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Flag Hoisting & Festivities Mark I-Day Across J&K

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir celebrated the 80th Independence Day on Saturday with patriotic fervour, enthusiasm and widespread public participation, with the Tricolour unfurled across the Valley at official functions marked by ceremonial parades, cultural programmes and tableaux showcasing the region's heritage and development.

The main function was held at Bakshi Stadium in Srinagar, where Chief Minister Omar Abdullah hoisted the National Flag and took the salute at an impressive ceremonial parade. He inspected contingents of the J&K Police, security forces and school students, while a helicopter showered flower petals over the stadium amid applause from the gathering.

Former Chief Ministers Farooq Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly Sunil Sharma, National



Photo : Abid Bhat

Conference MLAs from Srinagar and senior civil and police administration officials attended the main function.

Addressing the gathering, Omar reiterated his government's commitment to restoring Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and constitutional guarantees,

while stressing development, employment, democracy and federalism.

The celebrations extended across all district headquarters of the Valley, where senior ministers, advisors and deputy commissioners hoisted the National Flag and took the salute at

ceremonial parades.

In Baramulla, Agriculture Minister Javid Ahmad Dar presided over the main function at Professor Showkat Ali Sports Stadium. The parade featured contingents of the BSF, CRPF, J&K Police, SSB, Home Guards, NCC cadets and | [More on P6](#)

Whatever Was Snatched From Us Should Be Returned: CM

Hoists Tricolour in Srinagar, Says 1947 Accession to India Was the Right Decision



Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday hoisted the National Flag at the main 80th Independence Day function at Bakshi Stadium here and renewed his government's commitment to restoring the Union Territory's statehood and constitutional guarantees, while calling for stronger federalism, transparent governance and a new era of development.

Abdullah also took the salute at the ceremonial parade and march-past comprising contingents of the J&K Police, security

forces and school students, besides brass and pipe bands of the J&K Police and schools.

Opening his address with the patriotic verse, "Sare Jahan Se Achha, Hindustan Hamara; Hum Bulbulein Hain Iski, Yeh Gulistan Hamara," Abdullah said the words captured the love, pride and emotional bond people share with the country. He described Independence Day as "a day of joy, a day of remembrance and a day of gratitude" and paid tribute to those who sacrificed their lives for India's freedom.

The Chief | [More on P6](#)

CM Hosts 'At Home' At SKICC

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah hosted an 'At Home' reception on the occasion of Independence Day at Sher-e-Kashmir International Convention Centre (SKICC) here this evening.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, former Chief Minister Dr Farooq Abdullah, Speaker Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather, Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament, several Legislators, Judges of the High Court, Chief Secretary, Director General of Police, Administrative Secretaries, senior civil and police officers, representatives of civil society and other prominent citizens | [More on P6](#)

5 Officers Receive CM's Award for Honesty, Integrity

The Government of Jammu and Kashmir has conferred the Chief Minister's Award for Honesty, Integrity and Meritorious Public Service for 2026 on five officers in recognition of their exemplary contribution to public administration and dedicated service to the Union Territory. According to Government Order No. 1406-JK(GAD) of 2026, issued by the General Administration Department on August 15, the awards have been sanctioned in favour of five officers for their outstanding public service. The awardees | [More on P6](#)



Truest Tribute To Martyrs Is to Safeguard Hard-Earned Freedom: LG

Calls for Unity, Jobs, Women Empowerment on I-Day

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday called for greater unity, integrity and commitment to nation-building while stressing the need to empower women and youth, generate employment and ensure environmental sustainability. Sinha was speaking after hoisting | [More on P6](#)

5 Killed As Vehicle Plunges Into Chenab In Kishtwar

KO Web Desk

Srinagar: Five people were killed after a Mahindra Scorpio skidded off the road and plunged into the Chenab River in the Dachhan area of Yaivan in Kishtwar district on Saturday, officials said.

Five bodies have been recovered so far, officials said. Rescue teams are ascertaining the identities of the deceased and the exact number of occupants of the vehicle as the rescue operation continues.

Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh said he spoke to Kishtwar Deputy Commissioner Pankaj Kumar Sharma after receiving information about the accident.

"Unfortunately, all five passengers travelling in the vehicle lost their lives on the spot,"

Singh said, expressing condolences to the bereaved families.

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha expressed deep anguish over the loss of five lives in the accident and conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families.

"Pained by the loss of five lives in a tragic road accident in Dachhan, Kishtwar. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families," Sinha said.

The Lieutenant Governor said he had directed the district administration and senior officials to ensure immediate assistance to the affected families and extend all possible support to those impacted by the tragedy.

CM Omar also expressed deep sorrow over the deaths, saying he was | [More on P6](#)

From AI to Nuclear Power, PM Lays Out 2047 Roadmap

AI training for 1 crore youth, 100 GW nuclear capacity and more semiconductor plants among key I-Day announcements

KO Web Desk

Srinagar: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday laid out an ambitious roadmap for a developed India by 2047, calling for bigger dreams, firmer resolve and accelerated reforms while announcing a series of initiatives spanning artificial intelligence, semiconductors, nuclear energy, defence, education, sports and women-led development.

Addressing the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the 80th Independence Day, Modi said India could no longer afford to move forward with "small dreams"



and called upon citizens to transform dreams into resolve, resolve into capability and capability into success.

"We can no longer move forward with small dreams. We must dream big, because big dreams expand our thinking.

They broaden the horizons of our vision as well," Modi said.

He said India's goal was to build a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, when the country completes 100 years of Independence, and asserted that the target could be achieved through the collective efforts of 140 crore citizens.

"Our resolutions must be firm," he said, adding that when resolve was strong, the ability to find a way through difficulties and disasters emerged on its own.

Modi also called for ending what he described as the "mentality of slavery" and urged citizens to draw inspiration from the | [More on P6](#)

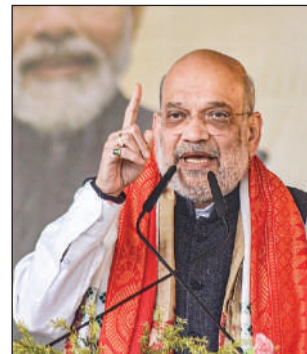
J&K Has Moved From Fear to Freedom Under Modi: HM

Agencies

Srinagar: Terming the Independence Day celebrations in Jammu and Kashmir as a symbol of the transformative changes witnessed by the region in recent years, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, J&K has "charted a journey from fear to freedom."

In a post on X, Shah wrote: "Jammu and Kashmir are symbol of the changes witnessed in the Union Territory in recent years. National flag is being waved across J&K with joy and pride. People are participating in Independence Day celebrations without any fear and threats,"

HM Shah said. | [More on P6](#)



"Celebrations in Jammu and Kashmir are symbol of the changes witnessed in the Union Territory in recent years. National flag is being waved across J&K with joy and pride. People are participating in Independence Day celebrations without any fear and threats," HM Shah said. | [More on P6](#)

Shrinkflation In Kashmir: Why Your 10-Rupee Girda Is Getting Smaller

As food costs rise, companies and sellers are reducing quantities, turning everyday purchases into a hidden drain on household budgets.

Irshad Mushtaq

Srinagar: The girda no longer seems enough to get Rukhsana Bhat's family through breakfast.

Around the table in her downtown Srinagar home, she has started hearing the same request: a little more bread, please.

Girda has long been part of the morning meal in Kashmir, usually eaten with hot tea.

Rukhsana used to buy the same bread from the same local baker, paying 50 rupees for five girdas and dividing it among her family of five.

Lately, one girda finishes faster than it used to.

The price at the bakery remains the same, but the bread in her hand has become smaller.

When Rukhsana asked the baker about the change, he pointed to the rising cost of flour.

His explanation revealed a broader pressure facing bakeries and food businesses, where the cost of basic ingredients has climbed while customers remain sensitive to price increases.

Economists call one response to that pressure shrinkflation: reducing the size, weight or quantity of a product while keeping its price unchanged or



moving it only slightly.

The difference from ordinary inflation comes down to what

the shopper sees.

"Inflation can be seen through higher prices for

vegetables, electricity, school fees and other household expenses," said Wasim Khan, a Srinagar-based economist. "Shrinkflation works through quantity."

A biscuit packet, Khan said, can continue selling for 10 rupees while its contents fall from 100 grams to 80.

Similarly, a chocolate bar can lose weight despite retaining its wrapper, while a chips packet can contain fewer chips in the same bright packaging.

"Both pressures reduce what a household can buy," Khan said. "But shrinkflation makes the change harder to spot."

Official figures | [More on P6](#)

J&K Lost Over 5,000 Govt Schools In A Decade

NITI Aayog Flags 146 Zero-Enrolment Schools

Agencies

Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir has seen a reduction of 5,089 government schools over the past decade, while the latest NITI Aayog assessment has highlighted another concern within the remaining network: 146 government schools had no students enrolled at all in 2024-25 and another 1,371 were functioning with only a single teacher.

Government data shows that the number of government schools in J&K fell from 23,874 in 2014-15 to 18,785 in 2023-24, a reduction of 5,089 institutions,

or more than 21 per cent of the network that existed at the beginning of the period.

The sharpest reduction came after 2018-19. The number of government schools stood at 24,080 in 2018-19 before falling to 23,165 in 2019-20 and remaining around 23,000 through 2021-22. It then dropped sharply to 18,785 in 2022-23 and remained at that level in 2023-24.

However, the figure of 5,089 should not automatically be interpreted as 5,089 schools being physically shut down. Government data has described the | [More on P6](#)



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Scholarships This Week

Kashmir Observer in association with Buddy4Study.com presents scholarships available for the meritorious students of Jammu and Kashmir

Scholarship Name 1: SBI Platinum Jubilee Asha Scholarship 2026

Description: The SBI Platinum Jubilee Asha Scholarship 2026-27, an initiative of SBI Foundation, supports meritorious students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds across India. It covers students from Classes 9 to 12 to undergraduate, postgraduate, medical, IIT, IIM and eligible overseas programmes.

Eligibility: Open to Indian nationals studying in Classes 9 to 12, undergraduate, postgraduate, MBBS, IIT or IIM programmes. Overseas Studies is open only to SC/ST Indian nationals.

Applicants must have at least 75% marks or 7.0 CGPA; SC/ST applicants receive a 10% relaxation. Annual family income must not exceed INR 3 lakh for school students and INR 6 lakh for other categories. General UG/PG institutions must have NAAC Grade 'A' or above or be among the Top 300 in NIRF Overall 2025-26. Medical applicants must study at AIIMS or a Top 50 NIRF medical institution. Overseas applicants must study at a Top 200 QS/THE-ranked institution and have a valid offer or acceptance letter. Category-specific entrance or proficiency scores may apply.

- Prizes & Rewards: Scholarships ranging from INR 15,000 to INR 20,00,000 per academic year will be awarded depending on the scholarship category. (*T&C Applied)
- Note: Scholarship support may be utilised for eligible education-related expenses such as tuition fees, accommodation, books, examination fees and educational equipment.
- Scholarship renewal is not automatic and is subject to continued eligibility, academic performance and verification each year.
- Last Date to Apply: 04-09-2026
- mode: Online applications only
- Short Url: www.b4s.in/observer/SBISF20
- QR Code: <https://d1e9eg0t05513.cloudfront.net/static/images/scho-media/sbi-platinum-jubilee-asha-scholarship-20261786449537.png>

Scholarship Name 2: Parivartan ECSS Programme 2026-27

Description: The Parivartan ECSS Programme 2026-27 is a scholarship initiative aimed at supporting meritorious and financially underprivileged students from Class 1 to the postgraduate level

Eligibility: Open to students in Classes 1 to 12, diploma, ITI, polytechnic, undergraduate (general and professional), and postgraduate (general and professional) courses

Minimum 55% marks in the most recent qualifying examination

Annual family income from all sources must not exceed INR 2.5 lakh
Open to Indian nationals only
Note: Preference will be given to applicants who have experienced a personal or family crisis in the past three years that has significantly impacted their ability to continue their studies

- Prizes & Rewards: Scholarship up to INR 75,000 based on education level.
- Last Date to Apply: 31-08-2026
- Application mode: Online applications only
- Short Url: www.b4s.in/observer/HDFC63
- QR Code: <https://d1e9eg0t05513.cloudfront.net/static/images/scho-media/parivartan-ecss-programme-2026-271786449527.png>

Scholarship Name 3: JK Tyre Shiksha Sarthi Scholarship Program 2026-27

Description: The JK Tyre Shiksha Sarthi Scholarship Program 2026-27, an initiative by JK Tyre & Industries Limited, supports daughters of heavy vehicle drivers pursuing undergraduate or diploma courses in general or professional fields. Eligible students from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu can receive scholarships of up to INR 25,000, with the possibility of renewal for the duration of the course, subject to academic performance and renewal criteria.

Eligibility: For female students who are daughters of heavy vehicle drivers and are enrolled in general or professional undergraduate courses or diploma courses.
Must have secured at least 55% marks in the previous academic year.
Annual parental income from all sources must not exceed INR 5,00,000.
Applicants must be residents of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka or Tamil Nadu.

- Prizes & Rewards: Selected students will receive scholarships up to INR 25,000
- Last Date to Apply: 10-09-2026
- Application mode: Online applications only
- Short Url: www.b4s.in/observer/JKTS4
- QR Code: <https://d1e9eg0t05513.cloudfront.net/static/images/scho-media/jk-tyre-shiksha-sarthi-scholarship-program-2026-271786449521.png>

Scholarship Name 4: Nikon Scholarship Program 2026-27

Description: Nikon India Private Limited has



launched the Nikon Scholarship Program 2026-27, offering up to INR 1,00,000 to students pursuing professional photography courses of 3 months or more. The program aims to nurture young visual talent and remove financial barriers to creative education.

Eligibility: Must be an Indian citizen. Must be currently pursuing a professional photography-related course with a minimum duration of three months.
Must have passed Class 12 (any stream).
Annual parental income from all sources must not exceed INR 6,00,000

- Prizes & Rewards: Scholarship up to INR 1,00,000 based on the actual course fee.
- Last Date to Apply: 24-08-2026
- Application mode: Online applications only
- Short Url: www.b4s.in/observer/NIKON14
- QR Code: <https://d1e9eg0t05513.cloudfront.net/static/images/scho-media/nikon-scholarship-program-2026-271785206520.png>

Scholarship Name 5: Panasonic Ratti Chhatr Scholarship 2026-27

Description: The Panasonic Ratti Chhatr Scholarship 2026-27 an initiative by Panasonic Life Solutions India aims to support first-year B.E./B.Tech students from low-income families admitted to any IIT by providing annual financial assistance of INR 70,250.

Eligibility: Open to students across India who have secured admission to B.E. or B.Tech. programs at any Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) for the academic year 2026-27.
Applicants must have completed their Class 12 examination with a minimum of 75% marks.

The annual family income should not exceed INR 8,00,000 from all sources.
Only candidates from the 2026-27 batch are eligible to apply.

- Prizes & Rewards: Scholarship of INR 70,250 per year.
- Note: Scholarship support will be provided until 2028, with the possibility of an extension.
- Last Date to Apply: 20-08-2026
- Application mode: Online applications only
- Short Url: www.b4s.in/observer/RCSFP7
- QR Code: <https://d1e9eg0t05513.cloudfront.net/static/images/scho-media/panasonic-ratti-chhatr-scholarship-2026-271785206513.png>

Scholarship Name 6: Satya Scholarship Program 2026

Description: The Satya Scholarship Program 2026, an initiative by Nehru Sidhant Kender Trust, offers 100% tuition fee coverage and accommodation support to meritorious Class 12 graduates from Punjab pursuing 3-5-year undergraduate or integrated master's programmes in Commerce, Engineering, and Medical & Health Sciences at select institutes – ensuring financial barriers do not stand in the way of higher education.

Eligibility: Open to first-year students in 3 to 5-year undergraduate or integrated master's courses in BBA, B.Com, B.Tech, B.E. (all streams), B.Sc. (Engineering), BCA, B.Arch, MBBS, BDS, BPT, B.Sc. (Nursing), B.Sc. (Allied and Healthcare).
Must have passed Class 12 Board Exam from a recognised board in Punjab with at least 60% aggregate.
Students from Punjab in 38 selected institutes in

Ludhiana or top 50 NIRF-ranked institutions in India are eligible.
Annual parental income must not exceed INR 8 lakh; guardian income limits apply for orphans. Applicants must be Indian citizens and not recipients of any other educational scholarship.
Note: Preference for girl students, sportspersons, persons with disabilities (PwD), orphans, and children of single parents.
Prizes & Rewards: 100% annual course fee coverage for the entire course duration, with additional support for hostel, accommodation, and meals as per program guidelines.

- Last Date to Apply: 31-08-2026
- Application mode: Online applications only
- Short Url: www.b4s.in/observer/SAT3
- QR Code: <https://d1e9eg0t05513.cloudfront.net/static/images/scho-media/satya-scholarship-program-20261783398813.png>

Scholarship Name 7: Muskaan Scholarship Program 2.0 (2026-27)

Description: The Muskaan Scholarship Program 2.0 (2026-27), an initiative by Valvoline Cummins Private Ltd. (VCPL), supports students in Classes 9 to 12 from southern, eastern, and northeastern India. The program aims to help children of commercial drivers, mechanics, and EWS category students continue their education.

Eligibility: Students studying in Classes 9 to 12 from Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Tripura, Puducherry, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana are eligible to apply.
Open to children of commercial drivers, including LMV/HMV drivers, children of mechanics, and students belonging to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) category.
Applicants must have secured 60% and above in their previous class.
The total annual family income from all sources must not exceed INR 8 lakh.
Children of employees of Valvoline Cummins Private Ltd. (VCPL) and Buddy4Study are not eligible.
Prizes & Rewards: Selected students will receive scholarship benefits as mentioned below. Scholarship of up to INR 12,000 (based on actual expenses)
Mentorship support (Session on Road Safety)

- Last Date to Apply: 20-08-2026
- Application mode: Online applications only
- Short Url: www.b4s.in/observer/MKSP3
- QR Code: <https://d1e9eg0t05513.cloudfront.net/static/images/scho-media/muskaan-scholarship-program-2-0-2026-271780373884.png>



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KU Marks 80th Independence Day with Patriotic Fervour

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The University of Kashmir (KU) on Saturday celebrated the 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour at its Main Campus and satellite campuses, commemorating the country's freedom struggle and paying tribute to the sacrifices of the freedom fighters who made India's independence possible.

Vice-Chancellor, University of Kashmir, Prof Nilofer Khan presided over the flag-hoisting ceremony.

sion, Prof Khan recalled the long struggle for India's independence and the sacrifices made by generations of freedom fighters to ensure that future generations could live with dignity and honour. She said Independence Day is not merely an occasion to celebrate freedom but also an opportunity to reflect upon the responsibilities that come with it.

"Freedom was achieved after years of struggle and sacrifice so that future generations could live with dignity and



mony at the Main Campus. The National Flag was unfurled with full honour and respect, followed by the singing of the National Song and National Anthem. A ceremonial guard of honour was also presented on the occasion by a contingent of the University Police.

Speaking on the occasion,

honour. Independence Day reminds us of the responsibility that rests upon each one of us as responsible citizens. We must honour the legacy of our freedom fighters and work towards building a nation that thrives on unity, equal opportunity and the true spirit of democracy," Prof Khan said.

Skill Development Key to Nation Building: Dr Owais Ahmad

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Dr. Owais Ahmad (IAS), Director, Skill Development Department, unfurled the National Flag at Government Polytechnic for Women, Srinagar today as part of the Independence Day celebrations.

The flag-hoisting ceremony was held on the college grounds on 15 August 2026 and was attended by a large and diverse gathering that included senior officials from the Police and paramilitary forces, representatives from the Directorate of Skill Development, principals of polytechnic colleges and ITIs across the region, faculty members, and students from various polytechnic colleges and ITIs.

The event commenced with the National Anthem following the flag hoist. In his brief address, Dr. Owais Ahmad (IAS) highlighted the importance of skill development in nation building and urged students to seize vocational training opportunities to contribute

to local and national development. He lauded the role of technical education institutions in empowering youth and praised the collaboration between training providers and industry partners in supporting community resilience.

Dr. Owais Ahmad (IAS) welcomed and thanked all participating institutions and security personnel for their support in ensuring the ceremony's smooth conduct. The programme also included patriotic songs by students and trainees, showcasing discipline and enthusiasm.

Dr. Owais Ahmad also felicitated the students of Government Polytechnic for Women for their exemplary performance in the recently held examinations, applauding their hard work and dedication.

The occasion reinforced the Department of Skill Development's commitment to merging patriotic values with practical skill-building, and to preparing students for meaningful employment and entrepreneurship.



Lal Chowk's Ghanta Ghar Becomes I-Day Attraction for Tourists, Locals

Agencies

Srinagar: For many visitors, a trip to Kashmir begins with its mountains, lakes and Mughal gardens. But for tourists who made their way to Srinagar's historic Lal Chowk on Independence Day, the memory of the Valley came with a different backdrop: the iconic Ghanta Ghar wrapped in Tricolour.

The Clock Tower became an unlikely meeting point for tourists and locals as Independence Day celebrations brought people together around one of the city's best-known landmarks.

According to KNO, visitors stopped to take photographs, wave the Tricolour and soak in the festive atmosphere, while locals joined the

celebrations, turning the usually bustling commercial square into a colourful gathering.

What made the scene different from an ordinary day was the quietness around it. With most shops and business establishments closed for the holiday, traffic remained thin on the city's roads, and fewer people were seen outside.

Across Srinagar, including Downtown and uptown areas, the usual bustle gave way to a slower holiday mood, with many residents choosing to remain at home.

Those who did step out were largely seen around places where Independence Day celebrations were being held, including Lal Chowk, where the Ghanta Ghar drew tourists and locals for photographs and a glimpse of the festivities.

For some tourists visiting Kashmir for the first time, the experience was less about ticking off another sightseeing spot and more about witnessing the city at its symbolic centre.

"This is my first trip to Kashmir, and I am enjoying my stay here. This place is as beautiful as heaven, and I cannot describe it in words," Karan, a tourist from Mumbai, said.

For locals too, the otherwise crowded commercial hub offered a different experience as the holiday brought a quieter rhythm to Lal Chowk. "It is wonderful to see such a diverse range of people participating in the celebrations. It brings a sense of unity and pride in our country," said Gulzar Ahmad, a resident of Karan Nagar, Srinagar, who runs a tea cart near Court Road.

FCS&CA Kashmir Marks 80th Independence Day

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Directorate of Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs (FCS&CA), Kashmir celebrated the 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour and enthusiasm here today.

The national flag was hoisted by Director, Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, Kashmir, Nazim Zai Khan. Joint Director, Shaheena Khan; Financial Advisor/Chief Accounts Officer, Peerzada Ahtishamul Haq; Deputy Director, Mohammad Rafeeq Bhat; officers and officials of the department were also present.

On the occasion, the Director extended his warm greetings and heartfelt congratulations to the nation and all employees of the Department on the auspicious occasion of Independence Day.

He appreciated the participation of all employees in the celebrations and urged them to continue working with commitment and a spirit of public service towards strengthening the delivery mechanism and ensuring that the benefits of Government schemes reach the deserving population in a transparent and efficient manner.

DIPR Celebrates 80th Independence Day at Srinagar

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) on Saturday celebrated the 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour and enthusiasm at the DIPR Media Complex here.

The celebrations were led by Director Information, Shreya Singhal, who hoisted the National Flag.

On the occasion, the Director Information extended warm greetings to all officers and officials on the 80th Independence Day. She highlighted the significance of the day, recalling the sacrifices of the freedom fighters and the values of unity, democracy, integrity and national service that continue to guide the nation.

Joint Director Information (Hqrs), Dr. Zahoor Ahmad Raina; Deputy Director Information (PR/AV), Javid



Ahmad Rather; other officers and officials of the DIPR were also present on the occasion.

SKUAST Celebrates 80th Independence Day with Patriotic Fervour

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-K) celebrated the 80th Independence Day with great patriotic fervour and enthusiasm at its Shalimar Campus on Saturday.

The National Flag was ceremonially hoisted by Prof. Nazir Ahmad Ganai, Vice Chancellor, SKUAST-K, in the presence of University officers, Deans, Directors, faculty members, staff and students. The ceremony was followed by the singing of the National Anthem.

Addressing the gathering, the Vice Chancellor, reaffirmed SKUAST-Kashmir's commitment



to advancing agricultural development, empowering farmers and contributing to the national vision of Viksit Bharat. He emphasised that agricultural universities have a vital role in strengthening

food and nutritional security, promoting sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture, fostering innovation and taking scientific knowledge and technologies to farming communities.

He also called upon the students to become responsible citizens and active contributors to nation-building. Emphasising the importance of holistic education, he encouraged students to broaden their intellectual horizons by engaging with the history, literature and diverse knowledge traditions of the country alongside their professional studies.

The enthusiastic participation of students added vibrancy and pride to the celebrations, reflecting their spirit of patriotism, unity and national commitment. Their participation made the occasion a memorable expression of love for the nation and hope for its future.

Independence Day celebrations were also held across the University's faculties, colleges, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and research stations. Deans, Associate Deans, Heads of KVKs and Heads of Research Stations led the flag-hoisting ceremonies at their respective campuses and stations, with faculty, staff and students participating enthusiastically.

The celebrations reaffirmed SKUAST-Kashmir's commitment to excellence in education, research, innovation and extension, and its continued endeavour to contribute to the development of a self-reliant agricultural sector and a prosperous Viksit Bharat.

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HIGHWAY STATUS



- Sgr-Jammu highway - (Open)
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**HIJRI
CALENDAR**

2 Rabi-ul-Awwal
1448

PRAYERS

FAJR	4: 21
ZUHR	12:35
ASR	5: 22
Magrib	7: 21
ISHA	8: 48

This Day In History

- 1384- Hongwu Emperor of Ming China, Emperor Dong, hears case of couple who tore money bills while fighting over them (equal to act of destroying stamped government documents - law necessitated 100 floggings). Hongwu Emperor decides to pardon them.
- 1513- Battle of the Spurs at Guinegate (now Eguinegate): Henry VIII of England and Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I beat France
- 1570- Treaty of Speyer establishing Principality of Transylvania signed by King of Hungary John Sigismund Zápolyai and Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II
- 1748- Dutch East Indianman The Geldermalsen sails to the East Indies
- 1777 American militiamen defeat British forces at the Battle of Bennington near Vermont, during the American Revolutionary War
- 1780- British decisively defeat Americans in Battle of Camden, South Carolina
- 1787- Turkey declares war on Russia (Russo-Turkish War 1787-92)
- 1794- Hungarian revolutionary Ignác Martinovics arrested in Vienna
- 1797- Comet C/1797 P1 (Bouvard-Herschel) approaches 0.0879 AUs of Earth
- 1865- Restoration Day in the Dominican Republic: The Dominican Republic regains its independence after four years of fighting against the Spanish annexation
- 1869- War of the Triple Alliance: A Paraguayan battalion composed of children is massacred by the Brazilian Army during the Battle of Acosta Nu
- 1906 - 8.6 earthquake destroys Valparaiso Chile, fire kills 20,000
- 1907- Mulay Hafid is proclaimed the Sultan of Morocco by supporters leading to civil war; Mulay is supported by Germany while France supports the existing Sultan
- 1908- The Committee of Union and Progress, 'The Young Turks', announces a program for reforms and respect for the rights of all within the Ottoman Empire, regardless of race or religion
- 1914- World War I: Battle of Cer begins.
- 1924 Dutch-Turkish peace treaty signed
- 1940- Pioneering 'Blood for Britain' program sending blood plasma for WWII wounded from the US, headed by Charles R. Drew, officially begins in Britain
- 1940 - 45 German aircrafts shot down over England
- 1944 First flight of the Junkers Ju 287.
- 1945 Puyi, the last Chinese Emperor and ruler of Manchukuo is captured by Soviet troops
- 1946 - Direct Action Day: Widespread riots erupt in Calcutta between Muslims and Hindus over whether Pakistan should be a separate state, killing over 4,000 and leaving 100,000 homeless
- 1948 - Arabs blow up Latrun pumping station in Jerusalem
- 1948 - Israeli pound becomes legal tender
- 1953 - Shah of Persia Mohammed Reza Pahlavi & princess Soraya flee to Baghdad & Rome
- 1959 - USSR introduces installment buying
- 1960 - Britain grants independence to crown colony of Cyprus
- 1972 - Morocco King Hassan II's B727 shot during failed coup attempt by General Mohamed Oufkir. Reportedly, King Hassan grabbed the radio and told the rebel pilots "Stop firing! The tyrant is dead!", fooling pilots to break off attack
- 1984 - NASA launches Ampt
- 1987 - Astrological Harmonic Convergence-Dawn of New Age
- 1988 - IBM introduces software for artificial intelligence
- 1990 - China performs nuclear test at Lop Nor, PRC
- 1990 - Iraq orders 4000 Britons & 2500 Americans in Kuwait to Iraq
- 2003 - Cristiano Ronaldo (18) makes his debut for Manchester United and the Premier League in a 4-0 home victory over Bolton Wanderers
- 2012 - Wikileaks founder, Julian Assange is granted political asylum by Ecuador



Aksa Muzamil

Kashmir floods again this year, and the script rarely changes.

Rivers rise past their banks, roads vanish under brown water, families climb to rooftops, and rescue boats move through streets that used to be markets.

Cameras capture the damage, officials promise reviews, and the story fades until the next storm forces it back into the news.

That cycle raises a question officials keep avoiding: If Kashmir has lived alongside flooding for centuries, why does each new episode do more damage than the last?

Meteorologists can measure how much rain fell in a given storm. Hydrologists can explain why a swollen river breaks its banks. Scientists have spent decades tracking Kashmir's disappearing wetlands and thinning forests.

Still the destruction keeps getting worse, storm after storm, even when rainfall totals resemble past decades.

The deeper problem lies outside the weather models entirely. It lives in economics.

Environmental science tells Kashmir what is happening to its rivers and forests. It does not explain why officials, builders, and residents keep making choices that damage those same systems, decisions whose consequences have been documented well in advance.

The answer starts with a term almost nobody outside a university lecture hall uses: assimilative capacity.

Ecosystems absorb pollution, regulate water flow, recycle nutrients, and recover from disturbance, all without sending an invoice. Kashmir's wetlands, forests, and floodplains performed this work without notice for centuries.

They slowed floods, filtered waste, held slopes together, and refilled groundwater. But none of it counted in a government ledger or a GDP report.

That capacity has a ceiling.

Push an ecosystem past it long enough, and it stops delivering the services people built their lives around. Degradation, in other words, is not only the loss of scenery. It is the slow collapse of a system's ability to protect the people living inside it.

Kashmir is watching that collapse happen in real time.

Hokersar Wetland has shrunk under decades of encroachment. Wular Lake keeps losing ground to silt and pollution. The floodplains along the Jhelum, once open ground that absorbed excess water, now hold houses, roads, and shops. The marshes around Srinagar that once buffered the city have narrowed to a fraction of their former size. Forests that slowed runoff on the hillsides have been cut into fragments.

Looked at one at a time, none of these changes reads as a crisis. But add them together, and a different picture forms: a valley losing, piece by piece, the buffer that once kept ordinary rainstorms from becoming disasters.

A warmer atmosphere holds about seven



When Nature Sends the Bill

Wetlands vanish, floodplains fill with concrete, and the bill lands on people who never approved the deal.

percent more moisture per degree Celsius of warming, so rain that once fell over several days now often lands within a few hours. That physical fact plays a real role.

Climate change explains part of this shift, but it does not explain why identical amounts of rainfall now cause so much more damage than they used to. The more honest explanation is that Kashmir has spent decades dismantling the natural systems that once absorbed that rainfall before it could do harm.

The environment itself has not turned hostile. People have stripped away its ability to protect them.

Climate change decides how much rain falls, while environmental degradation decides how much of that rain turns into disaster.

This is where environmental economics earns its place beside environmental science.

Science diagnoses the problem: rising temperatures, disappearing wetlands, thinning biodiversity, all documented and undeniable. Diagnosis on its own changes nothing on the ground. Economics asks the harder question: why do

wetlands keep turning into commercial plots, why do floodplains keep filling with construction, why do rivers get treated as drains instead of assets that keep an entire valley alive?

The answer is not complicated. Kashmir's economic system rewards people for actions that produce private profit while pushing the environmental cost onto other people.

Economists call this a negative externality, and Kashmir runs on it.

A builder who puts a structure on a floodplain pockets the return. But the families living nearby absorb the flood risk that construction creates.

A factory that pollutes a lake cuts its own costs while fishermen, hoteliers, and downstream towns pay the price in ruined water and lost tourism.

Clearing a forest raises its short-term commercial value while the landslides, erosion, and flooding that follow become a public bill nobody chose to sign.

Private gain becomes public loss, over and over, and calling it an environmental problem understates what it actually is. It is a market

failure, plain and simple.

Kashmir is building something else alongside its skyline: an economy of vulnerability.

A vanished wetland raises the cost of the next flood. A thinned forest sends more water downhill, faster. A polluted lake loses part of what made it valuable in the first place. An occupied floodplain multiplies the bill for the next heavy storm.

The geography beneath Kashmir has barely changed in centuries, but the price of living on that geography keeps climbing.

Kashmir has depreciated its natural capital while piling up debts in artificial infrastructure, disaster relief, compensation, and reconstruction, and much of that spending never shows up as a loss on record.

When floods wreck a bridge or a road, rebuilding it boosts GDP. The wetland that vanished, the forest that thinned, the lake that lost its filtering power, none of that registers as a cost anywhere in official statistics.

Growth built on fixing damage that better planning would have prevented is not real prog-

ress. It is a treadmill dressed up as an economy.

There is a fix available, and it starts with better accounting.

The United Nations' System of Environmental-Economic Accounting treats forests, wetlands, rivers, and lakes as productive assets instead of empty land waiting for a buyer. Put natural capital on the books, and its loss stops being invisible to policymakers and voters alike.

Accounting alone will not solve this. Incentives have to change too.

Communities that protect upstream forests and catchments cut flood risk and improve water supply for towns downstream, and they should get paid for that work through payment-for-ecosystem-services programs, the same way any other valuable labour gets compensated.

Builders who put concrete on wetlands or floodplains should face real costs for the risk they create, through Pigouvian levies that shift the bill for future disasters back onto the people generating them, rather than leaving taxpayers to cover it later.

Conservation should stop being framed as the opposite of development. A working wetland can protect a city better than an embankment built to replace it. An intact forest can prevent a landslide more cheaply than any engineering fix that follows one. A healthy river performs services that no pipe or pump can fully replace.

None of this happens through government policy alone. Residents decide, block by block, whether a river becomes a dumping ground or stays a functioning waterway, whether forests stay standing, whether waste gets managed responsibly.

Policy sets the incentives, while people decide whether those incentives take hold.

Kashmir has not passed the point where recovery becomes impossible. Wetlands can be restored, forests replanted, river corridors rebuilt, and lost buffering capacity brought back with sustained investment and political will.

Environmental economics is not asking Kashmir to pick between growth and conservation. It is showing that lasting growth cannot happen without conservation, because functioning ecosystems are not obstacles standing in the way of prosperity. They are the foundation prosperity sits on.

Kashmir's flooding crisis is not only a climate story. It is also the story of an economic model that has spent decades pricing nature at zero and then acting surprised when nature sends the bill.

The real threat facing the valley is not heavier rain or more frequent cloudbursts alone. It is the habit of treating wetlands as vacant lots, forests as obstacles, and rivers as engineering problems instead of capital worth protecting.

Cloudbursts and flash floods keep delivering the same message, storm after storm: nature has limits. Economists call those limits assimilative capacity.

Kashmir no longer has room to debate whether those limits exist.

The only real question left is whether the valley redesigns its economic choices before those limits close for good.

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A Tax Too Far

Three separate rulings have sided with vehicle owners, but transport officials keep demanding money the law does not allow them to collect.



Hamid Rather

A driver who moves a car from Delhi, Chandigarh, or Haryana into Jammu and Kashmir should be able to complete the documents without a fight.

Instead, that simple task has turned into a trip through several government counters, and often ends with a walk into the High Court.

The dispute centers on a 9 percent road or token tax that officials demand on vehicles already registered and taxed somewhere else in India.

The question resurfaced this summer in Mohammad Maqbool Mir and Another v. Union Territory of J&K, a petition heard by the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh at Srinagar on July 8, 2026.

The petitioners, represented by this writer, asked the court to order new J&K registration marks for their vehicles. They pointed to an earlier ruling, Zahoor Ahmad Bhat v. Government of J&K, as settled law on the point.

The court disposed of the case by directing the ARTO in Pulwama to decide the applications within one month. That order settled the immediate dispute, but the larger one remained open.

The Transport Department defended its demand by invoking Section 3 of the J&K Motor Vehicles Taxation Act, 1957, arguing that the 9 percent charge

amounted to a road tax on vehicles using J&K's roads, separate from anything decided in Zahoor Ahmad Bhat.

That earlier case, decided on April 29, 2021, drew a line the department has struggled to accept.

A Division Bench of the High Court held that assigning a new registration mark is not the same as registering a vehicle for the first time. Under Section 46 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, a registration granted in one state holds good throughout India. Section 47 simply calls for an owner to apply for a new mark once a vehicle has stayed in another state or union territory for more than twelve months.

The vehicle keeps its identity even though its plate changes.

Since lifetime tax had already been paid at the point of original registration, the bench ruled, the department lacked grounds to collect it again on the same vehicle.

The court did preserve the department's power to check documents and confirm that a vehicle is genuine.

But the government pushed back and took the fight to the Supreme Court.

The apex court dismissed the special leave petitions on grounds of delay in August 2023.

The controversy could have ended there, but it only grew.

Ishfaq Ahmad Tramboos owned a car registered in Gurgaon. When he applied for a J&K registration mark, the Transport Department told him to pay 9 percent of the vehicle's declared value, close to Rs 4 lakh, before it would process his application.

The department again cited Section 3 of the taxation act, insisting the charge was a legitimate road tax and



pointing out that Zahoor Ahmad Bhat had ruled on an administrative circular rather than on the constitutionality of Section 3 itself.

That distinction has some legal weight and merits genuine attention. But the High Court had already considered it.

On August 9, 2024, Justice Javed Iqbal Wani allowed Tramboos's petition and ordered the authorities to assign his registration mark under Section 47 without collecting the 9 percent charge.

The ruling left little room for a different reading.

The Transport Department retains a legitimate role in checking vehicles that enter J&K. Verifying chassis numbers, engine numbers, ownership papers, insurance, and no-objection certificates is sound administration, and the courts have said so explicitly.

The trouble starts when regulation

turns into a second tax bill that judges have already found unsustainable.

Consider the numbers. A 9 percent charge on a car worth Rs 5 lakh comes to Rs 45,000. On a Rs 10 lakh vehicle, it climbs to Rs 90,000. On costlier vehicles, the bill can reach several lakh rupees.

Owners are left with two options: pay up or go to court. Good government keeps citizens out of that position.

The used-vehicle business feels this pressure hardest. Dealers routinely buy cars in Chandigarh, Haryana, or Delhi that are already properly registered and taxed. If a fresh demand lands the moment those cars enter J&K, the math of the sale changes overnight.

Inventory becomes costlier to hold, working capital gets tied up, and sales slow down.

Buyers grow wary of a process they cannot predict, and dealers absorb one

more layer of compliance work on top of what already exists.

J&K has a legitimate interest in regulation, but its businesses also have a legitimate interest in knowing what the rules actually are.

Then there is the technology problem, which calls for close attention on its own.

The Transport Department's online portal apparently lacks a built-in path for processing applications from owners who fall outside the 9 percent charge under the court's rulings. The department has reportedly approached the National Informatics Centre to build that function. If that account is accurate, the fix demands action right away.

A government portal cannot become a source of law in its own right.

When courts interpret the law to permit a vehicle owner to secure a new registration mark without paying the disputed tax, the online system needs to make that outcome possible. A judicial order should always prevail over a software gap.

Case-by-case litigation is no substitute for a system built to follow the law from the outset.

The path forward runs through administration, well before it reaches a courtroom.

The Transport Department, the Law Department, the Finance Department, and the NIC should sit down together and write one clear standard operating procedure for vehicles entering J&K from elsewhere in India.

That procedure should separate temporary visitors from vehicles that stay beyond twelve months, address ownership transfers, spell out how a new registration mark gets assigned, and set a distinct track for cases involv-

ing fraud or faulty documents.

The portal should then be rebuilt around that procedure. Officials should issue one set of instructions to all RTOs and ARTOs so that two citizens in similar circumstances are not treated differently depending on which office they happen to visit.

Elected representatives, automobile associations, dealers, and civil society groups all have standing to press the government for that clarity, because this issue affects far more people than the ones who end up in court.

The government can lawfully collect taxes it is entitled to collect. That much is settled. The real question is narrower and harder to dodge: can a citizen who already paid lifetime tax on a car in another state be billed 9 percent again, simply because the vehicle needs a new registration mark after coming to J&K?

Zahoor Ahmad Bhat answered that question in 2021. The Supreme Court left that answer standing in 2023. Ishfaq Ahmad Tramboos confirmed it again in 2024.

Mohammad Maqbool Mir should be the moment the government stops treating individual cases as fresh fights and starts treating the answer as settled.

What remains, ultimately, is a test of whether an ordinary citizen still has to knock on a courtroom door to make an administrative office follow the law that already governs it.

The disputed 9 percent is only the trigger. That test calls for a policy answer, rather than another writ petition.

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Where Do Abandoned Babies Go in Kashmir?

A grandfather watching over his sick grandson at Srinagar's G.B. Pant Hospital discovered how the hospital had become an unofficial safety net for abandoned infants.



Syed Nissar H. Gilani

My grandson Raed was born on April 12, 2012, in a private nursing home in Srinagar, and the house filled with the noise a family makes when it has been waiting for good news.

Calls came in from uncles in Jammu, cousins in Delhi, and neighbours who barely knew us.

Then his chest tightened with infection, and the pediatricians sent him straight to G.B. Pant Children's Hospital in the cantonment area.

I spent the next several days standing beside his crib while nurses moved through a ward so full that beds nearly touched.

He got oxygen, fluids, and the attention that comes from people who have learned to work fast without looking rushed.

Standing there long enough, a person starts to notice things the staff has stopped seeing.

A foreign woman came through the ward with police officers beside her, stopping at particular prams, saying little. Outside the ICU, other women handed out toffees to visitors, as if marking an occasion nobody had announced.

Foreign visitors are not common in that ward, and unidentified ones are barred outright, so her presence pulled every head toward her

without a word being spoken.

I asked the then Medical Superintendent, Dr. Jaweed Chaudary, what was going on. His answer reset how I understood the hospital I had been sitting in all week.

Infants get left near the gates or found in public spaces around the city, he told me, and the hospital takes them in, treats them, and raises them toward health because that is the job, whatever the circumstances of their birth.

Once they recover, they become eligible for adoption, and the police visits I had been watching were part of the documents that hands a child from the state to a family.

The foreign woman, it turned out, ran an NGO and wanted permission to adopt some of these infants.

Indian policy bars foreign nationals from adopting abandoned children, a rule built to keep oversight inside the country, so her request went nowhere.

Two of those infants, a boy and a girl, were adopted by a couple from Srinagar I have stayed close to since. They are now in ninth grade at a well-regarded school, raised as brother and sister, and doing well by every measure that matters to a parent.

Their story is the good outcome. It also happens to be rare, and rarity is the problem worth sitting with.

Consider what desperation without a system looks like elsewhere first.

In April 1975, during the collapse of South Vietnam, the United States ran Operation Babylift, an effort to move more than three thousand orphans out of the country by air. On April 4, a C-5A Galaxy carrying 314 people, 243 of them infants and children, lost its rear cargo door at 23,000 feet. The explosive decompression damaged the flight controls, and Captain Dennis "Bud"



G.B. PANT HOSPITAL DOES THE WORK OF CATCHING WHAT IT CAN, staffed by people who treat abandonment as a medical emergency rather than a moral failure

belonging to someone else. But a hospital reacting case by case is not the same thing as a system built to intercept a crisis before it turns fatal.

Traynor still managed to bring the crippled plane back toward Saigon, putting it down in a rice paddy short of the runway.

One hundred and thirty-eight

people died. One hundred and seventy-six survived, including 149 infants pulled from the wreckage still strapped into their improvised cribs.

Even inside a catastrophe like that, the instinct to protect an infant held.

Germany built its Babyklappe decades ago, a padded, monitored

box set into a hospital or clinic wall where a parent in crisis can leave a newborn anonymously and walk away without prosecution.

An alarm alerts staff within seconds, and the child gets immediate care and a legal path into adoption.

Japan runs something similar, South Korea does too. The United States has Safe Haven Baby Boxes installed at fire stations and hospitals throughout dozens of states, built on the same premise: give a frightened parent a legal, monitored option, and fewer children end up in dumpsters or stairwells.

Kashmir has no such option. Newspapers here carry the grim record: infants left in roadside bins, on shrine steps, and in alleys where help comes too late.

G.B. Pant Hospital does the work of catching what it can, staffed by people who treat abandonment as a medical emergency rather than a moral failure belonging to someone else. But a hospital reacting case by case is not the same thing as a system built to intercept a crisis before it turns fatal.

What Kashmir needs is not complicated, and other countries have already built the blueprint.

State-sanctioned cradles at major hospitals, staffed and monitored, where a parent can leave a newborn without fear of arrest, would convert a hidden tragedy into a manageable one.

Pair that with clear legal protocols and a regulated adoption process, and Srinagar could offer the boy and girl now in ninth grade something better than an exception. It could offer them a rule.

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The Faces Behind the Door

A father in quarantine watching his children through a door hinge understood something about the pandemic that case numbers never could.



Syed Majid Gilani

I grew up watching soldiers empty a street within minutes, shopkeepers pull down shutters overnight, and a single hartal call silence a whole town by noon.

Closure was known to me way before 2020. A city standing still was something I had witnessed since my teenage years, so when the lockdown came, part of me recognized the outline before I understood what filled it.

Srinagar's roads went bare, its markets went dark, and its masjids stood without the crowds that had filled them my whole life.

On the surface, it looked like the shutdowns I already knew.

But the surface misled me, and working out why took the length of the pandemic. All the previous closures I had lived through had a source you could name: a strike called by a particular group, a curfew ordered from a specific office, a threat you could avoid by staying off one road. Covid gave us nothing to name.

The danger came in a cough, a handshake, a barber's fingers near your face, and it left no trace behind.

I had seen a bullet take a life and leave a wound, but this disease could take a life without a mark on the body, sometimes without a sign until a test came back positive.

That absence of a visible enemy is what separated this closure from all the ones before it, and it is why the fear settled so deep into ordinary gestures.

Handshakes disappeared first. People began bumping fists instead, because six feet became the unit we measured trust by. A cough or a snuffle turned a guest into a suspect. Nobody wanted to seem unwelcoming, so the watching stayed silent, but it stayed constant.

Entry into and exit from Jammu and Kashmir came under strict control. Anyone arriving had to test at designated centres, including the airport and the Tourist Reception Centre, and those who tested positive moved straight to quarantine.

Hotels that had spent years courting tourists began housing the infected instead, a reversal nobody could have scripted a year earlier.

Rumour filled the space that certainty left behind. Someone swore by ginger, someone else by cinnamon, and forwarded messages promised cures with a confidence no doctor could match.

Alongside the home remedies came the theories: some called the whole thing a drama staged for political ends, others framed it as a war launched from China. Most of those claims collapsed under scrutiny within months.

What never collapsed was the disease itself, visible in empty streets, in overwhelmed hospitals, in families who lost someone and could not gather to grieve properly.

Ordinary trades of daily life became calculations. A haircut meant sitting inches from a stranger's hands and breath, something none of us had thought twice about before.

Barbers began washing their instruments with antiseptic in front of customers, a small ritual that suddenly felt necessary rather than fussy.

I remember getting a haircut one afternoon and returning home to learn, within hours, that the same barber had tested positive and been taken to quarantine.

I had sat in his chair, and he had leaned close to trim my beard. There was nothing left to do except wait



and hope, and Alhamdulillah, I stayed well.

That single afternoon captured the whole period better than any statistic could: you could follow every precaution and still spend the following days uncertain of your own body.

The state's own machinery bent around the crisis. I was deputed for essential duty and posted to hotels converted into quarantine centres, checking that food, hygiene and medicine reached people who had been pulled from their routines and placed among strangers.

Colleagues went to the airport, others to the Tourist Reception Centre, moving on special passes that let us cross a city that had otherwise stopped moving. Thousands of arrivals spent fourteen days confined to rooms far from home during those early months, and looking back, the coordination behind that scale of quarantine, however imperfect, kept

a vulnerable situation from turning into something far worse.

Children paid a different price. Schools closed and classes moved online, but many households in Kashmir had never owned a smartphone or a stable connection before that year.

Parents scrambled to buy devices they had never budgeted for, and siblings shared a single screen for lessons that once happened in a room built for exactly that purpose.

Some students used the disruption well and went on to do better than before. Others drifted toward television and idle scrolling.

Doordarshan brought back Ramayan and Mahabharat, and adults who had watched those serials as children found themselves watching again, this time with children of their own beside them, when the ban on family visits made even that shared screen feel like company.

Months into the outbreak, the virus

found me directly.

I tested positive and spent a short stay in the Covid ward at SKIMS, Soura, before returning home to quarantine in a ground-floor room with the door kept shut.

I could not sit beside my family or move through the house I lived in. But near the door hinges, small gaps let me see my children's faces and hear their voices, and those glimpses did more for me than any medicine on the shelf.

A father listening for his children through a crack in a closed door says more than any figure in a newspaper. A curfew kept armed men off your street, while Covid kept your own children out of reach.

Vaccination eventually arrived, and with it came fresh doubt.

Messages about side effects moved from phone to phone with the same speed the ginger cures once had, but most people took their doses anyway,



I think about the barber's washed instruments, the door hinge, the empty masjids, the passes on our windshields, more often than I think about any official count of cases.

worn down by months of waiting for an ordinary life to resume.

Bit by bit, restrictions lifted. Shops opened fully, offices filled again, and masjids stood shoulder to shoulder the way they always had. Markets grew loud once more.

I think about the barber's washed instruments, the door hinge, the empty masjids, the passes on our windshields, more often than I think about any official count of cases.

Kashmir has survived closure before, but the Covid closure taught something a curfew never could: how much of ordinary life depends on being near the people you love, and how quickly that nearness can be taken away by something you cannot even see coming.

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CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Flag Hoisting &

school students. Various government departments also presented tableaux highlighting development schemes and initiatives, while students staged cultural performances on patriotic and social themes.

In Anantnag, Education Minister Sakina Itoo hoisted the National Flag at Shaheed Himayun Muzzamil Memorial Government Degree College, Khanabal, and took the salute at a parade comprising J&K Police, paramilitary forces, NCC cadets and schoolchildren. She highlighted the government's focus on education, healthcare, infrastructure, employment and youth empowerment. Cultural programmes and a prize distribution ceremony were also held.

In Kupwara, Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani hoisted the Tricolour at District Police Lines and reviewed the parade comprising J&K Police, CRPF, paramilitary forces and students. Departmental tableaux showcased ongoing development projects, while the Advisor highlighted initiatives relating to roads, education, healthcare, sports, employment and civic infrastructure.

Similar celebrations were held in other Valley districts, with deputy commissioners and senior officials leading the ceremonies. Government departments, educational institutions and other public institutions also organised flag-hoisting programmes and cultural events.

The celebrations were not confined to official venues. Lal Chowk in Srinagar wore a festive look, with hundreds of tourists and visitors gathering around the iconic Clock Tower. The area was decorated with Tricolours and witnessed patriotic slogans, cultural displays and public celebrations.

Across the districts, the programmes featured march-pasts by police and security forces, NCC cadets and schoolchildren, besides cultural performances reflecting patriotism, national unity and Jammu and Kashmir's rich cultural heritage. Various departments also used tableaux to showcase developmental works and government initiatives.

Independence Day celebrations were also organised at district court complexes, government offices and educational institutions across Kashmir. Judicial officers, employees and members of the legal fraternity hoisted the National Flag and reaffirmed their commitment to constitutional values, justice and public service.

The Directorate of Information and Public Relations and other government departments in Srinagar also held flag-hoisting ceremonies, with officers and employees paying tribute to freedom fighters and reiterating their commitment to public service.

Elaborate security arrangements were put in place across the Valley for the celebrations. Security personnel were deployed around major venues, with heightened checking and surveillance measures to ensure peaceful conduct of the functions.

Despite the heightened security, there were no restrictions on the movement of people and mobile internet services remained functional without disruption.

The celebrations across Jammu and Kashmir reflected a mix of official ceremonies, public participation, patriotic performances and cultural programmes, with the Tricolour flying at public institutions, government offices and prominent locations across the Valley.

Truest Tribute

the National Flag at Lok Bhavan on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day. A ceremonial police contingent presented the National Salute.

Paying homage to the freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country, the Lieutenant Governor recalled the difficult journey and struggle behind India's independence. He also paid tribute to civilians who lost their lives in natural calamities this year.

"On this historic day, I join all citizens in paying heartfelt tributes to our founding fathers and the valiant sons and daughters of Mother India who sacrificed their lives for country's freedom. Let us strive to realize their cherished dreams of building a peaceful, prosperous Jammu Kashmir and a great nation," Sinha said. "The truest tribute we can pay to our martyrs and freedom fighters is to resolve to work with integrity and safeguard our hard-earned freedom," he added.

While acknowledging the challenges ahead, Sinha expressed confidence in India's potential to emerge as a global leader and called upon citizens to work together to build an inclusive society that prioritises public interest and extends compassion to the underprivileged.

"Let us strive for balanced growth and the economic empowerment of women to build a more humane and compassionate society. We must prioritize empowering women and youth, generating jobs and ensuring environmental sustainability," he said.

Sinha said ongoing initiatives to revitalise heritage sites, restore ancient monuments and undertake large-scale afforestation drives reflected the administration's commitment to sustainable development.

He also emphasised the importance of active citizen participation in realising the vision of a self-reliant Jammu and Kashmir and Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Calling upon the people of Jammu and Kashmir to dedicate themselves to nation-building, the Lieutenant Governor stressed the need for transparency and accountability in governance.

Sinha also congratulated J&K Police and Central Armed Police Forces personnel who received gallantry medals on the eve of Independence Day.

He commended sportspersons from the Union Territory for their achievements and contribution to Jammu and Kashmir's pride, and urged citizens to renew their commitment to serving the nation with greater vigour, sincerity and dedication.

Whatever Was

Minister said his government was committed

to building a stronger Jammu and Kashmir and taking it to the next level in development, prosperity and progress, while continuing to pursue restoration of statehood and constitutional guarantees.

"We will continue to represent you. We will continue to serve you. We will continue to do our work to bring Jammu and Kashmir to that level," Abdullah said.

He said honouring the sacrifices made for the freedom and future of Jammu and Kashmir meant fulfilling the aspirations left behind by those who had laid down their lives.

"Whether it is to bring Jammu & Kashmir to that level again, whether it is to restore the constitutional guarantees of Jammu and Kashmir, whether it is to regain the special status of Jammu & Kashmir, or whether it is to start a new era of progress in J&K, your government is not only a promise for all these things, but your government will make it a reality," he said. "Strengthening federalism starts with J&K"

Abdullah described democracy and federalism as two of India's biggest strengths and said both needed to be preserved, strengthened and deepened.

"Our country is a Union of States. To save and strengthen federalism, we must start with Jammu and Kashmir. Whatever was snatched from us should be returned so that our identity does not just remain in words, but is put into practice," he said.

He argued that strengthening federalism was not limited to converting a Union Territory back into a state, but required strengthening the powers of states.

"When central agencies start interfering in the affairs of states, federalism suffers. When the powers of a state are eroded, hollowed out, and used by central agencies, federalism suffers, and the result is often seen on the streets," he said.

Referring to education and health, Abdullah said these had traditionally been areas in which states played an important role. He said national-level examinations for national institutions were legitimate, but state institutions should retain the right to conduct their own examinations and admissions.

He cited examinations such as NEET and JEE while arguing that the rights of states over admissions to their medical and engineering institutions had been curtailed. He said recent student protests reflected concerns arising from such centralisation.

Focus on transparent recruitment

The Chief Minister also stressed the need to restore public confidence in recruitment and admission processes.

He said young people in Jammu and Kashmir had been forced to take to the streets amid allegations of irregularities and fraud in recruitment examinations.

"The truth is that destroying credibility from a thing or a system is a matter of minutes, but re-establishing credibility takes years," he said.

Abdullah said recruitment and admissions in Jammu and Kashmir should be transparent, merit-based and fair so that those genuinely deserving jobs or seats received their rightful opportunities.

He said development, prosperity and employment could not be achieved through words alone and that the real test was translating commitments into action.

The government's efforts, he said, were aimed at ensuring that every young person in every village could see a ray of hope and feel that Jammu and Kashmir was moving from uncertainty towards a better future.

Sys accession decision was right

Abdullah also recalled the role played by people of Jammu and Kashmir in resisting the tribal invasion of 1947.

Referring to the situation across the Line of Control, he said it reinforced his belief that the decision taken by the leaders of Jammu and Kashmir 80 years ago to accede to India was the right one.

"When I see the situation across the border and the Line of Control, I realise that our ancestors who said 'Hamtlavar Khabardar, Hum Kashmiri Hain Tayyar' were right. I realise that 80 years ago, the decision our leaders took for us was the right decision," he said.

He recalled the contribution of National Conference founder Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and local volunteers who resisted the Pakistan-backed tribal invasion before the Indian Army reached the region.

Abdullah particularly remembered NC leader Master Abdul Aziz, who was killed in Muzaffarabad while attempting to resist the attack.

Referring to Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, Abdullah said the people living there were not strangers but part of Jammu and Kashmir.

"We consider those people as our own," he said, pointing out that seats in the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly continue to be kept vacant for representatives from that part of the region in the hope that they would one day occupy them.

CM Hosts 'At

attended the reception.

The Chief Minister interacted with the guests on the occasion and exchanged Independence Day greetings and best wishes with them.

5 Officers Receive

are Kuldeep Krishan Sidha, JKAS, Director, Archives, Archaeology and Museums, J&K; Anil Sharma, JKAS, Additional Resident Commissioner, J&K Government, New Delhi; Amit Vermani, JKAS, Additional Secretary to the Government, General Administration Department; Prof. Naseer Iqbal, Registrar, University of Kashmir, Srinagar; and Er. Sami-Ullah Beigh, Superintending Engineer, UEED, Jal Shakti/PHE R.W.S Division, Ganderbal.

As per the government order, each awardee will receive a cash prize of 51,000 along with a citation in recognition of their honesty, integrity and meritorious public service.

The awards were announced as part of the Independence Day celebrations and recognise

officials for their commitment, professionalism and excellence in discharging their public responsibilities.

The order was issued by M. Raju, IAS, Commissioner/Secretary to the Government, General Administration Department, on August 15, 2026.

The General Administration Department has circulated the order among senior government functionaries, including Financial Commissioners/Additional Chief Secretaries, the Director General of Police, Principal Secretaries, Divisional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, heads of departments, public sector undertakings and other concerned authorities.

The recognition is aimed at encouraging integrity, accountability and excellence in public administration across Jammu and Kashmir.

5 Killed As Vehicle

deeply pained by the loss of five precious lives in the unfortunate accident.

He conveyed his heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved families, prayed for peace to the departed souls and strength to the families to bear the irreparable loss.

The Chief Minister also directed the District Administration, Kishtwar, and senior officials to ensure immediate assistance and all necessary support to those affected by the accident

Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary also expressed grief over the loss of lives and directed the district administration and senior officials to assist those affected.

"Praying for strength for everyone affected by this devastating tragedy," Choudhary said.

From AI to Nuclear

visions of leaders and freedom fighters including Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, B R Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Raiguru, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Birsu Munda and Jyotiba Phule.

AI push, technology and innovation

Technology and innovation formed a major plank of the Prime Minister's address, with Modi announcing that one crore young Indians would receive artificial intelligence skills training over the next year.

He said the country was entering an era defined by AI, quantum technology, space, robotics and data centres and should not merely become a market for global technology.

"We must become a global hub for innovation," he said.

Modi said India should take the lead in next-generation communications and set a goal of ensuring that Made-in-India 6G technology reaches the world.

He highlighted India's digital public infrastructure and UPI as examples of its technological capabilities and said these strengths should now be taken into emerging areas.

He also pointed to India's growing startup ecosystem, saying there were more than 2.5 lakh registered startups and referring to the Rs 1 lakh crore Innovation Fund.

Semiconductor self-reliance

Calling chips indispensable to electronics, medical equipment and transportation, Modi said India could not afford to remain dependent on overseas supplies for critical technologies.

Three semiconductor plants have already started production, he said, adding that another five to eight plants are expected to come up over the next seven to eight years.

He said semiconductor self-reliance would provide India with a major pathway towards becoming a developed nation.

Energy security and nuclear power

Energy security was another central theme of the address, with Modi warning that geopolitical tensions and the weaponisation of resources and strategic sea routes had exposed the vulnerabilities created by dependence on overseas supplies.

He announced a target of 100 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047 and said five new nuclear reactors would be commissioned during this decade.

Modi also highlighted offshore oil and gas exploration, saying 99 per cent of India's sedimentary basins had been opened for exploration and production.

He referred to the Rs 84,084-crore Samudra Manthan National Offshore Exploration Scheme, aimed at accelerating exploration in deepwater and ultra-deepwater areas.

The Prime Minister said India's solar power generation had also risen sharply over the past decade, from 2 GW to 160 GW.

Free online coaching for competitive exams

In another major youth-focused announcement, Modi said the government would establish a network providing free online coaching for competitive examinations.

He said coaching had become a major financial burden for poor and middle-class families and that digital public infrastructure, teachers and available talent would be brought together to provide quality coaching online.

The initiative, he said, would allow students to remain close to their families while reducing the financial burden of coaching.

Sports talent hunt for future Olympians

With India aiming to host the 2036 Olympics, Modi announced a nationwide talent hunt for children between five and 15 years of age.

The programme will identify promising sportspersons from villages, cities and schools and provide selected children with specialised training.

Modi said India currently participates in only a fraction of the events held at the Olympics and stressed that preparation for 2036 had to begin with children who were five, 10 or 15 years old today.

He also said India would host the Commonwealth Games in 2030 and was emerging as a strong contender to host the 2036 Olympics.

Modern civil defence network

Highlighting the changing nature of warfare, Modi announced plans to establish a modern civil defence network and a large volunteer force trained to respond to contemporary threats.

He said future conflicts could target refineries, banks, data centres, factories and other critical infrastructure rather than remaining confined to border areas.

"The civil defence systems that have developed in our country in accordance with the wars of the last century have become outdated," he said.

The proposed system will familiarise citizens with modern technologies and prepare them to respond to new forms of threats.

Modi linked the initiative to the government's broader security push and said work on Mission Sudarshan Chakra was progressing rapidly.

He also highlighted India's growing defence manufacturing capabilities and called for the country to become a global supplier of advanced defence technologies, including drones, counter-drone systems and hypersonic technology.

J&K Has Moved

The remarks came on the 80th Independence Day, with celebrations being held across Jammu and Kashmir amid heightened security arrangements.

Meanwhile, J&K is witnessing massive public participation in the Har Ghar Tiranga Campaign 2026, being held from August 9 to 17 to mark the 80th Independence Day.

The campaign also holds special significance this year as the country commemorates the 150th anniversary of India's National Song, "Vande Mataram".

The administration has distributed more than 14 lakh National Flags across all 20 districts as part of efforts to ensure widespread participation and retain the Union Territory's top national ranking in public engagement under the campaign.

Pertinently, on August 12, LG Sinha led a flagship Tiranga rally from the Sher-i-Kashmir International Convention Centre (SKICC) to the Botanical Garden in Srinagar.

A spectacular Tiranga Shikara Rally was also held simultaneously on Dal Lake, with around 250 decorated boats taking part in the celebrations.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and other senior leaders had joined the celebrations, highlighting the spirit of national unity and patriotism across Jammu and Kashmir.

The week-long campaign features a series of programmes and activities across the Union Territory, with citizens, government departments and various organisations participating in the celebrations.

The administration has urged people to display the Tricolour at their homes and workplaces and participate in the campaign to strengthen the spirit of patriotism and national unity. (KNO)

Shrinkflation In

already show the wider pressure on food budgets.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation recorded consumer food inflation at 3.47 percent in February 2026 and 4.20 percent in April. The Consumer Food Price Index covers food and beverages, prepared meals, snacks, sweets and non-alcoholic drinks, categories that feature prominently in Kashmiri households.

Jammu and Kashmir's own price data on essential commodities also points to continuing pressure on household purchases.

And that pressure reaches well beyond flour. "Producers face higher expenses for flour, sugar, milk powder, cocoa, packaging, transport, wages and fuel," said Mehnaz Hassan, a financial expert. "A visible price increase can push shoppers toward competing brands."

Cutting the quantity inside a packet allows companies to retain the printed price while drawing less attention from buyers.

Most shoppers remember what a product costs, but far fewer remember its exact weight or piece count.

A review of Srinagar's markets shows how such reductions are appearing in everyday shopping.

Kulcha, girda and lavasa can retain their per-piece prices while becoming thinner. Toast and rusk packets can contain fewer pieces, while biscuits and chocolates aimed at children can become lighter inspite of retaining their brand packaging.

Tea, spice blends, masala pouches, soap bars and cooking-oil pouches can also lose small amounts of quantity over time.

But quantity tells only part of the story.

"Some products change in composition," said Hamid Zargar, a trader in Srinagar.

A sweet, he said, can replace real dry fruit with a cheaper filler, while a chocolate can contain less cocoa and retain the same wrapper.

"The customer then pays the established price for a smaller or less expensive product," Zargar said.

Packaging can make such changes harder for shoppers to notice. Phrases such as "new pack," "improved taste" and "family pack" compete for attention while the net weight often appears in smaller print.

Nasir Ahmad, who runs a grocery store in Rajbagh, said most customers focus on the large price printed on a product.

"They ask the price, I tell them the price, they buy it," he said. "Nobody checks the number printed underneath in small letters."

However, the financial effect of this 'unchecked practice' becomes clearer over time.

A few missing grams from a biscuit packet may seem insignificant at the moment of purchase. Similar reductions in bread, tea, snacks, soap, oil and masala, repeated through the month, can push household spending higher without producing a clear price increase on any single receipt.

Families working with tight monthly budgets can feel the cumulative effect most sharply.

"An open price increase gives shoppers a visible figure to account for," Khan said. "A smaller packet scatters the increase through dozens of purchases."

Consumer advocates advise shoppers to

read net weight and piece counts alongside the printed price.

Comparing similar products by quantity can reveal differences hidden by the headline price. Keeping a simple record of how much bread, biscuits or cooking oil a household buys can also expose changes that memory misses.

Hassan said families can make quantity checks part of their regular shopping habits and teach children and older relatives to do the same. Switching brands when reductions become frequent can also influence purchasing decisions.

The issue reaches beyond household budgets, as companies that preserve margins by reducing quantities can maintain short-term earnings while giving customers less product for their money.

Investors examining such businesses have reason to distinguish genuine growth from revenue sustained through smaller quantities.

The pressure also reaches household savings with rising prices reducing purchasing power, while smaller products squeezing it through the contents of popular packets.

Both pressures can come together, leaving families to spend more to maintain the same basket of goods.

As a result, quintessential Kashmiri homemakers like Rukhsana Bhat have changed the way they shop.

Some mornings, she studies the girda before putting it on the breakfast table. She looks at its size, and thinks about how much bread her family will want with their tea.

The price has remained 10 rupees for months, but what those 10 rupees buy her family has changed.

J&K Lost Over

reduction in terms of closure and merger, while the NITI Aayog report places the broader national trend in the context of school rationalization, consolidation and merging of under-enrolled institutions.

NITI Aayog's latest report, as per the news agency Kashmir News Trust based on UDISE+ 2024-25 data, says the decline in the number of schools nationally reflects consolidation of the school network, including rationalization and merging of under-enrolled institutions. The report argues that the objective is to optimize resources rather than simply increase the absolute number of schools.

But the J&K figures raise a question that goes beyond the arithmetic of school rationalization.

If thousands of government schools have been removed from the network while hundreds of the schools that remain have virtually no students or only one teacher, the issue is no longer simply how many school buildings exist. It is whether the restructuring has produced a more accessible and better staffed education system for children, particularly in remote and difficult terrain.

The NITI Aayog report records 146 government schools in J&K with zero enrolment in 2024-25. Despite having no students, these schools continued to exist in administrative records, with 61 teachers posted across them. The report notes that zero-enrolment schools can continue to receive financial and human resources because administrative records are not always updated to reflect the ground reality.

The situation is accompanied by a large number of single-teacher schools. According to the same NITI Aayog table, 1,371 J&K schools had only one teacher, serving a combined enrolment of 32,303 students. Such schools can require a single teacher to handle multiple grades and administrative responsibilities, creating obvious limitations for classroom instruction.

The problem becomes more significant when viewed against J&K's learning outcomes.

In PARAKH 2024, J&K recorded 46 per cent in Language, 39 per cent in Mathematics and 41 per cent in The World Around Us, compared with all-India averages of 57 per cent, 46 per cent and 49 per cent respectively. J&K therefore remained below the national average in all three assessed areas.

This creates a more complicated picture than a simple claim that school closures have either improved or damaged education.

On one hand, maintaining extremely small or empty schools can consume teachers and public resources without serving students effectively. On the other, indiscriminate consolidation in a geographically difficult region can increase the distance children have to travel and make access to education harder, particularly in remote and sparsely populated habitations.

NITI Aayog itself acknowledges this tension in its assessment of difficult geographies, noting that rural and remote regions, particularly those with difficult terrain, can face long travel distances, rough roads and irregular transport, making regular attendance challenging. It says dispersed settlements and low-density habitations complicate efforts to provide schools within easy reach of every community.

The report therefore raises a question for Jammu and Kashmir that cannot be answered merely by celebrating rationalization: where have the children from the schools that disappeared from the network gone, how far do they now travel for schooling, and has the merger of institutions actually improved teaching and learning?

There is another issue requiring scrutiny. The latest data shows that the problem is not simply an excess of schools. J&K simultaneously has zero-enrolment schools and a substantial number of single-teacher schools. That suggests that school rationalization, teacher deployment and student distribution may not yet be aligned effectively.

The figures also raise questions about the basis on which schools were selected for merger or closure, whether minimum-distance norms were maintained in remote areas, and whether the Government assessed the impact on enrolment, attendance and dropout rates before consolidating institutions.

NITI Aayog's findings therefore present a mixed picture for J&K: the government school network has contracted sharply, yet the remaining system continues to contain schools with no students and a large number operating with only one teacher, while learning outcomes remain below the national average. [KNT]

80th Independence Day Celebrated Across Kashmir with Patriotic Fervour

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The 80th Independence Day was celebrated across Kashmir Division with patriotic fervour and enthusiasm, with colourful functions organised at district, sub-divisional, tehsil, block and panchayat headquarters.

At district headquarters, Deputy Commissioners hoisted the National Flag, inspected ceremonial parades and took the salute from contingents of police, security forces, NCC cadets and school students. The celebrations also featured vibrant cultural programmes showcasing Kashmir's rich heritage and



patriotic spirit.

In Shopian, DC Shishir Gupta hoisted the Tricolour at District Police Lines and highlighted the

values of unity, peace, development and collective responsibility. Similar functions were held across Kulgam, Gander-

bal, Bandipora and Pulwama, where the respective Deputy Commissioners paid tributes to freedom fighters and outlined developmental achievements and priorities.

At Ganderbal, DC Jatin Kishore highlighted progress in connectivity, healthcare, education, agriculture, tourism and youth entrepreneurship, while stressing a whole-of-society approach against drug abuse.

In Bandipora, DC Indu Kanwal Chib highlighted infrastructure, tourism and livelihood initiatives, particularly in Gurez, and called for a "Nation Before Self" approach.

At Pulwama, DC Dr Basharat

Qayoom highlighted development in health, education, agriculture and infrastructure, while emphasising youth empowerment and the fight against drug abuse.

Similar celebrations were held in Anantnag, Budgam, Handwara, Karnah and Sopore, marked by flag hoisting, parades, cultural programmes and public participation.

Meritorious students, officials, police personnel, journalists and achievers were felicitated at several venues. The celebrations concluded with renewed pledges towards unity, peace, constitutional values and the vision of a developed India.

Jammu Celebrates 80th Independence Day with Patriotic Fervour

Observer News Service

JAMMU: Government departments, courts and educational institutions across Jammu division celebrated the 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour and enthusiasm, with flag-hoisting ceremonies, cultural programmes and tributes to freedom fighters.

The Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) celebrated the occasion at its Rail Head Complex office, where Joint Director Information Jammu Deepak Dubey hoisted the National Flag. The ceremony began with Vande Mataram and was followed by the National Anthem.

The Jammu Wing of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh also observed the day with dignity. Justice Sindhu Sharma hoisted the National Flag, followed by a National Salute and guard of honour by a CISF contingent. A police band presented patriotic melodies.

Similar celebrations were held at district courts and District Legal Services Authorities in Jammu, Doda, Udhampur, Samba, Reasi, Kathua and Rajouri, where judicial officers, lawyers, staff and students participated in the ceremonies.



Government departments including Health Services, Agriculture, Horticulture and EPFO, besides Central Jail Jammu, also organised Independence Day functions.

Educational institutions, including GDC Ramkote, GDC Kastigarh, GDC Katra, GDC Paloura, Government Polytechnic College Reasi and SCERT Jammu, marked the occasion with flag hoisting, patriotic programmes and addresses stressing unity, constitutional values and responsible citizenship.

The celebrations reaffirmed the collective commitment to nation-building and the ideals of freedom, justice, equality and democracy.

Educational Institutions, Departments Celebrate Independence Day across J&K

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Educational institutions and government departments across Jammu and Kashmir celebrated the 80th Independence Day on Saturday with patriotic fervour, enthusiasm and a renewed commitment to nation-building.

At Government Polytechnic for Women, Srinagar, Director Skill Development Department Dr Owais Ahmad hoisted the National Flag in the presence of senior officials, representatives of the Directorate of Skill Development, principals of polytechnic colleges and ITIs, faculty members and students.

The ceremony began with the National Anthem. Addressing the gathering, Dr Owais highlighted the importance of skill development in nation-building and urged students to make the most of vocational training opportunities to contribute to local and national development.

He stressed the role of technical education institutions in empowering youth and appreciated the collaboration between training providers and industry partners. Patriotic songs were also presented by students and trainees. Dr Owais felicitated students



of Government Polytechnic for Women for their exemplary performance in recently held examinations.

At the Jammu and Kashmir Entrepreneurship Development Institute (JKEDI), Sempora, Pampore, Director Mohd Younis Malik hoisted the National Flag in the presence of officers and officials.

Addressing employees, Malik emphasised the importance of entrepreneurship and self-employment in strengthening the economy of Jammu and Kashmir. He called for scaling up entrepreneurial activities and creating greater opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and employment.

Referring to the vision of

tribute to freedom fighters and national leaders and underlined the role of educational institutions in producing responsible, informed and socially conscious citizens.

She said education was not merely about acquiring knowledge but also an instrument for strengthening democracy, promoting social harmony and fostering responsibility towards the nation. She urged students to uphold constitutional values, unity in diversity, discipline, integrity, inclusiveness and social responsibility.

Meanwhile, Government Middle School, Moghalpura, also celebrated Independence Day in the presence of local dignitaries, parents, students and teaching staff. The function was presided over by Headmaster Muhammad Rafi Bajar.

Addressing the gathering, Bajar called for inculcating patriotism, discipline, unity and a spirit of service among students. He urged citizens to discharge their duties with honesty and sincerity and stressed that students, as the future of the nation, should strive for excellence and good character.

The programme concluded with special prayers for the security, progress and prosperity of the country.

Independence Day Celebrated at Juvenile Justice Board Kupwara



Observer News Service

KUPWARA: Today the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) Kupwara celebrated the 80th Independence Day at its premises wherein the national flag was hoisted by the Principal Magistrate, Juvenile Justice Board Kupwara, Shri Mudasir Bashir in the presence of the Member, JJB Kupwara, Shri Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Chairperson and Members of the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), Kupwara, Staff of Social Welfare, Staff of District Child Protection unit Kupwara, members of the Child Helpline and staff members of other units associated with the juvenile justice and child protection system.

In accordance with the

new instructions the national song "Vande Mataram" was sung first followed by the National Anthem. The participants joined in the singing with a deep sense of patriotism and respect for the nation.

The flag-hoisting ceremony was followed by the distribution of sweets and a high tea for all participants. During the interaction, the principles and values underlying independence were highlighted. Special emphasis was laid on the collective responsibility of all stakeholders towards protecting the rights, dignity, and welfare of children and ensuring that every child gets an opportunity to grow in a safe, supportive, and enabling environment.

Independence Day-2026 Celebrated at SANJY Base Camp

Observer News Service

ANANTNAG: The 80th Independence Day of India was celebrated with great enthusiasm and patriotic fervour at the Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra Base Camp, Chandanwari, Pahalgam on Saturday.

The National Flag was hoisted by the Chief Guest, Santosh Sharma (JKAS), Additional Camp Director, Chandanwari, in the presence of officers and personnel of the AD-HOC VI Unit, ITBP, along with representatives of the Army, Jammu & Kashmir Police, medical teams, SDRF, Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Board and other departments engaged in the smooth conduct and management of the Yatra.

The ceremony witnessed the participation of senior officers and personnel, including Rajesh Lu-

thra, ADHOC Commander; Gyan Singh, DC (Ops); Kulwant; and Devender, Assistant Commandant.

The Jammu & Kashmir Police contingent, led by Sub-Inspector Rashid, also participated in the ceremony along with the police team. Representatives and personnel from medical teams, SDRF, Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Board, security forces and other departments actively participated in the celebrations.

Addressing the gathering, Santosh Sharma paid rich tributes to the freedom fighters and national heroes whose sacrifices secured the country's independence. He highlighted the values of unity, integrity, service and dedication to the nation, and appreciated the exempla-



ry coordination among all security, civil, medical and support agencies deployed at the Yatra base camp.

He also acknowledged the commitment and dedication of the personnel working tirelessly to ensure the safety, security, medical assistance and smooth facilitation of Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra pilgrims.

80th I-Day:

Div Com Kashmir Hoists National Flag at Office Premises



Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg hoisted the National Flag at the office premises at Amar Niwas Complex, Srinagar, as part of a ceremonial function to mark Independence Day.

On the occasion, the Divisional Commissioner received the salute from a contingent of the CRPF.

Addressing the gathering, Div Com Kashmir underscored the significance of Independence Day, saying that the occasion reminds us of the immense sacrifices made by the freedom fighters for the nation. He also noted that the country is commemorating the 150th year of the National Song making this I-Day more significant.

He said the day serves as a reminder of the ideals, values and principles enshrined in the Constitution. Emphasizing the

importance of ethical and effective public administration, he called upon officers and officials to uphold integrity, enhance efficiency, make greater use of technology and demonstrate empathy towards the public in order to strengthen people's trust in government institutions.

He urged employees to adopt a citizen-centric approach in the discharge of their duties and ensure timely, efficient and responsive delivery of public services.

The function was attended by Deputy Commissioner Srinagar Akshay Labroo, Additional Commissioner Kashmir, ACC, officers and officials of the Divisional and District Administrations, besides security officers.

Earlier, the Divisional Commissioner hoisted the National Flag at his official residence Sonwar, Srinagar, to mark the proud occasion of Independence Day.

Sakeena Itoo Hoists Tricolour at Anantnag

SRINAGAR: The 80th Independence Day was celebrated across Anantnag district with great patriotic fervour, enthusiasm and national spirit.

The main function of the day was organised at Shaheed Himayun Muzzamil Memorial Government Degree College, Khanabal, where a large gathering of people joined the celebrations to commemorate the historic occasion and honour the sacrifices of the freedom fighters who laid down their lives for the nation's independence.

Minister for Education, Higher Education, Health and Medical Education and Social Welfare Departments, Sakeena Itoo, was the chief guest at the main function. She hoisted the National Flag and took the salute from the impressive ceremonial parade presented by contingents of the Jammu and Kashmir Police and paramilitary forces. The parade also featured contingents of NCC cadets and school children, who marched with discipline and enthusiasm, adding to the patriotic spirit of the occasion.

Addressing the gathering, Sakeena Itoo extended warm greetings to the people of Anantnag and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir on the 80th Independence Day. She paid rich tributes to the freedom fighters, martyrs and national heroes whose courage, sacrifice and determination made the country's independence possible. She emphasised the importance of preserving the values of freedom, democracy and unity of the nation. (Observer News Service)

Independence Day Celebrated Across Kashmir District Courts

SRINAGAR: The 80th Independence Day was celebrated with patriotic fervour across district court complexes in Kashmir, with Principal District and Sessions Judges hoisting the National Flag and taking salute at ceremonial parades.

Celebrations were held at Srinagar, Ganderbal, Anantnag, Shopian, Kupwara, Budgam, Bandipora, Kulgam and Baramulla, besides various subordinate and taluka courts.

The ceremonies were attended by judicial officers, lawyers, prosecution officials, court staff, legal aid functionaries and para-legal volunteers. Speakers paid tribute to freedom fighters and reaffirmed the judiciary's commitment to upholding the Constitution, rule of law and access to justice.

Appreciation certificates and sweets were also distributed at several venues as part of the celebrations. (Observer News Service)

MeT Predicts 4-Day Wet Spell from Today

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir is likely to witness spells of light to moderate rain and thundershowers at many places between August 16 and 19, with the Meteorological Centre Srinagar warning of heavy and brief intense showers in some districts that may trigger flash floods, landslides and mudslides.

The weather office, according to KNO said from August 16 to 19, several spells of light to moderate rain and thundershowers are expected at many places, while heavy rain or brief intense heavy showers may occur in a few districts, particularly during the early morning and afternoon hours.

The Meteorological Centre said there is a possibility of heavy rain or brief intense heavy showers in a few districts of the Jammu division during this period, while one or two districts in the Kashmir division may also experience brief intense showers.

It cautioned that torrential rain and brief intense heavy showers could lead to flash floods, landslides, mudslides and waterlogging in low-lying areas.

Between August 20 and 22, light to moderate rain or thundershowers are likely at scattered places, mainly during the early morning and late afternoon hours.

In the past 24 hours, Kulgam recorded the highest significant rainfall of 55.5 mm, followed by Pahalgam at 29.6 mm and Katra at 20.8 mm.

Despite the rainfall, temperatures remained relatively high in several parts of the region. Srinagar recorded a maximum of 32.0 degrees Celsius, which was 2.6 degrees above normal, while the minimum temperature settled at 18.5 degrees Celsius.

Qazigund recorded a maximum of 30.4 degrees Celsius and a minimum of 15.8 degrees Celsius, while Kupwara registered 31.8 degrees Celsius and 17.4 degrees Celsius respectively.

Pahalgam recorded a maximum temperature of 25.6 degrees Celsius and a minimum of 12.6 degrees Celsius. Gulmarg remained cooler, recording 21.4 degrees Celsius as the maximum and 11.6 degrees Celsius as the minimum.

In Jammu, the maximum temperature was 32.5 degrees Celsius and the minimum 23.6 degrees Celsius. Banihal recorded 29.7 degrees Celsius and 17.6 degrees Celsius, while Batote recorded 26.6 degrees Celsius and 19.6 degrees Celsius.

Katra recorded a maximum of 28.6 degrees Celsius and a minimum of 22.8 degrees Celsius, while Bhaderwah recorded 27.8 degrees Celsius and 17.0 degrees Celsius. (Agencies)

Statutory Post of Dy Speaker Vacant for Nearly 2 Years

SRINAGAR: On September 21, the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly will convene for its sixth session, but the key statutory post of Deputy Speaker remains vacant, with the ruling National Conference showing no inclination to fill the position.

As per KNO, legally, the Deputy Speaker is the Assembly's second-in-command, stepping in whenever the Speaker is absent or the post is vacant. As per the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, the Assembly is required to elect both a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker "as soon as may be." Section 19 of the Act states: "The Legislative Assembly shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the Assembly to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker thereof and, so often as the office of Speaker or Deputy Speaker becomes vacant, the Assembly shall choose another member to be Speaker or Deputy Speaker, as the case may be."

Soon after the formation of the elected government, the post of Speaker was filled during the first session, with Abdul Rahim elected unanimously after the BJP decided not to contest.

However, the post of Deputy Speaker has remained vacant for nearly two years. The elected government will complete two years in office on October 16, yet no move has been made to fill the position.

The ruling National Conference has not made any effort to fill the post of Deputy Speaker, which the ruling party has traditionally given to the largest opposition party. The largest opposition party happens to be the BJP in the House.

During the PDP-BJP government, Nazir Gurezi of the National Conference served as Deputy Speaker, while Sartaj Madni of PDP held the post during the NC-Congress rule.

According to sources, the National Conference is reluctant to offer the post of Deputy Speaker to the BJP, while the latter has also not pressed its claim for the position with the ruling party.

The issue of the vacant Deputy Speaker's post has not been raised even once in the House over the past two years, neither by the treasury benches nor by the opposition. (Agencies)

Working On Back Foot Game, Shot Selection Helped Padikkal: India Batting Coach Kotak

Press Trust of India

GALLE: India's batting coach Sitanshu Kotak on Saturday lauded Devdutt Padikkal for working on his back foot game and overall shot selection after the No. 3 batter made a wonderful maiden international hundred.

Padikkal's unbeaten 131 led India to a satisfying Day 1 score of 288 for two against Sri Lanka in the first Test here.

Kotak dwelled on the finer details on the 26-year-old's preparation for the ongoing Test series.

"I am so happy for him because he was actually waiting for his opportunity. The way he played here and in the warm-up match, it's really encouraging," Kotak said in the post-day press conference. "Preparation, I would say, overall the way Devdutt, was preparing and I saw it in the NCA (BCCI CoE)...he was working on his back foot game. We try that when we expect a turn from a pitch.

"We also tried to work on step-out, sweep besides the back foot game. So, a lot of credit goes to him, the way he has prepared himself for the last cou-

ple of years," he added.

True to Kotak's words, Padikkal was batting predominantly from the back foot and stepped out to Lankan spinners when it was essential to dominate them.

His six off left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya, stepping out and creaming over long-on, justified Kotak's observation.

Similarly, Padikkal scored nearly 40 runs from sweeps in his innings.

So, how does this innings place Padikkal when original No. 3 Sai Sudharshan returns from his toe injury?

"I think Devdutt batted really well. So Sai also has been batting really well at that number. But the thing is they all are new ball batsmen. So they open, they go number three, so, we are very flexible.

"But I would look at the way they bat, how they are adapting to conditions, how they are dealing with the different stages of a match, and that is very important for me rather than number three or four or five," he added.

It's cramps: Kotak on Rahul



Vice-captain KL Rahul had to retire on 77 and Kotak said the Bengaluru man is suffering from cramps.

"KL batted really well. I think he was getting only cramps. So by the end of the day, he was fine. Probably once you start getting cramps, you get it in the hamstring, you get it in the groin, you get it in your hand.

"But at the moment he looks absolutely fine. So he should be good to go tomorrow," he said.

But overall, Kotak was delighted to see the flexibility in Rahul's game — batting down the order in white ball formats and opening in Test cricket.

"See, he is someone, when he plays in one-day (match) as if you have seen him, he bats at number 6 or 5. So when you are a senior batsman, and if you are open to bat at any number and help the team, I think that is a great player to have.

"So for a team, he is someone who is very useful. So in a red ball match he opens, in a one-day match he bats wherever required. Now, the way he is batting, he is taking a lot of responsibilities, he is trying to create a lot of partnerships, and that is something really good to have, and he has been very, very consistent," he added.

The Galle pitch largely played smooth on Day one and Kotak thought the deck will offer more help to spinners in the coming days.

"It's on the drier side and it is a pure batting wicket now, normally it comes on to the bat very nicely, it doesn't spin. When you are 288-2, it is a good sign for us. But it is just one day, a long way to go for us. We have to bat well tomorrow. But I don't think it will crack.

"I just think it will offer more turn

as the game progresses on day 2, day 3, and day 4. Day 1, batting average is like 53 here. Day 2, it goes down to 38 and Day 3, it's something like 28. So, the overall record shows that as the game progresses, the average run for a batsman is going down noticeably," he explained.

Padikkal was superb: SL fielding coach

Sri Lanka's spin and fielding coach Jordan Gregory praised Padikkal and Rahul for taking the game to Sri Lanka.

"I think firstly, credit to Padikkal. I think that he batted superbly today and so did KL. Unfortunate for him to get injured," said Gregory.

He also was delighted to see debutant off-spinner Keshara Nuwantha holding his own against Indian batters.

"It's very encouraging to see that Kesh on his debut had asked a lot of questions and created a lot of opportunities.

"So credit to him. I could imagine there may have been a couple of nerves from his side. But I'm very proud of him and the way he bowled on his debut," he added.

It Was Important To Start With A Good Win: Harmanpreet

Press Trust of India

AMSTELVEEN: India captain Harmanpreet Singh on Saturday expressed satisfaction on his side's 3-1 victory over Wales in the men's Hockey World Cup opener here, saying that it was important to win the first match by a good margin and get full three points.

"We played very well. Our aim was to create chances and score goals match after match. It doesn't matter who is the man of the match or who is scoring the goals. We just need to score goals. We played with that mindset," Harmanpreet, who scored a brace in the team's win, said after the match.

"It was important to begin with a good win. We won 3-1 and took three points, which is a good result," he added.

Wales scored in the final minutes to deny India a clean sheet, but Harman-



preet said his team would learn from their mistakes in future matches.

"We tried our best, but they also played well. This was only the first match, and we will try not to make mistakes in future matches," said the ace drag-flicker.

India scored all three goals from penalty corners, while coach Craig Fulton has consistently emphasized field goals. Asked about this, the Indian captain said, "Our forward line performed well and earned several penalty corners. Whether they score field goals or create PCs, goals are important for the team."

On the Indian team's performance before the World Cup, he said that ups and downs were part of the game.

"Currently, the team's focus is on the World Cup and we are in good form, well prepared, and confident of a podium a finish."

Carlsen Wins Esports World Cup Title For Second Year In A Row

Press Trust of India

PARIS: World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen capped his masterful undefeated campaign by retaining his title after defeating Belarusian chess grandmaster Denis Lazavik in a lop-sided final at the Esports World Cup here on Saturday.

Team Liquid's Carlsen came with a clear goal and pursued it with unrelenting determination, not losing a single match en route to successfully defending his title.

The 35-year-old Norwegian secured a 2-0 (3-1, 3-1) win over Lazavik of AG.AL in the grand final.

Carlsen won USD 250,000 in prize money and 1000 Club Championship points for his

side Team Liquid. Denis secured USD 190,000 and 750 points for AG.AL.

"I followed Denis' games and talked to the coaches. I do feel, especially with Hikaru's approach, it was not right. Funny thing is, I said that he is not great at defending end-games, so I thought I should keep it together better than Hikaru," the five-time world champion said after the win.

"I have played Denis many times online, where I played riskily and got punished for it, so I didn't give him obvious positional advantages."

Asked if there was any moment when he felt he might lose, Carlsen said: "There were several moments, a couple against Alireza, against Nihal as well. There were cer-

tainly some moments, but I am thrilled to go undefeated.

"I was not trying to do anything out of the ordinary. I tried to take my chances, with a little bit of randomness, and I am happy."

Asked what it would take to beat him, Carlsen said: "I don't know. In this format, it is not easy at the moment, I think. I think Alireza had a very good chance. It is not easy..."

Nakamura finishes third after winning 'controversial match'

Meanwhile, United States' Hikaru Nakamura finished third after beating Alireza Firouzja 4-1 in a controversial and chaotic match marred by technical problems and disconnections.

After technical issues in Game 4 and subsequently losing that game against Nakamura, Alireza abandoned the third-place match and left the building. Alireza was trailing 1-3 at that stage with two games left.

Nakamura said he was left waiting for around 20 minutes before the officials told him that the match would be recorded a forfeit in his favour.

"Today's match with Alireza certainly didn't go well for anyone. It was chaos with multiple disconnections and then Alireza's untimely departure from the event. I was left hanging for 20 minutes until I was finally told that the match would be recorded as a forfeit by Alireza," Nakamura wrote on 'X'.

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