malla
 S/o Gh Nabi Malla
 R/o Malmapanpora Sopore
 FKO

OFFICE OF EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE 1ST CLASS ZAINGEER BOMAI
 Subject: Issuance of registration order in respect of delayed Birth & Death
Public Notice
 This office has received a written application from Farooq Ahmad Dar S/O Ghulam Mohidin Dar R/o Seloo, Tehsil Zaingeer for issuance of Birth & Death certificate in favour of ward Namely Adnan Farooq Dar Born on 08-04-2011 and as per document evidence produced by the applicant. In this regard, if anyone has any objection, he/she may file the same before the undersigned within 07 days. After that, no objection whatsoever will be entertained by this office.
 Tehsildar
 fko Executive Magistrate Bomai

Public Notice
 I have lost my passport while travelling from Hermain to Shopian. Now I have applied for the duplicate of the same if anybody has any objection in this regard he/she may file them in the Passport Office Srinagar within seven days. After that no objection shall be entertained.
 Bashir Ahmad Wani
 S/O Abdul Rasheed Wani
 R/O Hermain Shopian
 fko

The Jammu and Kashmir State Board Of School Education New Campus Bemina Srinagar
Notice for General Public
 The applicant/ candidate whose photograph is published in this notice and claiming to have lost her qualification certificate/s issued under as per below mentioned details:-
 Name: Mohammad Arif Mirza
 Roll No.: 2626489
 Class: 10th
 Session: 2016 (Bi-Annual)
 Registration No.: N14460500065
 Father's Name: Mohammad Mirza Qureshi
 Mother's Name: Naseema Begum
 Date of Birth: 05-08-2001
 Residence: Chattibandy, Bandipora
 According to the candidate concerned has approach to this office for issuance of Duplicate Qualification /Marks Certificate/s, so before the same is processed and provided to the candidate, under rules, anybody having any objection in this regard, shall bring into the notice of Assistant Secretary of Certificate as well as Assistant Secretary Examination Unit I & III KD within the period of 10 & 7 days respectively, from the date of publication of this notice.
 (Besides the above referred "Qualification / Marks Certificate/s" bearing No: 16BIKAM-8005643 be treated as "CANCELLED")
 No: F(Cer is-I-DQC)B/KD/
 Dated
 fko_r
 Assistant Secretary
 Certificates, KD.

ازنیابت یومی
 عنوان:- درخواست منجانب حبیب اللہ نیجار ولد عبدالرحیم نیجار ساکنہ گلی پورہ بمراد عطا گلی OBC تحت 176 SRO بحق پیرستان حبیب
اشہار ہر خاص و عام
 معاملہ مندرجہ عنوان صدر میں سائل/سائلہ نے ایک درخواست بغرض OBC سرٹیفکیٹ پیش کی ہے جو کہ زیر کارروائی ہے اس بارے میں پٹواری حلقہ سے رپورٹ طلب کی گئی ہے جس سے عیاں ہے کہ سائل/سائلہ واقعی نیجاڑات سے تعلق رکھتا ہے اور سائل/سائلہ سگی پورہ میں رہائش پذیر ہے اور کبھی بھی ترک سکونت نہیں کی ہے سائل/سائلہ کا کنبہ بذیل افراد پر مشتمل ہے
 حبیب اللہ نیجار ولد عبدالرحیم نیجار مزدوری 60 سال
 ظفر یقین نام زد حبیب اللہ گھریلو کام 55 سال
 حمیرہ حبیب دختر زیر تعلیم 27 سال
 توصیف احمد پسر -- 25 سال
 عفت حبیب دختر -- 21 سال
 خوشبو حبیب دختر -- 19 سال
 حنان حبیب پسر -- 17 سال
 سائل مذکورہ OBC سرٹیفکیٹ حاصل کرنے کا خواہ ہے اور کنبہ کی مہوار آمدنی 6,000 روپے تک ہے۔ سرٹیفکیٹ زیر بحث اجراء کرنے میں اگر کسی شخص کو کوئی مزیا عراض ہو تو وہ بعد مشورہ اخبار سارسات دن کے اندر اندر اپنے مندرجہ عراض عدالت حذا کو دفتر ی اوقات کے دوران پیش کریں۔ بعد گزرے میجا کوئی مندرجہ عراض قابل قبول نہیں ہوگا۔
 نائب تحصیلدار
 FKO

ازنیابت یومی
 عنوان:- درخواست منجانب حبیب اللہ نیجار ولد عبدالرحیم نیجار ساکنہ گلی پورہ بمراد عطا گلی OBC تحت 176 SRO بحق پیرستان حبیب
اشہار ہر خاص و عام
 معاملہ مندرجہ عنوان صدر میں سائل/سائلہ نے ایک درخواست بغرض OBC For Central سرٹیفکیٹ پیش کی ہے جو کہ زیر کارروائی ہے اس بارے میں پٹواری حلقہ سے رپورٹ طلب کی گئی ہے جس سے عیاں ہے کہ سائل/سائلہ واقعی نیجاڑات سے تعلق رکھتا ہے اور سائل/سائلہ سگی پورہ میں رہائش پذیر ہے اور کبھی بھی ترک سکونت نہیں کی ہے سائل/سائلہ کا کنبہ بذیل افراد پر مشتمل ہے
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 نائب تحصیلدار
 FKO

Passport Office to Hold Special Passport Service Drive on March 14

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Passport Seva Project (PSP) under the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India will conduct a special passport service drive on March 14, 2026 (Saturday) in view of the high demand for passport services within its jurisdiction.

As part of the initiative, the Passport Office Srinagar will facilitate passport application processing at the Post Office Passport Seva Kendra Anantnag and Post Office Passport Seva Kendra Baramulla, which will remain functional on the said date.

Rawat, Regional Passport Officer, Srinagar, said that the special drive has been organised to facilitate

applicants facing delays due to high demand and to provide faster access to passport services within the region.

According to KNO, Applicants can avail passport services by booking an appointment through the official Passport Seva portal and selecting their preferred location, POPSK Anantnag or POPSK Baramulla, along with the available time slot for the specified date. Applicants are required to visit the designated centre at the scheduled time with the appointment confirmation and carry all requisite documents in original.

For further information, applicants may visit the official Passport Seva website or contact the Regional Passport Office Srinagar.



Residents queue up with LPG cylinders at a distribution point in Eidgah, Srinagar, amid concerns over supply following the West Asia crisis. KO Photo By Abid Bhat

SKUAST-K Joins ICAR-NCVTC Network as Mycoplasma Repository

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: In a move that cements Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technologies of Kashmir's status as a premier research institution, varsity's Faculty of Veterinary Sciences & Animal Husbandry Shuhama has been formally inducted into the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's National Centre for Veterinary Type Culture (ICAR-NCVTC) network.

The prestigious national recognition designates the Veterinary Faculty Shuhama as a specialized repository unit for Mycoplasma cultures, positioning SKUAST-K at the forefront of national efforts to combat economically important livestock diseases.

The inclusion was formalised during the XIVth Annual Review Meeting of the ICAR-NCVTC Network Project held at the NASC Complex, New Delhi.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Raghavendra Bhatta, Deputy Director General, Animal Science, ICAR, and attended by Dr Divakar Hemadri, ADG, Animal Health; Dr TK Bhat-

tacharya, Director, ICAR-NRCE, and Dr RK Vaid, Head of Division, NCVTC.

As a designated repository unit, the Mycoplasma Laboratory at Shuhama will play a vital role in the collection, identification and preservation of veterinary pathogens. The collaboration is set to significantly enhance the university's research capacity and its contribution to national biosecurity.

Dr Mohammad Iqbal Yattoo, Associate Professor, Division Veterinary Clinical Medicine, has been designated as the Principal Investigator (PI) for the unit.

Vice Chancellor SKUAST-Kashmir, Prof Nazir Ahmad Ganai, congratulated the veterinary scientists particularly Dr Yattoo, for their dedicated efforts.

"The development is a matter of great pride for SKUAST-Kashmir," Prof Ganai stated. "Our inclusion in the ICAR-NCVTC network is a testament to the growing research excellence and national relevance of our university. It reinforces our commitment to addressing critical challenges in animal health at a national and global level", he added.

Jumat-ul-Vida

All Roads Lead to Hazratbal, Special Buses Ferry Devotees

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Thousands of devotees thronged the revered Hazratbal Shrine on Friday for Jumat-ul-Vida prayers, prompting authorities to press special buses into service to facilitate their movement, even as the massive rush led to heavy traffic congestion on several routes across the city.

Officials told KNO that around 22 buses of the Jammu and Kashmir State Road Transport Corporation (JKSRTC) and 25 buses operated by Srinagar Smart City Limited (SSCL) were deployed to ferry devotees from different parts of Srinagar to Hazratbal and back.

Despite the transport arrangements and traffic diversions put in place by authorities, several roads leading to Hazratbal and adjoining areas witnessed heavy congestion as thousands of people converged on

“We remained stuck in traffic for quite some time before and after the prayers and eventually had to walk as the roads were completely packed,”

the shrine.

Devotees said the roads remained choked for long periods due to the overwhelming rush of vehicles and pedestrians.

“We remained stuck in traffic for quite some time before and after the prayers and eventually had to walk as the roads were completely packed,” said Nazir Ahmad, a devotee who had come to offer prayers at Hazratbal.

Several others also reported similar experiences, saying that movement of vehicles became extremely slow due to the large number of devotees returning from the shrine at the same time.

“There was a huge rush of people and vehicles on the roads. While the buses helped many reach the shrine, the traffic situation became difficult to manage once the prayers concluded,” another devotee said.

Notably, traffic personnel were deployed at various junctions to regulate the movement of vehicles, while authorities maintained that special arrangements, including additional buses and diversions, were made to ensure devotees could attend the prayers without major inconvenience.

However, the large gathering led to traffic bottlenecks at several points around the shrine and adjoining localities, locals and eyewitnesses said.

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- PATTAN: 01954-293507
- QAZIGUND: 01951-296153

HIGHWAY STATUS

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



PRAYERS

FAJR 5: 20

ZUHR 12:40

ASR 4: 55

Magrib 6:40

ISHA 8: 00

HIJRI CALENDAR

24- Ramadan

1447

This Day In History

- 1812 - Congress authorizes war bonds to finance War of 1812
- 1862 - Battle of New Bern NC: General Burnside conquers New Bern
- 1864 - Union troops occupy Fort de Russy, Louisiana
- 1869 - Defeat of Maori leader Titokowaru in New Zealand.
- 1901 1st performance of Anton Bruckner's 6th Symphony in A
- 1901 - Germany's Chancellor von Bulow declares that the agreement Germany signed with Great Britain in October 1900, to restrain foreign aggression and maintain open trade, does not apply to Manchuria
- 1903 - 1st national bird reservation established in Sebastian, FL
- 1913 - South African Supreme Court declares that marriages not celebrated according to Christian rites and/or not registered by the Registrar of Marriages, are invalid; all Muslim and Hindu marriages are therefore declared invalid.
- 1914 - Serbia & Turkey sign peace treaty
- 1915 - German cruiser Dresden scuttled off Más a Tierra, Chile, having been pursued by the Royal Navy after the Battle of the Falkland Islands, with her engines worn out and virtually no coal.
- 1916 - Battle of Verdun - German attack on Mort-Homme ridge, West of Verdun
- 1923 - Allies accepts Vilnius taking East-Galicia in Poland
- 1926 - A train in Costa Rica falls into the Río Virilla, killing 248 and injuring 93.

Training Program on Scientific Beekeeping Organized

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: In a significant initiative to promote beekeeping as a viable livelihood option and equip beekeepers with the latest scientific practices, the Directorate of Agriculture Kashmir today launched a comprehensive seven-day training program on Scientific Beekeeping across the Kashmir Valley.

The program was inaugurated by Director Agriculture Kashmir, Sartaj Ahmad Shah, at Directorate hall Lalmandi Srinagar. The training at Lalmandi serves the central districts, while parallel sessions are being conducted for North Kashmir at the Faculty of Agriculture, Wadura, and for South Kashmir at the DAK Bungalow, Anantnag.

The training aims to acquaint existing and aspiring beekeepers with modern, scientific methods of apiculture, including colony management, disease prevention, honey extraction techniques, value addition of hive products, and strategies to enhance pollination services for better crop yields, particularly in oilseed and horticultural crops.

Sartaj Ahmad Shah, while inaugurating the program at Lalmandi, emphasized the importance of scientific beekeeping in boosting rural economies, generating employment op-

“The training aims to acquaint existing and aspiring beekeepers with modern, scientific methods of apiculture, including colony management, disease prevention, honey extraction techniques, value addition of hive products, and strategies to enhance pollination services for better crop yields,”

portunities, and supporting sustainable agriculture in the region. He highlighted that beekeeping not only provides additional income to farmers but also plays a crucial role in enhancing biodiversity and agricultural productivity through improved pollination.

The seven-day program features expert-led sessions, practical demonstrations, and interactive discussions covering all aspects of modern beekeeping practices tailored to the agro-climatic conditions of Kashmir. Participants include progressive farmers, youth entrepreneurs, and established beekeepers from various districts of the Valley.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

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Tender No.	Name of work	App. Cost. (Rs.)	Cost of Tender form (Rs.)	Date & time for submission of tender	Earnest Money (Rs.)	Completion period	Opening of tender	Website Particulars
27-TRD-GSU-T-110-2026-27	TRD work in c/w creation of infrastructure at Ludhiana out pit for scheduled/unscheduled inspection of ELS/LDH based Electric locos.	1,17,00532.07P	NIL	Up to 07.04.2026 15:00 Hrs.	2,08,500/-	12 Months	07.04.2026 after 15:00 Hrs.	www.ireps.gov.in

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Tenderer (s) may please note that offers received without Bid Security either in cash through e-payment gateway or as Bank Guarantee bond from a scheduled commercial bank of India or as mentioned in tender documents (as per Annexure-21) valid for a period of 90 days beyond the bid validity period, will be considered as incomplete & invalid offer and for which contractor shall have no claim on Railway. No:-27-TRD-GSU-T-110-2026-27 Dated:-13.03.2026. 851/2026

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Gulf Caught in Superpower Crossfire

As Iran retaliates against US strategic assets, GCC nations face domestic and regional pressures, highlighting the delicate balance between allegiance to Washington and local legitimacy.



Nayeema Ahmad Mahjoor



“Iran has also chosen its path. It may have to face isolation for a long time now, but the time has come for Tehran to end the war, rebuild its country, strengthen its intelligence, respect the basic rights of its people, and seek to build bridges rather than intimidate its neighbours.”

One question haunts the Muslims amid the ongoing confrontation in the region. Besides the Western policy of fomenting sectarian divides within the Muslim world, many Gulf nations have also contributed to creating sectarian divisions within their populations, justifying their alliances with genocidal regimes that aim solely to destroy the Middle East, its oil resources, and its stability.

According to many independent media organisations, support for Iran is not limited to Iranians. Understanding this requires analysing the vulnerability of a country surrounded by kingdoms with weapon depots aimed at it.

What could be the reason for establishing so many bases, if not to intimidate Iran and threaten it whenever it tries to develop its infrastructure? Does Iran have any other option left except attacks on these US strategic assets in the region?

Multiple think tanks indicate that the US and Israel have long-term regional strategies, and recent events

are not unexpected, contrary to some internet analysts' claims.

Ayatollahs have been under scrutiny since the Islamic Revolution replaced Iran's monarchy, which aimed to protect its oil assets, much to the disapproval of the West. The country was also prevented from establishing democracy when its democratically elected leader was imprisoned and punished for nationalising the country's oil reserves.

The dilemma of right and wrong has sparked intense debate on social media. The fight for justice and the maintenance of the moral high ground seem to concern non-Muslims more than Muslims themselves.

Many Americans are struggling to process the live streams of genocide in Gaza, which they never expected to witness. They have seen their own government launch a Tomahawk strike on a primary school, resulting in the deaths of over one hundred and fifty girls. This is haunting them.

As America currently presides over the UN Security Council, it has received support from many countries. Those who feel unable to oppose Donald Trump's unpredictable behaviour often feel threatened by his influence. However, this moment presents an opportunity to unite against aggression and advocate collectively for a better and safer future.

Regardless of whether countries like Cuba or Canada bear the brunt of Trump's actions, this resolution appears to strengthen his position.

Analysts warn that flattery or appeasement may not yield positive outcomes. Trump's erratic behaviour poses a risk to all nations. This is particularly evident in Britain, where Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has attempted to gain favour by offering tacit support, only to find himself humiliated and embarrassed by Trump's response, which has turned him into a laughing stock among his own party's supporters.

So far, Donald Trump appears very comfortable with Netanyahu. He is at odds with his own group of four, whom he accused of insisting that he unexpectedly attack Iran.

Since the attacks on Iran on 28th February, Trump has shifted his justification from nuclear issues to regime change, uprising, and the destruction of missile stockpiles. But none of these have been accepted or reconciled either inside or outside the US.

Is he trapped in the war, or has he dreamed of obliterating the Middle East?

Well, political pundits hold varied opinions. Concerns about his mental state are raised, especially if he is left to decide for 350 million people over the long term.

So far, Republicans find themselves in a scenario that could jeopardise the midterms, despite believing that Trump's image as a peacemaker would secure another term. Recent polls depict a bleak outlook for their prospects.

Outside America, monarchies, democracies, and dictatorial regimes are all relying on luck if they remain out of Trump's focus.

Israel has no vested interest in political resolutions, whether in Palestine or within its own borders. Its philosophy is: "I don't mind if a cat is black or white, as long as it eats mice."

It shows how it sees the Middle East, dreaming of crushing Arab nations and taking their resources, and sees Iran as the easiest target to start with.

The 'Greater Israel' project has already begun, with roots in Jolani's Syria and Aoun's Lebanon. Netanyahu knew Iran would retaliate by attacking US assets in GCC countries, thereby pitting Muslims against each other and serving Israel's purpose.

Perhaps Iran has no choice but to act. It cannot afford to watch its infrastructure be destroyed from US bases around it. This was a timely moment, and Gulf should consider closing all bases and establishing its own defence system, even if the US and the West would never permit it.

However, condemning outside aggression would be more appropriate than blaming Iran.

This attitude among GCC countries will likely foster hostility within the Muslim Belt, potentially encouraging the US to deepen its influence in the Gulf and retain control over these nations. Will Arab rulers listen to their people in creating a conducive atmosphere rather than acting as vassals of the US?

Iran has also chosen its path. It may have to face isolation for a long time now, but the time has come for Tehran to end the war, rebuild its country, strengthen its intelligence, respect the basic rights of its people, and seek to build bridges rather than intimidate its neighbours.

The author is a senior journalist and penguin author. She can be reached at nayeema7@gmail.com.

KO VIEW

Srinagar Housing Crunch

Srinagar is struggling to keep up with its own growth. Construction materials spill onto the sidewalks, and new apartment buildings rise over old wooden houses. Young families look through property listings, their excitement fading to worry as they realize how expensive everything has become.

The heritage city is growing fast. By 2035, its population will surge from 1.78 million to nearly 3 million. City planners have done the math. They know 300,000 new homes must rise in the next two decades simply to keep pace. But the city already faces a shortage of 19,000 units. The available land keeps shrinking.

Much of the surrounding area is protected for the environment or at risk of flooding. Builders cannot expand outward, so prices climb upward instead. For working families, the dream of owning a home drifts further from reach with each passing year.

This pattern repeats across urban India. Analysts predict home prices will rise 5 to 7 percent annually in coming years. Demand for upscale properties surges while affordable options remain stubbornly scarce. The result is a silent transformation of the middle and lower income households. They are slipping from the buyer's market into rental agreements or informal settlements that offer little security and even less dignity.

The human toll becomes visible once you look past the construction sites. Recent government data presented in Parliament reveals more than 10,800 people in Jammu and Kashmir's urban areas lack any permanent roof over their heads. They sleep in temporary shelters, carry no fixed address, and lack access to basic sanitation or clean water.

The crisis runs deeper still, with over six lakh people across forty urban clusters in the region living in slum conditions. Beyond abstract statistics on a spreadsheet, they represent families packed into single rooms. The contrast with glossy plans for smart cities and luxury developments could not be more stark.

Migration drives much of this housing pressure, as rural workers, students, and families pour into cities seeking opportunity. They arrive with savings and hope. Both evaporate quickly against Srinagar's rising rents. With formal housing beyond their budget, they settle on the urban fringe in makeshift colonies lacking paved roads, and drainage.

The government has taken note and rolled out programs like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban, turning some vacant properties into affordable rentals. 336 of these units now house low-income workers in J&K. It's a start, but just a start.

Without long-term action to match policy with reality, Srinagar and Jammu will keep growing in ways that leave out the very people who keep these cities alive.

The History of Attacks on Dr Farooq Abdullah

From a punch in Rajouri to a hall stormed by protesters, and now a cold-blooded assault, the threats against Dr Abdullah span decades.



Zafar Choudhary

for quite sometime as an office bearer of a national organisation.

Some of my very close college friends would often visit him in the lock up with food and other eatables. Upon being released, Shinde was honoured at function of which I am almost a witness. I remember people who knew him being very angry with the police treatment he received.

The second time was probably in 2001. Shekhar Gupta, Editor of Indian Express, was delivering a lecture at the Jammu Club where Dr Abdullah was on the dais as chief guest while Education Minister Shafi Uri was also a speaker at the late evening event, may be around 9:30.

A group of ABVP and BJYM members, already in the hall, suddenly rushed toward the dais. Back then, there were no commando-style NSG, SPG, or SSG teams around. Instead, a Sikh gentleman, possibly a DySP, led the security.

You hardly see any photograph of Dr. Abdullah from the 1990s or early 2000s without this Sikh officer in the background. He and his team quickly sprang into action, grabbed the



intruders, and dragged them out of the hall.

They were protesting the government decision to accommodate students of a dissolved private medical college in Srinagar in the two government colleges. Most students had, of course belonged to one community.

The Farooq government had to withdraw

“A group of ABVP and BJYM members, already in the hall, suddenly rushed toward the dais. Back then, there were no commando-style NSG, SPG, or SSG teams around. Instead, a Sikh gentleman, possibly a DySP, led the security.”

the order. But, interestingly, the Central government under Vajpayee with B.C. Khanduri as Health Minister later devised the same solution at a much larger scale adjusting some students in the colleges elsewhere in the country.

Kamal Singh Jamwal, the recent assassin

has a much frank reason: "I wanted to do this for 20 years," he says with pride.

He appears to have come to the venue in cold blood, armed with weapon and motive.

At a press briefing after the attack, Dr Abdullah said his assassin was possibly motivated by the "ongoing cyclic environment of hate in the country".

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and many others have pointed to the security lapse, and called for accountability.

Meanwhile, anonymously sourced reports have begun creeping into small media space to dismiss the breach theory and rather question Dr Abdullah for possibly being careless about his security detail.

Both points are subservient to the actual story: the motivation.

The author is a reputed journalist, author, policy analyst, and peace-building practitioner. He is the founding editor-in-chief of The Dispatch, focused on Jammu & Kashmir.

The recent assassination bid was the third such attack on Dr Farooq Abdullah in last 30 years which I remember very clearly for their details.

The first that I recall was in 1997 while Dr Abdullah was on tour of Rajouri as Chief Minister. A young man as part of local youth delegation came close to the Chief Minister and delivered a hard punch on his face. Dr Abdullah bled.

The man was identified as Yashwant Shinde from Maharashtra who was in Rajouri

Walnut Masters in a Machine Age

The chisels still ring in Srinagar's lanes, but machines and cheap copies are closing in on the valley's finest craft.



YOUNG KASHMIRIS SCROLL PAST THEIR OWN HERITAGE ONLINE. Foreign buyers fly in to grab authentic pieces for Dubai apartments and London flats. The craft survives for export markets while dying at home.



Irshad Mushtaq

In the old lanes of Srinagar, the sound finds you. Steel taps walnut with an artistry that has filled these streets for centuries.

Masters turned this wood into beds that survived marriages. They built cabinets that moved through ages, and carved panels so deep you could run your finger through the grooves and feel the valley's history.

The walnut trees grow slow and dense across Kashmir. Their timber packs tight with grain that holds detail like memory holds songs. Artisans learned to read that grain like a map.

They knew exactly where to cut, understood how hard to push, and recognized when to pull back before the wood split.

Fathers taught sons in workshops that had no formal walls. Masters took apprentices and showed them the chinar leaf. They demonstrated the lotus, and traced vines that seemed to crawl across the surface rather than sit on top.

No two tables ever matched completely. That was the entire point.

A single cabinet could eat up months of labour. Families paid accordingly because they understood the math: buy once and keep forever.

The wood fought off pests naturally, and the colour grew richer with each passing year. A bed bought for a wedding might eventually hold the grandchildren. Beyond decoration, it was about staying power in a place where nothing

else stayed put.

The craft worked because everyone understood the bargain. Artisans earned enough to stick around, and customers saved enough to buy quality. The furniture meant something beyond money. It rooted families to something solid. When Kashmir shook, the walnut bed held steady.

That world is cracking open now. Machines arrived first on the scene. Computer cutters now reproduce the chinar leaf in minutes. What took a master several weeks now takes an operator one afternoon. The patterns look fine from across the room, but step closer and the depth disappears completely.

Machines cut even and flat, but human hands know to change pressure. They let the wood speak, and ease up when the grain shifts direction.

Customers rarely step closer. They see the shape, notice the dark stain, check the price tag that reads half the workshop rate, and buy the copy and call it good enough.

Then came the substitutes. Kail wood appeared on the market, deodar followed close behind, and rubber wood shipped in from places with zero connection to this valley.

These timbers drink stain like water. A few coats of chemical polish let them wear walnut's colour like a costume. The real grain hides underneath.

The weight feels wrong. It is too light, and feels almost hollow. In any showroom, you will see them sitting side by side. The authentic piece and the imitation remain separated by thousands of rupees and centuries of knowledge. Most buyers grab the cheaper one.

Money is tight everywhere. The differences feel fussy, almost like collector's details, and it all seems far removed from real life.

Here is the trap that catches everyone: fake walnut sales pull support from real workshops, and kids who grow up around machine-carved junk lose the eye for hand-made work.

Young Kashmiris scroll past their



own heritage online. Foreign buyers fly in to grab authentic pieces for Dubai apartments and London flats. The craft survives for export markets while dying at home.

The money turned brutal over time. Raw walnut costs more every single season. Middlemen insert themselves between tree and table. They take cuts that leave artisans with scraps.

A master carver with twenty years of experience earns less than a construction labourer. His kids watch him bend over the wood until evening. They see his hands cramping, notice his eyes burning, make their own choices, study computers, apply for government posts, and leave the valley entirely.

The workshops grow emptier each year, the masters grow older, and the chain edges closer to breaking.

Some workshops tried to adapt to new times. They built lighter pieces for modern flats, wicker carved panels for electricity, filmed their process and posted it online, and hoped the story would sell what the

product alone could not.

These moves help some workshops survive, but cannot save the whole system and rescue the thick web of suppliers, carvers, polishers, and sellers that made the craft work at scale.

The threat runs deeper than simple technology.

Kashmir is forgetting how to recognize its own treasures. Kids who have never watched a master work cannot value what the hands produce. They see the glossy finish on machine-made kail wood, accept it as sufficient, inherit carved panels from grandparents, sell them to antique dealers for quick cash, and buy replacements that will crumble before their own children grow up.

Outside manufacturers grasp the value better than locals do. Factories in Punjab and Gujarat now churn out "Kashmiri style" furniture. They hire cheap hands, apply fake aging techniques, ship products back into the valley at prices no Srinagar workshop can touch, and steal the look and dump the meaning.

Each piece sold this way writes Kashmir out of its own story.

The valley faces a test that is really a question about identity. Can a society under pressure hold onto something that demands time, money, and faith? Can young Kashmiris learn to spot stained rubber wood against real walnut? Can they recognize embossed patterns against hand-cut depth? Can they build businesses that connect remaining masters to buyers who still care about the difference?

Some signs point toward yes. Small groups document the craft. They film artisans at work, archive patterns, and create records that might outlast the workshops themselves. Designers mix traditional carving with modern function. They build lamps and modular units that fit current life without ditching old methods. Online platforms allow direct sales. They cut out middlemen, and let carvers keep more of their own value.

These efforts remain scattered across the landscape. They need

coordination, money, and above all local pride.

The world already knows Kashmiri walnut work matters. International collectors pay top rates, while museums mount shows regularly. The recognition is already there, but what is missing is the internal belief that this heritage belongs to living Kashmiris. It is not meant for archives and foreign buyers alone.

The craft will survive in some form, but the question is what survival looks like in practice.

Walnut carving could shrink into a boutique craft, with a few masters serving global elites while machine copies flood the local market. It might survive only as a museum piece, explained in captions rather than practiced in homes.

Or it could find new life, sustained by Kashmiris who decide their own hands and history matter more than cheap convenience.

— The author is a Srinagar-based reputed financial educator.

The World Should Know Mikaeil's Name

How one photograph of a child can pierce the world's conscience, and why some children never get that chance.



Barry Malone

You know the picture. Everybody does.

A naked girl is running down a road, her hands and arms extended outward from her sides as if they have been tainted, as if she doesn't want them to touch her body, as if she is afraid of contact with herself. Her face, as much as her nakedness, is why we remember. She is in pain, that's clear. She is screaming, looking directly into the camera and, for the viewer, for us, it's almost like she is demanding that we help. It's like she is demanding we do something.

Of course, the girl, who we now know was named Phan Th Kim Phúc, wasn't asking for any of that. She was just a frightened child. But what we read into such images, what they make us feel and what they make us do, is important. Because what is journalism for if not for making us angry?

The nine-year-old, who had been severely burned in a napalm bombing in Vietnam, became widely known as "Napalm Girl" and the photo, which the Associated Press named "The Terror of War," was splashed on newspaper front pages all across the United States at a time when publishing a photo-

graph of someone naked was a particularly contentious thing for the media to do.

By 1972, when the image was taken, public opinion in the U.S. had already begun to turn against the Vietnam War, but its power still made it one of the most consequential news photos in history as it became a galvanizing symbol for the anti-war movement. Its importance was so potentially significant that President Richard Nixon was captured on tape wondering if it had been staged.

Nixon knew that whatever their politics, an image like this could change people's minds. He knew that little girl could provoke rage.

Last week, a photograph of another child caught people's attention.

In a way, it's mundane given that millions of people all over the world have taken exactly the same picture of their own children. But that is its power and that is what broke people's hearts as it spread quickly across social media.

The boy, named as Mikaeil Mirdoraghi, was waving goodbye to his mother as she took a photograph of him on his way to school. It would be the last time they saw each other as Mikaeil, it is said, was killed when the U.S. bombed the Shajareh Tayyeb school in southern Iran, killing up to 175 people, according to authorities, the majority of them seven to 12-year-old girls. Though the school was primarily for girls, boys were educated there also.

It's the details in the image that get you.

The morning sun illuminating the stairs, Mikaeil's shirt and trousers as he is sent out into the world well presented, the clunky shoes whose laces



his mother may have tied, and what appears to be a water bottle with a cartoon on the front.

And there's the glasses, the slightly awkward glasses, with a strap attached to make sure he doesn't lose them. I wonder had he lost them before.

Only a still image allows us to take all of that in. To pore over it and ponder it until we see ourselves, until we see people we know, until we see our own children, and until we can imagine being someone else, somewhere else.

There have been other such images of children.

Famed photographer Don McCullin's 1962 shot of a malnourished and skeletal woman in Biafra struggling to breast-feed her starving baby. Kevin Carter's forever haunting photo of an emaciated Sudanese boy on the verge of death as a vulture waited nearby. The sight of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh, sitting confused in the back of an ambulance in Syria, dusty and bloodied.

In 2015, the body of another Syrian boy, three-year-old Alan Kurdi, washed up on a beach in Turkey as his family tried to flee war. Again, it was the details. The way his body lay reminded people of the way their children slept in bed at night, unlike Alan, safe. There were the little shorts and the shoes with velcro fasteners.

I vividly remember seeing the image for the first time and noticing how alone he was, how he had been taken from his parents by a merciless current, not only of water, but of war, the type that sweeps people from their countries.

The photo, taken by Turkish photographer Nilufer Demir, had an overnight impact as it was not only shared on social platforms but picked up by major media organizations and splashed on screens and in print across the world.

In the wake of its publication, polls showed sympathy for refugees soaring. Even many who were previously hostile to

immigration said that Syrians should be welcomed. There was a spike in donations to refugee charities, with the Migrant Offshore Aid Station reporting a 15-fold increase in just 24 hours.

"As a father I felt deeply moved," Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron said, and under pressure from the public, pledged to allow 4,000 Syrian refugees a year enter the UK until 2020. Germany admitted thousands of people who had been stranded in Hungary. When it became apparent that the Kurdi family had been trying to reach Canada, refugees became a major issue in the country's federal election race, and Ottawa agreed to take in 25,000 Syrians.

And, most significantly, the European Union struck a deal to impose quotas that would share responsibility for some of the people arriving in Italy and Greece.

Though governments later cynically undid many of the decisions made during that moment of global compassion, the image of Alan on the beach left a lasting legacy of grassroots refugee rights organizing.

Like Napalm Girl, it changed opinions, and for a time, it changed policy.

More than 10 years after his death, and almost two and a half years into Israel's ongoing destruction of Gaza, I often wonder why we haven't had a Palestinian Alan Kurdi or Napalm Girl, even as the children of Gaza are slaughtered in front of our eyes, the before and after of their precious faces and mangled bodies flitting past our screens between ads for skincare products.

It's not for a want of awful material. More than 70,000

people have been killed in Gaza since Oct. 7, 2023, according to health ministry figures, more than 17,000 of them children, with most experts believing the figure to be an undercount.

Three-year-old Reem Naban, killed by an Israeli missile as she slept in bed alongside her five-year-old brother Tarek, immediately comes to mind. The heartbreak of her devoted grandfather, Khaled, led to several photos of the inseparable pair going viral. "She was the soul of my soul," Khaled, who would himself be killed by Israeli tank fire a year later, said.

Her favourite game? Pulling his beard.

If Reem couldn't change minds, then why not Saly Abu Maamar? Or 17-day-old al-Amira Aisha - "Princess Aisha"? Or Nour Abu al-Qumssan?

Samar Abu Elouf's portrait of 9-year-old Mahmoud Ajjour, who lost both of his arms in an Israeli assault, won the prestigious World Press Photo prize last year, but despite that recognition, it failed to achieve widespread attention.

Even the nightmarish death of Hind Rajab, killed in a hail of bullets by Israeli soldiers while trapped in a car surrounded by the bodies of dead family members, though the most widely known killing of a child in Gaza, did not move the dial.

The images of Kim Phúc and Alan achieved something those of Reem, Saly, Aisha, Nour, Mahmoud - and Mikaeil in Iran last week - did not. They broke through. People who did not usually follow the news saw the children and learned their names. They were discussed in workplaces and bars and around dining room tables. Their stories became part of the

national conversation.

This does not happen for Palestinian children because, through the nature of its coverage, the mainstream international media devalues their lives. Victims of U.S. and Israeli bombs and bullets are not humanized in the way that other victims are. If more than 170 people, most of them children, were killed in an Iranian attack on a school in Israel, it would lead the news for months. We would know who they were, we would see their photos, we would hear from their parents, we would learn of their hobbies and their hopes and their friendships.

The outpouring for Mikaeil and his mother was restricted to social media, to bubbles where only the already sympathetic and engaged would see it. In major media outlets, the Iranian children were buried deep in the middle pages of newspapers, at the tail end of bulletins, and when their killings were reported, it was most often as mere numbers against a backdrop of U.S.-Israeli denials.

But they are not just figures on a spreadsheet, and they are still being slaughtered in Iran, Gaza and Lebanon.

More have been killed in the week since the Shajareh Tayyeb school bombing, more will be killed this week, and more will be killed the week after that.

None of them will make the front pages.

— The author is a journalist, formerly an editor and executive producer at Al Jazeera and a correspondent for Reuters covering Africa and the Middle East. This article first appeared on the author's X profile.

Indian Himalayan Region Loses 2.2% Tree Cover in Two Years: Govt

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: The tree cover in the 13 states and Union territories of the Indian Himalayan region has shrunk by 2.27 per cent between 2021 and 2023, Union minister Kirti Vardhan Singh said.

In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha, the minister said that according to the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023, the tree cover in the region fell from 15,427.11 sq km in 2021 to 15,075.5 sq km in 2023.

Singh also said the total carbon stock in the forests of the Indian Himalayan region has been assessed to be 3,273.10 million tonnes in 2023, as compared to 3,272.68 million tonnes two years back.

Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh,



Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Assam and West Bengal are part of the Indian Himalayan region.

"Forest health is influenced by multiple ecological and biophysical parameters and not merely by the greenness of forest areas," he said.

Forest Survey of India (FSI)

collects data on various parameters of forest enabling conditions like soil depth and soil erosion, characteristics of forest vegetation, and threats to forests to ascertain forest health.

"These characteristics interact with each other and determine the state of forests at a given time and have been published in ISFR 2023," the minister said.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, rides on the back of a motorbike during a march in Tehran on Friday without security. Credit: Hassan Ghaedi

'Nobody Will Hire Women': SC Rejects Plea For Menstrual Leave

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a PIL seeking a nationwide policy providing paid menstrual leave for women students and workers, observing no one would give them jobs in such a scenario and that such a provision would unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes.

The top court, however, asked

the Centre and competent authorities to consider the representation of the PIL petitioner and examine the possibility of framing a policy on menstrual leave after consulting all relevant stakeholders.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Jyotsna Banerjee observed that while the intent behind the petition might be

welfare-oriented, the practical reality of the job market could lead to "counter-productive" outcomes for women.

"These pleas are made to create fear, to call women inferior, that menstruation is something bad happening to them... this is an affirmative right... but think about the employer who needs to give paid leave," the bench observed.

Senior advocate MR Shamsad,

appearing for the petitioner, said the Karnataka government has formulated a policy to allow menstrual leave and some private organisations are also providing this facility.

"Voluntarily they are giving, then it is excellent. That is a very good thing. But the moment you introduce it as a compulsory condition in law, you do not know the damage it will do

to the career of women. Nobody will give them responsibilities, even in judicial services, a normal trial will not be assigned to them," the CJ said.

During the hearing, the bench highlighted the risk of "unintended consequences", suggesting that a mandatory leave policy might discourage private employers from hiring women.

It as a compulsory condition in law, you do not know the damage it will do to the career of women," CJ Kant remarked.

"Nobody will give them responsibilities... This can be harmful to their growth," the bench added.

Justice Bagchi echoed these concerns from a business perspective, noting that affirmative action is constitutionally recognised but must be balanced

against market realities.

"Look at the practical reality in the job market. The more unattractive the human resource, the less is the possibility of assumption in the market.

Will any employer be happy with the competing claims of other genders," Justice Bagchi asked. The bench was hearing a PIL filed by Shailendra Mani Tripathi.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Connect New

you not only with an inheritance but also with the duty of its cultural and literary bequest. This tradition teaches us the virtue of inclusion," he added.

Sinha further observed that safeguarding language helps preserve collective memories, while nurturing regional art forms builds confidence within society.

He also emphasised the importance of focusing on local tales, dialects and artistic traditions, noting that individual identity draws nourishment from such roots.

"When generations gather to exchange experiences, cultural and literary heritage transcends the past and becomes a living dialogue," he said.

The two day conclave features cultural processions, stalls showcasing indigenous attires, handicrafts, traditional cuisines, books and art, besides panel discussions and other activities highlighting the region's languages, folklore, customs and literary heritage.

On the occasion, the first edition of Jammu University's multilingual magazine "The Litzine" was also released.

Among those present were Vice Chancellor of University of Jammu Prof Umesh Rai; Vice Chancellor of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University Prof Pragati Kumar; Vice Chancellor of Cluster University of Jammu Prof K S Chandrasekar; Consulting Editor of Amar Ujala Rajkishor; Editor of Sahitya Tak, India Today Group, Jai Prakash Pandey; Dean Research Studies Prof Neelu Rohmetra; Registrar Dr Neeraj Sharma; Coordinator of Sahitya Sanskriti Samagham Prof Sadaf Shah, along with faculty members, senior officials, prominent citizens and students.

Jumat-ul-Vida: Congregations

of prayers and manage crowds.

Jumat-ul-Vida holds deep spiritual significance for Muslims and traditionally draws large congregations at mosques and shrines, as believers intensify prayers and acts of devotion during the final days of Ramadan ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

However, congregational prayers were not allowed at the historic Jamia Masjid in Srinagar's Nowhatta area, one of the region's largest and most prominent mosques. Authorities shut down the mosque for the seventh consecutive year on the occasion. Officials did not immediately elaborate on the reasons for the restrictions.

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq criticised the decision, calling it unfortunate that prayers were disallowed at the Jamia Masjid on the important religious occasion.

"Disallowing Jumat-ul-Vida prayers at Jamia Masjid is deeply disappointing and condemnable," he said.

Meanwhile, Grand Mufti of Jammu and Kashmir Nasir Ul Islam had announced on Thursday that Jumat-ul-Vida would be observed this week after consultations with other scholars, even though there is a possibility of another Friday falling within the fasting month this year.

He said Eid-ul-Fitr is likely to be observed on March 20 or March 21, depending on the sighting of the crescent moon.

The Jammu and Kashmir government had also declared a public holiday on Friday to mark the occasion.

Large gatherings at mosques and shrines during the last Friday of Ramadan have long been a tradition in Kashmir, reflecting the strong religious observance associated with the day as worshippers pray for peace, prosperity and well-being.

J&K Cabinet Okays

Government Medical College Srinagar. These include 27 posts of Professors and 109 posts of Associate Professors.

The Cabinet is also understood to have approved a proposal allowing Ladakh to use the Jammu and Kashmir Real Estate Appellate Tribunal as a joint Real Estate Appellate Tribunal, sources said. (KNO)

Defiance In Tehran:

airstrike.

Despite the explosions and continuing strikes around the capital, crowds continued marching through central Tehran, including at Enqelab Square, chanting "God is Great", "Death to Israel", and "Death to America" as smoke rose in the distance.

Among those attending the rally were Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian and senior security official Ali Larjani, who appeared among demonstrators in the capital. Footage broadcast by state television showed Pezeshkian greeting supporters and taking photographs with participants on rain-soaked streets, at times walking without a visible security escort.

Several other senior officials also joined the march, including judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, national police chief Ahmad-Reza Radan and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

Mohseni Ejei had been speaking to state television during the rally when the blast occurred. His bodyguards quickly surrounded him as he raised his fist and declared that Iran "under this rain and missiles will never withdraw".

Addressing demonstrators, Larjani said the Israeli strike on the rally reflected "fear and desperation", arguing that Israel's actions revealed its weakening position. He also criticised U.S. President Donald Trump, saying Trump "does not understand" the resolve of the Iranian people.

"The Iranian people are a determined and capable nation, and the more pressure Trump applies, the stronger our will becomes," Larjani said.

Earlier, Israel had issued evacuation warnings in Persian on social media advising people to leave areas where rallies were planned and warning they could be targeted.

The demonstrations were part of the annual Quds Day observance, first established by Ruhollah Khomeini to express solidarity with Palestinians and remind the world of the continued occupation of Al-Aqsa.

Organisers said this year's rallies carried particular significance amid the ongoing conflict. "The security equations of the region and the world have changed with the power of resistance," the Islamic Development Coordination Council said in a statement, describing the emergence of what it called a "resistant Middle East".

Mass rallies were reported across more than 900 cities and numerous towns and villages despite heavy rain, snow and cold weather, with participants waving banners and chanting slogans supporting the Palestinian cause and denouncing the US-Israeli aggression.

The rallies took place as Israel continued a new wave of strikes across Iran, saying its air force had hit more than 200 targets in the past 24 hours.

The war broke out after the United States and Israel launched military attacks on Iran on February 28. Iran has since launched a fierce counterattack with missiles and drones on Israel as well as on U.S. bases across the Gulf.

Iran has also effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping route through which about one-fifth of the world's traded oil passes, sending shockwaves through global energy markets.

Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, in his first public message on Thursday, vowed to continue strikes on US bases spread across the region and maintain the closure of the strategic waterway.

Rising tensions have already pushed Brent crude prices above \$100 per barrel, with spikes reaching around \$120, roughly 40 percent higher than before the war began.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military said four of the six crew members aboard a Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker that crashed in western Iraq earlier this week had been found dead while search operations continued for the remaining two.

According to United States Central Command, the aircraft went down during an operation involving two refuelling planes, one of which landed safely.

The KC-135 incident marked the fourth publicly acknowledged aircraft loss linked to US operations in the conflict. Last week, three American fighter jets were shot down in Kuwait.

With the war entering its second week and showing no signs of easing, analysts warn that the confrontation is rapidly expanding into a broader regional crisis with global economic consequences. (Trans Asia News)

Jaishankar Holds

US and Israel launched the attack on Iran that killed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. They also spoke on March 5 and March 10.

"Had another conversation with Iranian FM @araghchi yesterday night. Discussed bilateral matters as also BRICS related issues," the external affairs minister said on social media.

The latest phone conversation came as India ramped up efforts to secure safe passage to the Indian-flagged merchant vessels through the strategic shipping route of Strait of Hormuz that has been partially blocked by Tehran following an escalation in its conflict with the US and Israel.

Global oil and gas prices have surged after Iran virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman that handles roughly 20 per cent of global oil and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas).

An Iranian readout said Araghchi briefed his Indian counterpart on the latest situation "resulting from the aggressions and crimes" committed by the US and Israel against Iran and its consequences on the stability and security of the region and the world.

It said the Iranian foreign minister emphasised to Jaishankar Tehran's firm will to exercise the "legitimate right to self-defence".

"Araghchi emphasised the need for international and regional forums and organisations to condemn military aggression against Iran," the readout said.

"Referring to the importance of the role and position of BRICS as a forum for developing multilateral cooperation, he considered it essential for this institution to play a constructive role at the current juncture to support stability and security in the region and the world," it added.

It said Araghchi emphasised the importance of finding a way to strengthen stability and a sustainable security environment in the region and called it a "collective need".

At an inter-ministerial media briefing, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India has conveyed to all sides to adopt the path of diplomacy and dialogue to resolve the conflict as soon as possible.

We are also talking to BRICS member states so that a consensus evolves on this issue, he said. (PTI)

Kashmiri Students

process gathers pace.

According to details, students from Urmia University have already crossed the Armenian border and are safe and in stable condition. Those with confirmed flight tickets for March 14 are expected to proceed to the airport shortly for their onward journey to India.

A second group that departed from Qom has reached the border and is awaiting immigration clearance before crossing into Armenia. Students from Shiraz Medical University have safely reached Qom after being relocated from their campuses and are expected to move towards Azerbaijan or Armenia once their visas are processed.

Around 27 students from Arak Medical University, along with several other Indian students, have also reached the border safely and are staying at a hotel near the crossing while awaiting further travel arrangements. Their flights to India are scheduled for March 20.

Despite the progress, concerns persist. The All India Medical Students Association (AIMSA) said it received distress calls from several Arak University students on the evening of March 12 after a building adjacent to their dormitory was attacked, triggering panic among those still in the area.

Students from Isfahan University have also requested immediate relocation, citing growing security concerns in the region.

Dr Mohammad Momin Khan of AIMSA, who has been coordinating closely with students and authorities throughout the evacuation, urged the Indian Embassy in Iran to expedite relocation for all remaining students. "AIMSA has been in constant contact with Indian students across different universities in Iran to ensure their safety and smooth evacuation," he said, appealing to the Embassy to immediately shift all Indian citizens to safer locations given the evolving security situation.

Among the returning students, around 150 belong to different districts of Kashmir. Parents in the Valley expressed relief as the evacuation moved forward, but urged the government to continue facilitating the safe return of all students still in Iran.

Students are expected to land at airports in Delhi and Mumbai before proceeding to their respective home states. (KNO)

MHA To Review

regions.

There are about 400 VIPs in various security categories under the central list, which includes about 220 with the CRPF, 156 with the CISF, nine with the NSG and a few with the ITBP.

PTI reported on Thursday that the National Security Guard (NSG) will undertake such a review for its protectees.

NSG provides Abdullah with the top-category Z-plus security cover.

Abdullah had a miraculous escape on Wednesday night when a gunman shot at him from behind as the National Conference president was leaving a wedding in Jammu.

CCTV footage from the event showed a policeman and an NSG commando intercepting the attacker, while a second commando and other security personnel pinned him to the ground.

The team immediately evacuated Abdullah from the venue. (Agencies)

LPG Panic Across

districts including Patna, Bhagalpur, Rohtas and Katihar to secure cylinders amid fears of supply disruption.

The anxiety over LPG supply comes amid the ongoing West Asia conflict, which has affected the movement of crude oil and petroleum products following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial shipping route between Iran

and Oman.

In Delhi, small vendors said the gas shortage had begun affecting their livelihoods. Naresh Chawla, who runs a fast-food stall near PVR Saket, said many small establishments support multiple families and rely heavily on a steady supply of cooking gas.

"One small shop supports eight to ten livelihoods. I employ three to four workers who have migrated from villages. Many of us have taken loans to run these stalls. If this situation continues, nearly 30 percent of street vendors could lose their source of income," he said.

In Adarsh Nagar, another vendor said he had to pay around Rs 4,000 for a small cylinder, adding that many vendors were now relying on savings or loans to meet daily expenses.

Restaurants in several states have begun altering their operations to cope with the situation. The Madhya Pradesh Hotel Association advised eateries to shift from gas-cooked rotis to traditional wood-fired tandoors and introduce "crisis menus" that require less fuel.

In Kerala, the Hotel and Restaurant Association warned that around 40 percent of restaurants could shut down if the shortage persists. According to the association, about 20 percent of restaurants had already closed by Thursday, with more expected to follow as LPG stocks run out.

Institutions are also feeling the impact. Desun Hospital in Kolkata temporarily modified its kitchen menu due to limited gas availability.

"The disruption in gas supply has affected several institutions, including hospital kitchens. We have temporarily restricted our menu to vegetarian and egg-based meals since non-vegetarian dishes require more fuel and longer cooking time," said hospital chairman Sajal Dutta.

In other parts of West Bengal, people were seen standing with empty cylinders outside distribution centres from Kakkdu to Siliguri, claiming they were unable to make bookings online.

In Odisha, protests and road blockades were reported as consumers complained of delays in receiving refilled cylinders. Residents in Jaipur blocked a road with empty cylinders after a distributor displayed a "No Stock Today" notice. Similar protests were reported in Keonjhar, where demonstrators blocked a key road over the alleged scarcity.

In Bengaluru, the Bangalore Apartments' Federation urged residents not to book multiple cylinders unnecessarily, warning that panic booking could create artificial shortages.

Religious institutions also expressed concern. The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee wrote to Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, seeking immediate intervention to ensure uninterrupted LPG supply for langar services at gurdwaras.

In Kota, Rajasthan, the shortage caused concern in the coaching hub, which hosts thousands of students and hundreds of hostel kitchens dependent on LPG.

Authorities have also cracked down on hoarding. In Madurai, Tamil Nadu, two people were detained under the Goondas Act for allegedly hoarding 398 LPG cylinders for black marketing.

In Karnataka's Yadgir district, officials seized 46 domestic LPG cylinders being illegally used for commercial purposes during a special inspection drive.

Meanwhile, opposition MPs staged a protest in the Parliament complex over the LPG situation. Members of the Trinamool Congress were joined by MPs from Congress and other INDIA bloc parties as they raised slogans demanding answers from Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the alleged crisis.

HM Shah-Headed Panel Okays Rs 330.34 Cr Extra Disaster Relief

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Centre has approved ₹330.34 crore as additional financial assistance to Jammu and Kashmir from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to support relief measures for natural disasters during 2025, the Union Home Ministry said on Friday.

The assistance, as per KNO, was cleared by a high-level committee chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

According to an official statement, the funds have been sanctioned for areas affected by floods, flash floods, cloudbursts, landslides and cyclonic storm

'Montha' during 2025.

The committee approved a total of Rs 1,912.99 crore as additional central assistance for six states and Union territories. Of this, Rs 330.34 crore has been allocated to Jammu and Kashmir.

Other states receiving assistance include Andhra Pradesh (Rs 341.48 crore), Chhattisgarh (Rs 15.70 crore), Gujarat (Rs 778.67 crore), Himachal Pradesh (Rs 288.39 crore) and Nagaland (Rs 158.41 crore).

The assistance will be provided from the National Disaster Response Fund and will be subject to adjustment of 50 per cent of the opening balance available in the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for the



year, the ministry said.

The Union government said the additional assistance is over and above the funds already released to states under the SDRF.

The ministry said that during the financial year 2025-26, the Centre has released Rs 20,735.20 crore to 28 states under the SDRF and Rs 3,628.18 crore to 21 states from the NDRF.

It added that Rs 5,373.20 crore has also been released to 23 states from the State Disaster Mitigation Fund and Rs 1,189.56 crore to 21 states from the National Disaster Mitigation Fund.

The government said it continues to support states and Union territories affected by natural disasters and provide necessary assistance for relief and rehabilitation measures.

Notably, J&K witnessed a series of severe weather-related

disasters in 2025, resulting in significant loss of life and widespread damage across several districts.

According to official data shared with the Ministry of Home Affairs, about 199 people were killed during the year due to incidents such as flash floods, cloudbursts, landslides and heavy rainfall triggered by intense monsoon activity.

The disasters also led to the death of nearly 11,700 livestock, while more than 8,400 houses were damaged across the Union Territory. Agricultural losses were also substantial, with around 77,915 hectares of crop land affected.

Cabinet Condemns Attack on Farooq Abdullah

JAMMU: The Jammu & Kashmir Cabinet on Friday unanimously condemned the attack on National Conference president Dr. Farooq Abdullah, sources disclosed.

Sources told KNO that the cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, condemned the assassination attempt on Dr. Farooq Abdullah and demanded a deeper investigation into the incident.

Dr. Farooq Abdullah had a narrow escape on Wednesday evening when a person, identified as Kamal Singh Jamwal, a resident of Purani Mandi, Jammu, approached him from behind with a pistol and opened fire.

The accused was quickly overpowered by two officers of the Jammu and Kashmir Police's security wing, and the shot fired by him missed the target. (Observer News Service)

J&K Govt to Overhaul Rules for Class IV Jobs

JAMMU: In a significant move, the Jammu and Kashmir Government has decided to review the rules governing the appointment of Class IV employees, commonly referred to as multi-tasking staff.

To initiate the process, as per KNO, the government has constituted a high-level committee under the chairmanship of the Administrative Secretary, Finance Department. The committee also includes the Administrative Secretary, General Administration Department; Administrative Secretary, Skill Development Department; and Administrative Secretary, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Department.

The committee has been mandated to review the statutory order issued by the General Administration Department on January 29, 2022, which re-designated all "Class IV" jobs in Jammu and Kashmir as "Multitasking Staff (MTS)," except sanitation workers and posts requiring technical qualifications.

It has also been tasked with reviewing relevant statutes to suggest appropriate measures regarding the recruitment of Multitasking Staff by recruiting agencies.

The committee will examine the minimum and maximum qualification criteria and recommend the provision of specific qualifications or skill tests to ensure the recruitment of manpower suited to departmental needs.

As per existing rules, the minimum qualification for Class IV jobs is matriculation (10th pass), while the maximum qualification is 12th pass (10+2). Candidates with higher qualifications are not eligible for these posts. (Observer News Service)

Unspent CDF Balances Must be Spent First: J&K Govt

JAMMU: The Jammu & Kashmir Government on Friday directed officers that the unspent Constituency Development Fund (CDF) balance from a preceding financial year shall be prioritised for utilization under the scheme in the next fiscal.

As per KNO, citing CDF scheme guidelines, which state that funds under the scheme are non-lapsable, the government instructed officers that "any unspent funds under each activity, if available as on 31st March of every year with the District Development Commissioner or executing agencies, shall be deposited in the government treasury."

The District Development Commissioners (DDCs) have also been directed to furnish details of such unspent balances to the Finance Department at the end of each financial year.

The Finance Department's circular, further invoking CDF guidelines, states that unspent balances are to be deposited in the treasury for utilization in the next financial year.

"In this context, it is impressed upon all the concerned officers/DDOs that these balances under the deposit head MH:8229 shall be prioritized as first charge for their utilization under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Scheme in the subsequent financial year to avoid parking of these funds in Receipt Head:8229, leading to delays in the execution and completion of developmental works," the circular reads. (Observer News Service)

Vinai Kumar Saxena Takes Oath as 4th LG of Ladakh

LEH: Vinai Kumar Saxena on Friday took oath as the fourth Lieutenant Governor of the Union Territory of Ladakh at a ceremony held in Leh.

According to the details available with KNO, the oath of office and secrecy was administered by Arun Palli at the Arya Nagarjuna Auditorium of the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in Choglamsar.

Earlier, Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra read out the warrant of appointment issued by the President of India, following which Saxena signed the charge certificate.

Saxena succeeds Kavinder Gupta as the Lieutenant Governor of the Union Territory. After the swearing-in ceremony, he was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour by the Ladakh Police.

Speaking to reporters, Saxena thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for entrusting him with the responsibility of serving the people of Ladakh.

He said he would visit villages and remote areas to understand issues faced by residents and work on solutions. Saxena said Ladakh has tourism potential and added that efforts would be made to further develop the sector.

He also spoke about the need for development that takes into account the region's environmental conditions and said focus would be placed on plantation drives, afforestation and development of water bodies.

Saxena said steps would also be taken to improve urban infrastructure, including cleanliness and expansion of sewage treatment facilities. He said the administration would work in coordination with people from different sections of society. (Observer News Service)

Railways Extend New Delhi-Katra Special Train

JAMMU: Taking into account the surge in passenger traffic and the convenience of devotees, the Jammu Division of Northern Railway has decided to extend the operational period of the special reserved train No. 04081/04082 (New Delhi-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra).

According to a statement issued, the decision has been taken in view of the large number of pilgrims expected to visit the shrine for Darshan of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi during the auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navratri.

The extension of the special train service is expected to ensure a smoother and more comfortable travel experience for devotees travelling to Katra during the festive period.

The details of the extended train services are as follows: Train No. 04081 running from New Delhi to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra, which was earlier scheduled to operate from February 21 to March 8, 2026, will now run for an extended period from March 17 to March 30, 2026, with a total of 14 trips. (Observer News Service)

Northern Army Commander Chairs Coordination Meeting in Jammu

Observer News Service

JAMMU: The General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C) of the Army's Northern Command, Lieutenant General Pratik Sharma, chaired a weekly co-ordination meeting of key security stakeholders at Police headquarters here.

According to the details available with KNO, Director General of Police Nalin Prabhat and other senior officers from various paramilitary forces and security agencies attended the meeting.

It reviewed the prevailing security situation and deliberated upon the steps taken to strengthen counter-terror coordination across Jammu and Kashmir, said a source.

"The discussions focused on strengthening real-time intelligence sharing and ensuring seamless operational integration among different agencies to enable swift responses to emerging security challenges," it said, adding, "The meeting also



reviewed the ongoing counter-terror strategy in the Union Territory, with participating agencies reiterating their commitment to maintaining a strong operational posture and adopting a coordinated approach against terrorism." "Emphasis was laid on maintaining a mission-ready framework and further enhancing synergy among the security forces operating in the region," the source added.

Earlier, the Northern Army Commander visited Basantgarh in Udhampur district to assess the ground security situation and review ongoing counter-terror operations in the area.

During the visit, he was

briefed on the existing intelligence grid and the measures being undertaken to strengthen the security architecture in coordination with other stakeholders. "Discussions during the field review focused on reinforcing security mechanisms and ensuring effective coordination between the Army, police and other agencies to counter potential threats," an official said, adding, "The Army Commander also interacted with troops deployed in the area and appreciated their professionalism, commitment and operational readiness in maintaining security and stability in Jammu and Kashmir."

Thousands Rally Across Kashmir on Youm-e-Quds

Syed Mohammad Burhan

SRINAGAR: Thousands of fasting Muslims took to the streets across Kashmir on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, observed as Youm-e-Quds, staging rallies and demonstrations in support of Palestine and calling for the liberation of Masjid-al-Aqsa, the first Qibla of Muslims and the third holiest site in Islam.

Protesters marched through streets in various towns and localities across Kashmir, raising pro-Palestine and anti-Israel slogans and demanding an end to what they described as the Zionist occupation of the holy land. The rallies saw participation largely from members of the Shia community.

In Srinagar, a procession was taken out from the Gupkar shrine on the Dal Lake Boulevard. Processions were also held in the Hassanabad, and Zadibal areas of the old city.

Maulana Masroor Abbas Ansari led a procession in Chattabal. He said that while



the event is observed every year, emotions were particularly intense this time as, according to him, "we have lost our leader Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei."

He voiced his allegiance to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Sayyed Mojtaba Khamenei, and expressed support for both Palestinians and Iranians.

In north Kashmir, a large procession marched through Magam Bazaar, where a sizeable number of women also joined the rally. Similar demonstrations were held in Budgam town and in several areas across Baramulla district.

Smaller processions were also reported from Bal-

hama, Khanda, Mirgund, and several other places.

In central Kashmir's Budgam district, a massive procession led by Anjuman-e-Sharie Shiayan Chief Agha Syed Hassan was carried out from Imambargah Budgam, drawing participation from thousands of people.

Another procession was led from Bemina Imambargah.

Reports of demonstrations were also received from several parts of north and south Kashmir.

Meanwhile, thousands of people also marked the day in Kargil, where processions were held after Friday prayers in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

CM Omar Chairs Cabinet Meeting in Jammu

Observer News Service

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday chaired a Cabinet meeting here, paving the way for key decisions aimed at strengthening governance and accelerating development across the Union Territory.

The decisions were taken with a focus on improving administrative efficiency

and public service delivery, the office of the chief minister said in a post on X.

According to PTI, the meeting was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary and ministers, including Sakina Itoo, Javed Ahmed Rana, Javid Ahmed Dar and Satish Sharma, officials said.

Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo was also present.

Separately, the chief

minister also chaired a review meeting on the implementation of works under the SASCI scheme.

He stressed the need for timely execution and effective monitoring of projects and directed officers to ensure that the benefits of the scheme reach people on the ground in a transparent and efficient manner within the stipulated time-frame, without any lapse of funds.

Dry Weather to Persist Till March 14; Rain Expected from March 15

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Erratic weather conditions are likely to continue across Jammu and Kashmir till March 20, with spells of rain and snowfall expected at several places, the Meteorological Department said on Friday.

According to the Meteorological Centre Srinagar, the Union Territory is expected to witness generally dry weather on March 13 and 14.

From the night of March 15 to the morning of March 16, the weather is likely to remain generally cloudy with spells of light to moderate rain in the plains and snowfall in higher reaches at many places.

The MeT department in-

formed KNO that between the night of March 17 and the morning of March 18, brief spells of light rain or snowfall over higher reaches are expected at isolated to scattered places.

Another spell of generally cloudy weather with the possibility of light to moderate rain and snowfall in higher areas is likely at many places between the night of March 19 and the morning of March 20.

The department said weather conditions are expected to remain generally dry between March 21 and 23.

However, from March 24 to 25, skies may remain generally cloudy with the possibility of light rain or snowfall over higher reaches at isolated places.

The MeT also issued an advisory warning of the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied by gusty winds at a few places on the evening of March 15.

Farmers have been advised to resume farm operations during the relatively stable weather window between March 13 and 14.

Meanwhile, the weather during the past 24 hours till 8:30 am Thursday saw temperatures remain above normal in many parts of the Kashmir division and several areas of the Jammu division.

Precipitation was reported at several stations across the region, with moderate rainfall recorded in some areas, the department said.

NC MP's Meet Murmu, Seek Restoration of Statehood

Observer News Service

NEW DELHI: National Conference MPs on Friday met Droupadi Murmu here and submitted a memorandum, seeking early restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir, and flagging issues such as land and job rights, hydropower projects and unemployment.

MPs Chowdry Mohammad Ramzan, Sajjad Ahmed Kichloo and Shammi Oberoi called on the president at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and submitted a memorandum raising a range of issues concerning Jammu and Kashmir, according to an official statement.

The MPs "strongly urged the early restoration of full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir in line with the assurances made on the floor of Parliament," it said.



They also "emphasised the need to protect land and job rights of the local population and called for a comprehensive economic and employment package to address the growing unemployment crisis among the youth," the statement said.

The delegation sought the return of major hydro-electric power projects currently operated by NHPC Limited to the region, stating that Jammu and Kashmir should receive a fair share of benefits from its natural resources.

The memorandum also

highlighted environmental concerns, noting the impact of climate change and the rapid retreat of glaciers such as the Kolahoi Glacier, and called for urgent scientific and policy interventions to protect the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

According to PTI, Kichloo said on X that he, along with his colleagues, had the honour of calling on the president at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.

"We submitted a memorandum highlighting key concerns of Jammu & Kashmir," he added.

Iran-Israel Conflict Halts Basmati Rice Exports from R.S. Pura Belt

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel has begun to cast a shadow on India's agricultural export sector, with traders and millers in Jammu and Kashmir's renowned rice belt of R.S. Pura reporting significant disruptions in the export of premium basmati rice.

R.S. Pura basmati, which enjoys a prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag, is internationally recognised for its distinct aroma, long grain and superior cooking quality.

The rice is exported in large quantities every year to markets across the Gulf region, Europe, and several other countries. However, exporters say that escalating hostilities in the Middle East have severely disrupted shipping routes, leaving several consignments stranded and creating uncertainty in the export chain.

Traders in the region told KNO that consignments of basmati rice are currently stuck either in transit or at ports due to disruptions in shipping routes to Iran and other Gulf destinations. The Middle East is among the largest consumers of basmati rice, which is widely used in traditional

dishes such as biryani. Sandeep Singh, an owner of one such mill, said the ongoing crisis has brought exports almost to a halt. "Our mill alone exports nearly 20,000 quintals of basmati rice annually to Gulf and European markets. Because of the war, shipments have come to a standstill. Several consignments are stuck, and payments are pending in Delhi," he said.

Singh added that the disruption has created serious financial strain for millers and farmers alike. "Farmers are waiting for their payments, but since exporters are not receiving funds from buyers, we are unable to clear their dues on time. This has created a chain reaction affecting the entire industry," he said.

With the situation worsening, traders and mill owners have appealed to the government for immediate intervention. They have requested External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and J&K's Food & Supplies minister Satish Sharma for relief measures for the affected sector.

The exporters have requested the government to explore diplomatic solutions to ease trade disruptions and provide financial

support to millers and exporters facing losses.

Among their key demands is a waiver or reduction of loan interest rates to help businesses survive the crisis.

The disruption in exports has also triggered a sharp decline in basmati rice prices in the domestic market. Traders say the price of R.S. Pura basmati has fallen by nearly 600-800 per quintal, dealing a severe blow to farmers who had hoped for better returns after last year's harvest.

"The rice crop was harvested in November, and February-March is normally the peak export season when international demand is highest," Singh said. "Due to the ongoing conflict, the entire export chain has been disrupted, and the industry is facing heavy financial losses."

Farmers in the R.S. Pura belt—one of the most prominent basmati-growing regions in Jammu and Kashmir—fear that if the conflict continues and export routes remain affected, the losses could deepen in the coming months.

Basmati exports are a crucial source of income for thousands of farmers, millers and traders in the region.



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