

Assembly Expansion,
Women's Quota, LG Powers

What New J&K Delimitation Bills Propose?

Agencies

Srinagar: The legislation proposed to be tabled in Parliament by the Union Government will empower a delimitation commission, to be constituted by the Centre, to determine the number and boundaries of Assembly segments in the Union Territory. The Commission will also decide Jammu & Kashmir's share in Lok Sabha seats among the Union Territories, which have been allocated a maximum of 35 seats.

According to the proposed amendments to the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir shall consist of such number of members, to be chosen by direct election from territorial constituencies in the Union Territory, as may be determined by the Delimitation Commission.

The proposed amendments, however, provide that the number of directly elected seats cannot be less than 114. This figure of 114 also includes 24 seats reserved for Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

It implies that the number of directly elected seats cannot be

less than the existing 90, since the total of 114 includes the 24 seats reserved for Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir Assembly.

Unlike the post-2019 delimitation, when the number of seats was already fixed in the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, no such restriction has been placed on the proposed Delimitation Commission.

Nominated quota
The proposed legislations provide that the number of women members nominated by the Lieutenant Governor shall be increased to three, but only after the readjustment of constituencies takes effect.

They also provide that the number of seats for Kashmiri migrants shall be increased to three from the existing two but this too will become applicable only after delimitation.

It means that post-delimitation LG would have powers to nominate seven members from existing five. Currently, LG is empowered to nominate five MLAs—two women, two migrants and one refugee from Pakistan Occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

This provision | [More on P6](#)

J&K Speaker To Pick 5 MLAs For Delimitation Panel

The Speaker of the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly will have to nominate five MLAs as associate members of the Delimitation Commission. According to the proposed delimitation bill, the commission shall associate 10 | [More on P6](#)

Sopore Student Protest

8 Arrested, 25 Identified In Vandalism Case

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Police have arrested eight persons for their alleged involvement in vandalism during a student protest in Sopore, while 25 others have been identified in connection with the incident, officials said on Tuesday.

An official said that the arrests were made following incidents of damage to public and private property during protests that erupted after allegations surfaced against a lecturer in the town.

He said those arrested were involved in ransacking property and

No Let-Up On Drugs: IGP Signals Faster, Tougher Action

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Kashmir V.K. Birdi on Tuesday said that Jammu and Kashmir Police will scale up its anti-drug operations in a "mission mode", warning of swift and strict action against drug peddlers, smugglers and traffickers across the Valley.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a function, Birdi, as

per news agency KNO, said that while the police have been consistently acting against the drug menace, the coming days will see a more aggressive and targeted crackdown.

"J&K Police has always been in mission mode against drugs. In the coming days, our action will be swifter to ensure strict legal action against peddlers, smugglers and all those involved in trafficking," he said. | [More on P6](#)

Ramban Youth Goes Missing CM Seeks Tough Action From LG

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Tuesday urged Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha to take strict action against those involved in the death of a youth in Ramban district, warning that "jungle raj" will not be tolerated in the Union Territory.

Addressing a public function in Bijbehara in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, Abdullah said certain elements were attempting to disturb the prevailing atmosphere and trigger communal tensions.

"We want the atmosphere to remain good, but there are some people who want to create jungle raj here. They want | [More on P6](#)



Faith and Festivity Mark Baisakhi Across Kashmir Valley

Press Trust Of India

Baisakhi was celebrated with religious fervour and gaiety in Kashmir on Tuesday, with the devotees thronging different gurdwaras to offer prayers. The main function was held at Gurdwara Chati Padshahi in the Rainawari area of the city, which was attended by a huge number of Sikh devotees.

Senior officers of police and civil administration visited the Gurudwara to pay their obeisance. The celebrations | [More on P6](#)

US Blockade Fails To Halt Strait Of Hormuz Traffic

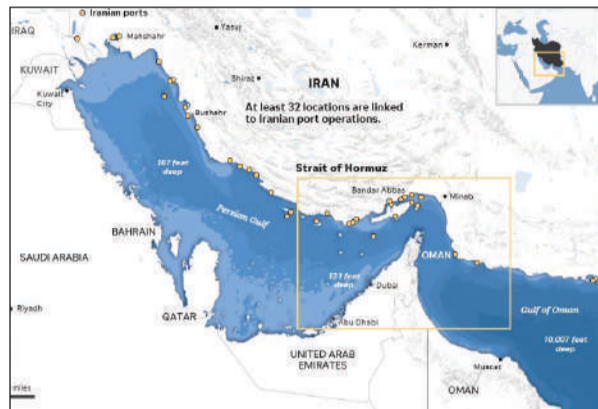
China Calls US Move 'Dangerous & Irresponsible'

Trans Asia News

London- The first full day of a US-imposed naval blockade on Iranian ports appeared to have only a limited effect on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, with several vessels continuing to transit the strategic waterway despite heightened tensions and military warnings.

Maritime tracking data on Tuesday indicated that at least eight ships, including several linked to Iran, crossed the strait — a critical chokepoint for global energy supplies — even as Washington sought to enforce restrictions on vessels entering or leaving Iranian ports.

The blockade, announced



by US President Donald Trump following failed weekend talks in Islamabad, is aimed at increasing pressure on Tehran after negotiations over its nuclear programme

and regional activities ended without agreement.

Conflicting signals on enforcement

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) | [More on P6](#)

US Hints At Renewed Iran Talks In Pakistan Within Days

President Donald Trump has said that a second round of talks with Iran could be held in Islamabad "over the next two days", according to a US media report on Tuesday. "You should stay there, really, because something could be happening over the next two days, and we're more inclined to go there," Trump told The New York Post. Trump | [More on P6](#)

UNDP Warns Millions In India Risk Poverty Amid Conflict

Yoshita Singh

United Nations, Apr 14: The conflict and military escalation in West Asia threatens to push 2.5 million people in India into poverty and the country is projected to experience some loss in its human development progress, according to estimates and projections by the United Nations.

The United Nations Development Programme, in a report titled 'Military Escalation In The Middle East: Human Development Impacts Across Asia And The Pacific' noted that the conflict is "widening human development pressures across Asia and the Pacific."

Through higher fuel, freight, and input costs, the shock is diminishing



household purchasing power, raising food insecurity, straining public budgets, and weakening livelihoods."

The preliminary assessment, issued Tuesday, estimates that

globally 8.8 million people are at risk of falling into poverty and the West Asia military escalation could cost Asia-Pacific up to USD 299 billion.

In India, | [More on P6](#)

Constitution Now Fully Applicable: PM On Art 370 Move

KO Web Desk

Srinagar: Asserting that the abrogation of Article 370 ensured the full application of the Constitution across the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the move had strengthened India's constitutional unity.

Paying tributes to Dr B R Ambedkar on his 135th birth anniversary, the Prime Minister said the Centre's decisions over the past decade were aimed at restoring the dignity of the Constitution

and ensuring equal rights for all citizens.

"Today is also the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar. I pay my heartfelt tributes to him. The policies and decisions taken by our government over the past decade have worked towards restoring the dignity of the Constitution. After the abrogation of Article 370, the Constitution of India is now fully applicable across the entire nation," Modi said.

Meanwhile, Union Home Minister Amit Shah also paid tributes | [More on P6](#)



Residents stand amid the charred remains of homes after a massive fire gutted seven houses in Chandpora, Nowhatta, Srinagar, on Tuesday. KO Photo By Abid Bhat.

Trump Dials PM Modi; Briefs Him On Crisis

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: US President Donald Trump dialled Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday to discuss the West Asia crisis and the need to keep the Strait of Hormuz "open and secure" even as US envoy Sergio Gor said India and the US are expected to seal certain "big-ticket" deals soon, including in the energy sector, to further boost bilateral ties.

Shortly after the nearly 40-minute conversation, Modi said he and Trump reviewed the "substantial progress" in the bilateral ties and that both sides are committed to further strengthening the India-US comprehensive global strategic partnership in "all areas".

The call between the two leaders came amid increasing global concerns over the US naval blockade of Iran's ports, as well as reports that Washington and Tehran may hold a second phase of direct negotiations days after the collapse of initial talks in Islamabad.

It was the third phone call between the two leaders this year and the first | [More on P6](#)

No Higher Duty Than Serving Needy: LG

Urges Collective Fight Against Drug Abuse

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Tuesday attended the upgradation ceremony of Apna Bhojanalaya, a community kitchen at Government Medical College (GMC) Jammu, lauding the initiative as a model of compassion and collective responsibility.

The kitchen is run by Sewa Bharti with support from Jammu and Kashmir Bank and



other donors. The Lieutenant Governor also partook in a meal during the visit. Addressing | [More on P6](#)

Dedicates ₹156-Cr Tawi Riverfront Phase-I

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Tuesday dedicated the ₹156-crore Tawi Riverfront Project (Phase-I) to the public on the occasion of Baisakhi, describing it as a blend of tradition and modern urban development aimed at transforming Jammu into a vibrant and inclusive city. | [More on P6](#)

Porcupine Menace Ravages Pampore's Saffron Fields

Growers Warn Of 'Red Gold' At Risk

Agencies

Srinagar: Saffron growers in South Kashmir's Pampore are raising alarm over extensive damage to their fields caused by porcupines, with farmers warning that the region's prized crop faces a serious threat if immediate action is not taken.

The crisis has spread across multiple saffron-growing areas, including Patalbagh, Chandhara, Khonibal, and Letapora, where farmers say the animals are repeatedly destroying crops during night hours.

The development is significant as Pampore's saffron, often referred to as Kashmir's "red gold," represents both a key source of livelihood and a

cultural symbol of the region. Farmers said porcupines dig into fields and consume saffron seeds, causing widespread damage that affects future yield.

"We have tried everything, scarecrows, plastic barriers, but they still come at night and destroy the fields," a farmer said.

They added that pesticides supplied by the horticulture department have offered only temporary relief, with porcupines returning within days and continuing the damage.

"After using the chemicals, they disappear for a short time but come back again. There is no lasting solution," another grower said.

Farmers warned that large portions of | [More on P6](#)



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'Older Adults In India At 12% Higher Depression Risk When Children Unemployed'

Press Trust Of India

A new analysis of data collected as part of India's longitudinal survey of older adults reveals a 12 per cent higher risk of depression when adult children are unemployed.

Findings published in the journal Social Science and Medicine also show that the link between older adults' well-being and children's employment status is stronger in families where children's economic and social support is crucial to parents' security. Researchers, including those from Sweden's Umea University, also found that older adults who are socially active fare significantly better compared to those living isolated lives.

The team analysed data from the Longitudinal Ageing Survey of India (LASI) -- a full-scale, nationally representative survey of over 73,000 adults aged 45 and above -- initiated by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Wave 1 of LASI was conducted in 2017-18.

Despite having a young population, India is home to the world's second largest absolute number of older adults and does not have a formal universal healthcare system, the researchers said.

Only 18 per cent of the older adults aged 60 and above are covered by health insurance, they said.

The team also noted the country's family-based culture where young members care for parents and grandparents, indicating a heavy dependence of the older adults on adult children for financial and healthcare support.

The study provides a unique picture of how families are affected when adult children fall out of the labour market, the researchers said.

"Our results show how closely interconnected generations in India are, and how vulnerable many older adults become when younger generations lose their foothold in the labour market. Without social participation, the impact is felt directly by older people," author Rishabh Tyagi from Umea University's centre for demographic and aging research said.

The authors wrote, "Our findings show a 3.14 percentage points (ppts) increase in absolute terms (and a 12.48 per cent relative increase) in the probability of parental depression risk associated with adult children's unemployment." Unemployment among first-born sons was found to be more strongly linked with the parents' depression risk, compared to unemployment among first-born daughters -- the result reflects India's cultural norms where eldest sons are expected to support parents in their later lives, the researchers said.

The expectations mean that a son's unemployment has greater consequences for parents' psychological well-being, they added.

However, despite the central role of the family, the researchers found a clear protective effect of social networks and active social engagement.

Older adults who take part in social activities have a lower risk of developing depression, even when their adult children are unemployed, they said.



'Short Bouts Of Vigorous Activity Daily Could Lower Risk Of 8 Major Conditions'

Press Trust Of India

Just a few minutes of vigorous activity each day may lower one's risk of eight major conditions, including arthritis, heart, liver and kidney disease and dementia, according to a study. While short bursts of intense, out-of-breath activity, such as running for the bus, were linked to lower disease and death risk overall, they were especially protective against inflammatory diseases, including arthritis, serious cardiovascular disease (heart attack and stroke) and dementia, the findings, published in the European Heart Journal show. Physical activity is known to bring down risk of chronic disease and premature death, with vigorous activity providing more benefits per minute.

"But questions remain about the importance of intense activity versus total physical activity," author Minxue Shen, from the Xiangya School of Public Health at Central South University in China, said.

"For example, if two people do the same total amount of activity, does the person who exercises more vigorously gain greater health benefits? And if someone has limited time, should they focus on exer-

cising harder rather than longer?" Shen said.

The researchers analysed data of more than 96,400 people from the UK Biobank. Accelerometers worn on the wrist for a week helped measure movements, including brief bouts of vigorous activity that people often forget, they said.

The data was compared with the chances of dying or developing eight serious health conditions in the following seven years -- major cardiovascular disease, irregular heartbeat, type 2 diabetes, immune-mediated inflammatory diseases, liver disease, chronic respiratory diseases, chronic kidney disease and dementia. "Participants with (more than) four per cent VPA (vigorous physical activity) had 29-61 per cent lower risks of these outcomes compared with those with 0 (zero) per cent VPA," the authors wrote.

For example, compared with those who did no vigorous activity at all, people with the highest levels had a 63% lower risk of developing dementia, a 60% lower risk of type 2 diabetes and 46% lower risk of dying. These benefits were seen even with relatively small amount of exercise. Shen said, "Vigorous physical activity appears to trigger specific

responses in the body that lower-intensity activity cannot fully replicate. During vigorous physical activity -- the kind that makes you feel out of breath -- your body responds in powerful ways. Your heart pumps more efficiently, your blood vessels become more flexible, and your body improves its ability to use oxygen." Further, intensity of vigorous activity appeared to be a key factor in lowering risk of inflammatory conditions such as arthritis and psoriasis. "It (vigorous activity) may also stimulate chemicals in the brain that help keep brain cells healthy, which could help explain the lower risk of dementia," Shen said. However, for conditions such as diabetes and chronic liver disease, both the duration and intensity they exercised for were found to be important.

The author recommended, "Adding short bursts of activity that make you slightly breathless into daily life, like taking the stairs quickly, walking fast between errands or playing actively with children, can make a real difference." "Even 15 to 20 minutes per week of this kind of effort -- just a few minutes a day -- was linked to meaningful health benefits," Shen said.

Government of Jammu and Kashmir
Office of The Naib-Tehsildar Palhallan
 Executive Magistrate 1st Class.
PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified for information of the general public that the Block Development Officer (BDO) Pattan has forwarded the case file for issuance of Date of Birth certificate Certificate in favour of Shabnum Mushtaq S/o / D/o Mushtaq Ahmad Waza R/o Palhallan with Date of Birth .

Objections, if any, regarding the details furnished by the applicant may be submitted in writing in the office of the Naib Tehsildar Palhallan within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice. If no objections are received within the stipulated time, the case shall be processed for issuance of the Birth certificate as per rules in vogue.

fko_r Naib-Tehsildar Palhallan

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified for the information of the general public that the name of Noora Begum, W/o Abdul Rashid Gojree, R/o Wanigam Payeen, Tehsil Pattan, District Baramulla, has been incorrectly recorded as Noori Begum in Aadhaar Card bearing No. 7078 6234 2753.

The correct and actual name is Noora Begum. If any person has any objection to this correction, they may file the same before the concerned authority within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice.

FKO

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified for the information of the general public that I, Rooza Hamid, D/o Ab Hamid, R/o Tangpora Pattan, Tehsil Pattan, District Baramulla, have been wrongly recorded as Roza Bano in my bank account bearing A/C NO I1229040150003568 maintained at J&K Bank, Goshbugh Branch.

That both the names, Roza Bano and Rooza Hamid, refer to one and the same person, i.e., myself. I have now adopted and shall be known by my correct name Rooza Hamid for all future purposes. Any person having any objection to this may file the same within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Sd/-
 Rooza Hamid fko
 Account number mention karna

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified for the information of the general public that I, Mohammad Asim Mir, S/o Late Abdul Gani Mir, R/o Akhzar Avenue, Ellahi Bagh, Near Power Grid Station, Buchpora, Srinagar-190020, have lost my original No Objection Certificate (NOC) issued by Mahindra Finance regarding the repayment of my car loan bearing Vehicle Registration No.: JK01AG-1595

Loan Account No.: 518994

The said document was reportedly lost on 24 October 2025 at Ellahi Bagh while carrying my documents. Despite thorough search, the same could not be traced. I am applying for issuance of a duplicate NOC

If anybody has any objection regarding the issuance of duplicate NOC, they may contact the undersigned within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice. Failing which, it shall be presumed that no objection exists.

Mohammad Asim Mir
 Contact: 9419018920 / 7006411604

Media line advt

PUBLIC NOTICE

I Have Changed My Name From Meraj Ud Din Sheikh To Mehraj Ud Din Sheikh. In Future I will Be Known As Mehraj Ud Din Sheikh
If anybody is having any objection he/she may contact Passport Office Srinagar, within & 7 days. After 7 days no objection will be accepted.

Media line advt

PUBLIC NOTICE

I have changed my Ward's name from Mohammad Atif Sheikh To Mohammad Haider Sheikh. In future he will be known as Mohammad Haider Sheikh.
If anybody is having any objection he/she may contact Passport Office Srinagar, within & 7 days. After 7 days no objection will be accepted.

Media line advt

Public Notice

I, Fayaz Ahmad Dar S/o Late Abdul Rahman Dar R/o Arampora Tehsil: Singhpora District Baramulla, want to apply for D Class (Civil/ Sanitary) Contractor Card in Public Works (R&B) Circle Baramulla. Anybody having any objection, can file it in the office of SE concerned within 07 days, failing which, it shall be presumed that, no body has any objection, in the matter.

inf

Public Notice

I have applied for the issuance of a Date of Birth (DOB) certificate in favour of my daughter Saniya Zehra, D/o Mohammad Yousuf Dar, who was born on 05-02-2015 as per school records. If anybody has any objection in this regard, he/she may file the same in the BDO Office, Singhpora within seven (7) days from the date of publication of this notice. After that, no objection shall be entertained.

F/o: Mohammad Yousuf Dar D/o: Saniya Zehra
 R/o: Kripalpora Payeen Tehsil: Singhpora
 Block: Singhpora fko

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PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified for the information of the general public that the name of my ward has been wrongly recorded in the Aadhaar Card Bearing no 4017.2230.3880 as Muntazir Ayoub. The correct name is Muntazir Ayoub Dar.

Hence, I intend to correct/update the name in official records. If any person has any objection, they may contact the undersigned within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Mohammad Ayoub Dar
 R/o Ceck Jamal Mir Palhallan, Pattan District Baramulla

FKO

PUBLIC NOTICE

I have changed my name from Minhaaj ul rub to Minhaaj Ur Rabb. In future I will be known as Minhaaj Ur Rabb.

If anybody is having any objection he/she may contact Passport Office Srinagar within the period of 7 days. After 7 days no objection will be accepted.

ako

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified for the information of the general public that the name of the son of Nazir Ahmad Bhat, R/o Diver Yakhmanpora, Tehsil Singhpora, District Baramulla, has been inadvertently recorded as Mujtaba Hussain Bhat in Aadhaar records bearing No. 6891-9264-1560.

The correct and actual name is Meesum Abass Bhat. If anybody has any objection to this correction, they may file the same with the concerned authority within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice.

FKO

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public that Mr. Hakeem Mohammad Abass S/o Hakeem Ghulam Hassan R/o Gund Khawaja Qasim, Tehsil Singhpora, District Baramulla is the lawful heir of late Hakeem Ghulam Hassan, who was the registered consumer of electricity connection bearing Consumer No. 0213040012286, installed at Gund Khawaja Qasim and provided by JK PDD.

That the said Hakeem Ghulam Hassan has expired, and now the above-named applicant intends to transfer the said electricity connection in his own name.

That other legal heirs namely Marjana Begum and Raja Begum have given their no objection for the said transfer.

If any person has any objection, claim, or interest regarding the transfer of the above-mentioned electricity connection, they are hereby requested to submit their objection in writing, along with supporting documents, within 7 days from the publication of this notice, failing which it shall be presumed that no one has any objection and the transfer process shall be completed accordingly.

Contact Details:
 Name: Hakeem Mohammad Abass
 Address: Gund Khawaja Qasim, Tehsil Singhpora, District Baramulla

brmg

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 contact No.7889381616



Visitors throng Nishat Bagh enjoying a sunny day amid blooming gardens and cascading fountains. KO Photo Abid Bhat

Tulip Garden to Close on April 16

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Asia's largest Tulip Garden in Srinagar is set to close on April 16 as the bloom is steadily fading and is expected to drop further in the coming days. "We usually close the garden once the bloom falls below 15 per cent. As of now, it is around 20 per cent, officials said on Tuesday.

Assistant Floriculture Officer In-charge Tulip Garden Srinagar, Imran Ahmad, told KNO that the bloom is steadily fading and is expected to drop further in the coming days. "We usually close the garden once the bloom falls below 15 per cent. As of now, it is around 20 per cent, so the garden will be closed on April 16," he said.

Ahmad said the garden has completed 29 days of operations this season, attracting around 3.54 lakh visitors, including online ticketing. "Out of the total footfall, nearly 2 lakh were national visitors, around 1.5 lakh were locals, besides a good num-

ber of foreign tourists," he said.

Highlighting a major trend, the officer said daily footfall has seen a sharp rise this year. "Earlier, we used to receive 3,000-4,000 national visitors per day, but now the number has increased to 9,000-11,000 daily, which is very encouraging," he said.

He said the surge has come despite challenges, including the garden opening 10-12 days earlier than usual and prevailing global uncertainties. "Even then, we are consistently witnessing around 10,000 visitors daily, especially from outside J&K," he added.

Ahmad said the Tulip Garden continues to mark the beginning of Kashmir's tourism season and expressed hope for a strong summer. "With rising temperatures in other parts of the country and Kashmir's pleasant weather, we expect more tourists in the coming months," he added.

Baad Premieres to Acclaim in Srinagar

Observer News Service

Srinagar: In what is being hailed as a landmark moment for regional storytelling, the Kashmiri-language feature film Baad premiered at INOX Srinagar, marking a significant cultural and cinematic achievement for the Valley. The film not only adds another feather to the cap of director Ali Emran and producer Mrs. Yaqut Mushtaq, but also stands as a defining moment in the evolution of Kashmiri-language cinema.

Directed by Ali Emran—already recognized for his consistent commitment to indigenous storytelling—and produced by Yaqut Mushtaq, Baad arrives as a deeply rooted, purpose-driven film that transcends conventional narratives. With a career spanning multiple films that foreground Kashmiri identity and culture, Emran's latest work reinforces his position as one of the leading voices in regional cinema.

At its heart, Baad is not just another film—it is the first cinematic exploration of Baand-e-Pather, Kashmir's centuries-old folk theatre tradition. This alone places the film in a historic context, offering audiences a rare and authentic glimpse into an art form that has long remained confined to rural per-

formance spaces. Based on the journey of a traditional folk artist, Gani Bhagat, and his son Akhtar, the film captures a poignant generational conflict—between preserving legacy and adapting to modernity. But beyond its narrative, Baad functions as something far more significant: a living archive of a fading cultural heritage.

The film traverses the world of Baand artists with sensitivity and realism, documenting their struggles, dignity, and gradual marginalization in a rapidly changing society. It highlights the urgent need to preserve traditional art forms that are increasingly threatened by urbanization, digital consumption, and shifting cultural priorities.

Midnight Blaze Guts 7 Houses in Nowhatta, Families Left Devastated

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Grief and disbelief gripped families in downtown Srinagar after a midnight blaze reduced multiple homes to ashes in Chandpora-Saifuddin Pora area of Nowhatta, with survivors recounting chilling moments of panic, loss and helplessness.

Zahoor Ahmad, a fire victim, told KNO that the fire broke out while people were asleep. "Around 12:45 AM, smoke started filling the house. Neighbours shouted and woke us up. By the time we rushed out, flames had already spread across several houses. Everything I had hoped for in my home, my belongings were gone within minutes," he said.

He said at least seven to eight houses were engulfed, leaving families with nothing. "Not just houses, even furniture and basic belongings were destroyed. We are trying to salvage whatever little is left," he added.

Another local resident, Ghulam Nabi, said the congested locality made firefighting extremely difficult. "The lanes are too narrow. Fire service vehicles couldn't reach easily and laying pipes took time. If they had reached earlier,

maybe some houses could have been saved. In downtown, houses are packed together and fire spreads in seconds," he said.

Echoing similar distress, Shabir Ahmad, a neighbour, highlighted the scale of human loss behind the incident. "These are poor labourer families. They have nothing left now. One blind man

Begum, appealed for immediate government intervention. "Entire households are gone, from utensils, cash, medicines, everything. These families cannot recover on their own. The government must step in and provide relief so they can rebuild their lives," she said.

Locals also alleged delays in response, saying firefighting efforts

“Around 12:45 AM, smoke started filling the house. Neighbours shouted and woke us up. By the time we rushed out, flames had already spread across several houses. Everything I had hoped for in my home, my belongings were gone within minutes

here lost everything, even the Rs 50,000 he had saved for his daughter's medicine. People don't even have clothes and are wearing what neighbours gave them," he said.

He added that the fire spread rapidly as residents were unaware initially. "Everyone was asleep. By the time smoke was noticed, flames had already taken over multiple houses. The damage is beyond imagination," he said.

Another resident, Parveena

were slowed due to access issues. "It took time to control the blaze, but had it been any later, the entire locality could have been wiped out," a resident said.

The fire, which broke out around 1:00 AM, damaged at least seven residential houses. While no casualties were reported, the emotional and financial toll on affected families has been immense, with many now left staring at an uncertain future.

KU Law Students Engage in Seminar on Women's Reservation

Observer News Service

Srinagar: University of Kashmir's (KU) School of Law organised a one-day seminar on 'Implementation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023' at the Main Campus.

The seminar aimed to examine the constitutional and practical dimensions of the 106th Constitutional Amendment, which provides for one-third reservation for women in legislative bodies. The students, which included mostly girls from KU's school of law, engaged themselves in a thought-provoking academic exchange.

Vice-Chancellor KU, Prof. Nilofer Khan, said, in her message, "Such academic platforms encourage critical thinking among students and help them engage meaningfully with contemporary constitutional developments and issues of social importance."

Dean and Head, School of Law, KU, Prof. Shahnaz, in her welcome address, highlighted the importance of inclusive participation and gender justice in democratic institutions.



The event featured enthusiastic participation from students, who delivered insightful speeches on women's political representation, challenges in implementation, and the broader idea of meaningful empowerment beyond numerical representation.

They were evaluated by a panel including Prof. Tabassum Firdous, faculty at CCAS KU, Prof. Ifat Yas-

min, Head, Economics Department KU, Prof. Towseef Rizvi, Head, Psychology Department KU.

The winners of the speech competition included Sanjeeda Amin (Winner), Sayana Warsi (1st Runner-up), and Kainaat Amin and Noha Balkhi (2nd Runner-ups). Certificates were also distributed among the participants.

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HIGHWAY STATUS

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

<p>HIJRI CALENDAR 26 - Shawwal 1447</p>	PRAYERS	
	FAJR	4: 33
	ZUHR	12:32
	ASR	5:11
	Magrib	7:05
	ISHA	8: 30

From KO Archives

Legislative History Created, Entire Opposition Expelled

Observer News Service

Jammu- History of sorts was created here state legislative assembly here today, with at least fifteen people including seven legislator sustaining injuries in a clash between watch and ward staff of the Assembly and opposition MIAs in the course latter's forcible removal as ordered by the Speaker Ali Mohammed Naik. Barring Dilawar Mir (JD), Yusuf Tarigami (CPM) and Bhagat Ram Chand (BSP) entire opposition was expelled for the rest of the current session.

The Speaker's order followed unprecedented pandemonium that broke out in the house, soon after today's session started, with Naik announcing the question hour. The agitating members left their seats and assembled in the well of the house demanding suspension of the question hour and asking for a discussion over the situation arising of the agitation of Jammu students against the alleged "injustice" done to the students from that division. The opposition members also demanded that the list of selected candidates for MBBS and BDS courses be scrapped.

The trouble started immediately after Speaker resumed his seat when members the BJP, Congress and Janta Dal got up to raise the issue of "large scale bungling, irregularities and corruption" in the recently released selection list of MBBS and BDS. The speaker Ali Mohd Naik however ignored the shouts of opposition and instead named the member, on top of the list of questions slated for today, to ask his question. But the agitated opposition continued with slogan shouting and amidst unruly noisy scenes in the house, nothing was audible. As the protest continued, CPM member Yusuf Tarigami was heard inviting the attention of the speaker about the "environment of the house" saying "we want to speak about environment of the state but the environment inside the house is not well".

When the speaker disallowed all pleas of the opposition, the agitated members walked to well of the house and staged a dharna shouting slogans against ministers and ruling party members. Harsh Dev Singh (NPP) Mohd Yusuf alias Kuka Parrey (AL) Satpal Lakhitra and Jagdish Dubev (JD) also joined the dharna and continued shouting slogans demanding scrap of list. The BJP and Congress members including Mehbooba Mufti, Ashok Sharma, Balbir Singh, Lal Singh, Searing Dorjay, and Tara Chand also joined the BJP legislators headed by Shiv Charn Gupta and demanded suspension of question hour and a reply from the government. At one stage some opposition members were seen rushing towards the Speaker's podium amidst shouts of slogans.

At this stage Law minister P L Handoo, who also hold Parliamentary Affairs portfolio, moved a motion seeking expulsion of all the members for rest of the session. The motion was seconded by Finance Minister Mohd Shafi carried by a voice vote and then followed Naik's order expelling all the 17 members, including in "uncalled for behaviour" for remaining period of the current session of the assembly. After the motion was adopted and Speaker gave his ruling, the members were asked to leave the house. However as the members defied the repeated orders of the chair, the Speaker adjourned the house for half an hour. But the opposition members continued their dharna and slogan shouting in the well of the house.

As the house re-assembled, after stipulated time, the opposition was there in the well busy in slogan shouting and making it impossible for the Speaker to go ahead with the proceedings.

The Speaker at this stage ordered the Marshall of the house to remove the expelled members physically with the help of watch and ward staff, this resulted in violent clashes between the members and the watch and ward staff with the former offering stiff resistance. Chairs and microphones were used in the melee that followed leading to multiple injuries to Ashok Sharma, Ch. Lal Singh, Shiv Charn Gupta, Prithvi Chand, Bali Bhagat, Ch Chuni Lala, Ch Piar Singh and Satpal Lahotra. Seven members of the watch and ward staff also received injuries.

The Chief Minister and his ministerial colleagues did not respond to opposition members' demand for scrapping the list or discussion over the issue.

(Kashmir Observer, 15 April, 1998)

PUBLIC NOTICE

I have changed my name from Owais Bashir (Old name) to Owais Bashir Rather (new name). In future, I shall be known as Owais Bashir Rather. If anybody has any objection, he/she may contact the Passport Office, Srinagar within 7 days. After 7 days, no objection will be entertained. fko

PUBLIC NOTICE

I want to correct my name from Sheikh Feroze Ahmad to Sheikh Feroz Ahmad, Now in future my name will be Sheikh Feroz Ahmad. Anyone having any objection may submit the same to the Passport Office Srinagar within seven days. After which no objection will be entertained. Sheikh Feroz Ahmad S/o Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh

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KO VIEW

Cultural Drift

Kashmir once moved to the cadence of shared life, where gatherings gave people a sense of belonging and joy. Weddings, harvests, and seasonal festivals brought neighbourhoods together, with music, storytelling, and folk performances turning ordinary days into memorable experiences.

Each occasion held meaning that went beyond celebration, providing a space where identity felt alive and deeply rooted.

Time has changed that connection. Many of those gatherings now appear only on staged platforms or official cultural events, where they feel distant from everyday life. Younger generations often view these traditions as outdated, with little effort made to present them as sources of pride or relevance. Cultural practices that once grew naturally within communities now stand at the margins, observed rather than lived.

Ladisha, a form of satirical storytelling and performance, aptly shows this shift. It once served as a lively social critique, blending humour with sharp commentary on society. Audiences gathered to think and engage. Over time, its voice has faded, losing its place as a meaningful public expression. What was once an institution of insight now feels like a relic with limited reach.

A look beyond Kashmir tells a different story. Indigenous communities in countries like New Zealand actively preserve and celebrate their traditions, weaving them into daily life and national identity. Cultural expressions there inspire pride and participation, offering people a clear sense of who they are. Such examples show how tradition can live alongside modernity without losing its essence.

Kashmir faces a deeper challenge as environmental strain and unchecked football place pressure on both land and culture. The valley's natural beauty attracts visitors, while local practices that once honoured this landscape receive less attention.

Cultural identity and environmental care once moved together, strengthening each other. That connection now calls for renewal.

Social spaces still hold the power to revive this bond. A visit to Hazratbal on a Friday offers more than prayer. Families gather, share moments, and return home with a sense of calm and connection. These experiences act as a silent form of healing, grounding people in shared values and collective memory.

Modern life brings stress and constant movement, pushing many toward formal therapy and structured relief. Cultural gatherings provide a parallel path, where music, storytelling, and shared presence give comfort and release. These traditions hold emotional value that feels immediate and human.

Reviving Kashmir's cultural life calls for active effort. Schools, communities, and institutions can bring these practices back into daily spaces, making them accessible and meaningful. A renewed focus on participation can turn passive observation into lived experience.

Cultural pride grows when people see their heritage as a living part of their present, rather than a distant memory.



Dr. Ashraf Zainabi

Private school fees in Jammu and Kashmir have remained a source of stress for parents and confusion for authorities for years.

Every session brings the same cycle: fee hikes, protests, notices, and silence. Schools defend themselves by citing rising costs, parents feel burdened and unheard.

In between, there is no clear system that explains who should charge what, and why.

The real problem is not just high fees. It is the absence of a simple, transparent structure.

All schools are treated as if they are the same, when in reality they are very different. A small neighbourhood school cannot be compared with a high-end institution claiming international standards. Yet, both operate in the same unclear space. This is where reform must begin, with classification.

Private schools should be divided into, let us say, five clear categories: Class A, B, C, D, and E. This classification should be based on visible and measurable factors, beginning teacher salary, infrastructure, student-teacher ratio, and academic environment.

Teacher salary is the most honest indicator of a school's standard. A school that pays its teachers well is more likely to deliver quality education. A school that pays very low salaries cannot claim high standards, no matter how attractive its building looks.

Once classified, each category should have a fixed base fee. This base fee must be simple. It should include only one component: monthly tuition fee. Nothing else, not even annual fee, development fee, or activity fee under different names. The only extra charge allowed should be a small amount between 200 and 500 in a year, only for picnics or excursions. That is all.

The bus (transport) fee is linked to distance travelled by student and doesn't need regulation, but can be regulated if need arises.

Let us imagine how this can work from the year 2027.

Class A schools will be the top category. These schools claim high standards, smart classrooms, high-end labs, international-level sports stadium and other sports infrastructure, national and international student exchange exposure, and trained teachers, etc.

But the most important condition is teacher sala-

ry. If a school is paying its teachers properly, through bank transfer, and salaries are significantly higher than average, let us say above 50,000 per month, it qualifies here.

For such schools, a base monthly tuition fee can reasonably fall between 5,000 and 6,000 per month.

Class B schools will be one step below. They may have good facilities and decent teaching standards, but not at the highest level. Teacher salaries will be moderate, not very high but not too low either, let us say above 30,000 per month.

These schools can have a base monthly tuition fee between 3,000 and 4,000 per month.

Class C schools will form the middle group. These are average schools with basic infrastructure and regular teaching. Teacher salaries here are usually modest, between 15000-20000 per month.

For this category, a base monthly fee between 15,00 and 2000 is fair.

Class D schools will include institutions with limited facilities, often located in smaller towns or outskirts. They play an important role in access to education but cannot charge high fees. Teacher salaries here are generally low, between 8000-12000 per month.

evidence. If inflation has increased costs, if schools have genuinely improved facilities, and most importantly, if teacher salaries have increased (shown through bank transfers), then a revision can be allowed. Otherwise, fees should remain the same or even come down.

This also opens the door for movement between categories. Class D school that improves its standards and starts paying better salaries can move from Class C or Class B. On the other hand, a school that fails to maintain quality or continues to underpay teachers can be moved down. Fee revision should follow this movement, not the other way around.

Such a system will also protect teachers. Today, many teachers work on very low salaries despite high student fees.

By linking fee categories with salary levels, schools will be under pressure to treat teachers fairly. This will improve teaching quality in the long run.

Transparency is key to making this work. Every school should clearly declare its category, its fee, and its average teacher salary. This information should be available to parents. Authorities should verify this through simple checks, mainly bank salary records. There is no

Such a system will also protect teachers. Today, many teachers work on very low salaries despite high student fees. By linking fee categories with salary levels, schools will be under pressure to treat teachers fairly. This will improve teaching quality in the long run.

A base monthly tuition between 800 and 1200 suits this category.

Class E schools will be the lowest fee group. These are small schools with minimal infrastructure. In many such schools, teachers are paid between 5,000 and 6,000 per month. That itself explains the level of resources available.

For these schools, a base monthly tuition fee between 600 and 900 is reasonable.

This structure does something important. It connects fees with reality. A school cannot demand high fees while paying low salaries to its teachers. If a school claims to be Class A, it must prove it through proper salary records and facilities. Otherwise, it must fall into a lower category.

The next step is stability. Once these base fees are fixed in 2027, they should remain unchanged for three years, without yearly hikes, or sudden jumps. Parents should know what they are paying, and schools should plan within that limit. This three-year gap will bring much-needed predictability.

After three years, there can be a review. But this review should not be automatic. It must be based on

need for heavy control, just honest monitoring.

Some schools may resist this idea. They may say it limits their freedom. But the truth is, the current system has too much confusion and too little trust. A simple structure does not destroy autonomy. It brings clarity.

For parents, this model offers relief and confidence. They will know what they are paying and why. For schools, it offers stability and a fair ground to compete. For teachers, it offers dignity through better pay. And for the government, it reduces the need for constant firefighting.

Fixing private school fees is about bringing balance. When fees match quality, hikes are justified, and teachers are valued, the system becomes stronger.

Jammu and Kashmir needs a clear, honest, and workable model. A five-category system, a base tuition fee, a three-year freeze, and a transparent review can alone change the story.

The author is a teacher and researcher based in Gowhar Pora Chadoora J&K, and can be reached at bhatashraf@gmail.com.

CASH COURSE

Read This Before You Buy Anything

Wealth Pathways

Demystifying investing so individuals can grow wealth with patience and strategy.

Irshad Mushtaq

Investing can feel like a distant world, filled with complex terms and confusing charts. Understanding how to grow your money can transform financial security into a real possibility.

Shares offer a way to own a piece of a company you believe in. Dividends and growth over time reward patience and insight. ETFs, or exchange-traded funds, simplify diversification. With a single investment, you can spread risk across sectors and even across borders. Global ETFs open doors to international markets, letting Kashmiri investors tap into growth outside the local economy.

Gold and silver remain enduring stores of value. Investing in them through ETFs avoids the complications of physical storage while protecting against economic uncertainty. For those drawn to real estate, REITs provide a stake in property markets without managing buildings or tenants.

More advanced options like futures and options allow investors to plan around future asset prices, while expiry-day strategies can optimize returns with calculated risk. Commodities trading, company fixed deposits, and mutual funds offer additional layers of portfolio diversification, balancing potential growth with stability. Systematic investment and withdrawal plans help manage regular contributions or income, harnessing the power of compounding and providing steady support over time.

Kashmiri investors have a wide array of tools at their disposal. Each option carries its own balance of risk and reward. By understanding these choices and planning thoughtfully, building wealth becomes a deliberate and achievable journey, helping individuals secure their futures while contributing to the region's growing economic potential.

The author is a Srinagar-based reputed financial educator.

Letter to Editor

Urban Planning Fails at the Crosswalk

Every morning on my way to the office, I see the same worrying sight. Patients and their attendants, sometimes with small children, dart across the Bypass near the Children's Hospital and JVC Bemina. With no zebra crossing or pedestrian signal, every step feels risky. Cars and bikes speed by, leaving almost no margin for error.

The government deserves credit for moving hospitals from crowded city centers to the outskirts. The idea makes sense. It eases congestion and gives hospitals more space.

On the roads, however, the reality is harsh. Unsafe streets, traffic bottlenecks, and missing basic safety measures make the journey to these hospitals dangerous. A modern building matters little if people risk their lives just to reach it.

Simple interventions could save lives: marked pedestrian crossings, working traffic signals, and strict speed limits. Public health facilities need safe access as much as they need good infrastructure.

Urban traffic planning cannot be reactive. Signposts, footpaths, traffic lights, and pedestrian subways should be standard, not optional. Policies must be guided by evidence, foresight, and accountability.

These measures are mandatory as Srinagar's streets are becoming increasingly hazardous. Weak enforcement, reckless driving, and absent pedestrian infrastructure turn the city into a hazard zone. Zebra crossings fade into the asphalt, parking is scarce, and enforcement sometimes encourages bribery instead of compliance. Fines alone won't change behaviour. Educa-

tion, infrastructure, and enforcement must work together.

Commercial drivers, especially tippers and Tata Mobile operators, need mandatory training. Underage driving is common, and risky two-wheeler stunts spike in winter. Restricting teenage riders during peak accident months could prevent injuries. Overloaded vehicles worsen congestion, damage roads, and endanger lives. Temporary suspension of licenses, rather than fines, may be more effective.

City roads are filling up faster than they can be expanded. Widening roads, building flyovers, enforcing one-way streets, and integrating modern public transport can ease pressure.

Schools, colleges, and government offices concentrated in central Srinagar should gradually shift to suburban areas. During peak hours, traffic personnel near

Sincerely,

*Dr. Sajad Hussain Deen
sajad_08phd12@nitsri.ac.in*

Inside Kashmir's Growing Pet Culture

A Kashmir-based practitioner discusses vaccine myths, emergency red flags, and why bringing a pet home means making a promise you cannot break.



Aashiq Hussain Andrabi

Suraya Sartaj begins her day knowing that no two cases will ever look the same.

Kashmir's growing pet culture brings a steady stream of first-time owners into clinics, with questions about care, prevention, and responsibility.

That shift has made veterinary practice more visible and demanding, placing doctors like her at the centre of a changing relationship between people and animals.

A BVSc and AH graduate, Suraya works closely with companion and small animals, handling everything from routine vaccinations to complex medical cases.

Her patients range from kittens and puppies to birds, rodents, and even injured snakes. Each case calls for close observation and quick judgement, where small behavioural changes often reveal what words cannot.

"Pets may not speak, but they communicate constantly," she says, underscoring the importance of noticing early signs.

Her interest in animals began early, influenced by long hours spent watching how they live and respond to the world. A career in human medicine once seemed likely, though

veterinary science soon felt more aligned with that early curiosity.

"Helping those who cannot speak for themselves gives purpose," she says, describing the belief that anchors her work.

As more households in Kashmir bring pets into their lives, Suraya sees encouraging change along with clear gaps.

Emotional connection has deepened, though awareness around preventive care still needs attention. "Vaccination is life-saving," she says. "A single word explains the biggest mistake I see: waiting."

Her clinic often becomes the point where delayed care turns into emergency treatment, reinforcing the need for timely action. She also points to the wider link between animal health and public health, where responsible care benefits both.

In this freewheeling conversation with Kashmir Observer, Dr. Suraya Sartaj speaks about her journey, daily practice, and what it takes to ensure better care for animals in a rapidly changing pet culture.

You grew up watching animals closely. Did that childhood curiosity lead you straight to veterinary medicine?

I trace my interest back to early childhood. Hours of wildlife watching filled my days back then. Animals lived, survived, and communicated through methods that felt almost human. I wondered constantly how they understood each other lacking words.

Interestingly, fear of animals existed too, at least from a distance. Human medicine



Pet owners often debate vaccination schedules. Where do you stand on this?

I consider vaccination absolutely essential. It saves lives. Healthy, protected pets live long lives on one side. Preventable cases of parvovirus, panleukopenia, and distemper fill the other side.

Many owners recognize this reality only after it becomes too late.

Vaccinations begin early at six weeks and continue until sixteen weeks. Timely annual boosters follow. Owners invest small efforts. For the animal, this investment means survival.

Deworming slips off many to-do lists. Why does this matter more than people realize?

Damage from worms remains silent. These parasites work silently, bypassing sudden alarms. They work slowly, weakening the animal gradually. An active pet becomes dull, weak, and lifeless. Owners notice the impact only after it establishes itself.

The solution is simple: regular deworming. One small step prevents extensive suffering.

What mistake do you see most often when owners approach preventive care?

Waiting answers this question. Owners wait for visible symptoms. They wait for conditions to worsen. Preventive care requires proactive timing. Early action changes everything for the pet and the owner.

Animals cannot tell us where it hurts. What signs should owners watch closely?

Pets communicate constantly despite lacking speech. A drop in appetite signals trouble. Unusual laziness indicates problems. A cat hiding more than usual demands attention. Unusual stool or small behavioural changes provide additional clues.

Trust your instinct when something feels different. That feeling matters greatly.

Which symptoms seem small but actually signal serious trouble?



PETS COMMUNICATE CONSTANTLY DESPITE LACKING SPEECH. A drop in appetite signals trouble. Unusual laziness indicates problems. A cat hiding more than usual demands attention. Unusual stool or small behavioural changes provide additional clues. Trust your instinct when something feels different. That feeling matters greatly.

Minor symptoms often mask major problems. A slight limp hides a possible fracture. Pale gums indicate severe anaemia. A mild cough in a bird suggests serious danger. Small animals decline rapidly from slight illness. Their condition deteriorates quickly.

Timing matters in emergencies. When should owners rush to the clinic versus wait and see?

Clarity comes instantly: doubt demands immediate action. Seizures, breathing difficulty, heavy bleeding, collapse, and continuous vomiting require instant response.

These situations tolerate zero delay. Minutes make the difference during these moments.

How aware are Kashmiri pet owners today compared to five years ago? What should every prospective owner know first?

Progress brings encouragement. Pets now enjoy full family status, exceeding mere companionship. Basic awareness around vaccinations and deworming still needs improvement. Bringing a pet home is a permanent decision. It demands long-term commitment of time, patience, care, and emotional responsibility. Prepare first, then bring a pet home.

Pet ownership culture has shifted dramatically. What improvements still lie ahead?

Changes in this area are beautiful. Pets receive love, care, and emotional value more than ever before. The journey continues. Awareness about sterilisation, mental stimulation, and proper care, especially for exotic animals, still needs attention. Progress happens step by step.

Human health and animal health intertwine constantly. Can you explain this connection simply?

This connection exceeds most people's understanding. The One Health concept links animals, humans, and the environment. Diseases like rabies plus certain bacterial and viral illnesses pass between species. Medicine misuse, especially antibiotics in animals, leads to resistant superbugs affecting humans too.

Healthy animals create safer human conditions. Everything connects. Veterinarians protect families, communities, and public health through animal treatment. This represents the bigger picture.

Your work extends past clinic walls. How do veterinarians serve schools and communities?

Veterinary professionals serve significant roles outside clinics. Educating children matters, while guiding communities helps. Conducting awareness drives and promoting sterilisation programs change how society treats animals.

Awareness builds empathy, and empathy creates real change.

What guidance do you offer young people considering this career? Any final words for our readers?

Young people need passion plus strength, as veterinary science demands patience and dedication. The work rewards participants with deep meaning.

Pet owners should practice kindness freely. Animals feel, trust, and love deeply. Our faith values kindness toward animals greatly. Even small acts of mercy matter.

Lives depend on silent understanding amid worldly noise. Compassion, awareness, and responsibility help us hear that silence. True humanity begins there.

— The interviewer is a senior scribe from Pulwama.



MINOR SYMPTOMS OFTEN MASK MAJOR PROBLEMS. A slight limp hides a possible fracture. Pale gums indicate severe anaemia. A mild cough in a bird suggests serious danger. Small animals decline rapidly from slight illness. Their condition deteriorates quickly.

through NEET attracted me initially, like many students. But life held different plans. Veterinary science appeared unexpectedly.

With time, it transformed from an option into a calling. Helping voiceless creatures gives my work purpose. This path chose me, somewhere along the way.

Describe your typical morning at the clinic. Do you ever know what species you will treat next?

Each day differs completely. One moment involves a young kitten needing care. The next brings a restless puppy squirming during vaccination. Surprises follow: injured snakes, pet rats, birds with breathing issues.

Every day brings something new. Routine treatments, emergencies, and surgeries fill my hours. This unpredictability keeps my work alive. This profession offers constant learning.



Fuel Price Freeze: Rs 18/Litre Loss On Petrol, Rs 35 On Diesel

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: Losses on petrol have widened to Rs 18 per litre and to Rs 35 on diesel as state-owned fuel retailers continue to keep pump prices frozen despite a sharp rise in input costs, sources said.

Despite prices being de-regulated more than a decade back, state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd

(BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) have not changed the retail petrol and diesel price since April 2022. Global crude oil prices have seen sharp fluctuations over this period – from above USD 100 per barrel following the Russia-Ukraine war, to easing to around USD 70 a barrel earlier this year, before surging again to about USD 120 last month after the US-Israel attacks on Iran triggered fresh supply concerns.

The three firms were incurring losses of about Rs 2,400 crore per day at the peak last month, which have since narrowed to around Rs 1,600 crore daily after the government cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 10 per litre each – a reduction that was not passed on to consumers but used to partly offset losses, industry sources said.

The losses in March have wiped away all gains they

made in January/February, they said, adding the three firms are most likely to post losses in the January-March quarter.

Macquarie Group, in a report on 'India Fuel Retail', said, "At spot petrol-diesel pricing of USD 135-165 per barrel, we estimate India's oil marketing companies lose Rs 18 and Rs 35 per litre on petrol and diesel sales (respectively)."

Every USD 10 per barrel increase in crude adds roughly Rs 6 per litre to marketing losses,

the report said.

The brokerage flagged a high likelihood of retail fuel price hikes after elections in key states like West Bengal and Tamil Nadu at the end of this month. "We see risk of higher pump prices post state elections in April."

India, which imported about 88 per cent of its crude oil requirement in 2025, remains highly exposed to global price swings. Around 45 per cent of imports came from the Middle East, 35 per

cent from Russia and 6 per cent from the United States. Despite this, the country continued to be a net exporter of key petroleum products, including diesel, petrol and aviation turbine fuel.

While the government cut excise duty on fuels by Rs 10 per litre in March, central levies have been on a declining trend and now stand at Rs 11.9 per litre on petrol and Rs 7.8 per litre on diesel.

Even a complete removal of excise duties would not

fully offset OMC losses at current prices, the report noted.

State-level VAT rates, however, have largely remained stable.

The fiscal implications of further tax cuts could be significant. Based on provisional consumption estimates of about 170 billion litres in FY26, a full rollback of excise duties could lead to an annual revenue loss of around USD 36 billion, widening the fiscal deficit by an estimated 80 basis points, it said.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

What New J&K

will become applicable only after the Delimitation Commission's report comes into effect.

No impact on current Assembly

According to the proposed amendments, the readjustment shall not affect representation in the Legislative Assembly until the dissolution of the existing Assembly. It further provides that until such readjustment takes effect, any election to the Legislative Assembly may be held on the basis of the territorial constituencies existing before such readjustment.

33 Women Reservation

The amendments also specify that Jammu & Kashmir will have 33 percent women's reservation in its Assembly, but only after constituencies are redrawn through delimitation. The reservation for women will last for 15 years from the date the 106th Constitutional Amendment (2023) began, unless Parliament decides to extend it further. The reserved seats for women will not be fixed permanently; they will be rotated among different constituencies in J&K (and other States/UTs) over time.

Lok Sabha

The proposed laws provide that delimitation Commission will decide about Jammu & Kashmir's share in Lok Sabha among the Union Territories and fix their boundaries.

However, the number of seats to all Union Territories cannot be more than 35, the proposed bills state. Currently, Union Territories have 19 Lok Sabha seats. (KNO)

J&K Speaker

members with itself-five from the Lok Sabha and five from the Legislative Assembly-for the purpose of assisting it in its duties in respect of each State and Union Territory with a legislature.

While the Lok Sabha Speaker will nominate five MPs from J&K, the Speaker of the J&K Assembly will be empowered to nominate five MLAs.

As per the bill, the Speaker of the J&K Assembly will have to nominate the names of five associate members within one month from the date of constitution of the Commission, while the Speaker of the Lok Sabha will have to nominate five members within two months.

These nominations must be sent to the Chief Election Commissioner. If the nominations are made by a Legislative Assembly Speaker, they must also be sent to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

All five MPs from J&K would be nominated as associate members given that their total strength is similar. All eyes will be on 5 MLAs to be nominated by assembly Speaker.

US Blockade Fails

had threatened the blockade would target "vessels of all nations entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas".

However, independent shipping data pointed a more nuanced picture. At least three Iran-linked vessels were recorded transiting the strait, though they were not bound for Iranian ports.

Among them were a bulk carrier and a tanker that had recently departed Iranian ports, as well as a Chinese tanker, the Rich Starry, that crossed the Strait overnight via the Iranian-approved vetting route south of Larak Island.

Analysts cautioned that tracking ship movements in the region has become increasingly difficult, with reports of signal disruption and manipulation complicating efforts to verify vessel activity.

Iran imposed restrictions on the passage of vessels in the Strait following the US-Israeli war of aggression on February 28.

Shipping continues at reduced levels

While traffic has not stopped entirely, it remains sharply below normal levels. Before the outbreak of hostilities on 28 February, more than 130 vessels were passing through the strait each day. Current volumes are only a fraction of that figure, reflecting widespread caution among shipping companies, oil traders and insurers.

The uncertainty has driven up risk premiums and disrupted logistics chains, as operators weigh the dangers of navigating a heavily militarised waterway.

"The situation is highly volatile," one industry source said. "Even if passage is technically possible, the risks are far higher than before."

'Dangerous & Irresponsible'

China criticised the US move, describing the blockade as "dangerous and irresponsible" and warning that it risked further destabilising the region. Beijing did not confirm whether its vessels would continue transiting the strait.

Iran, meanwhile, has maintained restrictions on shipping following what it describes as a US-Israeli "war of aggression" that began in late February.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) warned that any military vessels entering the strait would be seen as violating a fragile ceasefire agreed after weeks of intense fighting. Iranian military officials have also threatened a broader regional response if Iranian ports are targeted.

A fragile standoff

Despite the show of force, the early evidence suggests the blockade may be difficult to fully enforce without escalating into direct confrontation.

With both sides issuing warnings and asserting control, the Strait of Hormuz has become a focal point of a tense and uncertain standoff – one that carries significant risks not only for regional stability but for the global economy.

For now, shipping continues – cautiously,

unevenly, and under the shadow of a conflict that shows little sign of resolution.

US Hints At

attributed the possibility of a second round of talks to the "great job" done by Pakistan Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir.

"It's more likely, you know why?" Because the field marshal is doing a great job," the US President said.

Fox News reported that the US decision on the blockade of Iranian ports was one of the reasons for Tehran returning to the negotiating table.

"A lot is happening today and tomorrow. We have all the ingredients of a deal, but it's not all there yet," an unnamed US official told Fox News.

US Central Command said it successfully blocked all vessels travelling to and from Iranian ports and coastal areas in the first 24 hours of President Trump's blockade.

CENTCOM said the blockade is being enforced "impartially against vessels of all nations" entering and exiting Iranian ports.

It added that six merchant vessels complied with the US directions to turn around.

More than 10,000 US service members are participating in the blockade, including over 100 aircraft and 18 warships.

CENTCOM said US forces were supporting freedom of navigation for vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz to and from non-Iranian ports.

The US and Iran failed to reach an agreement in the 21-hour marathon peace talks in Islamabad over the weekend, with Washington insisting that Tehran refused to give up its right to nuclear enrichment.

Trump Dials

after the recent peace talks between Iran and the US. They spoke on February 2 to announce progress in a trade deal, and on March 24 to discuss the situation in West Asia.

Soon after the call, US ambassador Gor told a select group of journalists that some "big-ticket deals", including on energy, are expected to be sealed between India and the US in the next "few days and weeks". However, he refused to elaborate on the deals.

"Received a call from my friend President Donald Trump. We reviewed the substantial progress achieved in our bilateral cooperation in various sectors. We are committed to further strengthening our Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership in all areas," Modi said on social media.

"We also discussed the situation in West Asia and stressed the importance of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open and secure," he said.

The call ended with Trump telling PM Modi that: "I just want you to know we all love you", according to ambassador Gor.

"We do have some big-ticket items that will be announced over the next few days or the next few weeks, and the relationship is on a firm footing. We will have something very interesting and exciting," he said.

Sources said certain Indian public sector companies in the energy sector may announce collaborations with American firms in the coming days.

On the Modi-Trump discussion on West Asia, Gor said the US President wanted to update the prime minister on the overall situation in the region.

"You have a nation that is holding the entire world hostage. These are international waterways. There are international treaties," the envoy said, referring to Iran blocking the movement of ships through the Strait of Hormuz that has resulted spike in energy prices.

"There's only one reason that prices (of oil and gas) have gone up (and that) is because somebody is holding this area hostage.

"So obviously the United States wants to open this waterway. And so, I think it benefits the whole world, including here in India," he said.

Gor said PM Modi and President Trump also discussed the US naval blockade of Iran's ports. He refused to answer questions on any fresh talks between Iran and the US after the collapse of the negotiations in Islamabad.

"It's not for me to announce any future talks. They did talk about the blockade and the importance of it reopening as soon as possible. Frankly, this whole region, the whole world is suffering because of this," he said.

"Why should one country be able to turn off the lights anywhere else in the world? It's unfair. It needs to stop, and the United States is determined to make that happen," he added.

The call between the two leaders came two days after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri wrapped up a three-day visit to Washington DC.

Both sides have been working to stabilise the ties after a spell of uncertainty and strain.

The relations witnessed a major downturn after Washington imposed punitive tariffs on India and President Trump made controversial assertions regarding his role in de-escalating the India-Pakistan military clashes last May.

However, both sides made efforts in the last few months to repair the ties.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will visit India next month to hold wide-ranging talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and other functionaries of the government.

No Higher Duty

the gathering, Sinha described service to the needy as the highest human duty, saying such initiatives not only address hunger but also uphold dignity. "To strengthen Apna Bhojanalaya is to

strengthen the very fabric of our society," he said, commending Sewa Bharti's sustained efforts in community welfare.

He underscored that feeding the hungry is among the most sacred acts, calling it a reflection of humanity at its finest. Emphasising the need for collective action, the Lieutenant Governor said that building a strong Jammu and Kashmir requires empowered citizens, resilient communities and a shared commitment to service.

"Our aim should be selfless service to the neighbour, the city around us and the nation that unites us. When we lift every sector, we lift the Union Territory itself," he said, urging people to contribute to social causes to the best of their ability.

Sinha further noted that meaningful change does not always require vast resources but depends on vision, persistence and compassion. He praised volunteers and donors associated with Sewa Bharti for transforming lives through their work and called for the continuity of such efforts.

"You did not merely feed the hungry, you upheld the dignity of millions. Let us ensure that this service never stops and that every hand contributes to those in need," he added.

On the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor also called upon all sections of society to join efforts against drug abuse, stressing the importance of community participation in addressing social challenges.

Among those present were MLA Jammu West Arvind Gupta, Managing Director and CEO of J&K Bank Amitava Chatterjee, Principal GMC Jammu Dr Ashutosh Gupta, and several office bearers and volunteers of Sewa Bharti.

Dedicates ₹156-Cr

Addressing a gathering during the inauguration and the launch of the three-day Tawi Mahotsav-2026, Sinha said the project had been opened to citizens in keeping with the long-standing tradition of performing aarti on the banks of the sacred Tawi River.

"In Phase-I, promenades have been developed on the left bank, right bank and the central island, creating four continuous stretches for walking, jogging and cycling," he said, adding that a dedicated ghat has also been constructed for the Tawi Aarti.

Outlining future plans, the Lieutenant Governor said a four-lane connecting road along with a bridge to the right bank would be built to ease congestion and directly link Bhagwati Nagar rotary with Jewel Chowk.

He also announced the development of green spaces along the top promenade of the left bank, aimed at turning the riverfront into a vibrant public and tourist destination.

Under the Urban Challenge Fund, Sinha said two key initiatives – real estate monetisation of Phase-I and extension of the riverfront from Bikram Chowk Bridge to Har Ki Paudi – are being taken up to position the area as a premier recreational hub and economic centre.

"Our vision is to create inclusive, accessible and enriching spaces for every citizen. The Tawi Riverfront embodies this ethos with a seamless blend of tradition and modernity, where development harmonises with nature," he said.

Describing Jammu as an "ancient temple town" rooted in spirituality and culture, Sinha said cities along rivers preserve civilisational values and have historically attracted saints, philosophers and artists.

Referring to development initiatives under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said efforts in recent years have sought to enhance Jammu's grandeur and cultural consciousness.

On the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor joined citizens for the Tawi Aarti, administered an anti-drug pledge and felicitated winners of a traditional dangal. Several public representatives, officials, religious leaders and citizens attended the event.

UNDP Warns

poverty is expected to rise from around 400,000 to 2.5 million, the report said.

It added that the number of people pushed into poverty in the world as a result of the conflict rises from approximately 1.9 million to nearly 8.8 million across scenarios, with South Asia accounting for the largest share, ranging from about 1.7 million to over 8 million, reflecting both the subregion's population size and its higher exposure to income and price shocks.

China is estimated to experience a more moderate increase in the number of people at risk of falling into poverty, from around 115,000 to over 620,000, reflecting small proportional changes applied to a very large population base.

Highlighting the estimated poverty impact of the military escalation (28-day conflict, most severe scenario with 8-month adjustment), the report said that India's poverty rate is estimated to rise to 24.2 per cent post-crisis from 23.9 per cent, pushing 2,464,698 people into poverty. An estimated 354,033,698 people are projected to live in poverty in the country post-crisis as compared to 351,569,000 pre-crisis.

The UNDP simulation estimates the impact of the conflict on the Human Development Index (HDI) for countries across the region. It indicates that Iran's HDI could decline by an amount equivalent to roughly one to one and a half years of human development progress.

"India is projected to experience a loss of approximately 0.03–0.12 years of HDI progress, followed by Nepal at around 0.02–0.09 years and Viet Nam at 0.02–0.07 years, while for China, the

estimated effects on HDI remain limited in magnitude, ranging roughly 0.01–0.05 years," it said.

The report notes that among the region's larger importers, India meets over 90 per cent of its oil needs through imports, sourcing more than 40 per cent of crude imports and 90 per cent of LPG imports from West Asia. Further, West Asian countries supply over 45 per cent of India's fertiliser imports, while

85 per cent of the country's domestic urea production depends on imported regasified liquefied natural gas.

The shock of the conflict is also influencing energy choices in several countries. With LNG prices rising, some economies, including India, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam, have increased their reliance on coal-fired power.

On trade and supply chain disruptions, UNDP country-level analysis indicated significant impacts in 25 out of 36 countries through freight surcharges, war-risk insurance premia, route diversions, and delayed delivery of intermediate and consumer goods.

India's assessment shows that West Asian markets account for 14 per cent of exports and 20.9 per cent of imports, with roughly USD 48 billion in non-oil exports, particularly in basmati rice, tea, gems and jewellery, and apparel. Bangladesh also reports significant disruption as Gulf carriers cancelled flights, shipments from Bangladesh and India were stranded, it said.

Highlighting the impact of the military escalation on food security, the report said that "For several countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines, food security pressures could also be compounded by remittance losses, as reduced Gulf economic activity weakens household incomes and purchasing power."

"In India, the timing is especially sensitive: any prolonged disruption would coincide with the preparations for the Kharif (the monsoon cropping season), which begins in June. Urea stocks stood at 6.114 million tons, providing a near-term buffer but not fully insulating the sector if disruptions persist into the planting season," it said.

The report also notes the impact of the conflict on remittances and migrant workers.

"For several countries, the scale of direct exposure to Gulf labour markets and remittance flows is both substantial and consequential," the report said.

"India has the largest absolute exposure," it said as it cited the Ministry of External Affairs data that 9.37 million Indians were residing in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as of October 2024, sending about 38-40 per cent of India's inward remittances.

The military escalation is affecting employment and livelihoods across the Asia-Pacific region through disruptions to economic activity, mobility, trade, and supply chains, it said.

"In India, employment risks are likely to be especially pronounced in MSME-intensive sectors that rely on imported energy and inputs or are exposed to Gulf-linked trade. This is particularly significant in a labour market where about 90 per cent of employment is informal.

"Small firms in hospitality, food processing, construction materials, steel-based manufacturing, and gems and diamonds may face higher input costs, supply shortages, and delayed or cancelled orders, with knock-on effects on jobs, hours worked and business continuity. These pressures could translate into reduced working hours, job losses and business interruptions, especially for informal and migrant workers and MSMEs operating with limited financial buffers and constrained access to credit," it said.

In India, raw material costs for medical devices are also expected to rise by around 50 per cent due to disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz, while wholesale prices of medicine have already risen by 10-15 per cent.

"At the same time, we see important opportunities for countries to accelerate longterm resilience through adaptive social protection, stronger local and regional value chains, and diversified energy and food systems," UN Assistant Secretary General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific Kanni Wignaraja said.

Constitution Now

to Ambedkar, describing him as the architect of a democratic framework that guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all sections of society.

In a post on X, Shah said Ambedkar had opposed Article 370, terming it against the country's unity and integrity. "He laid the strong foundation of India's democracy by giving the country a Constitution that grants equal rights and opportunities to every class. He staunchly opposed Article 370 for the sake of the country's integrity," Shah said.

Speaking at a separate event, Shah also highlighted the government's security approach, linking it to responses to past terror attacks. He said the present dispensation had responded decisively to incidents such as the Uri and Pulwama attacks.

"After Uri, surgical strikes were carried out. After Pulwama, air strikes were conducted, and after the Pahalgam attack, Operation Sindoor was launched," he said.

Referring to efforts against Left-wing extremism, the Home Minister said the government had taken firm steps to curb Naxalism.

On border security, Shah said that if the BJP returns to power in West Bengal, land required for fencing along the borders would be made available within a fixed timeline.

"We have decided that once the BJP government is formed, within 45 days, the 600 acres of land needed for fencing will be allocated to the Government of India and the work will be completed," he said.

8 Arrested, 25

damaging vehicles during the protest. "Eight miscreants have been arrested so far, while 25 others have been identified. Strict action will be taken against all those involved in disturbing public order," the official said.

He added that efforts are underway to apprehend the remaining accused. Police have also urged people to maintain calm and refrain from taking the law into their own hands.

No Let-Up On

The IGP asserted that law enforcement agencies are committed to dismantling drug networks and ensuring a safer society through intensified operations and stronger enforcement mechanisms.

Highlighting the role of youth in society, Birdi urged young people to stay away from substance abuse and contribute positively to the nation. "Youth should keep themselves away from drugs so that they can play a constructive role in society and the country," he added.

Responding to a query about a recent incident in Sopore, the IGP said eight persons have been arrested and an investigation is underway. He clarified that those involved were outsiders and that no one from the school was linked to the case.

"The investigation is in progress, and the culprits will not be spared," he said.

Earlier in the day, the IGP visited a Gurudwara on the occasion of Baisakhi, where he extended greetings to the Sikh community and prayed for peace, prosperity and communal harmony in the region.

Describing Baisakhi as a festival symbolising sacrifice, justice and protection of the oppressed, Birdi said it also promotes values of ethics and goodwill. "It is a holy occasion and the creation day of Khalsa Panth. We paid obeisance and conveyed greetings to the Sikh community on behalf of J&K Police," he said.

Porcupine Menace

saffron land are now affected, with continuous losses raising fears about the long-term survival of saffron cultivation in the area.

They have appealed to the government to step in with a permanent solution to control the wild-life threat and protect the crop.

"If this continues, saffron fields in Pampore will disappear," a farmer said. [KNT]

CM Seeks Tough

to vitiate the atmosphere and create communal conflict," he said.

Referring to the Ramban incident, the Chief Minister said an innocent person had been killed and called for a firm response from the administration.

"I want to tell those trying to vitiate the atmosphere in the garb of religion that as long as my government is here, we will not allow them to succeed in Jammu and Kashmir," Abdullah said.

He appealed to Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha to ensure stern action against those involved in the killing as well as those attempting to disrupt communal harmony. "A strong message must go out that the current dispensation will not allow hooliganism or jungle raj in Jammu and Kashmir," he added.

Meanwhile, authorities on Tuesday intensified a multi-agency search operation in Ramban district for a man feared to have fallen into a fast-flowing stream after allegedly being assaulted.

Police have constituted a Special Investigation Team to probe the case and have arrested four persons in connection with the incident, which has sparked protests and tension in parts of the district along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway.

The victim, identified as Tanveer Ahmad Chopan (25), a resident of Mundkhal Pogal in Ukhal tehsil, was travelling from Jammu to his native village in a Tata Mobile vehicle on Sunday, ferrying a milch cow and two calves, when he was allegedly chased and assaulted by suspected cow vigilantes, according to locals.

Officials said efforts were on to trace the missing youth, even as security has been tightened in sensitive areas to prevent any escalation of tension.

Faith and Festivity

by the members of the Sikh community were also held in various districts of the valley.

Baisakhi, which marks the beginning of the harvest season, is also a commemoration of the formation of the Khalsa Panth of warriors under Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

Scores of Sikh devotees were seen participating in bhajan keertans and other religious activities. The Sikh community and other NGOs had set up stalls for langar. Medical camps were also organised for the event.

Meanwhile, people thronged Mughal gardens, Tulip garden and other parks across Kashmir. People from the Sikh community were seen enjoying the festival with friends and families.

The day marked events at various famous tourist spots, including Pahalgam and Doodhpathri, as well where members of the majority Muslim community also joined the celebrations.

CM Omar Calls for Stronger Banking Partnerships to Drive J&K's Growth

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah addressed the Axis Bank Senior Management Confluence in Srinagar, underscoring the critical role of the banking sector in strengthening financial inclusion, supporting entrepreneurship, and driving sustainable economic growth in Jammu & Kashmir.

Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani, MLA Gulmarg Pirzada Farooq Ahmed Shah, MLA Zaidal Tanvir Sadiq, MLA Hazratbal Salman Ali Sagar, Director Tourism Qamar Sajad, Managing Director & CEO of Axis Bank Amitabh Chaudhry, Executive Director Munish Sharda, President & Head Branch Banking (North) Reynold D'souza, along with regional heads and senior officials, were present on the occasion.

Appreciating Axis Bank for organizing the Confluence and its continued engagement with Jammu & Kashmir, the Chief Minister noted that the bank, with its network of 54 branches across Jammu and Kashmir, has played a significant role in advancing financial inclusion.

Reflecting candidly on the region's economic landscape, the Chief



Minister said that Jammu & Kashmir may be relatively small in terms of geographical size, market scale, and natural resources compared to other states, but it is rich in opportunities. He emphasized that sectors such as MSMEs, tourism, agriculture, and horticulture offer immense potential for growth and investment.

Highlighting the region's transformative trajectory, he said Jammu & Kashmir is witnessing sustained progress driven by infrastructure de-

velopment, tourism expansion, agricultural advancement, and a growing entrepreneurial ecosystem. He reiterated that the banking sector plays a pivotal role in enabling credit access, promoting digital finance, and supporting enterprise growth.

Speaking on tourism, the Chief Minister described it as a sector close to the collective aspirations of both the government and private stakeholders. He pointed out the need to enhance customer experience at key

destinations such as the Gulmarg Gondola, suggesting improvements in queue management, introduction of time-slot based ticketing, and plugging operational gaps. He noted that such areas present opportunities for collaboration between the government and financial institutions like Axis Bank, particularly in deploying technology-driven solutions.

At the same time, he underscored that while tourism is important, agriculture and horticulture remain the largest contributors to Jammu & Kashmir's GSDP. He called for innovative partnerships with the banking sector to deliver tailored financial solutions, strengthen value chains, and improve market access for farmers and horticulturalists.

The Chief Minister also highlighted opportunities in urban governance, including municipal services such as collections and disbursements, where banking institutions can play a greater role through efficient and technology-driven systems. He acknowledged that banks operating in Jammu & Kashmir are familiar with the region's unique challenges and encouraged them to innovate within this context.

Calling for stronger collabora-

Seerbagh-Sempora Bridge to be Opened Soon

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary informed that the Seerbagh-Sempora bridge is nearing completion and will be opened to the public at the earliest.

The Deputy Chief Minister apprised this during his visit to the project site conducted to assess the pace and quality of ongoing works. He was accompanied by MLA Chadoora, Ali Mohammad Dar; Chief Engineer, PWD Central Kashmir, Narinder Kumar; Superintending Engineer, Iram Lone and other concerned officers.

During the inspection, the Deputy Chief Minister emphasized strict adherence to quality standards and timely completion of the project. He expressed satisfaction over the pace of work and observed that the bridge is in its final stage of construction.

Highlighting the significance of the

project, he said that the bridge will greatly enhance the connectivity and accessibility for the residents of Sempora, Seerbagh, Summerbagh and adjoining areas of Chadoora, Pampore and Srinagar, benefiting a large section of the public.

Later, the Deputy Chief Minister inspected the PWD (R&B) Guest House at Hyderpora, Srinagar and reviewed the proposed site for construction of an Engineering Office-cum-Conference Hall.

The officers present on the occasion briefed him on the design and scope of the proposed facility.

He directed the concerned to ensure proper planning and expeditious execution of the project while maintaining quality benchmarks. He also reviewed the condition of the guest house and discussed necessary measures to improve its infrastructure and utility.

Chief Engineer PWD Central Kashmir, Executive Engineers and other officials were present during the inspection

CM Inaugurates Jashn-e-Amad-e-Bahar

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah inaugurated Jashn-e-Amad-e-Bahar, the Spring Festival on the occasion of Baisakhi, at Jablipora in Anantnag.

Addressing a large gathering on the occasion, the Chief Minister described spring as a symbol of renewal and hope, stating that the festival represents not just a seasonal transition but also a new phase of development and governance in Jammu & Kashmir.

"We always celebrate the arrival of spring because spring is a new beginning for us. These spring celebrations are not only to celebrate the beginning of this year's spring, but also to remind people that after the arrival of our

government, there was not only an effort, but a path was made. There is a new spring, a new beginning," he said.

Highlighting recent policy initiatives, the Chief Minister referred to key decisions taken during the recent budget session, including provision of free six LPG cylinders to the poorest households and free electricity under the Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana.

He also emphasized the landmark decision to allow establishment of private universities in Jammu & Kashmir, aimed at expanding access to quality higher education within Jammu and Kashmir.

"Our children are struggling. In other states, to get admission in private universities, their expenses also increase and they have to face difficulties from time to time. We have now opened the doors for those private universities to come to J&K. Now we will go to different states and invite these universities to come here, to come to J&K, to come to Kashmir, to establish their campuses in remote areas. And our children, who had to leave J&K to get education, will now get education in those private universities here in J&K," he added.

Reaffirming his government's commitment to strengthening rural liveli-

Mehbooba Expresses Concern over Incidents Related to Cow Vigilantism in J-K

Observer New Service

Srinagar: PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti on Tuesday expressed concern over incidents related to cow vigilantism, and appealed to the BJP to refrain from actions that could disrupt peace and harmony in Jammu and Kashmir.

In a statement, a party spokesman said the PDP president urged restraint and caution. She appealed to the BJP to refrain from actions that could disrupt peace and harmony in the region, the spokesman said after the PDP president attended a party event in the Budgam district in central Kashmir.

"This is Jammu and Kashmir, and its sensitivities must be respected," Mufti said.

Commenting on India's foreign policy, the former chief minister of J-K claimed that "its

ties with Israel may influence international perceptions".

Reiterating that meaningful dialogue remains the only viable path forward, she invoked the approach of party founder and former CM Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, underlining that engagement and communication are essential to address grievances and work towards lasting peace.

According to PTI, Mufti stressed the need for sustained dialogue and deeper public engagement. Pointing to a series of the party's interactions with the public, Mufti said the initiative was not politically driven but aimed at listening to people, especially the youth.

"It was important to hear young voices. If the PDP can contribute in any way to easing their challenges, it would be a step in the right direction," she said.

Baisakhi Celebrated with Great Fervour

Observer New Service

The Baisakhi festival was celebrated with immense enthusiasm, devotion and spiritual fervour in Poonch.

The grand religious programme was organized in the presence of Sant Mahant Manjit Singh Ji, Head of Dera Santpura Nangali Sahib Poonch.

A large number of devotees from different areas thronged the venue and paid obeisance at the Gurudwara. Several dignitaries, including MLA Haveli Aijaz Ahmed Jan, DIG Rajouri-Poonch Sandeep Wazir, Deputy Commissioner Poonch Ashok Kumar Sharma, ADC Poonch, Tahir Mustafa Malik, SSP Poonch Shafiq Hussain Bhat, ACR Muad Sayeed, Tehsildar Haveli Azhar Majid, DySP Headquarters Neeraj Sharma, DySP DAR and SHO along with officers from the Army including Lt.Colonel, Major and other senior officers were also present and paid their respects. The Gurudwara Committee

honoured the dignitaries, who extended warm Baisakhi greetings to the devotees and saints present on the occasion.

The Health Department set up a medical stall where doctors were available to provide free check-ups to the devotees besides some other departments also set-up departmental stalls.

The celebrations were marked by soulful Gurbani Kiratan recited by renowned Ragi Jathas, creating a deeply spiritual atmosphere.

During the programme, S. Harcharan Singh, General Secretary of DGPC conducted the proceedings. Prominent speakers including S. Narinder Singh, President DGPC, Anmol Singh of Shri Guru Ramdas Sewa Society Poonch, S. Balbir Singh, Dr. Natar Singh and other religious leaders addressed the gathering. They highlighted the significance of Baisakhi and elaborated on Sikh history, especially the creation of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh Ji in 1699.

Man Booked in Budgam for Impersonating SSP on WhatsApp

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Police in the Budgam district of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday said an FIR was registered against a person for operating a fake WhatsApp account in the name of SSP Budgam.

"Budgam police station has received reliable information that an individual, Sameer Ali Bhat, a resident of Pallar Budgam, was sharing screenshots of chats with a fake WhatsApp account operating in the name of SSP Budgam among the general public and posing as a close aide

in order to influence people," a police spokesperson said.

Upon verification, it was found that Bhat is linked to multiple FIRs and was allegedly operating a fake WhatsApp account in the name of the SSP, the officer said.

According to PTI, Bhat was also sharing screenshots of conversations involving the fake account to portray himself as a close associate to have undue influence, according to police.

Acting swiftly on this information, a case has been registered under relevant sections of law, the spokesperson added.

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West Asia Conflict: India's Soybean Meal Exports Fall 63 Percent

PTI

Indore, Apr 14: India's soybean meal exports fell nearly 63 percent to 60,000 tonnes in March due to high prices and the conflict in West Asia, a processors' association said on Tuesday.

According to the Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA) estimates, 1.62 lakh tonnes of soybean meal had been exported in March 2025.

Soybean meal is left after soybean oil is extracted in processing plants. It is a significant source of protein and used to produce food products like soy flour and soybean chunks, as well as animal feed and poultry and fish feed.

SOPA Executive Director D N Pathak told PTI that Indian soybean meal prices have remained higher than those in other major exporting countries like the US, Brazil and Argentina for a long time.

"Due to the conflict in West Asia, the supply of Indian soybean meal to countries like Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Oman has been disrupted, increasing pressure on exports," Pathak said.

However, domestic consumption of soybean meal remained strong in March. According to SOPA estimates, soybean meal consumption in India rose to six lakh tons last month, up from five lakh tons in March 2025. It indicated that the domestic animal feed industry is supporting demand for soybean meal.

The conflict in West Asia began after the US and Israeli attacks on Iran on February 28.

Trump Faces Vatican Heat Over Attacks on Pope

AP

Vatican City, Apr 14: Inappropriate. Ridiculous. Absurd. Visitors to the Vatican on Tuesday had some choice words for US President Donald Trump after his harsh criticism of Pope Leo XIV for his calls to soften the rhetoric of war.

The world has buzzed at the extraordinary clash between the US-born pope and the American president. Trump called Leo "weak" and captive to the "radical left" on social media this week, after the pope called Trump's threats toward Iran "truly unacceptable."

At the Vatican, visitors had Leo's back while he was away on a 10-day trip to Africa.

"It's just ridiculous, because if the pope is not speaking about peace and is not taking care of every people in the world, he's not the pope," said Joerg Soler, who was visiting the Vatican from Switzerland.

"It's completely inappropriate," said Mariella Acciaoli, a French tourist. "Things are getting too much. We need to mobilise everyone, especially our leaders, to deal with this behavior that is going beyond every limit."

US tourist Paul Saruskas expressed disbelief at Trump's unprecedented broadside, calling it "absurd."

"I think he needs to keep his



nose out of religion. He's telling the pope what to do. He's telling the pope how to do his job," Saruskas said. "Where the pope just wants to do good things, right? He wants to talk about peace, about helping other people, whereas the current administration is doing something completely opposite. They're just tearing people apart. They're talking about division and war and hate."

Trump clearly expected the American pope to be "subservient" to the United States, said Italian journalist Massimo Franco, who has a new book, "Popes, Dollars and Wars," about U.S.-Vatican relations.

"A pope must be a pope. He must respond to a wider community. And if he sees that Trump's policy risks to give a distorted view of the United States, I think the pope is helping the United States as well, not just the United States, to find the right path," Franco said.

to the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education, said Trump's fury "against a moral voice" shows that "the president is powerless."

"He can't bring the pope to the same terrain where he has brought everyone else, where he can dominate with language," Spadaro told Italian Radio 24. "In this sense, the moral force of the church is evident. It is not a counter-power but a space in which power is being judged by criteria that power itself cannot control."

the Rev. Antonio Spadaro, a prominent Italian Jesuit theologian and undersecretary

No Man Worth His Salt Can Build a Babri Masjid in Bengal: Shah

PTI

Malda (West Bengal), Apr 14: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday asserted the BJP will not allow a Babri Masjid replica to be built in West Bengal once it "assumes power in the state after the assembly elections".

He even termed Humayun Kabir, the chief of the newly-formed Aam Janata Unnayan Party that is taking on both the BJP and the TMC in the upcoming state polls, an "agent" of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Kabir was suspended from the TMC in December last year after he proposed building a Babri-like mosque in the Beldanga area of Murshidabad district, bordering Malda.

Shah alleged that Kabir was "taking cues" from the Trinamool supremo for the proposed construction of his pet project.

"Mamata didi and Humayun Kabir should listen to me carefully. This is Bharat, and no man worth his salt can build a Babri Masjid here," Shah said at a poll rally at Gazole in Malda district.

"Humayun Kabir should listen with his ears open when I say the BJP won't allow the mosque to be built. Mamata Banerjee and her nephew should also know that their dreams of building that mosque will be shattered on May 5," Shah said at a rally held earlier in the day in Malda's Manikchak area.

Polling in West Bengal will be held in two phases -- on April 23

and April 29. Votes will be counted on May 4.

Kabir laid the foundation stone of the mosque on December 6 last year, the 33rd anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, with the project creating major political dust-up across the state.

The mosque is being built on approximately eight acres of private land, at an estimated cost of Rs 86 crore.

On Monday, while addressing multiple public meetings in Birbhum and Paschim Bardhaman districts, the Union home minister alleged that the TMC supremo and Kabir are "two of a kind".

At a rally in the coal mine belt of Raniganj in Paschim Bardhaman district, Shah had accused Banerjee of opposing the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and drew parallels with Kabir's initiative to build a Babri-style mosque.

"The Congress, Mamata Banerjee's TMC and other parties such as the DMK, Samajwadi Party, and Bahujan Samaj Party supported keeping Ram Lalla under a tent for 550 years.

"After receiving an overwhelming mandate from people in 2019, Modiji built the Ram temple in Ayodhya, which leaders like Banerjee opposed. Now, Humayun Kabir, who is cast in the same mould as Mamata Banerjee, wants to build Babri Masjid in Bengal," the former BJP chief said.

Sikhs Crowdfund to Legally Challenge UK's Anti-Muslim Hostility

PTI

London, Apr 14: A UK-based umbrella body of Sikh organisations has launched a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds to legally challenge the government's decision to launch a new anti-Muslim hostility definition.

UK Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Steve Reed had tabled the definition alongside a social cohesion strategy in Parliament last month as a crackdown on "unacceptable prejudice, discrimination

and hatred directed at Muslims or those perceived to be Muslim".

However, some British Hindu and Sikh groups had expressed concerns over the impact such a definition would have on freedom of religion in the UK.

"Freedom of religion and belief for British Sikhs is under threat with the government-backed 'anti-Muslim hostility definition,'" the Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) said.

"We are compelled to pursue judicial review due to the government's actions and their expected effect on British Sikhs and other

faith groups' ability to practice their beliefs.

"We believe there should be one law for all. As we previously stated, if there is a special government-backed definition for one group, why not for others - a 'tsar' for one, why then the exclusivity?"

"Allegations of 'anti-Muslim hostility' will act like non-crime hate incidents - that is they don't meet the criminal threshold, but are investigated, nevertheless, and this will have a chilling effect on freedom of speech and religious freedom. The process then be-

comes the punishment," it stated.

The NSO fears the new non-statutory definition will likely permeate extensively across schools, universities, councils, the workplace and the online arena.

"The definition poses problems that threaten free speech and will directly affect how British Sikhs (and other faiths) are able to express and manifest their faith, and moreover openly discuss their history," it noted.

The group is now preparing for a judicial review in court on the grounds that the government's

move interferes with protected Article 9, 10 and 14 rights under the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR).

Its Crowdfunder.co.uk campaign raised over 2,000 pounds of the 25,000 pounds target within days of its launch on Sunday. The group said it is joining the Free Speech Union and allied organisations and representatives of other faiths and beliefs to challenge the "ill-conceived definition" and all funds raised will contribute towards a legal fund for the judicial review.

"The definition safeguards our fun-

damental right to freedom of speech - about religion in general or any religion in particular - and ensures that concerns raised in the public interest are protected," Minister Steve Reed told Parliament last month.

The full definition reads: "Anti-Muslim hostility is intentionally engaging in, assisting or encouraging criminal acts - including acts of violence, vandalism, harassment, or intimidation, whether physical, verbal, written or electronically communicated - that are directed at Muslims because of their religion or at those who are

perceived to be Muslim, including where that perception is based on assumptions about ethnicity, race or appearance.

"It is also the prejudicial stereotyping of Muslims, or people perceived to be Muslim, including because of their ethnic or racial backgrounds or their appearance, and treating them as a collective group defined by fixed and negative characteristics, with the intention of encouraging hatred against them, irrespective of their actual opinions, beliefs or actions as individuals.

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