

The Gulf War Comes to Kashmir Looms

Conflict in the Middle East disrupts ancient shawl trade routes, sending shockwaves through Kashmir's workshops and artisan households

Irshad Mushtaq

Srinagar: Morning light rests on rows of silk carpets in Ghulam Hassan Bhat's showroom near the Dal Lake, each roll holding months of labour in its fine weave. A kettle of kehwa cools nearby as Bhat checks his phone again, waiting for a message

that will decide if the carpets leave, or stay.

"Buyers once confirmed shipments within days," he says, setting the phone aside. "Now they ask us to wait. They speak about freight costs, rising insurance, and risk along the sea route."

His family has exported carpets for three generations,



building ties with retailers in Dubai, Doha and Riyadh. Orders once moved through established maritime routes linking India to West Asia, giving exporters a dependable path from workshop to showroom.

That path now faces disruption Escalating tensions involving Iran, Israel and the United

States have altered shipping conditions along key corridors. Missile activity near the Strait of Hormuz and security concerns along Yemen's coast have pushed shipping companies to revise operations.

Freight charges on the India-West Asia route have climbed by 30 to 50 percent since hostilities

intensified, while insurers have introduced war-risk premiums for vessels passing through sensitive zones.

Exporters describe delays stretching from a few days into two or three weeks. Some buyers have stopped new orders altogether as they assess the situation. "We prepared | **More on P6**

LG Clears 3 Bills, 2 More Introduced In Assembly

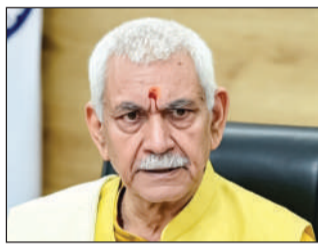
Bill To Set Up Private Universities Tabled

Observer News Service

Jammu: The Jammu and Kashmir government on Thursday introduced two bills in the legislative assembly aimed at decriminalising certain offences to ease doing business and paving the way for private universities in the Union Territory.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah introduced a bill to amend various enactments, seeking to decriminalise and rationalise offences for "ease of living and ease of doing business", and to repeal certain outdated provisions.

Education Minister Sakeena



Itto tabled a separate bill proposing the establishment and incorporation of private universities, with provisions to ensure academic standards, safeguard quality education and protect student interests.

Meanwhile, | **More on P6**

LG Hands Job Letter To SI's Widow

Observer News Service

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday handed over an appointment letter to Alka Sharma, the widow of Sub-Inspector Deepak | **More on P6**

J&K Power Dues Cross ₹3,747 Cr; PHE, CRPF Among Top Defaulters

KO Web Desk

Srinagar: Outstanding electricity dues in Jammu and Kashmir have crossed ₹3,747 crore, with a large share owed by government departments, public sector units and security agencies, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah informed the legislative assembly on Thursday.

Responding to a question raised by PDP MLA Aga Syed Muntazir Mehdi, Omar, who also holds charge of the Power Development Department, said the total outstanding stands at ₹3,74,735.42 lakh.

Of this, ₹2,31,022.41 lakh is pending under Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Limited (KPDC), while ₹1,43,713.01 lakh is under Jammu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (JPDC).

The Public Health



Engineering (PHE) department is the largest defaulter with dues of ₹1,30,043 lakh. It is followed by the Irrigation and Flood Control department, which owes ₹58,059.72 lakh.

Among security agencies, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has pending dues of ₹29,638.45 lakh, while the Army owes ₹19,719.94 lakh and the

Border Security Force (BSF) ₹1,116.87 lakh.

The Home department has accumulated dues of ₹22,306.46 lakh, while the Housing and Urban Development department owes ₹14,449.47 lakh.

The Power Development Department itself has outstanding liabilities of ₹10,756.53 lakh, while the Power | **More on P6**

Prepaid Electricity Meters Not Compulsory: Govt To LS

Press Trust Of India

The government on Thursday said in the Lok Sabha that consumers are not required to install pre-paid electricity meters. Responding to supplementaries during Question Hour, Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar rejected suggestions that the government was compelling consumers to adopt pre-paid meters in a manner similar to private companies. In response to a question regarding how poor farmers, who rely on daily earnings, would manage to pay for electricity, he explained | **More on P6**

Major J&K Police Rejig 34 IPS Among 82 Officers Shifted

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday ordered a major reshuffle in the police department, transferring 82 officers, including 34 IPS officers, with immediate effect, with the CID and Crime units getting new IGP's.

According to a government order issued by Principal Secretary Chandraker Bharti, Sinha ordered the transfer and postings of police officers in the interest of the administration.

The rejig saw 15 DIGs and several SSPs, SPs, and DSPs shifted to new postings.

Tejinder Singh, DIG Rajouri-Poonch Range, has been posted as IGP CID, while Sarah Rizvi, DIG Udhampur-Reasi Range, has been appointed as IGP Crime, J&K. Shahid Mehraj Rather, DIG Armed Kashmir, has been posted as Director, Police Telecommunication, and Shridhar Patil Daulu, DIG Doda-Kishtwar-Ramban, as DIG Jammu-Samba-Kathua.

Haseeb-ur-Rehman, DIG Railways, has | **More on P6**



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KO VIEW

Startup Slogans

The Government of India has bet big on startups. That bet has paid off in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Pune. But in Kashmir, it has barely registered.

Over a dozen incubation centers dot the valley. Generous incentives flow from Delhi, but unemployment keeps climbing. The crisis grows sharper each year.

The gap is cultural, structural, and human. Startup India works as a national mission. In Jammu and Kashmir, it remains mostly a slogan.

Local entrepreneurs cannot find reliable, skilled workers. Thousands of qualified youth, meanwhile, stare at a mismatch between their dreams and their options. A young tech graduate learns Python in college. He finds no place to use it locally. Gulf salaries lure him away. Startups that do launch cannot hold onto talent. Those with talent cannot find reasons to stay.

This goes deeper than jobs versus workers. The system itself is out of alignment.

Colleges still teach for exams rather than enterprises. Practical skills remain scarce. Incubators, often run by academics with little industry exposure, drift far from market realities. They host PowerPoint-heavy bootcamps instead of building product-ready companies. Without strong industry partnerships, these centers turn ceremonial. They stop catalyzing anything real.

Traditional sectors still dominate Kashmir's economy. Handicrafts and tourism bring seasonal income. They offer little tech infusion and no room for modern ambition. Agriculture feeds the region. It does not excite the engineers it produces.

A trust gap runs underneath everything. Workers feel underpaid and undervalued. Businesses fear investing in people who might bolt the moment a government job opens. Private firms cannot offer long-term security. They struggle to compete.

Government policy must shift. Stop laying stones for new centers. Start cultivating actual companies. Engage industry leaders, not academics who view startups as a career move. Bring commerce into classrooms. Teach entrepreneurship as a life skill instead of a last resort.

The valley overflows with ideas. It lacks alignment. Kashmir needs a business culture that treats innovation as more than jargon and stability as more than a government posting.

Startups can thrive here. First, we must stop mistaking incubation for transformation.

CASH COURSE

Read This Before You Buy Anything

Crop Crisis

Overbuilding on farmland endangers Kashmir's economy, culture, and food security.

Irshad Mushtaq

Kashmir's farm economy once made up nearly a third of our livelihood. Now it is closer to one fifth and shrinking fast.

The reason is easy to spot. Drive a few kilometers outside Srinagar and you will see fertile fields replaced by giant concrete houses. These are symbols of status, often spread across three floors, built for a single family.

We tell ourselves these houses are assets. They are not. The day construction ends, they begin to lose value. They produce no income. They demand constant spending on repairs, electricity, and upkeep. The real winners are cement sellers and tile companies. The owner is left with bills.

Land works differently. It feeds families, creates jobs, and earns money year after year. From land, you get crops. From oversized houses, you get expenses.

The real cost will be paid by the next generation. In 30 years, where will our children build? What land will they farm? We are using up the very soil they will depend on. What they may inherit is a surplus of large houses with no buyers and too little land to grow food.

We have seen this story before on the edges of Srinagar. Farmland was lost. Demand faded. The mistake is now spreading deeper into rural Kashmir.

The answer is not to stop building. It is to build wisely. Kashmir's future must be vertical. Apartments and shared housing use less land and leave space for farming. One acre can house many families without killing the fields around it.

This requires firm action. Construction on agricultural land must stop. This is about survival. Kashmir's economy, culture, and identity rise from its soil. If we lose that, no house, however large, will shelter us from the cost.

The author is a Srinagar-based reputed financial educator.

Crisis in the Craft Economy

The war in West Asia has disrupted trade routes and markets that sustain Kashmir's centuries-old crafts, leaving artisans caught between global conflict and local survival.



Malik Daniyal

The ongoing conflict in West Asia, sparked by joint United States-Israeli military strikes on Iran on February 28, 2026, now stretches well into its second month. It extends beyond a regional geopolitical crisis. Its cascading economic consequences mark a civilisational disruption, sending tremors across continents and economies far removed from the theatre of war.

Kashmir's cottage industry, long the cultural spine and economic lifeline of the valley, now faces a moment that could undo years of painstaking recovery.

Understanding the vulnerability of Kashmir's handicraft economy begins with grasping the scale of the catastrophe unfolding in West Asia. Operation Epic Fury, the name assigned by the United States to the joint military campaign, has assassinated Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and dismantled significant parts of the Iranian state apparatus. The offensive has also unleashed a war of unprecedented regional breadth.

Iran's retaliatory strikes now target all six Gulf Cooperation Council states, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UAE, marking the first instance in modern history of Tehran directly engaging all its Gulf neighbours at once.

The strategic and economic heart of this crisis lies in the Strait of Hormuz.

In 2025, roughly 25 percent of the world's seaborne oil trade passed through this narrow passage, along with over 110 billion cubic metres of liquefied natural gas, representing nearly 20 percent of global supply, much of it from Qatar. Iranian military operations have slowed commercial traffic in the strait to a near standstill.

The International Energy Agency describes the resulting disruption as the "largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market." Brent crude, which traded around \$70 per barrel before the conflict, has surged past \$110 per barrel, with volatile price swings fueling fears of a global energy crisis.

Amid this backdrop of geopolitical conflagration, Kashmir's cottage industry occupies a particularly exposed position.

The valley's artisans have crafted their livelihoods from the finest materials, including Pashmina and Kani shawls, hand-knotted silk and woollen carpets, papier-mâché, walnut wood carving, crewel embroidery, chain-stitch work, and Sozni needlework for generations.

These creations extend beyond commodities, serving as repositories of cultural memory, with techniques handed down across generations in the intimate domestic spaces of karkhandar workshops and home looms that define cottage production.

Official data shows that Kashmir's handicraft sector recorded exports worth around 410 crore during the first half of the Financial Year 2025-26, with Gulf countries, Europe, and North America emerging as the most critical international markets. The Gulf alone represents a market of singular importance.

Kashmiri embroidered shawls, particularly the turban worn in turban style, enjoy a devoted clientele in GCC states, while hand-knotted carpets and Pashmina products attract the most affluent buyers in the luxury markets of Dubai, Riyadh, Doha, and Abu Dhabi.

This dependence on the Gulf reflects a structural reality, rooted in cultural affinity, geographic proximity, and decades of commercial engagement.

Official figures from the Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom show that Kashmir's handicraft exports, which peaked at 1,162 crore in 2023-24, fell to 733 crore in 2024-25, a decline of nearly 37 percent, largely driven by global conflicts and disrupted demand from Europe and West Asia.

The current escalation intensifies this structural vulnerability, pushing the sector toward an acute crisis.



Even modest inflation in food and fuel translates directly into the difference between sustaining a craft and abandoning it for Kashmiri artisans, many of whom earn daily or weekly piece-rate wages.

The West Asian war affects Kashmir's cottage economy through multiple, mutually reinforcing channels. The paralysis of the Gulf market delivers the most immediate impact.

Tourism in the UAE and Qatar has dropped sharply, with hotel bookings collapsing and economic hubs like Dubai experiencing what analysts describe as near standstill.

The Gulf's mercantile classes, who are the wealthiest and most consistent buyers of Kashmiri luxury crafts, are focused on survival rather than consumption. Trade exhibitions, luxury retail events, and cultural fairs that once served as launchpads for Kashmiri artisans in GCC capitals have been cancelled or indefinitely postponed. Buyers who once acquired a Kani shawl in a Doha emporium or commissioned a silk carpet from a Srinagar exporter through a Dubai showroom now contend with missile alerts and fuel shortages. Discretionary spending on artisanal luxury naturally retreats in times of existential uncertainty.

The freight and logistics shock represents a second and equally severe channel of disruption.

The widening conflict has driven a global surge in shipping costs and insurance premiums, with vessels rerouted away from Gulf ports, creating congestion at alternative ports and delaying shipments worldwide.

Kashmir's exporters, already constrained by landlocked geography, high freight costs, and dependence on mainland Indian port infrastructure, face direct pressure on the thin margins that sustain cottage-scale exports.

The artisan who earns a daily wage weaving a carpet does not bear these costs. The exporter absorbs them, often reducing or cancelling orders as a result.

India's macroeconomic vulnerability adds a third dimension to the crisis.

With limited strategic oil reserves and heavy reliance on Middle Eastern crude, India ranks among the economies most exposed to a prolonged disruption. Rising energy prices are driving inflation, weakening the rupee, and putting growth under pressure.

A weaker rupee, while theoretically boosting export competitiveness in nominal terms, increases the cost of imported raw materials and energy, compresses household incomes, and accelerates domestic inflation.

UN estimates indicate that oil prices have risen by around 45 percent and gas by 55 percent since late February, with regional inflation in Asia projected to reach 4.6 percent in 2026, up from 3.5 percent the previous year.

Even modest inflation in food and fuel translates directly into the difference between sustaining a craft and abandoning it for Kashmiri artisans, many

of whom earn daily or weekly piece-rate wages.

A profound, if painful, irony lies at the heart of this crisis. The Persian aesthetic tradition from the Safavid courts of Isfahan, which sent master weavers and designers to Kashmir under Mughal patronage, forms the foundational grammar of Kashmiri craft.

The carpet, the shawl, the paisley or buta motif that adorns the valley's most iconic products all carry the imprint of Iranian civilisational influence that shaped the industry at its very origins.

Today, the war that has reduced parts of Iran to rubble is, through its economic dislocations, gradually unraveling the markets built upon that same civilisational continuum.

It would be misleading to portray the crisis as absolute or irreversible. Industry stakeholders emphasize that Kashmiri handicrafts occupy a niche market prized for their authenticity and craftsmanship, creating opportunities even in turbulent times.

The sector's recovery from pandemic-era lows to record export figures in 2023-24 demonstrates a defiance that should not be underestimated.

Structural diversification of export destinations, with European and North American markets providing a measure of counterbalance to Gulf volatility, offers an additional buffer.

The current crisis, however, highlights several long-standing imperatives with renewed push.

The cottage industry's reliance on a narrow cluster of Gulf markets leaves it systemically exposed to the very geopolitical shocks now unfolding. Expanding market penetration in East Asia, Australasia, and Latin America, regions less affected by Middle Eastern turbulence, must shift from aspiration to actionable policy.

Digitising supply chains, developing direct-to-consumer export platforms, and strengthening GI-tagged product certifications are instruments of economic survival.

Artisans sitting at looms or embroidering Sozni shawls do not track the movements of the Strait of Hormuz or the trajectory of Brent crude. But the war raging in West Asia draws a direct, if invisible, line between the fires of Tehran and the silence of a Kashmiri workshop.

Geopolitics does not accommodate the delicacy of craftsmanship. The valley's artisans, its most vulnerable economic constituency, deserve both the protection of responsive governance and the value of markets that endure beyond the volatility of distant wars.

The author is a final year economics student at University of Delhi and writes regularly on UT's economy. He can be reached at mdaniyal.054@gmail.com.

Letter to Editor

The Emotional Price of Lengthy Divorce in Kashmir

In Hazratbal, Srinagar, earlier last year, a young woman ended her life by setting herself on fire after a family dispute.

The horror of that moment hides years of silent suffering, emotional pressure, and a system that failed to step in.

Families and neighbours remember the arguments, the moments of despair, and the subtle signs of distress.

Behind closed doors, many people live trapped in marriages that have become unbearable, and the law often offers no timely help.

The legal system meant to protect spouses can sometimes make matters worse.

Divorce or separation stretches for years, with endless court hearings,

mounting expenses, and complex procedures. Social stigma and family pressure pile on top, turning already tense relationships into emotional pressure cookers.

Instead of offering relief, the law often adds another layer of stress.

Laws meant to shield vulnerable people are also being misused. False accusations, prolonged legal battles, and rising hostility push couples further apart. In some cases, genuine victims are doubted, while disputes spiral beyond reconciliation.

Studies and reports show a clear link between such prolonged legal conflicts and mental distress, with some cases ending in tragic suicides.

Legal protections against cruelty must remain, but the law should also al-

low timely, dignified separation when a marriage cannot be saved.

Family Courts, recommended by the Law Commission of India in 1974 and established through the Family Courts Act of 1984, were intended to fill this gap.

These courts are designed to handle marital disputes with a humane approach, supported by counselors, psychologists, and social workers.

Unfortunately, many districts, including in Jammu & Kashmir, still lack fully functional Family Courts.

Accessible courts can help resolve conflicts earlier, prevent emotional harm, and even promote reconciliation when possible.

Matrimonial disputes are a serious social concern. The tragedy in Hazrat-

bal and other similar cases highlight the emotional toll of prolonged marital conflict and systemic failures.

When the legal system cannot respond with speed, balance, or care, individuals are left vulnerable to despair. Lawmakers, judicial institutions, and society must treat these incidents as urgent calls for action.

Accessible, compassionate, and effective family justice is essential to save lives, protect dignity, and restore trust in the system.

Sincerely,

Suhail Gaznavi
suhailadv13@gmail.com

The Kashmiri Man Who Never Left

Between birth and belief, a man discovers fatherhood while another holds on to a future that keeps slipping away.



HE LOOKED LIKE A CHARACTER PULLED FROM A 19TH-CENTURY RUSSIAN NOVEL, TRANSPORTED TO A KASHMIRI WINTER. His skin was the colour of old parchment, a sickly yellowish hue that suggested his lungs were as tired as his eyes. And then there were the sores, an angry, weeping map of herpes or some fungal equivalent that littered his jawline.



Jamsheed Rasool

The air in Srinagar in February bites past the wind. It's a sharp, clinical cold that finds the gaps in your pheran and reminds you exactly how far 3 kilometers can feel when you are on two wheels.

At that hour, the city is a ghost of itself: the Jhelum a dark, silent ribbon and the streetlights casting long, amber shadows over the frost-covered tarmac. You arrived at Ramadan Hospital looking less like a father-to-be and more like a man who had just survived a Himalayan expedition on a moped.

The scene at the desk is dismal. There is a specific silence in a Kashmiri hospital at 5:30 AM during Ramzan. The hallways smell of floor cleaner and the faint trail of some-

prayer, saw the panic in your shivering frame. He saw a man-on-a-mission rather than a "loser moped rider". He led you to the reception, a Formica island in a sea of sterile white tiles.

You stand there, fingers still numb from the handlebars, fumbling with your wallet and the plastic folder of my wife's medical records.

The Forms: "Name of Patient": ABC

You write with a shaky hand, the blue ink stuttering on the page because your pulse is racing faster than the moped's engine ever could.

Outside, the sky is turning that bruised, pre-sunrise purple. Inside, the "Ramadan" signage feels like a silent omen of barakah. It's the month of patience, and here you are, at the finish line of a nine-month marathon.

In a few hours, the sun will hit the tin roofs of the city, the "hipster" malls will open their glass doors, and the doctors will arrive in their heated sedans. But for now, it's just you, the scratching of a pen on an admission form, and the anticipation of my wife arriving from her parents' home, the bridge between your two families about to be personified in a single cry.

The sun hadn't quite cleared the horizon yet, but the sky had shifted from that deep, ink-black to a bruised, electric violet. You stood by the wide glass doors of the Ramadan Hospital lobby, your hands still tingling from the moped's vibration, watching the frost on the porch catch the first hint of gray light.

Then, the twin beams of a car's headlights cut through the morning mist, sweeping across the "Designated Parking" signs and pulling you right into the porch, a privilege your moped had been denied.

The car door opened, and a gust of the February chill tried to follow my wife inside. She emerged from the backseat, wrapped in a heavy, charcoal-grey shawl, looking like a queen who had just survived a long journey. Her mother was on one side, her sister on the other, the family convoy that always accompanies a Kashmiri birth.

When she saw you standing there, shivering slightly in your over-sized jacket, her eyes crinkled. It was that look, part, "I can't believe you rode that moped in this cold", and part, "I'm so glad you're here."

As she stepped into the lobby, the sleepy, pre-dawn atmosphere of the hospital snapped into focus.

The night-shift nurses, who had just finished their own hurried pre-fast meals, suddenly moved with a new pulse. The squeak of rubber soles on the linoleum floors became a percussion of purpose.

The receptionist, who had been lazily filing your forms, stood up. The sterile folder you had just filled out suddenly became a living document, a ticket to the labour

ward. Somewhere in the distance, the last echoes of the Sehri sirens or the morning calls from a nearby masjid were fading. The fast had officially begun. For millions, it was a day of abstaining, but for you and your wife, this was a day of profound giving.

You took the small bag from her brother's hand, the one packed with baby clothes that had been washed and folded three times over. As the elevator doors slid open, the weight of the "loser moped rider" identity fell away.

In that clinical, yellow light of the elevator, you weren't the guy struggling with the February wind anymore. You were the man your wife was looking at for strength. The "Ramadan" name on the hospital wall didn't feel like a coincidence anymore. It felt like a silent witness to a miracle about to happen in the holiest of months.

The waiting room of the hospital was a study in suspended animation. By 8 am, the pale February sun was struggling to cut through the Srinagar haze, casting weak, rectangular patches of light on the green linoleum floor.

Because it was the month of fasting, the usual sensory markers of a hospital morning were missing. There was no steam rising from paper cups of Noon Chai, no rhythmic crunch of someone snacking on a hidden biscuit to calm their nerves. The air was thin, quiet, and purely expectant.

You sat on a hard plastic chair, your knees still feeling the ghostly vibration of the moped ride. Around you, the other men, including fathers-in-law, brothers, and fellow waiting husbands, were statues of restraint. To your left, an older man in a brown tweed pheran moved his thumb rhythmically over a set of dark wooden tasbih beads. Each click was a silent prayer for a daughter or a daughter-in-law behind the swinging double doors.

You felt the scratchiness in your own throat, the thirst of the fast beginning to set in, made sharper by the adrenaline. In any other month, you'd have walked to the canteen to kill time. Today, time had to be faced head-on, unbuffered by caffeine or sugar.

There is a strange irony in a maternity ward during Ramzan. While the world outside is practicing sabr through stillness and prayer, the women inside, my wife included, are engaged in the most violent, beautiful labour imaginable.

Every time the heavy doors swung open, a gust of "active" noise escaped: the sharp beep of a monitor, the hurried command of a doctor, or the low, guttural groan of a woman in the throes of creation. The waiting room would collectively hold its breath, eyes darting to the nurse in the blue scrubs, before exhaling in unison when she called

a name that wasn't theirs.

You looked out the window down at the parking lot. From this height, your moped looked like a lonely insect huddled against the grand SUVs of the senior consultants. You thought about the journey, the 3 kilometers of freezing wind, the hurried Fajr, the scribbled paperwork.

In the silence of the fast, your mind drifted to the "Bridges" we talked about earlier. You were standing on a bridge right now. Behind you was the life of a son, a husband, a guy on a moped. Ahead of you, somewhere behind those swinging doors, was a version of you that was a father.

Then, it happened.

It was a thin, jagged sound that sliced through the "Ramadan" quiet like a silver blade. It was a cry that didn't care about the fast, the cold, or the Dogra kings of the past. It was the sound of the 2000-year-old Jhelum finding a new stream.

The nurse stepped out, her mask hanging from one ear, looking for the man who had arrived in the dark.

The silence of the waiting room was finally broken by the sound of the double doors swinging open. The nurse, her face etched with the professional fatigue of a long Ramzan night shift, stepped out.

You stood up so fast your chair scraped harshly against the linoleum. Your heart, which had been idling like a cold moped engine, was now revving at a thousand RPM.

"How is my wife?" you asked, the words catching in your dry, fasting throat.

"She is well. Alhamdulillah," the nurse replied with a small, knowing smile.

"And... the baby?"

You looked at her, searching for the answer to the question that had been humming in your mind for months. She paused, a playful glint in her eyes despite the exhaustion. "That," she said, "is a surprise for you. Just wait a few more minutes."

She disappeared back into the sterile white beyond. Those few minutes felt longer than the three-kilometer ride through the freezing February wind. You sat back down, but your body wouldn't settle. You looked at your hands, the hands of a "loser moped rider," still slightly red from the cold, the nails short, the skin smelling faintly of the dawn's lime and the metal of the handlebars. You wondered if these hands were meant for something as delicate as a surprise.

The door swung open a second time. This time, she wasn't empty-handed. She carried a bundle wrapped tightly in hospital-grade white cotton, a tiny "Kashmiri cocoon."

She walked straight toward you. The other families in the waiting room, including the old man with the beads, and the anxious aunts, all fell away. The world narrowed down to the space between you

and her outstretched arms.

"It is a boy," she said, her voice dropping into a softer, warmer register. "A beautiful, healthy boy."

As she leaned forward to place him in your arms, a sudden, inexplicable stillness took over your body. The shivering stopped. The "moped rider" hands, which usually struggled with the finicky clutch and the heavy grocery bags from the market, suddenly found a perfect, instinctive geometry.

You tucked your elbows in, and cupped his head with a firmness you didn't know you possessed.

He was the most "High-End" thing you had ever held. Looking down at his face, crinkled like a dried walnut and still flushed with the heat of his arrival, you realized the paperwork was done. The moped was parked. The fast was being observed.

But as his tiny, translucent fingers brushed against your calloused thumb, you realized the "GTM strategy" of your entire existence had just been rewritten. You weren't just a son of the soil or a husband on a budget anymore. You were the bridge.

The heart of that morning wasn't the sterile hospital walls or the looming mountains. It was the man behind the reception desk.

While I was shivering from the moped ride, he was shivering from a different kind of fever, the one that comes from a life spent waiting for a door that never quite opens. He was the Sultan of the Reception Desk, a man who seemed to be physically decomposing under the flickering fluorescent lights.

He looked like a character pulled from a 19th-century Russian novel, transported to a Kashmiri winter. His skin was the colour of old parchment, a sickly yellowish hue that suggested his lungs were as tired as his eyes. And then there were the sores, an angry, weeping map of herpes or some fungal equivalent that littered his jawline.

As I handed him my wife's files, he reached up, scratched a crusting lesion with a jagged fingernail, and then, without a flicker of hesitation, pressed those same fingers onto the white sheets of the prescription.

"I had just managed to catch some sleep," he muttered, his voice a gravelly rasp of self-flagellation. "Then you turn up."

He blamed the sores on the cook. "Spicy, cold food for Suhoor," he hissed, as if the chili powder had manifested directly through his pores. "That man is a butcher, not a cook."

In between the coughing and the scratching, he spoke of home, a village in the highlands that sounded like a fever-dream of Eden. He spoke of a brooklet that snaked through the moss, of plane trees that touched the clouds, and a village pond where the water was as

clear as the air.

He spoke of the "Bigshot Politician" from the next village over. "He has the men by their throats," the receptionist whispered, a mix of envy and disgust dancing in his yellowed eyes. "He moves the psychology of the valley. I could have been him. But I am a straight arrow. And look at me, writing names on paper until my fingers ache."

Then came the mantra. The spell that kept his heart beating.

"Today is my last working day. I am leaving for Kuwait next week. My Visa has arrived."

I looked at him, at the consumption in his chest and the infection on his face, and I was startled by his absolute, terrifying confidence. To him, the moped-riding father in front of him was the one trapped. He was already gone.

That was the same day the news broke: Khamenei had been killed in an air raid. The world felt like it was tilting on its axis. When I mentioned it, hoping for a shared moment of grief or political outrage, he only became irate.

"Kuwait is far, far away from Iran!" he snapped, slamming a stamp onto a form. "Let them bomb. My flight is in three days. When I mentioned it, hoping for a shared moment of grief or political outrage, he only became irate."

Weeks later, I returned. The February frost had turned into the wet uncertainty of early spring. I walked to the desk to collect my son's birth certificate, expecting a new face, perhaps someone healthy and local. Instead, there he was.

The yellow skin was still there. The sores had moved, "some infection on my backside," he grumbled, shifting uncomfortably in his chair. He looked even more diminished, a ghost haunting his own workstation.

"They served me spicy cold food again," he complained, his fingers trembling as he gripped the pen. "My fingers are aching. These sheets of paper... they never end."

He looked up at me, and for a second, I thought the delusion had broken. But then, the old spark of desperate hope flared up in those jaundiced eyes.

"But fortunately," he whispered, as if sharing a state secret, "my visa from Kuwait has come. I am leaving tomorrow."

He was the Jhelum in reverse, always flowing toward a sea he would never reach, anchored to that desk by a piece of paper that was likely as phantom as the clear air of his highland village.

— The author is a senior scribe and short story writer from Srinagar with more than 15 years of experience in media, education, and corporate sectors. His work, published in various outlets, focuses on the human stories and changing dynamics of his homeland. He can be reached at jamsheedlar85@gmail.com.



THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN A SECOND TIME. This time, she wasn't empty-handed. She carried a bundle wrapped tightly in hospital-grade white cotton, a tiny "Kashmiri cocoon."

one's pre-dawn noon chai. The security guard, likely still adjusting his cap after his own Fajr

Census 2027 To Be Held In 2 Phases Across J&K

KO Web Desk

Srinagar- The Directorate of Census Operations, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh on Thursday said the upcoming Census 2027 will be conducted in two phases in a digital backbone with self-enumeration, mobile-based data collection and GIS mapping to ensure accurate and transparent data.

Addressing a press conference in Jammu, Chief Principal Census Officer, Amit Sharma said the exercise marks a significant shift from traditional methods, with technology playing a central role from enumeration to data processing.

He said the process will involve large-scale deployment of manpower, with thousands of supervisors and enumerators to be trained and engaged across regions. "The Census will be conducted in two phases and will leverage a robust digital framework. Citizens will also have the option of self-enumeration through an online portal, making the process more inclusive and efficient," he said.

The self-enumeration facility will allow individuals to submit their details online, reducing field workload and enabling real-time data validation.

Sharma added that mobile applications for house listing and enumeration will be deployed, while satellite imagery and GIS tools will be used to map enumeration blocks precisely.

"Technology integration from data capture to storage will enhance transparency and efficiency. Secure data centres will handle the processing, ensuring reliability and confidentiality," he said.

He further said that senior government functionaries, including constitutional authorities, are expected to participate in self-enumeration to build public trust and encourage wider participation.

He said the Census will play a vital role in policy formulation and targeted delivery of welfare schemes. "Accurate data is the foundation of effective governance. Public participation is key to its success," they said.

He added that training programmes for field staff and public awareness campaigns are underway, with further details on timelines and portal access expected to be rolled out ahead of the enumeration process across Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

Rajouri Attack Case

SIA Chargesheets Man for Harbours Terrorists



Press Trust Of India

Srinagar: The State Investigation Agency (SIA) has filed a chargesheet against a terrorist harbourer in a case related to the killing of a villager and injuring his soldier brother in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district two years ago, an official said.

The charge sheet was filed before the designated court against Sabar Hussain, originally a resident of Khabalwali, Shahdara Sharief and presently living at Chamrer in Surankote area of Poonch for harbouring terrorists affiliated with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and its offshoot The Resistance Front (TRF) involved in the brutal killing of Mohd Razaq, a spokesperson of the SIA said.

Razaq lost his life and his brother Tahir Khurshid alias Tahir Fauji, a Territorial Army personnel, sustained injuries when unidentified terrorists opened indiscriminate firing after entering their home at Kunda village, Shahdara Sharief in Thanamandi on April 22, 2024.

Initially the case was registered at Thanamandi police station and later the investigation was transferred to SIA due to sensitivity of the incident.

During the course of investigation, crucial evidence was recovered from the scene. Statements of key witnesses, were recorded under relevant provisions of law, the spokesperson said.

He said the investigations established that Hussain has provided shelter, food, and logistical support to three terrorists at his seasonal hut in Chamrer, thereby facilitating the execution of the terror attack.

Accordingly, prima facie offences under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act have been established against the accused and case stands chargesheeted, the spokesperson said.

He said the filing of the chargesheet marks a crucial step in dismantling terror support networks and reaffirming the commitment of law enforcement agencies to ensure justice and security in the region.

Over 16,000 Kanals of JDA Land Under Encroachment: CM

Press Trust Of India

Jammu: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on Thursday that over 16,000 kanals of land under the Jammu Development Authority (JDA) are currently being encroached upon, and that eviction drives are being carried out in a phased and time-bound manner.

In response to a question from BJP MLA Dr Narinder Singh Raina in the assembly, the chief minister stated that the total land managed by the JDA amounts to 80,976 kanals and 10 marlas, of which 16,127 kanals and 10 marlas are under illegal occupation.

In Jammu and Kashmir, land is traditionally measured using units like 'kanal' and 'marla', which are part of an

older system still widely used in property and agriculture. One kanal is equal to 20 marlas, and a kanal measures about 5,445 square feet, while one marla is approximately 272.25 square feet (though slight variations can exist locally).

Abdullah explained that encroachments are identified through inspections conducted by field staff and records maintained by the Revenue Department.

"Eviction notices are issued under the provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, and regular eviction and demolition drives are conducted in coordination with the district administration and police," the chief minister said.

He added that field

inspections occur regularly to prevent new encroachments, and the eviction of illegal occupants is being implemented in a phased and time-bound manner, following statutory procedures.

Regarding details about the encroachers, including whether they are politicians, bureaucrats, private individuals, or organisations, Abdullah noted that the JDA does not maintain records categorised by these groups.

"Encroacher lists are received from the Revenue department and maintained on a land parcel-wise or location-wise basis," he said in his response, emphasising that actions are taken strictly according to legal provisions to ensure transparency and accountability.

Kashmir Police Control Room Gets PHQ Budget Allocation Software

Press Trust Of India

Srinagar: The police control room Kashmir on Thursday got the PHQ Budget Allocation Software (PBAS) aimed at strengthening financial transparency and accountability.

"In a significant step towards strengthening financial transparency, accountability, and efficiency, Ajay Shanker Singh, ICAS, Principal Chief Controller of Accounts (CCA), Ministry of Home Affairs, inaugurated the PHQ Budget Allocation Software (PBAS) at PCR Kashmir today," a police

spokesman said.

He said the PBAS platform has been developed to streamline the process of budget allocation, monitoring, and utilisation within Police Headquarters.

The initiative marks a major advancement in adopting technology-driven solutions to enhance financial governance and operational efficiency, he added.

Senior police officers including DGP Nalin Prabhat, Special DGP coordination S J M Gilla 1 and IGP Kashmir V K Birdi were present on the

occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, Singh emphasized the importance of digital platforms in ensuring transparency, accuracy, and real-time financial oversight.

He said the systems like PBAS play a crucial role in strengthening governance and optimising the use of public resources.

Prabhat highlighted the significance of modern financial management systems in enhancing institutional efficiency and accountability within the police organisation.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

The Gulf War

a consignment for Dubai last month," Bhat says. "The buyer called and said he would wait. He wanted to see how things develop."

That break sends a clear signal through Kashmir's handicraft economy, a ₹2,500-crore sector that employs more than three lakh artisans in urban workshops and remote villages. Carpets and handicrafts alone generate between ₹600 and ₹700 crore annually, forming a significant share of income in a region with limited formal industry.

Around 2.5 lakh artisans work directly in production, while another one lakh support related roles such as spinning, dyeing, packaging and transport. When the full value chain is considered, from Pashmina goat herders in Ladakh to forwarding agents in Mumbai, four to five lakh livelihoods depend on this system.

Every link relies on the next. On the outskirts of Srinagar, Bashir Ahmad stands beside a truck that once transported carpets regularly to Delhi's cargo terminals. He flips through a worn notebook where trip entries have thinned.

"Trucks used to leave almost every week," he says. "Now I wait for a call that comes less often. Drivers ask me when we will move again."

Workshops throughout the valley produce items that demand time and precision. Silk carpets often contain up to 400 knots per square inch. Sozni embroidery requires months of careful stitching. Walnut wood furniture carries intricate carvings inspired by chinar leaves, while papier-mâché boxes feature detailed designs painted in mineral pigments.

These traditions extend over centuries, sustained through periods of political and economic strain. External shocks now influence them in immediate ways.

"Shipping disruptions raise costs for exporters, who adjust payments within the chain," says Showkat Ali, a Srinagar-based carpet trader. "Buyers in Gulf markets respond with caution, reducing inventory purchases as regional uncertainty affects demand."

Industry leaders estimate that fresh orders have declined by 30 to 40 percent since tensions escalated.

That contraction arrives at a sensitive moment. The sector had begun to recover from pandemic losses, supported by government promotion and renewed interest in Geographical Indication protections. Handicraft exports reached ₹197 crore in 2018-19 before falling sharply during COVID-19. Recent gains now face pressure.

The effect appears most clearly in villages where production takes place. Kanihama, known for Pashmina weaving, offers a close view of the change.

Inside a modest home, Rafiq Begum works at a wooden loom set near a window. Threads stretch tightly in front of her, forming a developing shawl. A notebook nearby lists expenses and expected payments.

"Work arrived regularly before," she says. "Now they tell us to wait for yarn. Waiting brings no income."

Weavers depend on advances from traders, who rely on payments from exporters, who depend on buyers abroad. Disruption at the final stage tightens credit through each level.

Mohammad Yousuf, a shawl trader in Srinagar, describes the shift. "I reduced advances this month because payments have slowed,"

he says. "One weaver borrowed money from relatives to pay school fees."

This structure defines the craft economy. Each rupee of export value passes through multiple hands, including wool importers, dyers, apprentices and transport workers.

"When there is no order, I practice designs on paper," says Aamir, a 19-year-old apprentice in downtown Srinagar. "My father asks me to look for other work."

Such choices influence the future of the craft. Skills develop over years of repetition, with knowledge embedded in both technique and memory. Interruptions can push workers toward other forms of labour, reducing the number of trained artisans over time.

Economic pressure extends beyond workshops.

Kashmir maintains strong ties to West Asia through labour migration. Government figures place about 87 lakh Indian workers in six major Gulf states, including 43 lakh in the United Arab Emirates and 27 lakh in Saudi Arabia. Jammu and Kashmir contributes a smaller share, receiving roughly 0.3 percent of India's \$80 billion annual remittance inflow, though dependence remains concentrated in specific communities.

In Pulwama, Danish Ahmad listens to voice messages from his brother in Dubai, who works in a hotel. Reduced working hours have lowered his earnings in recent weeks.

"He says business has slowed," Danish explains. "His extra shifts helped us pay our home loan. Now we think about the next installment."

Rising oil prices linked to regional tensions add another layer of strain. Higher crude costs increase India's import bill and translate into higher fuel prices domestically.

Rising diesel prices affect nearly every household expense in Kashmir, where transportation already adds 15 to 20 percent to the cost of goods.

Shabnam, a vegetable seller in Srinagar, arranges her produce as customers gather. "Transport has become expensive," she says. "I pay more to bring vegetables here, and prices go up."

Officials in Srinagar have introduced credit support for exporters and discussed efforts to expand into new markets, including East Asia and domestic tourism channels. Artisan groups have called for direct income support, marketing assistance and broader social protection.

A senior official, speaking privately, describes the limits of intervention. "Global developments influence these disruptions," he says. "Local measures can reduce the impact, though they cannot remove it."

The long-term implications extend beyond immediate income loss. Craft traditions require sustained practice to endure. A worker who shifts to another occupation may leave behind skills developed over decades.

"My daughter has learned embroidery," Rafiq Begum says. "I tell her to study instead. This work feels uncertain."

In an older part of Srinagar, Abdul Rahman sits before a loom, tying knots into a carpet stretched across a wooden frame. His hands move with practiced precision, following a pattern he has memorized over many years.

"I have seen many difficult periods," he says. "The work must continue."

Bhat reads another message and sets the phone beside the untouched tea. Carpets rise

behind him, months of labour held in wait.

"They call it risk," he says. "It decides our work."

Distant tensions now reach Kashmir with force. They arrive as delayed orders and idle looms. Decisions in shipping lanes and foreign capitals decide whether work moves or stays.

LG Clears 3 Bills

Assembly Secretary Manoj Kumar Pandit informed the House that Lt Governor Manoj Sinha has assented to three bills passed earlier by the legislature.

These include the Jammu and Kashmir Jan-Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026; the Jammu and Kashmir Eliminating Discrimination Against Persons Affected by Leprosy Bill, 2026; and the Jammu and Kashmir State Civil Courts (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which received assent on March 31.

Omar also tabled copies of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India reports on Union Territory finances for the financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25.

LG Hands Job Letter

Sharma, under the J&K Rehabilitation Assistance Scheme, 2022.

An official spokesperson said the Lt Governor assured all possible assistance and support to the bereaved family

Sharma, a braveheart of the Jammu and Kashmir Police, made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty in 2024 while fighting and neutralizing a most-wanted gangster in Kathua district, officials added.

J&K Power Dues

Development Corporation owes ₹2,277.51 lakh.

Municipal bodies account for a significant share, with municipalities alone owing ₹24,163.80 lakh. The Revenue and Relief Department has dues of ₹8,227.62 lakh, and the Health and Medical Education Department ₹11,989.31 lakh.

Other contributors include the Tourism Department (₹4,759.05 lakh), Education Department (₹2,866.40 lakh), Public Works (R&B) Department (₹1,951.21 lakh) and Rural Development Department (₹1,062.95 lakh).

The data also includes dues from central agencies and public sector undertakings such as NHPC, NHAI, Railways, Power Grid Corporation of India, BSNL and Prasar Bharati, along with several development authorities and corporations including JDA, UDA, SIDCO and SRTC.

Omar said power distribution companies are actively pursuing recovery from defaulting departments and establishments.

The disclosure underscores mounting financial stress on the power sector in Jammu and Kashmir, with a substantial portion of unpaid dues tied to government and institutional consumption. (PTI)

Prepaid Electricity

that options for small recharges lasting five to ten days are available.

However, he noted that serial defaulters — those who take "pride" in not paying their electricity bills — would be required to switch to pre-paid meters to reduce the risk of non-payment.

The minister emphasised that power companies are commercial in nature and need to earn

revenue to provide electricity to consumers.

34 IPS Among 82

been posted as DIG Traffic Kashmir, while Nisha Nathyal, DIG (Headquarters) PHQ, has been posted as DIG IR Jammu. Dr. Vinod Kumar, DIG IR Jammu, has been posted as DIG North Kashmir Range, and Maqsood-ul-Zaman, DIG North Kashmir Range, as DIG Armed Kashmir. Shiv Kumar Sharma, DIG Jammu-Samba-Kathua, has been posted as DIG Udhampur-Reasi.

Sargun, Commandant IR-15 Battalion, has been posted as DIG Doda-Kishtwar-Ramban, while Sandeep Wazir, AIG Personnel PHQ, has been posted as DIG Rajouri-Poonch. Anita Sharma, Commandant IR-1 Battalion, has been posted as DIG CD & SDRF Jammu. Jatinder Singh Johar, J/C Director Police Telecom, has been posted as DIG HQ PHQ.

Swarn Singh Kotwal, Director SSF, has been retained as Director SSF, while Zahid Naseem Manhas, Commandant SDRF 2 Battalion, has been posted as DIG Railways.

Amod Nagpure Ashok, SSP Udhampur, has been posted as SSP Anantnag, while Amritpal Singh, SSP Anantnag, has been posted as SSP Udhampur. Rajesh Kumar Sharma, SSP Security Jammu, has been posted as Dy Director SKPA Udhampur, and Rajesh Bali, AD SKPA Udhampur, as SO to IG Armed Jammu. Mohd Aslam, Commandant IRP-24, has been posted as Commandant SDRF 2 Battalion.

Anuj Kumar, Commandant IR-11, has been posted as SSP Samba, while Sudhanshu Dhama (awaiting posting) has been posted as SSP Ganderbal. Bisma Qazi, Commanding Officer Women Battalion, has been posted as SSP Tech CID HQ, and Deepika (awaiting posting) as SSP CTFD CID HQ.

Sukant Shalja Ballabh (awaiting posting) has been posted as SSP Security Jammu, while Kamal Pal Singh Malhotra (awaiting posting) as SSP Finger Print Bureau. Sunny Gupta (awaiting posting) has been posted as Additional SP Anantnag, and Kartik Shrotriya, Additional SP Anantnag, as SSP Doda.

Mukund Tibrewal, SP Ops Border Kathua, has been posted as SSP Reasi, while Hariprasad K.K., Additional SP Baramulla, has been posted as SSP Budgam. Vaibhav Meena, SDPO Nehru Park, has been posted as SP South Jammu, and Anna Sinha (awaiting posting) as SP HQ Jammu.

Harshal Rajesh Mahajan (awaiting posting) has been posted as Additional SP Baramulla, while Neha Jain (awaiting posting) has been posted as SP East Srinagar.

Shamsher Hussain, SO to IGP Jammu, has been posted as SSP PCR Jammu, while Randhir Singh, SSP CI CID Jammu, has been posted as SO to IGP Railways. Virinder Singh Manhas, SSP Samba, has been posted as Commandant 4 JKAP, and Sandeep Kumar Mehta, SSP Doda, as Commandant 24 IR.

Sheikh Zulfikar Azad (awaiting posting) has been posted as Commandant 6 JKAP. Amit Gupta, SSP HQ CID, has been posted as SSP CID SB Jammu, while Mohd Majid Malik, SSP (SS) CID HQ, has been posted as Commandant 10 IR. Mohd Youisf, SSP Finger Print Bureau, has been posted as SSP Security Civil Secretariat.

Ravinder Paul Singh, SSP Traffic Rural Kashmir, has been posted as Commandant 4 IR, while Khalil Ahmad Poswal, SSP Ganderbal, has been posted as Commandant 12 IR (to take effect upon retirement of incumbent).

Liaquat Ali, SSP PTWS Srinagar, has been posted as SSP Traffic Rural Kashmir, while Girdhari Lal, SSP CID SB Jammu, has been posted as SSP HQ CID. Vinay Kumar, SO to IGP Railways, has been posted as AIG Provisions.

Suneel Raj, Commanding Officer JKAP-12th Battalion, has been posted as SSP APCR Jammu, while Rajinder Kumar Katoch, Commandant IR-10, has been posted as Commandant 1 IR. Paramvir Singh, SSP Reasi, has been posted as Commandant 1 Border Battalion.

Dushyant Sharma, Commanding Officer JKAP-3, has been posted as Commandant 15 IR. Sajad Khaliq Bhat, SSP Security Civil Secretariat, has been posted as SSP Security Kashmir.

Dawood Ayoub, SSP (TMG) CID HQ, has been posted as SSP CID CI Kashmir, while Perbeest Singh, SSP CTFD CID HQ, has been posted as SSP CID CI Jammu. Tahir Ashraf Bhatti, SSP CID CI Kashmir, has been posted as SSP SIA Kashmir.

Aftab Ahmed Sheikh, Commanding Officer IR-17, has been attached to PHQ awaiting posting.

Sheikh Faisal Qayoom, SSP Security Kashmir, has been posted as Commandant 21 IR, while Khalid Amin (awaiting posting) has been posted as SSP Security J&K.

Rajinder Singh, SSP APCR Jammu, has been posted as SO to IGP Jammu, while Tariq Ahmad Wani, Dy CO IR-23, has been posted as SP APCR Kashmir. Rahul Charak, Additional SP Kathua, has been posted as Dy CO IR-22.

Feroz Ahmad, SP Operations Baramulla, has been posted as SP TMG CID HQ, while Irshad Hussain Rather, SP HQ Jammu, has been posted as Additional SP Baramulla. Zoheb Tanveer, SP East Srinagar, has been posted as Dy CO Women Battalion.

Brijesh Kumar Sharma, SP Rural Jammu, has been posted as Additional SP Ops Border Kathua, while Kameshwar Puri, SP Ops Jammu, has been posted as Additional SP Katra.

Furqaan Qadir, Additional SP Ops Anantnag, has been posted as Dy CO IR-6, while Dr. Ajay Sharma, SP South Jammu, has been posted as Additional SP Ops Poonch. Ruhail Mircha, Additional SP Bandipora, has been posted as Dy CO IR-11.

Farhan Jehanzeb Nagash (awaiting posting) has been posted as Additional SP CID CI Kashmir, while Sunil Kumar Kesar, Dy CO IR-15, has been posted as Additional SP Kathua. Prithpal Singh, Dy CO 1 Border Battalion, has been posted as Additional SP Ops Upper Kathua.

Mir Murtaza Hussain Sohail, Additional SP Sopore, has been posted as Additional SP Bandipora, while Syed Javeed Ahmad, Additional SP Kupwara, has been posted as Dy CO 11 JKAP. Peerzada Aijaz Ahmad, Dy CO IR-4, has been posted as Additional SP SIA Kashmir.

Aumer Iqbal, Additional SP Ops Upper Kathua, has been posted as Dy CO 9 JKAP, while Altaf Ahmad Naik, Additional SP SIA Kashmir, has been posted as Dy CO 2 Women Battalion.

Ravinder Singh, Aide-de-Camp to the Lieutenant Governor, has been posted as SP Rural Jammu, while Mohan Lal, Additional SP Poonch, has been posted as Additional SP Ops Jammu.

Sarfraz Bashir Ganai, Dy CO IR-11, has been posted as Additional SP Sopore, while Shahzada Kabir Mattoo, Dy CO JKAP-9, has been posted as Additional SP Kupwara. Sourabh Prashar, Dy SP CID SB Jammu, has been posted as Aide-de-Camp to the Lieutenant Governor.

1979 Power Pact With Punjab

J&K Entitled To 20% Power Share: CM

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said the 1979 agreement between Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab is a "sovereign commitment" that must be honoured in both letter and spirit, as he flagged the Union Territory's pending 20 percent share of power from the Ranjit Sagar Dam project.

Replying to a supplementary question by MLA Basohli Darshan Kumar during Question Hour in the ongoing Budget Session of the Legislative Assembly, Omar said he would take up the matter with the Punjab government and his counterpart.

"We will strive to ensure that the agreement signed in 1979 is implemented in letter and spirit," he said, adding that he would personally engage with the Punjab Chief Minister to reiterate that the pact is a binding commitment between the two governments.

Holding charge of the Power Development Department, Omar informed the House that under the 1979 agreement, J&K is entitled to 20 percent of the total power generated at Their Dam and Shahpur Kandi Barrage at bus bar cost.

He said a power sale agreement between Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) and Jammu and Kashmir Power Corporation Limited (JKPCL) was signed on October 11, 2019, for supply from the Ranjit Sagar Dam project. However, no power is currently being supplied to J&K due to the absence of required transmission infrastruc-



No Immediate Shortage Of Essentials In J&K: CM

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said the developments at the international level remain beyond the control of both the Union government and the people, asserting that the situation in Jammu and Kashmir will largely mirror the broader national scenario.

He said the Union territory is currently not facing any shortage of essential supplies, including fuel, and that stocks are sufficient for the next 10 to 15 days.

Omar was speaking to media persons on the West Asia crisis after attending the Legislative Assembly here, accompanied by his father and NC president Farooq

Abdullah. "Whatever the situation in the rest of the country, the same will reflect in Jammu and Kashmir," the chief minister said, adding that there is no immediate cause for concern.

He, however, cautioned that in case the ongoing conflict prolongs and leads to shortages elsewhere in the country, its impact could extend to the Union territory as well.

Referring to a recent review meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the chief minister said assurances have been given that supplies are being maintained through multiple sources.

"There is no need to panic at this stage. If there is any change in the situation, we will inform the public," he said.

On compensation to project-affected families, Omar said the total compensation stands at ₹85.48 crore, of which ₹71.15 crore has been released by the Punjab government, leaving ₹14.32 crore pending. He said ₹5.41 crore in interest accrued on earlier funds has already

been utilised for land compensation, reducing the adjusted pending amount to ₹8.90 crore.

He further informed that ₹1.10 crore is payable under various court orders, while pending interest as of September 30, 2025, stands at ₹27.02 crore, taking the total liability to ₹37.03 crore. Against this, ₹21.08 crore was received in 2020, leaving a balance of ₹15.94 crore in the compensation account. So far, ₹50.51 crore has been disbursed.

Explaining delays, Omar said non-submission of required documents by some landowners remains a key hurdle. These include compensation applications, bank account details, PAN and Aadhaar cards. He said the Deputy Commissioner, Kathua, has issued multiple public notices urging beneficiaries to complete formalities.

"The government is committed to ensuring that all eligible beneficiaries receive their dues once procedural requirements are fulfilled," he said.

On employment, the Chief Minister said the issue has been taken up with dam authorities through the Deputy Commissioner, Kathua, for providing jobs to 816 affected families.

He added that as per Government Order No. 340-PW (Hyd) of 2018, employment to oustees is to be provided by the Punjab government in accordance with the agreed Rehabilitation and Resettlement policy of both sides, and will be extended strictly as per its provisions.

Legislator Sham Lal Sharma also raised a supplementary during the discussion.

On strengthening and consolidating existing healthcare infrastructure across the Union Territory rather than creating new facilities at this stage.

She said that over 4,000 health institutions are currently operational in Jammu and Kashmir, and the priority is to enhance their functioning by improving availability of human resources, modern equipment, and service delivery mechanisms.

The minister further highlighted the role of digital healthcare initiatives in bridging gaps, saying that services such as tele-medicine, tele-radiology, and mobile medical units are being leveraged to improve access to healthcare, particularly in remote and underserved areas like Uri.

"Once a formal decision is taken by the government regarding the creation of new health facilities—following the withdrawal of austerity measures by the Finance Department—new institutions based on gap analysis will be considered for all districts, including Baramulla," she added. (Observer News Service)

CM Thanks Centre for PMGSY Deadline Extension Till 2027

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday thanked Union Minister for Rural Development Shivraj Singh Chouhan for approving the extension of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY-I) timeline in Jammu and

Kashmir till March 2027, terming the move a major boost for rural connectivity.

In a post on X, the Chief Minister's Office said the extension would facilitate the completion of several pending rural road projects across the Union Territory, particularly in hilly and remote areas.

Omar said the decision would significantly strengthen connectivity in far-flung regions, improving access to essential services and accelerating overall development.

The PMGSY-I programme has played a key role in providing all-weather road connectivity to unconnect-

ed villages. The extension is aimed at addressing delays caused by difficult terrain and adverse climatic conditions in the region.

Officials said the extended timeline would help ensure timely completion of ongoing works and enhance last-mile connectivity across Jammu and Kashmir.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PMGSY (JKRRDA) DIVISION GANDERBAL

DUDERHAMA GANDERBAL, NEAR QAMARIYA PARK, 191201

NOTICE INVITING E- TENDERS
E-NIT No.: 01/EE/PMGSY/Gbl/E-tendering of 2026-27, Dated:- 01-04-2026

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of UT of Jammu & Kashmir, Executive Engineer PMGSY Division Ganderal invites e-tenders (In Single Cover System) on Percentage Basis from the eligible & approved contractors of J&K Govt. CPWD, Railways and other States.

S.No	Name of Work with Package No.	Advertised Cost Incl GST (Rs in Lacs.)	Cost of Tender documents (Rs in Rupees.)	Earnest Money (Bid Security) (Rs in Lacs.)	Time of Completion (Days)	Tender Call	Time and Date of opening of Tenders online	Class of Contractor
1	Permanent Restoration of road Kangan Naranang Via Wangath, Package No JK13-20.	75.00	1600	1.5	120	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A" Class
2	Permanent Restoration of road from Katchnambal to Chattergull, Package No JK13-66.	23.00	800	0.46	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
3	Permanent Restoration of road Satrina- Kawcherwan, Package No JK13-68.	21.00	800	0.42	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
4	Permanent Restoration of road Akhal to Hayan, Package No JK13-69	33.00	1100	0.66	75	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A & B" Class
5	Permanent Restoration of road T02-Kolan- Rezan, Package No JK13-2002.	12.00	600	0.24	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B, C & D" Class
6	Permanent Restoration of road T01-Wussan to Ari Via Chattergull, Package No JK16-3010	12.00	600	0.24	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B, C & D" Class
7	Permanent Restoration of road MRL01-Plang to Hayan Via Akhal, Package No JK16-3011	23.00	800	0.46	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
8	Permanent Restoration of road L042-Gujierpati, Package No JK13-140	28.00	1100	0.56	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A & B" Class
9	Permanent Restoration of road NHW-Katchpatri, Package No JK13-16.	80.00	1600	1.60	120	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A" Class
10	Permanent Restoration of road Wangath-Pethkhanan, Package No JK13-104.	17.00	800	0.34	45	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
11	Permanent Restoration of road NHW-Gujierpati-II, Package No JK13-177.	17.00	800	0.34	45	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
12	Permanent Restoration of road NHW-Gitchkhud, Package No JK13-144.	80.00	1600	1.60	120	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A" Class
13	Permanent Restoration of road Thune-Badipathri, Package No JK13-99.	90.00	1600	1.80	120	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A" Class
14	Permanent Restoration of road Katchnambal Wangath Via Babanagri, Package No JK13-116.	24.00	800	0.48	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
15	Permanent Restoration of road Ganiwan-Yachama No JK13-05B.	35.00	1100	0.70	75	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A & B" Class
16	Permanent Restoration by way of Installation of Crash Barrier on road Khimber- Takia Sangreshi, Package No JK13-89.	17.00	800	0.34	45	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
17	Permanent Restoration of road New Theed to Mulnar, Package No JK13-145.	5.00	300	0.1	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"D" Class
18	Permanent Restoration by way of Installation of Crash Barrier on road Chowdharibagh Gujierbasti Gori Mohalla, Package No JK13-77.	25.00	800	0.5	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
19	Permanent Restoration of road MRL03-Duderhama to Block Boundary Ganderal Via Haran, Package No JK16-3007.	13.00	600	0.26	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B, C & D" Class
20	Permanent Restoration of road Guzerbal- Dedrambagh, Package No JK13-71.	24.00	800	0.48	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
21	Permanent Restoration of road Dab-Batwina, Package No JK13-135.	9.00	600	0.18	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"C & D" Class
22	Permanent Restoration of road MRL01-Badampora to Block Boundary safapora Via Kondbal, Package No JK16-3001.	9.00	600	0.18	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"C & D" Class
23	Permanent Restoration of road Satkari-Narayanbagh, Package No JK13-134.	28.00	1100	0.56	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
24	Permanent Restoration of road T01-Kurhama to Chewa via Malpora-Manasbal, Package No JK16-3008.	17.00	800	0.34	45	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
25	Permanent Restoration of road Duderhama Rabitar to Narayanbagh, Package No JK13-113.	41.65	1100	0.833	90	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A & B" Class
26	Permanent Restoration of road MRL01-Barsoo to Nawabagh Via Kurhama, Package No JK16-3002.	8.00	300	0.16	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"C & D" Class
27	Permanent Restoration of road Sindbal Malikpora Via Gogligund, Package No JK13-127.	19.00	800	0.38	45	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
28	Permanent Restoration by way of Installation of Crash Barrier on road Rabitar Rakhi Rabitar Gundroshan, Package No JK13-19.	11.00	600	0.22	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B, C & D" Class
29	Permanent Restoration of road Shallabugh- TullaMohalla, Package No JK13-88.	22.00	800	0.44	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
30	Permanent Restoration of road Duderhama- Tullamulla, Package No JK13-125.	33.00	1100	0.66	75	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A & B" Class
31	Permanent Restoration of road Checki-Yangoora Babasalih, Package No JK13-39.	17.00	800	0.34	45	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
32	Permanent Restoration of road Lar-Chuntiwar, Package No JK13-2003.	27.00	1100	0.54	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A & B" Class
33	Permanent Restoration of road Barsoo-Manigam, Package No JK13-21.	27.00	1100	0.54	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"A & B" Class
34	Permanent Restoration of road Chuntiwar to Waliwar, Package No JK13-32.	22.00	800	0.44	60	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
35	Permanent Restoration of road Chuntiwar- Gulabpora, Package No JK13-33.	10.00	300	0.20	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"C & D" Class
36	Permanent Restoration of road Salora Hajam Mohalla Daribal, Package No JK13-87.	13.00	600	0.26	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B, C & D" Class
37	Permanent Restoration by way of Installation of Crash Barrier on road Repora- Mian Multani, Package No JK13-78.	8.00	300	0.16	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"C & D" Class
38	Permanent Restoration of road Watlar Shah Qalander to Pastooni Mohalla, Package No JK13-70.	17.00	800	0.34	45	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"B & C" Class
39	Permanent Restoration of road Kujjar to Rakhi Kujjar, Package No JK13-75.	7.00	300	0.14	30	1st	17/04/2026 10:30 AM	"C & D" Class

The important dates and time are as under:-

1.	Date of issue of tender notice	01/04/2026
2.	Period of downloading of bidding documents	03/04/2026 To 16/04/2026
4.	Bid submission start date	03/04/2026 09:00 AM
5.	Bid submission end date	16/04/2026 06:55 PM
6.	Date & time of opening of Technical/financial Bids (Online)	17/04/2026 at 10:30 AM

Status of Administrative Approval: **Accorded**
Status of Technical Sanction: **Accorded**
Major Head of Account: **M.H 5054 S.H 2181 (PMGSY Roads)**

- Cost of Bid Form (non-refundable) is shown in the column no. 4 and should be submitted only in form of e-challan/treasury challan/receipt. Availability of Bid Document and mode of submission: The bid documents are available online and bids should be submitted online on website www.pmgstendersjk.gov.in. The bidders are required to register in the website which is free of cost. For submission of bids, the bidder is required to have valid Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities (CA). Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and password for participating in e-tendering in PMGSY may obtain the same from the website: www.pmgstendersjk.gov.in. Digital signature is mandatory to participate in the e-tendering. Bidders already possessing the valid digital signature issued from authorized CAs can use the same in this tender.
- Bids must be uploaded along with Scanned copy of cost of Tender Document as mentioned in column 4 in shape of e-challan/treasury challan/receipt favouring Executive Engineer PMGSY Division Ganderal by crediting the requisite charges to MH 0059-PWD (Revenue) and scanned copy of Bid Security/ Earnest Money as mentioned in column 5 pledged to the Executive Engineer PMGSY Division Ganderal. The bid security/earnest money in the form of CDR/ FDR/ BG shall be valid for a period not less than 120 days after the deadline date for bid submission.
- The original documents, viz, the cost of tender document, Bid Security submitted by L1 should be same as uploaded online (scanned copies) otherwise the allotment will not be issued. The tenders will be cancelled and the bidder will not be allowed to Participate in any further/future tendering process in PMGSY for a period of one year.
- As per Government order issued vide No. PWD-ACCT/68/2025-05 Dated:- 23-07-2025, The GST linked account number is to be used only at the time of bid submission by contractors. No payment shall be released by the Government department / agency to any other account except the one linked with GST registration number. The bidder shall upload undertaking regarding same, as per format given in Annexure A below. The order is enclosed as Annexure-C to this NIT.
- The Bidding documents can be downloaded from the website http://pmgstendersjk.gov.in
- Only online submission of bids is permitted, therefore; bids must be submitted online on website http://pmgstendersjk.gov.in. The technical / financial qualification part of the bids will be opened online by the authorized officers on 17/04/2026 at 10:30AM. If the office happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened online on the next working day at the same time.
- The bids for the work shall remain valid for acceptance for a period not less than 120 days after the deadline date for bid submission.
- The bids of such bidders shall be out rightly rejected whose record of performance is poor such as abandoning the works, not properly completing the contract, inordinate delays in completion, litigation history or financial failure etc.
- Any damage caused to the private/public property during execution of works shall in the liability of the contractor and no claim on account of any such restoration to be carried or disposal of mulba / excavated earth to the suitable dumping spot by the contractor shall not be entertained by the department.

No:- EE/PMGSY/Gbl/01-04. Dated: 01/04/2026
DIPK-56-26 DT: 02/04/2026
Executive Engineer PMGSY- Division Ganderal



DEVOTEES CARRYING FLAMING TORCHES gather at the shrine of Baba Zain-ud-Din Wali during the Zool festival in Aishmuqam. KO PHOTO, ABID BHAT

MeT Predicts Rain, Snow till April 10

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Meteorological Department has forecast erratic weather conditions across Jammu and Kashmir till April 10, with spells of rain and snow, prompting authorities to issue advisories for residents, farmers, and travellers.

An official of the MeT office in Srinagar told KNO that from April 3 onwards the weather is expected to remain generally cloudy with intermittent light to moderate rain and snowfall at many places. "Thunderstorms, hailstorms, and gusty winds are also likely during the afternoon of April 3 through the evening of April 4," he added.

The official said isolated higher reaches of both Kashmir and Jammu divisions may receive moderate to heavy rain or snowfall during this period.

Weather conditions are expected to improve slight-

ly on April 5 and 6, with partly cloudy skies and light rain at isolated locations. However, fresh spells of light to moderate rain or snow in higher reaches, accompanied by thunder and gusty winds, are likely again from April 7 to 9.

The MeT office has warned of thunderstorms, hailstorms, and gusty winds with speeds of 40-50 kmph at a few places between April 3 and 4. It has also cautioned that intense showers over short periods could trigger flash floods, landslides, shooting stones, and waterlogging in vulnerable and low-lying areas.

Farmers have been advised to suspend agricultural operations during this period, while travellers have been asked to plan their journeys accordingly.

Meanwhile, the Traffic Police Headquarters issued a detailed advisory in view of the forecast, urging commuters to travel only after confirming road conditions.

Govt says No Proposal to Upgrade SDH Uri to District hospital

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir government has clarified that there is currently no proposal under consideration to upgrade the Sub-District Hospital (SDH) Uri to a full-fledged District Hospital, despite concerns over the region's challenging terrain and healthcare demands.

Replying to a question raised by MLA Dr Sajad Shafi, Health and Medical Education Department Minister Sakeena Itoo, as reported by KNO, informed the House that no such plan is presently being examined by the department.

The legislator had sought to know whether the government intends to elevate SDH Uri, given the difficult and hilly geography of the Uri constituency, which comprises around 143 villages with a widely scattered population. He highlighted the heavy patient load from Uri being referred to Government Medical College (GMC)-associated hospital in Baramulla.

In response, the minister said the government has adopted a "reasoned stand" to fo-

cus on strengthening and consolidating existing healthcare infrastructure across the Union Territory rather than creating new facilities at this stage.

She said that over 4,000 health institutions are currently operational in Jammu and Kashmir, and the priority is to enhance their functioning by improving availability of human resources, modern equipment, and service delivery mechanisms.

The minister further highlighted the role of digital healthcare initiatives in bridging gaps, saying that services such as tele-medicine, tele-radiology, and mobile medical units are being leveraged to improve access to healthcare, particularly in remote and underserved areas like Uri.

"Once a formal decision is taken by the government regarding the creation of new health facilities—following the withdrawal of austerity measures by the Finance Department—new institutions based on gap analysis will be considered for all districts, including Baramulla," she added. (Observer News Service)

US Targets Iran Peace Envoy; Army Chief Warns Against Invasion

Trans Asia News

DUBAI: Iran's army chief warned on Thursday that if US forces launch a ground invasion of the Islamic Republic, "not a single person" among the invaders would survive.

"If the enemy conducts a ground incursion, not a single life will be spared," Major General Amir Hatami said during a video conference with senior commanders across the army's ground, air, naval, and air defence forces.

He affirmed the army's readiness to counter any hostile action, both defensively and offensively, and urged commanders to closely monitor enemy movements and prepare response plans.

"The shadow of war must be lifted from our country, and there must be security for everyone, because it is not possible for places to be safe while our people remain unsafe," he added.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the armed forces' unified command said Tehran would continue its campaign in the Middle East until the US and Israel face "permanent regret and surrender", according to the semi-official Tasnim news agency.

Ebrahim Zolfaghari, spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbeya Central Headquarters, said US and Israeli assessments of Iran's military strength were "incomplete". He warned that Iran would escalate its operations, with "more crushing, broader, and more destructive" attacks planned.

Responding to US President Donald Trump's recent remarks, Zolfaghari claimed Iran maintains undisclosed stockpiles of weapons and munitions. "The centres you believe you have targeted are insignificant. Our strategic military production takes place in locations you do not know and will never reach," he said.

US-Israeli Strike Targets Former Foreign Minister

Former Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharazi has been seriously wounded in an apparent assassination attempt during ongoing US-Israeli strikes, which have continued for a fifth week.

Kharazi, a senior adviser and former diplomat reportedly involved in backchannel efforts with Pakistan regarding possible US-Iran negotiations, was targeted at his home in Tehran early Thursday, according to Iranian newspapers Etamad and Ham Mihan. The strike reportedly killed his wife.

He sustained severe injuries and was hospitalised. The attack coincided with President Trump's address, in which he said the United States was "very close" to



ending the war with Iran.

Last week, Kharazi indicated that Iran remained open to indirect negotiations, although he had earlier told CNN that he saw "no room for diplomacy" with the US.

"Trump has deceived others and failed to honour his promises. We experienced this twice during negotiations—while talks were ongoing, they struck us," Kharazi said.

Iranian officials have warned that further assassinations would trigger retaliation against American interests, particularly technology and AI-related facilities in the region, which they accuse of aiding targeted operations.

Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin criticised President Trump's threat to bomb Iran "back to the Stone Age," calling such rhetoric unacceptable.

Irish PM Criticises Trump's Rhetoric

He stressed that Iranian civilians, who are not responsible for the conflict, deserve protection. "Everyone involved in war must prioritise civilian safety," Martin told Newstalk radio.

"This conflict is causing death and destruction among people who had no role in the regime." While condemning threats against civilians, Martin noted uncertainty over whether Trump's remarks were directed at people or infrastructure.

"We could spend endless time interpreting what President Trump says versus what is actually carried out—that has always been the case," he said.

Hours after Trump claimed US military objectives were "nearing completion", Iran responded

Iran's Speaker Says 7 Million Ready to Fight US

AP

TEHRAN: Iran's parliament speaker claimed Thursday that 7 million Iranians stood ready to fight any US ground invasion of the Islamic Republic.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, who has been discussed as a possible negotiating partner with the US, has offered a series of online posts challenging America since the war's start.

"Right now, in less than a week, a powerful national campaign sweeping the country has brought forward around 7 million Iranians who have already stepped up and declared they're ready to pick

up arms and stand in defence of our nation," he wrote on X.

This claim has been circulating on social media accounts for days.

Qalibaf is the first high-ranking official to mention it in Iran, a nation home to some 90 million people.

It is unclear where this figure comes from, but state media and text message campaigns have urged people to volunteer. The government has also called on retired soldiers to express their interest in fighting, while the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's all-volunteer Basij force has begun accepting children as young as 12 into its ranks.

with renewed threats, vowing to intensify its attacks until the US and Israel surrender.

In his address, Trump again warned that unless Iran agrees

to end the war, the US would target its oil and energy infrastructure, threatening to bomb the country "into the Stone Age" in the coming weeks.

Govt Exempts Import Duty on Key Petrochemicals Till June

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, APR 2 (PTI)

The government on Thursday exempted import of critical petrochemical products from customs duty for three months till June 30, giving relief to sectors like pharmaceuticals, chemicals and textiles, and ensuring supply stability amid the ongoing West Asia crisis.

The "temporary and targeted relief" will cost the exchequer about Rs 1,800 crore but help ensure price stability and continuity in production and supply chain, CBIC Member (Tax Policy) Sanjay Mangal told reporters at a press briefing.

In a statement, the finance ministry said in light of the ongoing conflict in West Asia and the consequent disruptions in global supply chains, the government has decided to provide full customs duty exemption on critical petrochemical products till June 30.

Sectors dependent on petrochemical feedstock and intermediates such as plastics, packaging, textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automotive components and other manufacturing segments will benefit from the duty exemption which will cost the exchequer Rs 1,800 crore.

"This measure has been taken as a temporary and targeted relief in order to ensure continued availability of critical petrochemical inputs for domestic industry, reduce cost pressures on downstream sectors, and safeguard supply stability in the country," it said.

This will also provide relief to consumers of final products, it added. The goods on which the customs duty have been exempted include Methanol, Anhydrous ammonia, Toluene, Styrene, Dichloromethane (methylene chloride), Vinyl chloride monomer, Poly butadiene, Styrene butadiene and Unsaturated polyester resins.

Disruption in shipping routes amid the West Asia war has raised concerns over imports of fertiliser, crude oil and natural gas. India is a major importer of fertiliser and petroleum.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was asked whether Indian student enrolments in the US have dropped, and to what extent "scarce visa slots" and "high percentage of rejections of visas" are contributing to it.

In a written reply to the query, the Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh shared with the Rajya Sabha some data released by the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Mapping Tool of the US Department of Homeland Security.

According to the data, the total number of Indian students pursuing various educational programs (primary, secondary, other vocational, high school, language training, flight school, associate, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, and others) in the United States of America stands at February, 2025: 378,787 students and February 2026: 352,644 students, he said.

The figure indicates a decline of around 6.9 per cent in overall student enrolments in US academic institutions, he added.

Indian Student Enrolment in US Institutions Drops by 6.9%

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, APR 2 (PTI)

More than 3.5 lakh Indian students are pursuing various educational programmes ranging from primary schooling to university courses in the US as of February 2026, which is a decline of around 6.9 per cent from the corresponding figure the previous year, the Parliament was informed on Thursday.

According to the data, the total number of Indian students pursuing various educational programs (primary, secondary, other vocational, high school, language training, flight school, associate, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, and others) in the United States of America stands at February, 2025: 378,787 students and February 2026: 352,644 students, he said.

The figure indicates a decline of around 6.9 per cent in overall student enrolments in US academic institutions, he added.

JNU Releases E-prospectus for 2026-27 Admissions

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: Jawaharlal

Nehru University on Thursday issued its e-prospectus for admissions to undergraduate, postgraduate, PG Diploma and Advanced Diploma programmes for the academic session 2026-2027.

According to the notification issued by JNU, admissions to the BA (Hons) Foreign Languages, B.Sc. Ayurveda Biology and Certificate of Proficiency programmes will be based on CUET (UG) 2026.

Meanwhile, admission to the B Tech programme will be granted based on the JEE Main examination. Candidates seeking admission to MA, MSc, M.P.H., M Tech, PG Diploma, and Advanced Di-

ploma programmes will be required to appear for the CUET (PG) 2026.

Meanwhile, admissions to the M.Sc. Biotechnology and M.Sc. Computational Biology programmes will be based on the GAT-B score.

Admissions to the M Tech Computer Science and Engineering and Communication Engineering programmes at the School of Engineering will be conducted through centralised counselling for M Tech (CCMT).

Candidates are required to submit a separate application for admission after the CUET examination results have been declared. The university has advised candidates to regularly visit the JNU website.

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